

“Christian Values“

Pastor Sam Richards

19 February 2023

Texts: Ephesians 4:1-8; Matthew 6:31-7:6

What do we mean by values, or, more particularly *Christian values*? There’s lots of talk about values these days and most of those talking have not defined their terms. The result? Some of what some call values are not “values” at all.

Hence this message attempts to define Christian values. According to the world even, values may be “more than ideals, or moral absolutes to which we aspire.” If we seek to define “value” more closely, we might begin to define a value as:

“An inner construct (cognitive construct such as an idea, model or theory) which blends religious beliefs, ethical principles, societal norms, historical and/or life experiences (lessons, or learnings applied to this construct).”

This, I think, is an adequate *secular* definition of a value. Here’s what separates that definition of a value from the definition of a “Christian value.” A Christian value incorporates things like our “creation mandate,” and “divine imperatives” such as found in the commandments of God, and/or commands of our Lord Jesus Christ *as revealed to us in Scripture*. It is revelation truth that separates the two categories and it is a crucial distinction.

For example, last Sunday Tom said something about “Shalom.” He said that some take it to mean “peace . . . or the absence of conflict.” I think I have cited him correctly. He went on to suggest that the meaning of “Shalom” is somewhat fuller, incorporating personal health, well-being and wholeness.” So, if someone says “Shalom” to you you may not fully understand what they mean to bless you with unless you engage more fully. Unless you request a clarification. The world does not mean by “shalom” what a believing Jew would mean, or a believing Christian for that matter. Many other examples could be cited but I think this is enough.

Let’s take a biblical example: from Ephesians 4 we learn that certain attitudes, as found in Christ, are to be valued by us, emulated in us: all **humility and gentleness**, with **patience**, showing **tolerance for one another in love**, 3 being diligent to preserve **the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace. This attitude shapes how we behave. However, certain behaviors also qualify as Christian values: **not worrying about food, drink or clothing; not judging our brothers, self-correction before critiquing others** (the “lose the plank to remove the speck” business!) And demonstrating discretion (**don’t give what’s holy to dogs, or cast pearls of truth, or wisdom to swine**—the former don’t appreciate holiness and the latter is innately destructive. So attitudes and certain behaviors both operate as *Christian values*. What we know should inform what we do and all that we do should exemplify our Lord’s character.

Secondarily, we should acknowledge that values can operate more, or less “consciously.” That is, our minds, behind our speech, could be engaged to a greater, or lesser degree—varying from person to person, and experience should bring maturity. Levels of personal consciousness, or awareness about our values can and do vary from person to person.

A value blends religious beliefs, ethical principles, societal norms, historical and life experiences and, when revelation truth is added, we arrive at “biblically-based, Christian values.”

Then, we operate out of this matrix of inputs with a greater or lesser degree of individual consciousness we are being Christian. If we think of these influences as letters in the alphabet of human consciousness, we can grasp that these letters, arranged differently spell out different words. Each person possesses his own inner lexicon, or set of “words.”

Hence comes our integrity, our identity and our uniqueness.

And it is from the interplay of our inner wiring, and more pointedly, from our conformity, or aberration from, these values that we engage our *integrity*. If we act consistently with our values, or in conformity with our basic principles and convictions, we feel honest, authentic—we are acting in our integrity as a unified being, or whole person. We call all of that “personal character.” We are not living a lie, or hypocritically when we live out our values. Christians seek to live lives transparently similar to Jesus’ life and Jesus’ values—that is how they live Christianly.

Jesus’ life, and most importantly Jesus’ values, as appropriated by the individual believer; that is, as absorbed and lived out, these attitudes and behaviors define us. As a thinking, reflecting, investigative and imagining person (such as Jesus is), and as a shaped and shaping person—as one who studies to enlarge his “kingdom footprint!” To do so, I can cross-examine myself asking: can I be bought, or sold, or bartered, or even enslaved? Does my life-style align with my confession, or profession . . . while being scriptural? Are my choices driven by a desire to please, honor and glorify God? Or am I living beneath all of that in a self-serving and self-aggrandizing manner?

Higher level questions like: Can I define myself with biblical precision and spiritual accuracy? Do I conduct myself and express myself in ways that are Christlike(?) can await a later and more convenient hour?

I say a later hour, because, fundamentally, we need first to consider well that our values be informed, and energized by the values manifested in Jesus’ life?

Do I love the Lord my God with all my soul, mind, and strength . . . and my neighbor as myself? Do I love my enemies as Christ loved me while we were still enemies? Do I actively engage with such assertions? Imperative interrogatives? Do I labor to take possession of them, to own and appropriate them as my own? Do I even try? For, if the truth be known, this spiritual process of assimilation is continuous—it is a determined and disciplined course of life-long enrichment.

