

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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Goodbye "Virtues" Hello "Values"

By David Diestelkamp

When is the last time you heard someone on the street use the word "virtue?" The dictionary doesn't note it as an archaic word, but I fear that it is headed in that direction. Society, rather than decrying the death of virtue, is instead hailing its replacement -- "values."

Virtues are things of "intrinsic eminence, moral goodness" (Vines Expository Dictionary). They are things which are in and of themselves important and morally right. Their attainment is therefore considered excellence and worthy of praise (Phil. 4:8). Unfortunately, standards this high and unyielding have fallen on hard times today. The term "values" seems innocent enough on the surface when viewed only as things of estimated worth. Webster's New World College Dictionary takes it another step farther in showing its modern usage: "the social principles, goals, or standards held or accepted by an individual, class, society, etc." Even this may not seem so serious until one realizes that this concept of values recognizes no standard outside of self.

Remember, virtues carry with them the authority of a standard. Individual actions can therefore be compared to an objective standard, not simply weighed by mere feelings, concepts, or philosophies. But values are based on searching your own mind and life in order to find self-fulfillment, inner peace, a sense of acceptance, etc. A value is essentially what

you like or love to do. It is not an ought to, but a want to. Actions can then only be judged based on how well they express what is desired or whether they are consistent with a chosen lifestyle.

In school our children are often given exercises designed to "clarify" their values. In other words, they are challenged to search within themselves to find what they feel is of worth. They are learning to emphasize feelings and personal growth from tapping inner power, rather than being taught to look to objective standards and listening to the aged voice of wisdom and reason. This is symptomatic of a society that is developing the inability to distinguish between personal preference and matters of moral obligation.

Of course, values can be virtues, but they don't have to be. Often values are simply opinions, feelings, preferences, even personal quirks and obsessions. It can be anything anyone happens to think is of value at any time, for any reason. This is at the heart of the appeal of the modern virtues concept -- all distinctions and differences are therefore either ignored or seen as inconsequential. Everyone has their own values and they are seen to be as good as anyone else's. Therefore a sort of moral equality is seen to exist even when preferences and lifestyles differ -- no one is right and no one is wrong, they are simply being true to their personal values system.

While it is true that we make our life's decisions based on what we value, we must base our sense of worth on something greater than fallible inner passion. Paul Earnhart once said, "The inner light is the worst form of illumination -- it is based only on self."

We must reach out to what the world rejects and ignores. Lost in modern values is an infallible standard upon which to make moral choices. In turn, moral choice itself seems to disappear along with its consequences, principles, character, and responsibility. But we know that Scripture is "profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every

good work" (2 Tim. 3:16). Now that is a standard upon which both values and virtues can stand as moral absolutes.

The worst of mankind still has some sort of values, but the righteous will be satisfied with no less than virtue. We must see the importance of adding virtue to our faith (2 Pet. 1:5), for it is to "glory and virtue" that God calls us (2 Pet. 1:3).

Immaturity

By Robert F. Turner

Irresponsible, shortsighted, rash and selfish conduct is often proof of immaturity. But we do not refer to years. People sixty and above may be immature — acting like little children when they do not get their way, or are forced to face the realities of this life. They are incapable of objectivity, their pride is easily hurt, and they throw a tantrum. That is bad enough in secular life, but it can be tragic in the church.

Bible knowledge maturity is found in those who dwell on something more than first principles (Heb 5:12f). They have learned that justice, mercy, and faith are the grounds upon which their concern for tithes of mint, anise and cummin can have validity. Ignore the first, and one becomes an hypocritical nit-picker with all else (Matt 23:23-24). He may strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

People-dealing maturity comes only after we learn that we are all sinners (Rom 3:23), and are completely humbled before God. The "babe" seeks an "issue" and perhaps make a "name" for himself. But maturity seeks for souls, hoping to "give 'em Heaven," and save them from Hell. The babe sees himself as a General in the Lord's army; the mature saint is an expendable servant of the Lord.

Doctrinal maturity is not compromise with error. It is simply wisdom enough to know we do not know it all. The babe paddles wildly about on the surface of the water, loudly proclaiming his domination of the seas; but maturity is aware of the unexplored depths below. The fool has an answer, the wise, a reason.

Paul told Timothy to "*flee youthful lusts*" and "*foolish and unlearned questions avoid*" (2 Tim 2:22f). There is no "instant maturity" for any of us. We must start with instructions to youth, and "*by reason of use*" we may "*grow up*" in Christ. All of us are in the process in many facets of the Christian life, not having attained (Phil 3:12f). We can be patient and tolerant of blustering spiritual babes without appointing them as elders, preachers, and editors. In time, with enough milk and nurture, we may all learn to act like men.