

Calibrating Values

A value is ascribed importance. Do our values line up with, supercede, or ignore God's values, as given in Scripture? Do we ascribe the same value weight to activities as does God? "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23, NIV). A faulty value system misaligns life—something like the shirt of life being buttoned up by the wrong holes. It doesn't fit. Giving martyr status to suicide bombers killing civilians is such a "misvalue."

Core values lead to attitudes and actions. Values lead to the kind of church we attend, where we give money, whether we give money, our clothing style, the car we drive and the home in which we live. Lifestyles are clusters of values. The abortion debate is about value priority: the woman or the fetus. AIDS is about the value of sex, typically. Often the divorcer is valuing freedom, an exciting new partner and "the pursuit of happiness" above marriage vows.

The Bible should recalibrate our values. As we read scripture, we're washed by the water of the Word (Eph. 5:26), so as not to be encrusted by the world's values. We can realign to, resist, reject or repudiate God's values. We notice skewed values generally in personal extremes or compulsiveness or in lopsided spending or time involvement. Even good things can become bad when overdone. The Word of God can change our worldview, which is essentially our value grid (even when our perceptions are in the "physical" realm). "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb. 4:12). When we neglect the Word, the world's values gain on us.

Skewed values of unbelievers "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt. 7:21-23). As John Gerstner points out, they were trying to get credit for doing evil, so skewed were their values. But we cannot skew God. With some frequency evildoers believe themselves good. A man on a porch pondered, unable to remember the last time he'd sinned. An older man who couldn't stand it any more reminded him that he was shacking up with a woman.

A young pregnant woman I met last week was positive that she was going to heaven. Why? Because she was saved and believed in God. A policeman walked up and began conversing. That afternoon she had been arraigned in court for brawling with another woman, and was anticipating with some eagerness round two. When I reminded her that she was pregnant, it was almost

as if I'd mentioned that she had a good shirt on. It was no problem. She didn't attend church and had no plans to go. Values.

American values We praise efficiency, youth, beauty, wealth, risk and extremes, technology, pleasure (sex, travel, alcohol, spas, music, entertainment), freedom, and independence. A Christian from India once judged Americans: if you say it, you think you've *done* it. The saying it should be done suffices for the doing. I find this personally true at times.

Values among Christians Let me respectfully mention church attendance, which is a good (Heb. 10:24-25). I spend a lot of time trying to get people to go to church. But if the pastor leans on people to spend the majority of their free hours and days at church, this is a good value gone awry, to the detriment of children, marriages, and ultimately to the church herself. National Christians can have different values. I spent three months with a French mission to industrial workers. They valued dialogue, expression, eating, the contest of ideas, working together for the lost, love, identifying with and serving the poor and powerless. The Ugandan church values prayer—Friday all-night prayer meetings are commonplace—singing, teaching, harmony, learning, evangelism, testifying, visiting and caring for the sick and visitors.

Major values of the US evangelical white and black churches White Christians value Sunday school, offerings, buildings, missions and missionaries, eating, evangelism, friendships, propriety in worship, eating, teaching, a bigger church, and wellbeing. Sunday school may be higher on the local church hierarchy of values than sending famine relief or seeing that widows in the church are nurtured. Giving to retirement may be more religiously observed than giving to missions. Many black Christians value being of one mind, koinoia, emotional expression and catharsis, talking about God's providence, eating, a power choir, holding office, faithfulness in coming to church, gospel preaching and singing, eating, wellbeing and prosperity.

Consequentiality I listened to a black Gospel station last month and heard "If God's been good, groove with me." "Give Him hand praise...a foot praise." "If you wanna be used, put your hands together." God's goodness should lead to things like telling those in darkness about Him, not just grooving. The worship service is not the arena of our major service to God—that would be outside the church walls. "God can use me anywhere and any time." True. But will we resist? We can actually use praise as a way of getting around missions and other types of obedience. We can elevate enthusiasm—getting excited about God—far above serving God in practical ways. Picking on black power choirs, I think God lays more importance upon a missionary going to a remote village in Uzbekistan to introduce them to Jesus Christ, then upon a traveling, swaying and rippin' church choir—the kind getting everybody up inside the first four bars. Maybe we should esteem missions more than choir music. "Go into all the world with a power choir?" But cross cultural missions is so far behind the power choir it may never

catch up.

Evangelism and skewed values George Barna provides the values of born again evangelists vs. born again non-evangelists: evangelists (vs. non-evangelists) believe that the Bible “is totally true in all of its teachings” (77% vs. 57%) and “every word of the Bible is true and can be trusted.” (81% vs. 61%). Yet the following behaviors are about equal in these two groups (levels not stated): heavy debt, personal addictions, looking at pornography, getting drunk, getting psychic advice, and committing adultery¹. So a higher view of Scripture hasn’t impacted evangelists’ morality in these moral areas. Personal values—pleasure in particular—outweigh the biblical value of self-control and holiness and major transformations in sanctification are needed to align lifestyle with Word. Values have not dropped from head to heart to hand.

At the end of the week have we emphasized what God emphasizes? Have we minored on majors and majored on minors? We can have a false sense of accomplishment if we hit all our priorities and expect rich blessings from God, but miss what God values most. Our values can become so skewed that God judges them. Idolatry is misreckoned values--elevating to supreme importance what is of secondary, or less, importance--usurping the Creator with something of His creation. Even in face of reality, we still can cling to them—"Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good. Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods!" (Jer 16:19b-20). "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, `This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.' 12 But they will reply, `It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.' " (Jer. 18:11-12). When God’s values are overlaid upon our own, how do they align? When they judge us, will we throw up our hands and say “It’s no use!” or will we realign our values by God’s Spirit and our resolve?

1 “George Barna, “49 Million Born Again Adults Shared Their Faith in Jesus in the Past Year,” www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=147&Reference=F, accessed 10/16/03.

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