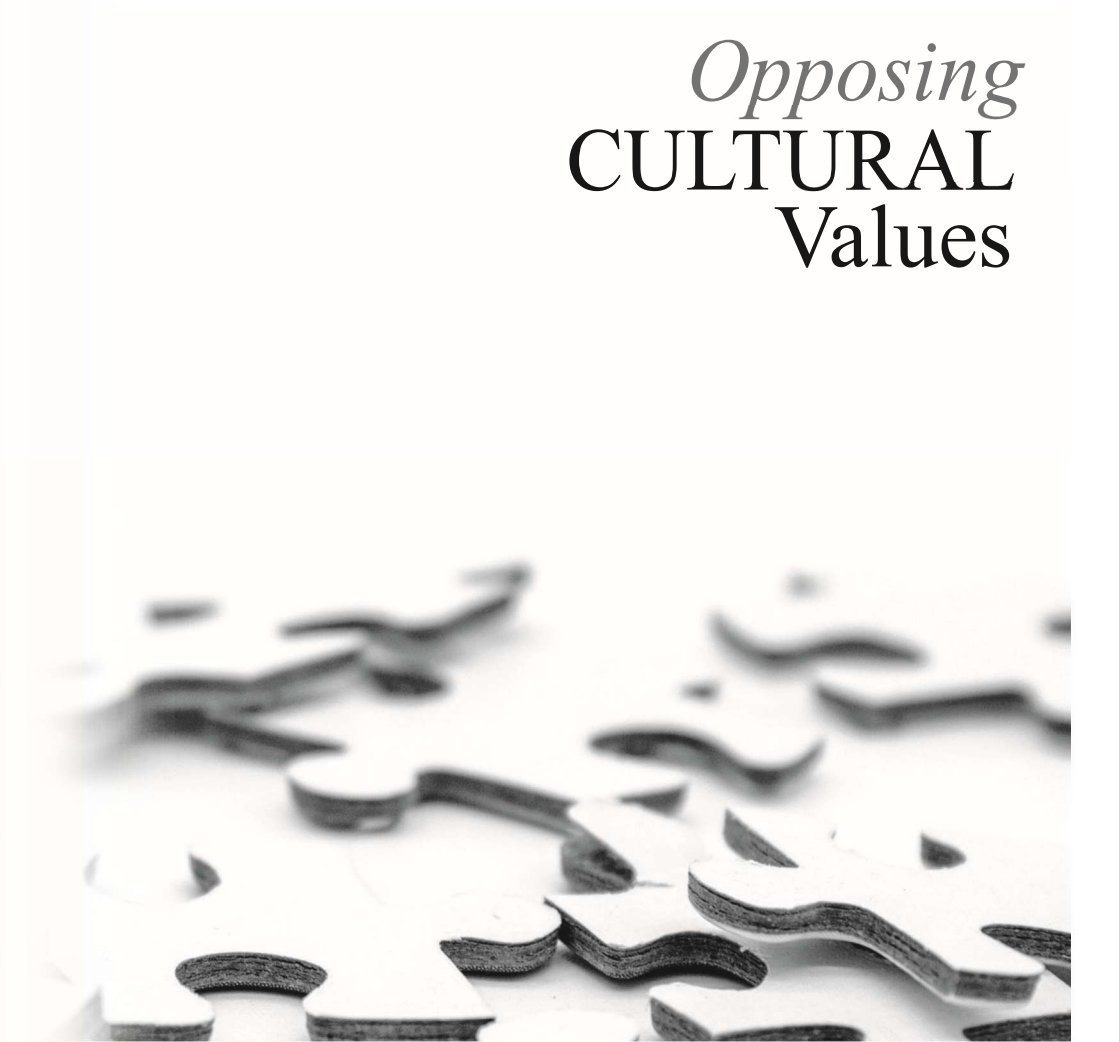


Opposing
CULTURAL
Values





Religion

I want to look now at a few different and opposing cultural values on the same subject that are also present in different cultures. This section was inspired by a chapter in Ken Eldred's book; *God Is at Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business*.¹ The opposing cultural values listed here are from this book. The commentary unless otherwise noted is mine. We will also see what effect they have on a society's political, social, and economic development. I also want to examine and compare which cultural values best reflect God's Word and how those values can be more beneficial to their society.

