

VALUES

Ezekiel 16:20-21; 23:36-39; Psalm 139:13-16

How do we determine what is important to us? Or asked in a different way, how do we put a value on anything in our lives? Gandhi said in a well-known quote that our habits become our values and our values become our destiny. That is how many (maybe most) people in the world operate. They start with an idea or belief that could come from any number of sources and that belief impacts their thoughts which become actions that lead to habits, values, and destiny. This seems to be just the reverse of what we should do. If we begin with the ultimate objective or destiny in mind, then that will impact our life values which then will influence the habits we develop. Habits account for most of our actions and our actions influence what we talk about and our words become subconscious thoughts which lead to a solidification of our beliefs. Gandhi's process will usually produce random (chaotic) outcomes or destinies. Simply reversing the order and "beginning with the end in mind" should lead to more orderliness.

Such considerations require that we make some effort to know the ultimate outcome of human life. In general, all experience physical death. However, human life is more than physical life. It also has a spiritual component that we variously describe with such terms as soul and spirit. To say that we struggle to understand all that is involved in the "after physical life" existence is understated. The spiritual realm is certainly mysterious; however, many acknowledge its existence and show interest to varying extents. The existence of divine or supernatural beings is accepted by many and most cultures show evidence that human life is valued. There were and are all too many exceptions to what we would consider to be a natural affection to preserve life that seemingly defy logic when examined. Even in Israel, among God's chosen people, life was sometimes treated as if it had no value.

Wrong Doing is Justified – Eze 16:20-21

²⁰ And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter ²¹ that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them? Ezekiel 16:20–21 (ESV)

Problems arise when all human life is not valued equally by those who have acquired positions of power in the world. We can name those who are notorious villains in this tragedy and such names as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Moa Tse Tung, Idi Amin, and might even let our minds think about abuses in our own nation's history. Most of us see such tyrants and their tyranny as remote and unrelated to ordinary human motivation and activities. However, those infamous leaders of nations were passively (if not actively) allowed to carry out such atrocities by the general populace who were impacted by what is now identified as "mass formation psychosis" in which people became unable to carry out rational thoughts and judgments and they just went along with whatever their leaders and so-called experts told them.

Ezekiel used mixed metaphors to describe the spiritual adultery of Israel in terms of physical acts of those who participated in unrestrained orgies that were typical of what prostitutes did and what happened in pagan religious rituals in which some of the Jews participated. The spiritual prostitution was actually expressed in the treaties with other nations such as Babylon and Egypt for protection from Egypt and Babylon. Rather than trusting in God, they would pay tribute money to have this protection in which they put their trust. God saw this as prostitution with a difference. The difference was that most prostitutes would receive payment for their acts, but Israel was bribing these other nations rather than receiving payment.

This dependence on (or trusting in) other nations for protection was bad enough;

however, Israel went even further in that they adopted ritualistic worship practices associated with the pagan gods of these nations. These practices were not simply lighting a candle or baking cakes to honor the queen of heaven, but it even went to the point of child sacrifice as burnt offerings to these pagan deities. Not only was this atrocity beyond the pale of natural affections, it was a presumptive act of putting themselves in the place of Yahweh Who is the Giver of life and Who considers that each human being belongs to Him. Notice that God had Ezekiel tell them, “You slaughtered My children.” This reality tells us that parents do not “own” their children but are appointed (by God) to be stewards of them and, therefore, they (the parents – both of them) are responsible and accountable to God for protecting, nourishing and teaching them truth.

Children do NOT belong to the state (the government) and they certainly do not belong to anyone in the education systems or the medical systems of our world. These entities do not even have a primary stewardship role which has God ordained. They may have a secondary stewardship role that is granted by parents (either intentionally or through neglect), which makes these entities responsible to the parents who will be ultimately held accountable to God.

It is evident that abandoning or even reducing the priority status of Yahweh as protector and provider and the only sovereign led to child sacrifice in Israel. That realization should make us question what gods have our nation embraced that resulted in the gruesome practice of abortion of children in the womb and even infanticide in some cases. That may be too difficult a question for most people to answer since we consider ourselves to be so sophisticated that we would never worship a god. Let’s rephrase the question to ask, what do we consider to be the most important thing(s) in our national psyche? The answers have to be fairly evenly split between “freedom” and “safety.”

Is it possible that these two concepts (and the resulting outcomes) have become the gods of our nation (or perhaps the world)? We might imagine that if some future civilization were to find the remains of our civilization that they would conclude that we worshiped at the Shrine of Freedom and that we worshiped the goddess Liberty. In fact, we even erected a huge statue of this goddess in the harbor near one the large cities. One glimpse at our daily lives, one introspective examination of what really motivates us and we too can conclude that freedom is high on our list of priorities. For some, “freedom” as they define it, is more important than family, community, country, the church, the Kingdom of God, and the God of the Kingdom.

