

Choosing My Standards

Psalm 57:7

If I were to ask you, "What are your values in life?" what would your answer be? I realize that is a question that would require some amount of thought! Your *values* are your *core beliefs* that shape everything you do in life. There are a lot of people who would say, "It really doesn't matter what you believe" but that is just not true. It does matter what you believe. Your *beliefs* determine your *behavior* and your *behavior* determines what you *become*. So the kind of person you are, if you look at the foundation, is based on the things you have chosen to *value*. In other words, your convictions in life determine your conduct. And your *conduct* determines your *character*. So whatever you want to be in life, you better figure out quick what your *values* are because they determine your *stress level*, your *success*, your *salvation*, and many other things.

If you want to build a lasting life of success and significance you must build it on lasting values. That is what we are going to look at in this series.

Tonight, I just want to briefly introduce the series and then in the weeks ahead we are going to get into ten individual values that you need to build into your life for success, significance, and being all God wants you to be.

One thing that basically everybody in our society agrees with today -- whether you are a liberal or whether you are conservative, democrat, republican, independent, religious or irreligious, a Christian or a nonchristian or an atheist or whatever -- the vast majority of people say that our society today is in a stage of moral decline. There is a decaying of values in our society.

Many surveys say that over 80% of Americans say that the number one problem in America now is *not the economy*, but it is the decline and decay of *moral values*. George Gallup did a pole and discovered that *Americans today are more interested in values than at any other time in the past sixty years.* It is a very hot item.

In the past year or so there have been over 350 articles in secular magazines that deal with the concern about the *moral decline and decaying of values in America*. Some of the articles were: "Is the U.S. Morally in Trouble?", "Can we save our culture?", "The Character Deficiency Syndrome", "Fighting to Fill the Values Gap", "The Decline of a Nation", "A Nation of Liars", "The Moral Obtuseness in America", "Living in the New Dark Ages", "A Nation of Finger Pointers", "How Moral Deprivation Breeds Kids With Attitudes", "Morals and Mixed Signals", "The People Magazine Sin Pole", "The New Dangers of Relativism", "Shifting Realities", "Our Moral Makeover: The Spiritual Void in Drug Use", "When Winning is the Only Thing", "Signs of Hope Amid Moral Decay", "Why is Common Curtsey Less Common?", "Beyond Materialism", "The Sexual Revolution Reconsidered", "Faultiness: The Lack of Responsibility in Our Society", "How Disregard for the Truth has Become Epidemic in America".

What we discovered is that every single national magazine has devoted at least one cover to this issue of *values* and *moral decline* in the last two years.

This crisis can be seen in many areas. I have listed five: politics, business, entertainment, education, and religion. If I said write down the current scandal in each of these areas, you would easily be able to do it.

What is the cause of all this? Why is there so much concern for all of this in our society? Tonight we are going to look at the Cause of moral decline -- the cause of why people are not building their life on values, the Cost of it to our families and ourselves, and the Cure. **Next**

week we are going to get into the solutions. This is just the introduction.

What is the cause of the crisis of values in our society? Two words: Truth Decay. The fact is, we no longer value the truth in America. Instead, we value two other things. We value *convenience*: Is it easy? And we value *pragmatism*: Does it work?

In fact, the word “post-truth” was coined in 2010, but was declared by Oxford Dictionaries as “the word of the year” in 2016. “Post-truth” is defined as “an adjective relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals.”

This represents a major shift in values in the last 40 years in our society. Fifty years ago, there was almost universal agreement about what was true, what was right and what was wrong. That did not mean everybody did it, because they didn't. But at least, fifty years ago in the generation that fought World War II, when those people did wrong, they knew they were doing wrong. They chose. They said, "I know this is wrong, but I'm going to do it anyway." And they would do it. There was no disagreement about what was right or wrong or what was true.

Today it is very different. We have an entire generation of young people and children who don't even know the difference between right and wrong. There are parts of our society that say, “There's no such thing as right and wrong. What may be right for you, may be wrong for me. What may be right for me, may be wrong for you.” So there are no standards by which you can evaluate your life and behavior.

What happened? Why is it that in just one generation's time we went from general agreement on "This is true!" to today, if I stood up and said, "This and this is true, this is right, this is wrong," there would

be all kinds of controversy about it. And it happened in just one generation. What happened?

We were sold a bill of goods. We fell for **three very destructive philosophies** that have replaced truth in our society.

1. Individuality or individualism. That is, live for myself, for only I can be the standard of my life, only I can judge what is really true, only I can judge what is right and only I can judge what is wrong and you do not have any place telling me what is right or wrong or true. I basically am my own god and I live for myself and I have got to do what is best for me. **That is called individualism.** A recent survey by the Wall Street Journal of executives across America discovered that when executives in America have an ethical crisis about 44% of them say, "I consult with myself." And only 3% say, "I consult with God." They are saying, "I set myself up as the standard."