- ❖ Religions that exalt poverty promote values that are resistant to development.
- ❖ Religions that view wealth as a blessing promote values that are favorable to development.

¹ Eldred, Ken (2009). *God Is at Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business* (p. 83).

It's wise to note, however, that the Prosperity, or Health and Wealth Gospel, has bad theology behind it, selecting only verses that seem to support it. It's a self-serving theology that focuses on man receiving blessings rather than God receiving glory. The Prosperity Gospel is very popular in Sub-Saharan Africa, because it closely resembles how African Traditional Religion views the relationship between God and man. I'll discuss this in more detail later.

Rejecting wealth as sinful is sometimes espoused by some Christians based on the biblical teaching against the love of money, or chasing after wealth, making it the desire of the heart. Liberation Theology promotes the idea that you are blessed by God if you are poor. Many verses in Scripture point out the futility of trusting in wealth.

Ecclesiastes 5:10: *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.*

Hebrews 13:5: *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you."*

These are just a few of the verses that emphasize the fact that trusting in God and His promises is where our hearts should be focused, not on the money. Many verses are also related to giving and being generous, yet it would be difficult to give or be generous if we had nothing from which to give. Money itself isn't bad; in fact, money can be very necessary if certain ministries are to operate. As missionaries, we depend on others' generosity to meet our ministry's financial needs. The denomination we worked within in West Africa has also sent out their own national missionaries. That never could have happened without those churches that give generously to support that vision. I believe that a healthy economic system that can provide jobs and opportunity for Christians is one of the neglected areas when we talk about church strengthening.

I mentioned earlier that we believe that part of church strengthening is for Christians to be givers to their local churches so they can pay their own pastors, sponsor their own programs, and send out their own missionaries. Unfortunately, many churches and Christians in Africa believe that they're supposed to be the receivers of assistance, which is God's provision in their lives. There have been many times when a project was proposed in a village or a church, and the first question asked was how they would find a funding source; the idea of them paying for it themselves wasn't even given a thought. I believe that some, if not

most of this thinking, has been an assumption that comes from the many teams of people who have gone there doing projects and giving things over the years. One of the things that got me heading down this road to investigate why there's a lack of development was the statistic that said that more than \$35 Trillion dollars had been spent in Sub-Saharan Africa over the past 45 years. Virtually no sustainable change and few meaningful changes have occurred in the people's living conditions even though all of this money has been spent. The idea of just giving things to people and doing things for them when it's not necessary can do much more harm than good and can foster an attitude that they themselves can't or shouldn't do it.

Module | opposing Cultural Values—

Religion [Pages 32 – 34]

Theme: *How theological framing of wealth and poverty shapes societal development and discipleship.*

Grounding Scripture Ecclesiastes 5:10 – *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money... this also is vanity.”* Hebrews 13:5 – *“Keep your life free from love of money... “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*
2 Corinthians 9:8 – *“God is able to bless you abundantly... so that you may abound in every good work.”*

Puzzle Piece Insight: Religious values around wealth and poverty deeply influence cultural attitudes toward development, generosity, and responsibility. Some traditions exalt poverty as spiritual virtue; others treat wealth as divine favor. Both can distort biblical truth.

Challenge: When theology is shaped by cultural assumptions— whether prosperity-driven or poverty-glorifying—it can hinder sustainable development and misrepresent God’s character.

Bridge Thought | Connection

- A biblical view of wealth sees it as a resource for generosity and mission— not a measure of righteousness or shame.
- Churches empowered to give, support pastors, and send missionaries reflect a theology of stewardship and dignity.

Toolbox | Practical Tools

Theology Audit: Compare cultural views of wealth with biblical teaching on stewardship, generosity, and contentment.

Narrative Shift: Share stories of churches funding their own ministries to reframe expectations.

Empowerment Lens: Evaluate development projects through the lens of dignity, ownership, and long-term impact.

Reflection Prompts

1. How has your culture shaped your view of wealth and poverty?
2. What biblical truths challenge or affirm those views?
3. In what ways can generosity become a form of discipleship?

Action Steps

- Teach stewardship as part of church strengthening—not just spiritual growth.
- Highlight examples of national churches funding their own outreach.
- Reframe development work to promote dignity and local ownership.