Of course, we realize that there are varying quality levels of freedom and the present-day situation is that many have abandoned the idea of “freedom” that results from “knowing the truth” and have embraced the idea of “freedom without responsibility or accountability.” This latter idea of totally unrestrained “freedom” produces chaos and ultimate destruction. It is fairly clear that such chaos negates any semblance of “safety” which is the other priority previously identified. This relationship is apparently not so obvious in the case of individuals exercising their freedom to have an abortion. They justify their decisions and actions by such shallow thinking that “no one is harmed.” Such a statement as this should bring us back to the statement we saw earlier “problems arise when all human life is not valued equally by those who have acquired positions of power in the world.” These we called “the unborn” are certainly not “safe” when an abortion happens any more than the Jews were safe from Hitler and the German people who were victims of mass formation psychosis.

Callousness Becomes the Norm – Eze 23:36-39

³⁶ The LORD said to me: “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. ³⁷ For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and

they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. ³⁸ Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. ³⁹ For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house. Ezekiel 23:36–39 (ESV)

Earlier in this twenty-third chapter, God had Ezekiel tell Judah (called Oholibah) that they had gone the way of the northern kingdom of Israel (Oholah) in their spiritual adultery and the consequences of such practices would be that they would have to drink the same cup of God's judgment.

Judah had witnessed what had happened to Samaria a century and a half earlier and they did not learn from that. Consequently, they traveled down the same road and had gone even beyond the practices of their northern cousins in their spiritual adultery. In words very similar to what we read in chapter sixteen; we see the repeated charge against them of child sacrifice of God's children which was not only a sin against the helpless babies but was (as is all sin) done against God Himself.

At the same time they were doing the child sacrifices in the pagan sanctuaries such as the altar to Moloch in the Valley of Topheth. This was a location in Jerusalem in the Gehinnom (a valley just south of the city) where worshipers engaged in a ritual that involved "passing a child through the fire." To add an insult to what they were doing on the pagan altars, they even defiled the Temple of God by setting up idols to "other gods" in the sanctuary where they still carried out ritualistic worship practices to Yahweh.

Apparently, they had no sense of conscience that bringing in things of the world into such a holy place (literally a place set aside for worship of Yahweh) was wrong and very displeasing to God. We are essentially doing the same things in our churches when we fail to respect the places that we have set aside to come together for corporate worship. We can extend this and make this same argument regarding what happens when we fail to keep in mind and respect that our body is the temple of God and that we have been set aside by God (when we were saved) to be a holy people. Whatever happened to "come ye out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord?"

Sometimes we express such concern of the influence of the world invading and defiling our sanctuaries with regard to harsh music and disco style lighting and fail to notice the not-so-obvious issues as incorporation of a worldly mind set with regard to values and fundamental beliefs. This perhaps can be summed up in two questions and answers: What in the world is wrong with the church? And the answer is Nothing! In fact, the church is supposed to be "in the world" making disciples of all nations. The second question is "What in the church is wrong with the world?" And the answer is Everything! Worldly influences – its value systems which conflict with God's principles – are not supposed to be in the church at all.

At the same time the people were defiling the Temple sanctuary and worshiping other gods in remote place such as on mountain tops and under every tree, they were ignoring the Sabbaths which were to be continuing reminders of their dependence on God for everything in life and beyond. Not only did they ignore the weekly Sabbaths (which was an abuse of people and animals used for work) they also disregarded the yearly Sabbaths which was an abuse of the land God had given them to provide for their food and wellbeing.

God's Truth Revealed – Ps 139:13-16

¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was

none of them. Psalm 139:13–16 (ESV)

This commonly referenced passage helps us understand that not only is human life important, but also that unborn human life is important. Those who would argue that abortion is OK anytime during a pregnancy would do well to learn the meaning of these four verses. The Psalmist realized that the human body (with all the interior parts that function as they do) could result only as a result of action by an omniscient, omnipotent God. To argue that complex life forms evolved as a chance happening is totally unbelievable and it would take more faith than I have for me to accept such a concept.

The description used here is "marvelous" and that may be an understatement if we knew all there is to know about the workings of the various systems in our body. There is chemistry so complex that the best scientists are still trying to unravel its mysteries and have only scratched the surface of what is there. The Psalmist was so impressed in his soul (his mind, his emotion and his will) with the wonder of the human body that he praised God for being his Creator.

He used a metaphor of the mother being as the earth and the baby being as the elements that combine to produce compounds that are found in the earth. He realized God was aware of his formation and growth even from the time of conception.

From this passage we also see that God already has a plan and purpose for every unborn child and those who would deliberately interfere with what God has planned will find themselves working in opposition and at cross purposes to the will of God. How many of the 50 million aborted babies did God plan to use to find a cure for cancer or to unlock ways to use solar energy in an effective way to provide for clean energy. Was there someone who never saw the light of day who would find the secret to solving the Alzheimer's problem? When we interfere with what God plans for us, then we lose the benefit of His blessing that could have been ours.

ADDENDUM:

“We, as a society, over the last 50, 60 years, have made some very bad choices. For example, we've desanctified or defiled gender roles ... Marriage has lost its sanctity. The unborn are being massacred. In the Bible, there are two cities that were destroyed, Sodom and Gomorrah, and there's an analysis why that happened. It wasn't because of the immorality, because the whole world was immoral. It was because they codified immorality into the law of the land. That's exactly what has happened in [the U.S.] We've devolved ... We worship the God of science, the god of technology, the god of money, god of power. Anything but [the true] God. And we are clearly practicing child sacrifice.” (Vladimir Zelenko)