This is nothing new. Individualism has gone on in nations for centuries, millennia. Thousands of years ago the nation of Israel fell prey to this. **If you want to read the dark ages of the nation of Israel, read the book of Judges.** It was the time of total chaos. Why? The answer is found in 1 Chronicles, "In those days Israel had no authority (no king) so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." **Does that sound vaguely contemporary? They just did whatever they thought was right.** If there are no judges, no standard, no rule, no law, no absolutes, they did whatever they wanted. **That is an easy philosophy to hold onto because it means I never have to feel guilty.** I do not have to measure up to my standards or your standards or anybody else's, and if you say, "This is right" then that may be right for you but for me, I am an individual and I run my own life.

That is the first philosophy. The result of it in the nation of Israel was anarchy and that is going to be the result if America keeps going that way here. **Anything goes.** **If I want to blow you away with a shot gun, fine!** Because the only thing that matters is **me.**

2. The second philosophy that we have bought into is called *Secularism*. Secularism can be summarized in three words: God is unnecessary. That does not mean that I don't believe there is a god. I believe there is a god, I just don't need Him in my life. For the last fifty years we have been systematically removing God from every area of public life - schools, government, media, newspapers, all the different areas of public opinion in life and we basically relegated God to Sunday mornings. I believe in God but He is just a slice of life. And I really decide for myself how I am going to live the rest of my life. God is not necessary. I've got it all together on my own.

This has all happened in just the last fifty years. Fifty years ago, most school rooms had the Ten Commandments hanging on the wall, and they were a standard of moral authority. Fifty years ago, in many if not most school rooms, classes began with prayer. Fifty years ago, the majority of people in America went to church. More people went to church than did not go to church.

Today, that is exactly the opposite. It has flip-flopped. Obviously there is no Ten Commandments or prayer in schools. And the majority of people do not go to church today. So where are they getting their morals? Oprah and all the other talk and so-called "Reality" shows take the most bizarre creatures found on the planet, put them on stage and say, "This is normal!" They are getting more and more bizarre. The audience will applaud and agree! The number one purveyor of values today is not God, the Bible, the church, even parents. It is television.

So in secularism, God has been removed from the main stream. This is talked about in the book of Romans, chapter 1, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped created things rather than the Creator." That is called *materialism*. When you worship things instead of the God who created everything. That is why there will be more people at the beach and the mountains today worshipping their tan, than there are at church worshipping God. We hear about all of these

uneducated tribes in some dark forest and say, "Isn't it sad that these tribes get a little piece of wood and carve it into an idol and then they bow down in front of it and worship it? How uneducated!" **But Americans have idols too that we worship.** The only difference is our idols have chrome on them and a thing on the front of the hood that says, "This is how much I paid for this car!" A lot of people worship their boat, their house, their career, anything that is created, rather than worshipping God. So God is unnecessary and I live for myself.

3. **Next, there is Relativism.** That does not mean you have bad relatives staying at your house for weeks. You can summarize relativism in two words: *No absolutes.*

The idea behind relativism goes like this: What is true for me may not be true for you and what is truth for you may not be truth for me. Therefore, what is right for me, may not be right for you and what is right for you, may not be right for me. And nobody can say what is right or wrong because all truth is relative. There is no real standard and truth is some vague idea.

That is a great way to live if you do not want to have any guilt. Then you say, "That is your standard. My standard is this..." If I do not measure up to God's standard, I just lower the bar a whole bunch and then I say, "Look how great I am!"

This is a problem and it comes up in a lot of familiar phrases: "It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you are sincere and it does not matter what you believe as long as you sincerely believe it." Really? **Have you thought through the logical extension of that?** How do you explain the 39 people who committed suicide in California a few years ago? They were sincere, very sincere, in what they were doing. **But they were deluded and they were wrong.** And there is a right and a wrong. You can be sincerely wrong.

If I think a cup is filled with water for me to drink but it is really filled with sulfuric acid and I drink it thinking it is water but it is sulfuric acid, then I would be sincerely dead. It really does matter what you believe.

It is illogical because the statement itself is an absolute, "There are no absolutes!" You have just stated one, which means obviously that statement is wrong. You cannot make an absolute statement that there are no absolutes, that is illogical.

Truth is narrow. That is why it's called *truth*. God says He wants us to know the truth.

Don't let anybody con you. We have been conned by *individualism* (live for myself), *secularism* (God is unnecessary), and *relativism* (there are no absolutes).