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Character Education and Its Parallels to Biblical Morality

David Palmer

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Steve Vandegriff, D. Min.
Chairman of Thesis

Samuel Smith, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Jonathan Geukgeuzian, M.R.E.
Committee Member

Marilyn Gadomski
Assistant Honors Program Director
Committee Member

Date

Abstract

This paper includes both historical and present day examinations of the state of public education and character in students. Written for the benefit of Christian youth ministers, this paper examines some of the common tenants of modern day character education and seeks to demonstrate their Biblical parallels. Issues regarding the state of character in students and legality of people in a religious profession on a school campus are examined. This paper demonstrates without question that a Christian person can readily support a character education program in the public schools because of the Biblical basis for the values espoused. After examining the evidence it should also provide a youth minister with a better understanding of the acceptable verbiage to use to gain more consistent access to a public school campus.

Character Education and Its Parallels to Biblical Morality

Legal Issues of Religion in Public Schools

The United States has long been deep in the mist of an identity crisis. As a nation it struggles to reconcile the identity of its founders with the ideals upon which it was founded. It is a country originally settled by those fleeing religious persecution. It is a country founded upon the ideals inherent in a Christian worldview. American founders believed that all people are valuable and entitled to freedom. The vast majority of the founders gained this perspective because they believed that people are made in the image of God, and that God cared for them. Therein lies part of the problem that this land faces. Should the United States deny the very Christian teaching and doctrine that helped to form the country? The obvious answer is no, America should not deny its heritage. However, how can it keep the nation from ending up persecuting other religions or favoring those with a similar tradition to the founders? The answer lies in the Constitution.

The first amendment to the constitution has a clause that is meant to address the issue of religious freedom and a state or federally sanctioned religion. The establishment clause has evolved into what people know today as the clause that demands a separation of church and state. While the actual words 'separation of church and state' are never used in the Constitution the idea behind this comes from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1801 to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut. In this letter Jefferson states,

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man & his god, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state” (Jefferson, 1802).

The idea that Jefferson espouses in this letter has become the battle cry of those who wish to abolish the idea of any type of religious presence on a public school campus.

Another founding father’s opinion can be seen in James Madison’s *Memorial and Remonstrance* (1785). In this work Madison argues, “that it is a ‘fundamental and undeniable truth’ that ‘religion or the duty which we owe to our Creator and the Manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence.’” Madison continued:

The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right. It is unalienable; because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men: It is unalienable also, because what is here a right towards men, is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to him. This duty is precedent both in order of time and degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society (Krannawitter and Palm, 2005, p. 69).

Here Madison demonstrates that his desire was to promote and protect religious freedom for all men, but at the same time prevent the establishment of a state religion (p. 69).

The original intent of the establishment clause in the first amendment is most likely much less severe than the idea that Jefferson put forth in 1801. The clause is stated in the Constitution as follows, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” (U.S. Constitution, 1st Amendment). Once the

true wording of the establishment clause is analyzed a much broader scope for interpretation emerges.

At one end of the spectrum are those who believe that the separation of church and state allows for no room in which anything having to do with religion can be breached on a public school (and therefore federal) campus. These groups believe that this clause should be interpreted to say that religion and religious practices should have no place on campus. This extreme position has recently been shown in a public school in New York in 2002 administrators told a kindergarten girl she was not allowed to pray with her friends before lunch (Kafer, 2002, para. 1). Another extreme position was recently promoted in the case of *Newdow v. U.S. Congress*. In this case the Ninth Circuit decided that while schools were saying the Pledge of Allegiance the phrase “under God” was in violation of the Establishment Clause. This 2002 decision has caused a shock to even those on the far political left of the spectrum. “‘Embarrassing at best,’ commented Democratic Senator Diane Feinstein, and Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle described it as ‘just nuts’” (Krannawitter, p. 79).

At the other end of the spectrum are those who say that the clause was solely meant to prevent the government from declaring and funding an official national religion. It is much less clear as to whether the establishment clause prohibits the government from supporting a particular religion. Those who question the broad interpretation of the establishment clause point out that the same lawmakers who proposed the Bill of Rights also opened each day in prayer and voted to use federal dollars to fund Christian missionaries in India (Linder, 2007, para. 2). Those who hold to this view of the Establishment Clause believe that the founding fathers did not write the Bill of Rights

and Constitution to create natural rights, but rather wrote to describe natural rights given to all by God (Krannawitter, p. 79). Those in favor of this view see a slippery slope on which courts have been ruling allowing the wording of the Constitution to dictate their decisions rather than the ideas behind the words written.

It is clear that in the current culture the majority of citizens view the separation of church and state as a good and necessary protection. What is less clear is how far should school administrators take this separation. Since 1947 this establishment clause has been at the center of numerous lawsuits, several of which have been taken all the way to the Supreme Court for a ruling. The results from these rulings have been mixed over the years. In 1948 the Court decided that it is against the establishment clause to invite various religious instructors onto a school campus to give optional lectures. Then in the 1952 case *Zorach v. Clauson* the court upheld a schools right to give students “release time” to attend religious programs in various places of worship (Linder, 2007, para. 4).

