



Values

## CHRISTIAN VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

CRAIG AND JANET PARSHALL

(Galatians 5:22)

**T**he “spin-doctors” are definitely in. From politics to media, any topic can be given the proper makeover to introduce it to society as politically, socially, and even spiritually correct.

Today is a time of moral relativism where moral values are never absolute. Many people think that the situation determines the nature or value of personal choice (“moral autonomy”). However, the Word of God has much to say in opposition to this kind of moral value system.

### KNOWING GOD’S VALUES

In distinct contrast to moral relativism, the Christian message is that God has clearly and authoritatively spoken about the values His people should hold. God’s Word gives a description of truly beneficial moral attributes that glorify God. Because these values are eternal, they are always applicable, not situational. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8). This is the standard of objectively true and divinely reliable moral values. Paul’s exhortation ends with the instruction to “meditate” about the moral values that God prizes.

God does not want people to decide what is virtuous according to the circumstances. And yet how often people do just that! Who has ever lied to the boss and tried to justify doing so? Who has ever tried to come up with a reason to see an impure movie or video because everyone is talking about it at work? Many times people know what is right, but because of societal pressure or their own selfishness, they choose what is wrong and attempt to justify it.

In contrast, God’s people rely on His standard about what is good, true, and morally pure. They then apply that standard to their circumstances, not the other way around. The standard does not change; instead, their lives must change to match the standard.

### APPLYING GOD’S VALUES

Simply knowing what values are best is not enough. Christians need to understand and apply them. That means turning God’s moral values into their own personal virtues. How is that possible? Virtuous character begins with the awesome idea of personal freedom. Followers of Jesus Christ are set free from continuing as slavish servants of depravity. As Paul wrote, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

The Bible makes it clear that the freedom given in Christ Jesus is for a purpose. “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). Christ’s gift of freedom is not to be used as an excuse to sin. There is a clear choice. People can serve the “works of the flesh” such as “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions,

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jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like" (Gal. 5:19, 20). But that choice is contradictory to the life one is able to live "in the Spirit" of God (Gal. 5:16). The solution, then, is to crucify the improper desires of the sinful nature. Believers can consider themselves dead to sin. Then they are free to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25).

### **WALKING IN THE SPIRIT**

Walking in the Spirit is a muscular enterprise. It means Christians are to manifest the "fruit" or expression of the Spirit whenever possible. Of course, Christian character is also a byproduct of a natural process. Apple trees don't sweat, moan, and groan in order to produce apples. In the same way, a Christian walking in the Spirit should, over time, naturally exhibit the fruit of Christian character: moral virtues.

In the end, this is a joint venture. While God's empowering Spirit gives Christians the fruit of Christlike character, they also play a critical part in their pursuit of these values. When they yield to the Holy Spirit and maintain a daily lifestyle that is consistent with God's values, the result is that they will inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21). What are these values that Christians should reveal? They are the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23).

While virtue comes from the internal process of deciding to walk according to the Spirit rather than the flesh, it is also forged from the blast furnace of external trials and pressures. "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:3-5). Peo-

ple often gain a greater level of maturity, temperance, and character as a result of hardship. Through difficulties, they come to understand what they truly value.

If our lives are marked by Christlike virtues, we will be happy and productive. We will experience personal peace and security. We know that even though our circumstances change, our values will not. Best of all, we will also revolutionize the world by drawing others to Christ through our solid example.

### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of values include:

- > Psalm 15:1-5
- > Micah 6:8
- > Matthew 6:33
- > 1 Corinthians 10:31
- > Ephesians 5:1-4

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on values at 2 Peter 1:5-9 on page 1669. See also the personality profile of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego on page 1108.

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flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

<sup>19</sup>Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery,<sup>a</sup> fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, <sup>21</sup>envy, murders,<sup>a</sup> drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup>And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

#### BEAR AND SHARE THE BURDENS

**6** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore

**5:19** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *adultery*. **5:21** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *murders*.

#### SOUL NOTE



**God's Fruit** (5:22, 23) What do we value most in life? Many people try self-improvement or self-awareness programs to find meaning and purpose. These two verses hold the secret to becoming exactly what God desires. The "fruit of the Spirit" are not works that believers must accomplish so they can check them off as they "grow" them. Instead, these fruit grow naturally as the produce of the Holy Spirit's ministry in a person's life. As we grow in the Christian faith, these characteristics should increasingly be manifested in our lives. The key is for us to submit our lives to Christ daily, allowing Him to work in and through us. That should be our highest value.

**Topic: Values**

#### KEY PASSAGE



**Restoration**

### BACK TO THE BODY

(6:1-5)

Although all believers have been born again, they still face the dilemma of the sin nature. At times, this can overwhelm a believer, causing involvement in destructive sin. So what should other believers do for a brother or sister who is "overtaken in any trespass"?

Paul had advised elsewhere that discipline may be required (as in 1 Cor. 5), but its purpose should always be to restore the believer to the fellowship. Those who seek out an erring believer must come in a "spirit of gentleness," realizing that they also are sinners constantly in need of God's grace and forgiveness. The fallen but repentant believer is not neglected or rejected but rather is helped, encouraged, prayed over, offered assistance, and warmly welcomed back into the fellowship. Restoration helps a repentant believer get back on track and continue to grow; it humbles the church to realize the reality of sin; and it reveals the grace and power of Almighty God.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about restoration on pages 1412, 1413. See also the personality profile of David on page 418.

cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup>There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

<sup>13</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup>Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? <sup>15</sup>Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But

if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

<sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup>If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup>But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."

