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### **More On Values**

by William P. Wilson, M.D.

-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

Space prevents me from commenting at length in this letter, but I saw an article in our local paper recently that was worthy of a few words. The headline read, "Some N.C. Clergymen Welcome Prayer Ban." The article said that a school superintendent had banned baccalaureate sermons in the systems high schools. After quoting parents who were upset about the ban, the reporter also related comments by a theologian and a philosopher. The theologian said, "'Many Christians in this country simply haven't faced up to the fact that this isn't a Christian society,' said Stanley Hauerwas professor of theological ethics at the Divinity School of Duke University. 'They need to give up on thinking there is Christian hegemony.'" The philosopher commented on the fear held by many parents that schools will fail to teach important moral values. "Paul Bredenberg, a retired professor of philosophy at N.C. State University, said that the most important values have no religious basis.

'They are universal -- honesty, truth telling, dedication to open inquiry, the golden rule.' Bredenberg said. 'They can be taught without any reference to the Bible or any other religion.'

My response to the article was that we have never lived in a Christian society. Committed (real) Christians have always been in a minority, and in numbers have never exceeded thirty percent of the population. What is true is that the country was founded on Judeo-Christian values. The reason for their choice was related to the prevailing view that God's principles and laws were known to promote the interests of free men and women.

The founding fathers also recognized that one cannot legislate religion. They had seen what happened when there was an established church in England, Germany and Sweden. Therefore, they saw to it that the constitution did not allow an established church. What they wanted to be sure of was that the government could not favor one church or religion over another as they do in the countries already mentioned and in Italy or Spain.

Dr. Bredenberg is wrong when he says that the most important values are not Christian. Our law, both criminal and common, is based on the Bible. The values taught in the Bible are worded so that they can only be interpreted one way. They are absolute. We must have absolute values, else every man becomes a law unto himself. The only higher authoritative source for values is God. We can only live by these values if we are empowered by God, or the state enforces their observance.

To be sure there are 2 universal taboos. Murder and incest are the only taboos found in all societies. Other societies relativise many of the other values that Christians hold to be absolute. If a man or a government legislates behavior, the laws only have the authority of that man or government. This authority is not absolute. Gods values are absolute because He has absolute authority.

We have denied the authority of God, and have relativized His laws. The history of all civilizations is that when they relativise their absolute values, the society decays.

For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. (Deuteronomy 30:16-18).

Years ago I wrote an essay entitled "Why Morality." It was not very good, so I never published it. There were, though, some good points made in it. One of them was that values that regulate behavior, have consequences. The scripture verses cited above describe these consequences quite clearly. These consequences affect the individual and the society in which he or she lives. The history of communities, nations, and observation of the lives of people in our society confirms the absoluteness of these values. All of God's values are absolute, not just some. We have been given a choice, and urged to make the right choice.

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Why has our nation chosen to make the wrong choices? The answer is lack of faith. We are too affluent. As a result we have chosen another God -- money. We have chosen death, because we have chosen to live by man's values, not God's.