

Core Personal Values

As Jesus walked among the people of His day teaching and preaching the blessed gospel, it was obvious from His words that He desired for His truths to bring about changes not only within their outward actions and their behaviors, but even further, to reach down deeply within each of their souls to their inmost beings, to bring about changes in their value systems and to their thinking processes.

It seems that even for the most devout of believers in that day, the concept of right and wrong, sin and righteousness, was based, for the most part, on their actual “behaviors”, their actual “deeds”. That as long as they only thought about sin and didn’t actually do it, they would still be alright in the sight of God. And then also, even if they did fail in their efforts to be and to do “good”, all they had to do was to offer an acceptable sacrifice at the temple and all would be made right with God.

And while that manner of belief has some small measure of rightness to it, it still falls well short of God’s plan for our souls.

In the Book of James chapter 1, God warns about that very manner of behavior, about how if we allow sinful thoughts to linger within our minds for very long, those thoughts can quickly and easily turn to sin. Listen to these words, given in verse 14 of James chapter 1!

¹⁴ . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14)

Folks, Jesus knows us so very well. He knows that from that first moment we were formed in our mother’s womb, our souls have a “sinful nature”, a “bent” toward sinning. And because He knows we have that “nature” within us, all of His teaching and guidance reaches toward redeeming those desires and those tendencies, those core personal values, that will develop within that sinful nature.

And so, he tells us here in Luke chapter 9,

²³Then He said to *them* all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will

save it. ²⁵For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? ²⁶For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and *in His Father's*, and of the holy angels.

²⁷But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:23-27)

Note carefully that these exhortations from the Lord Jesus are not just focusing on our outward behaviors, but are reaching far deeper within us, addressing those desires that come out from a part of our being that these words call "self".

In last week's message, we learned that our "self" is that part of our being that resides deep within our soul where desires and "lusts of the flesh" come out from, that part of our soul where the remnants of our old sin nature are still able to tempt and influence our behaviors.

And "self" is well demonstrated within those words of James chapter 1 that we read a moment ago, those words that tell us that sin has its beginnings deep within the recesses of our minds and our emotions. There as simple thoughts come to our mind, our "self" is able to raise its insidious head and begin to influence the direction that those simple thoughts take. Again, those words from James chapter 1,

¹⁴ . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14)

Let me say this again folks. We must clearly understand and accept that we are born into this life with a basic "bent" towards sinful behavior fully entrenched within our souls. And if left unchanged, the desires of our heart for the things of this world and the things of our fleshly souls, will always rise to the surface and sinful behaviors will be their evidence. And so, the Lord Jesus says to us,

²³ "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. ²⁵For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost, (forfeits his own soul)? (Luke 9:23-25)

Jesus is telling us that we have to be fully aware of the demands that the desires of our flesh, our "self", can have upon us. And we need to be ready to do

battle with those desires and to deny them before they ever have the opportunity to rise to the surface and begin to control our behaviors.

These instructions from the Lord Jesus remind me of an occasion some years ago when we in the leadership at French Camp Academy went through a season of evaluating our program of loving watchcare over those dear young people who were entrusted into our care. Knowing that if we truly desired to raise those young people up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then we would need to begin first by carefully evaluating the deeply held core values and core beliefs within our own souls, individually and corporately.

The understanding being that unless we ourselves possessed that same value system that was within the heart of the Lord Jesus, that we would not be able to adequately convey His value system to those young people.

During that time of soul-searching, we considered and questioned ourselves about some of those most deeply held core values that influenced and guided our own personal motives and behaviors, both in our private homes and family lives, as well as those in our work and ministry involvements, understanding and accepting that all such things are inseparably linked together.

Simply put, we recognized and accepted that our personally held value systems worked their way into and became the guide for everything that we thought, said and did, both in our private lives and within our ministry related activities.

Our task was to solemnly evaluate those core values in order that God might be allowed to minister to us in them, changing the values that needed to be changed and adding emphasis to those values that are good.

And again, we found as we studied through our value systems, that all of our values were inseparably linked together, whether they be long-term or short-term, spiritual or secular. Who we are, what we think, how we act, our hopes, our plans, our dreams all come from one central set of core beliefs and values within us. None of it can be separated out or compartmentalized. It is simply who we are.

As I studied through these thoughts, I was reminded of some of the highly publicized events of the Bill Clinton presidential years, as he involved himself in various forms of immoral conduct. In an effort to excuse and explain away his

immoral behavior, his political party and the very supportive news media rationalized that he should not be measured by his “character”, but rather by his presidential skills and accomplishments.

Their rationale being that the two, the value system that guided his character and his actual behavior were separate and irrespective of each other. And interestingly his excuse makers, coined the expression “compartmentalizing”, saying that Bill Clinton's character and his behavior could be compartmentalized from one another, with one not influencing or affecting the other.

But their rationale was severely flawed, because it is so clear that such things are never separate. They are in every way all a part of the same. Our character and our core values influence, guide and direct all that we are, all that we say and all that we do in life, whether those matters be spiritual or secular.