**SAVED IN FIERY TRIAL**

<sup>19</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke

and commanded seven times to be cast into the furnace. <sup>20</sup>And he commanded Meshach, and Shadrach, and Abed-Nego, to be bound in turbans, and to be cast into the furnace. <sup>22</sup>Therefore, O king, be urgent, and do not let the flame of the furnace consume them. <sup>23</sup>For if these three men are found to be alive, I will give you the gold, silver, and bronze vessels of the temple. <sup>24</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar was angry and his face turned red; and he commanded that his counselors be bound into the furnace.

They answered and said to the king, "O king, <sup>25</sup>"Look! We are loose, walking about here, and they are not hurt, like the Sor-

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR** <sup>26</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar said to the king of the Chaldeans, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, do not come here. <sup>27</sup>And the king of the Chaldeans said to the king of the Babylonians, "The fire had no power over them, and the smoke did not singe them. <sup>28</sup>Nebuchadnezzar said to the king of the Chaldeans, "I will give you the gold, silver, and bronze vessels of the temple."



same as the others. <sup>29</sup>And the king of the Chaldeans said to the king of the Babylonians, "I will give you the gold, silver, and bronze vessels of the temple."

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Values

**THREE MEN AND A POWERFUL GOD**

(DANIEL 3)

Most of the Book of Daniel centers on his personal life and leadership. The story of his three Hebrew friends, however, provides a fascinating added example of young men holding to their beliefs and values in the face of pressure. Daniel's friends, whose Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are better known to us by their Babylonian names—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Despite being taken captive to Babylon and forced to serve the king, these young men remained faithful to God.

Although their lives were threatened on several occasions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego faced their greatest test when they were ordered to bow and worship a huge statue of the king. The friends recognized that obedience in this case meant more than simply giving honor to the king as their leader. Because it included the requirement of worship, it actually involved a choice between ultimate loyalty to God or the king. For them, the choice was clear: They would serve the king, but they would not worship him.

When the three men were confronted and threatened, they offered a marvelous and courageous statement of faith: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (3:16-18). Their tone was respectful, confident, and uncompromising. They only assumed God's unlimited ability, not what might happen to them. They were clearly ready to die rather than deny God.

The depth of our faith and our loyalty to God can only be measured against resistance. Threats of harm or whispers of compromise have this equal possible benefit in common: They provide an opportunity to test our faith. Sometimes, as in Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego's lives, the test becomes a miracle!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about values on pages 1544, 1545. See also the key passage note at 2 Peter 1:5-9 on page 1669.

<sup>31</sup>“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup>For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. <sup>34</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

**DO NOT JUDGE**

**7** “Judge not, that you be not judged. <sup>2</sup>For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. <sup>3</sup>And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

<sup>6</sup>“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

**KEEP ASKING, SEEKING, KNOCKING**

<sup>7</sup>“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>9</sup>Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? <sup>10</sup>Or if he asks for a fish, will he

give him a serpent? <sup>11</sup>If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! <sup>12</sup>Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

**THE NARROW WAY**

<sup>13</sup>“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup>Because<sup>a</sup> narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

**YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS**

<sup>15</sup>“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup>You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every

tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

MATTHEW 7:7

**I NEVER KNEW YOU**

<sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ <sup>23</sup>And then

7:14 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text and M-Text read *How*.

**SOUL NOTE**



**The Golden Rule (7:12)** “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.” This simple statement, called the “Golden Rule,” is God’s direction for how people should treat one another. This rule would eliminate all cheating, stealing, hatred, and murder. God calls His people to a high standard. While not everyone will follow this rule, Christians must do so, setting an example for others. These timeless words can help us know how to act in any given situation. When we treat others as we would want to be treated, we show God’s love in a practical way. **Topic: Values**

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light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; <sup>20</sup>knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, <sup>a</sup> <sup>21</sup>for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God<sup>a</sup> spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

#### DESTRUCTIVE DOCTRINES

**2** But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup>And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup>By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judg-

ment has not been idle, and their destruction does<sup>a</sup> not slumber.

#### DOOM OF FALSE TEACHERS

<sup>4</sup>For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; <sup>5</sup>and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; <sup>6</sup>and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned *them* to destruction, making *them* an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; <sup>7</sup>and delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy

1:20 <sup>a</sup>Or *origin* 1:21 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *but men spoke from God.* 2:3 <sup>a</sup>M-Text reads *will not*

#### KEY PASSAGE



Values

### MOST VALUABLE?

(1:5-9)

What people value says much about their character. Some people value possessions, position, power, or wealth. But here are listed the life traits believers should value above all else. These values reveal a person's spiritual maturity.

Christians have faith in Christ, but faith that isn't put into action is dead and useless (James 2:17). Dead faith is still faith, but it isn't *doing* anything for God. Alive faith is working faith. It's not to be saved that believers need to add to their faith; they add these characteristics so that they will "be neither barren nor unfruitful." Believers who desire to mature in their faith and be fruitful for Christ will add such characteristics as virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love.

Christ gives us His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), but we are responsible to use that nature to set aside sinful desires and follow Him. We have to value Christ above all else.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about values on pages 1544, 1545. See also the personality profile of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego on page 1108.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Last Words (1:13-15)** Peter faced death calmly, knowing that he was merely putting off the "tent" of his body and moving on to be with Christ in heaven. Peter wanted to make sure the believers had a reminder of the gospel message that had brought them salvation, and of the power of God that had brought them true life. Believers should live each day reminding those around them—through words and actions—about the power of God. What legacy are we leaving for our loved ones? If we had to say our last words today, what would we say? **Topic: Life Transitions**