**Value in studying other cultures:**

* **Knowledge brings respect**

Humans tend to fear things that are unfamiliar or different to what they grew up with. Understanding other cultures helps prevent wars and conflicts based on race or ethnicity. The more you know about another culture, the less likely you are to hate, fear, or discriminate against people from that culture. You are also less likely to use harmful or offensive stereotypes or generalisations

* **Perspective**

There is more than one way to see things. Looking at other cultures makes you look at your own culture & customs in a new way. It’s interesting to compare & contrast, and think about reasons **why** we do things the way we do. Other customs or behaviours aren’t necessarily better or worse. Looking at different ways to do things can help us decide what we feel is right or fair.

* **Relate to other people better**

The world is becoming more multi-cultural. Understanding people’s cultural background makes you better at working together with them and makes you a better leaders, employees, and citizens. Greater cultural knowledge can also help you to preach the gospel to others more effectively!

* **Treat others fairly**

Despite cultural differences, people are people. They aren’t defined by their culture or background and may not necessarily agree with or stick to the same ideas as others from their country. No matter their background, people have the same right to be respected and treated fairly.

**Ethnocentrism**

* Ethnocentrism is the belief that your own culture is better than everyone else’s
* This was what people believed during the ‘Colonial’ era in Europe during 1800s-1900s. Other cultures were seen as uncivilized barbarians or savages. They genuinely believed white people were better, more advanced/evolved, and thought it was their responsibility to educate & rule over them. This caused great harm and suffering
* Many countries and people are still ethnocentric

**Cultural Relativism**

* This theory is the opposite of ethnocentrism. This is the idea is that all beliefs, customs & ethics are relative and must be considered within cultural context.
* Cultural relativism says no practices or beliefs are bad or good. Right & wrong are different for different people - what’s right for them might seem wrong to us
* This means that under this theory, moral truth is subjective. Human rights violations are ‘cultural practices’ and must not be judged!

We SHOULD be accepting of different people and cultures and try to understand & respect cultural traditions and customs. But we should NOT accept cultural customs that go against basic human rights, or against our moral and religious beliefs. And we should NEVER fight or kill other people whose beliefs we disagree with or don’t accept.

**Spiritual Perspectives**

God doesn’t judge based on culture and willingly offers salvation to everyone no matter who they are or where they came from. He accepted believers from countries that were enemies of his people, like Rahab, Ruth, the Ninevites, Cornelius, the Egyptians and Nebuchadnezzar.

* **Gal 3:28** Neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, but you are all one in Christ Jesus
* **Acts 10:34** God is no respecter of persons

However, God expects believers to obey His principles and do what is right in His sight ABOVE what laws that kings or rulers of men might put in place. **Acts 5:29** – “Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men.” God is angered by wicked cultural customs like immorality or ritual burning of children (offering to Molech – **Lev 18:21**).

Other Bible examples:

* Jesus – told the story of a kind Samaritan to highlight the Jews’ cultural prejudice towards them, and spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well.
* Paul - used the Altar to the Unknown God as an opportunity to preach – didn’t mock their culture but was respectful
* Jonah – was ethnocentric, God taught him to overcome this in order to preach
* Aaron & Miriam – prejudiced against the Cushites, God punished them for this
* Daniel didn’t practice cultural beliefs he didn’t agree with e.g. food offered to idols, refused to bow to image, kept praying 3x a day even when it was against the law.
* Peter & the sheet of unclean animals: “What God has cleansed, don’t call unclean”
* **Romans 12:2** being transformed – changing from what we want to what God wants us to be. Sometimes might mean giving up cultural practices that go against God’s expectations.