And the Lord Jesus explained it so very clearly by using the simple example of a fruit tree. He said,

16 “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 “So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:16-20)

And as I read through these words of Jesus and His question to us, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and yet forfeits his own soul?” His words bring us directly to this consideration of our personal system of values, and the probable consequence for our behaviors.

And folks, we really do need to solemnly consider these options, these “trade-offs” that we will surely encounter, and suffer, if we pursue the wrong path of choices. And again, we need to understand and accept that the choices we make have everything to do with the motivation that comes out from our personal system of values.

So then, what is our, what is your, what is my system of values as it relates to all those things and activities and possessions that the world has to offer.

Our first “spiritual” response might be to say, “Oh, I agree completely with the words of 1 John 2 that tell us that we are not to,”

¹⁵ . . . love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

And yes, we as Christians really do believe these words and we really do want to live by them, to never desire or lust after the things of this world. And sometimes we are bold enough to really believe that we can follow through on the words we sing in the hymn “Where He Leads Me I Will Follow”.

But let me ask each of us, are we really that strong in our faith and in our resolve to obey these instructions of Christ? And do we really think and feel and live our daily lives with a strong resolve towards righteousness?

Unfortunately, for most of us, the answer to that question is, “probably not”! “Probably not”! As a matter of reality and of practice, we will find that we are very “soft” in our resolve. We really do like so many of the things the world has to offer, the idea of a “secure financial future”. And we want to have and to own many of those secular enjoyments that the world and the wealthier people of this world have.

And even though we are not ever actually able to have all those grander things of the secular world, hidden beneath the surface of our outward value system, we still do remain desirous, even lustful for more.

And with such desire and lust remaining within us, how are we supposed to deal with verse 23 of our passage?

²³ . . . “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23)

How much am I willing to deny myself the pleasures that I’m confronted with and tempted by with each day? Some would argue, but most all of those things are simple physical pleasures, and in these words, God is speaking more in “spiritual” terms. And that rationale may be true, but again, as we said a few moments ago, all such things are part of the same system of core values. They

cannot be separated out from one another. They really can't be "compartmentalized".

Within our hearts, you and I might really desire not to want or to accept anything that we are not entitled to or have not personally worked for. But just how committed are we to that value. The reality is we seldom ever deny ourselves any benefit or help that might be available to us.

I'm reminded of the so-called "stimulus checks" that were given out during the COVID epidemic, and how I "winked" at receiving those gifts from our government while I went about spending that money. I could have refused to accept that money and then returned it to the government. But I didn't. And I would suspect that most of you did much the same as I did.

. . . These words of Jesus are piercing and they are confronting and they have so many applications. And they should provoke us to consider their effects and their impact within the things and the involvements that we engage in each day. Again, these words of the Lord Jesus,

²⁵For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his own soul? (Luke 9:25)

A favorite expression among us is to say such things as, "Well, I work hard and earn all that I have"! But again, what are our "core values" as we work hard to earn our money?

If a person is a merchant, how much above the cost of his merchandise does he charge his customers? Is it a fair price, or is it simply what other merchants charge, that being, whatever the market will bear.

If a person is a craftsman, or a technician, or a repairman, how much does he or she charge for their labor? Is it a fair price, or is it simply what other workers charge, perhaps, whatever the market will bear.

Even our investments in the stock market are a winner or loser involvement. For me to gain in the stock market, most often someone else, just like me, must lose. I gain at another investor's expense.

The ideal core value would be for each of us to work hard, and to only charge what we need to charge to make a reasonable profit. If everyone did that, then everyone would gain and no one would lose.

And if we find that something we did, some work we performed went bad, then we should be willing to personally sacrifice to make it right.

If doctors and hospitals were willing to "try again", for free, when a surgery didn't work out the way the doctor intended, then perhaps insurance companies and Medicare would be more forthcoming in their payments.

When fundraising benefits are held and money is raised for people who are injured or when a disaster strikes a community, why should not merchants and doctors and hospitals be just as giving and generous in their charges and their fees.

All of these considerations bring us back to the question of core values. What are the values that influence and guide our daily thoughts, our attitudes and our behaviors? Do we love ourselves and the things of this world so much that we will simply continue to demand all that the market will bear, or are we willing to sacrifice and do as these words of Jesus command?

²³ . . . "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23)

And are we willing to take to heart the meaning behind these words of Jesus,
²⁵For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his own soul? (Luke 9:25)

Denying ourselves and becoming givers instead of takers is not an easy thing. It is contrary to our American success system of ideas. But it is truly the right and righteous way. And it is truly what God desires of each of us.

Here in our scripture text, Jesus is urging us on to love and to good works, encouraging us to take a serious look at our core system of values, and commanding us to deny the ways of our sinful self, and then to adopt Godly values as our common way of belief and behavior.

And as we behave in that godly manner, our behavior will then also witness to and influence others to want and to receive the sweet salvation of Christ for their own souls.

Listen again to these words as we close,

²³ . . . “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23)

²⁵For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his own soul? (Luke 9:25)

Let's Pray.