The goal is: seeing with His eyes, and hearing with His ears, the pitiable, oppressive and helpless state of our race. Can we hear beneath the addled and sedated state of so many of our fellow human beings, the real, crying out for redemption and for rescue? Beneath the

crushing mountains of demolition, heaped upon us by Satan, amidst the howling of demonic hordes, real souls are truly perishing.

Sometimes I hear this “cry out” in silly ways. For instance I catch myself wondering, bewildered at why no one is taking care of me . . . making my doctor’s appointments . . . my dentist and eye doctor’s appointments for me. I act as if taking care of myself is somehow too burdensome for me . . . Or am I really just too lazy, timid and . . .too prone to delaying tactics?

Alas, I am. How foolishly do I oppress myself (!) and, then, look to blame others. What is the quality of such a life? Who is responsible for this quality of life?

And speaking of *quality of life*, just what do we mean by that? Something “this-worldly?” Are we satisfied with some few, external factors?

What if your world is sick and sad because *all is not well with your soul*? And you refuse to raise your hand, or move your foot to do anything about it? Really?! O, my soul, tell this sack of bones to get up and get going—do not be absorbed with self-indulgence and self-pity . . . and other such things as rot the soul!-like greed, envy, covetousness and bitterness! If you would only get up as far as your knees, that would be room enough to repent and find relief and reprieve.

*Quality of life relates directly to the quality of person living that life!*

Once I have expelled the last lazy bone out of my body, **the plank in my own eye!**, then I will be in a position to encourage someone else to follow my example!

I think you know what I am pointing at here. Jesus is our leader, we should submit to follow His lead in service, love and sacrifice. I pray you do not interpret my agitation with my spiritual indolence as a criticism of anyone else. I truly have a lot to do just keeping myself in line.

*And that is the nature of a life lived according to Christian values.*

Everyone can, and should improve his quality of life with some interior remodeling and renovation—yes, after the demolition of repentance, comes the better fabrication of a repentant heart. Jesus taught us that it is not our material conditions, it is not our social position, nor social standing, nor legal standing (slave or free); it is not our political posturing and it is not even our moral conformity to anything commanded by Him, that impacts our quality of life. The problem is not our environment, as in “out there.” the problem lies more in me.

I have heard it said that every person has an inner philosopher, or a “contemplative person within.” This voice of conscience, this prod of perfection is part of our standard equipment, standard issue—part of the welcome to life package we come with!

We may stifle this inner voice, muffle it through avoidance and neglect, but we have it in us to question both our choices and our motives . . . our actions and our behaviors.

Conscience operates both ruthlessly and tirelessly. We can treat it with drugs, but when we cease sedating it, there it is again.

How happy, as Scripture says, is the man who has a clear, or good conscience!

From somewhere within we “hear”: what in the world were you thinking? What are you doing? This will not turn out well. Or, “Where did this insanity come from?” Just who do you think you are? You are so confused and it’s all your doing. One bright therapist called this our “inner idiot.” That fits!

Christ asks us, “Where are you headed? Why are you going there? Is your unhappy agitation and your inner discontent really all there is to life? Get up, put on your shoes . . . lace them up. Let’s get going!”

Are you taking your family for granted? Why not stop it, right now? Are you thankless and ungrateful? Is that your legacy? Do you only serve up bitter stew, or always set peoples’ teeth on edge? Have you launched their trajectory to the pit? Or have you smelled a rose lately? How about a flight correction . . . yes. mid-flight to avoid collision, or to redirect to a better location? If so, inform the cockpit and keep your seat belt on, tightened.

Yes, Jesus did say, **you must be perfect** but he did not say, ***you must perfect yourself . . . or that you are to do this on your own.*** Surely this is a compelling reason to participate in church . . . you are not the only ear in the corn patch! We are the Lord’s harvest! He shucks us of self-righteousness, He removes our narrowness of mind, He heals our blindness and makes our lame limbs function again. But this is no mere “helpful visit to the chiropractor!”—one which helped, one which served on our present need.

Here is a better close, a more inviting picture. Imagine an *exquisite awakening* wherein someone who loves you, tenderly, daringly and affectionately, rouses you from sleep. Ignorance is one such sleep. And sweetly this attending one leans over to whisper you awake, welcomingly. And so, binding your heart with cords of love, with longing desires, pulls both of your hearts into full union—into bliss. Yes, into perfect happiness and perfect joy—both inseparable.

Such is the conversion of a child of the King!

The question is: will you awaken and enter His embrace of redeeming love.

**Amen.**