The two most recent Supreme Court rulings on the establishment clause were both decided in 2005. These rulings had to do with the legality of displaying the Ten Commandments in county courthouses. The purpose of the displays was “to demonstrate that the Ten Commandments were part of the foundation of American Law and Government’ and ‘to educate the citizens of the county regarding some of the documents that played a significant role in the formation of our system of law and government’” (Krannawitter, p. 80-81). The Court ruled in the case of *Van Orden v. Perry* that a monument to the Ten Commandments was allowed. The Court ruled in the case of *McCreary County v. ACLU of Kentucky* that the display was unconstitutional,

even though the display also included the Declaration of Independence, which also acknowledges God's place in the founding of America (p. 80).

Contradictory decisions on the Establishment Clause have led to a great deal of frustration and confusion on both sides of the issue. Often these decisions have come from a divided court. While these cases, and many more like them regarding religious or spiritual activities on school campuses, have made the landscape of education and religious freedom less clear than ever, what is crystal clear is that they have caused a shift in the way that educating students is realized.

History of Education and Character in Schools

In order to understand the full scope of the shift in American education it is necessary to explore the history of American education. The history of American education is different from state to state. This difference is the result of the lack of any mention about education in the Constitution. Therefore, states were to be responsible for their own education systems. From the beginning of our country education was thought to be something that happened mainly at home. Parents and families were charged with giving their children the information and knowledge needed in order to be successful and happy citizens. Education was not merely an exercise of the mind or something to be measured by an aptitude test. Education was thought to be the means by which someone was taught right from wrong, and the proper way to live in a society. John Adams wrote a bit about education in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. Adams wrote:

Wisdom and Knowledge, as well as virtue diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties, and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of the Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them...

(Thomas, 1981, p. 192).

Education in America started out as much more than just knowledge it also was meant to instill wisdom and virtue. Other early educators echo these sentiments about education. Francis Wayland Parker of Quincy, Massachusetts took a holistic approach to educating students. At their school all subjects were combined. Reading and writing bred lessons on spelling. Language lessons would breed lessons on science. Math lessons were combined into art and color lessons. The overarching premise being that all lessons were to teach good manners and morality to the students (p. 200).

Throughout the early educational period curriculum was varied. The recognized subjects to be taught in public schools included topics on, arithmetic, language, literacy, geography, and natural and moral philosophy (p. 201). These subjects had less to do with what public schools wanted to teach and thought were important and more to do with how to pass a college entrance exam. It is possible that these college entrance exams really saved the public school systems by making their entrance exams fairly uniform. These exams helped teachers know what to teach their students (p. 204).

In the early 1900's the landscape of public education had changed somewhat. With more public land and funding available to public school systems there was a dramatic increase in the number of schools available. According to research done by W.F. Connell (1980) 72 % of children ages 5-17 were enrolled in a school by 1900. In its content the curriculum of primary education was largely unchanged since the last 100 years. This education was meant to teach students to be literate and have a basic understanding of mathematics as well as to instill in children good character, honesty, a

good work ethic and patriotism (p. 4). These were all qualities that were meant to make a student into a good and productive citizen.

Since the early 1900's the education system has gone through several major shocks. WWI and WWII helped the U.S. end isolationism. This in turn woke citizens up to the fact that they have to be able to compete on a global scale. This has led to more attention being paid to the American education system. This increased level of accountability has raised the standards of what it means to be a student and to teach in a public school. The obvious implications of such a shift are more standardized curriculum. Schools are allowed freedom to choose their curriculum but always must keep in mind that the decisions they make must be able to help their students learn at a competitive rate. This competition between schools is being measured through standardized tests and the test scores of their students.

Changes in Modern Educations Approach to Teaching Character

As a consequence of the standardized tests, a teacher's job description has changed a good deal over the past fifty years. No longer are teachers able to spend their time trying to mold students into effective thinkers and good citizens. They must spend their time teaching the topics and subjects that will be on the standardized tests. Their own jobs depend on how well they can prepare their students to do on a test. As a consequence there are now classes on test taking skills. These classes attempt to teach students how to manage their anxiety, and time. They also teach students how to spot incorrect answers in order to better their odds of getting a question answered correctly. Classes such as these have replaced classes that teach on moral philosophy and show students how to decide what is right.

The jump from teaching students the importance of moral behavior in public schools to teaching students how to best take a test has been a complicated process taking the better part of fifty years. According to Thomas Lickona (1991) the shift really began with Darwin's theory of evolution being taught as fact. Since all life was evolving this led many in the general public to view morality as something that is constantly evolving as well. Einstein's theory of relativity was taken past its physical application and into the moral realm. Morality now become something that was relative to each person and their experiences and point of view. Also, a new philosophy about distinguishing between facts and values began to take hold of educators. Students were being taught that the only sure truths, or fact were ones that could be scientifically proven (p. 8).

These views really gave rise to a new attitude of self-importance and an egocentric way of thought in the 1960's and 1970's. The focus left society or the greater good, and students were taught to focus on what was important to them. The focus was no longer on what is right or ought to be done and was placed rather on what a person wanted to do. Since this time the next thirty years has seen a significant rise in crimes, assaults, cheating, peer cruelty, obscene language, sexual abuse and promiscuity, and disrespect for authority in public schools (p. 9-19).

At this point our culture is realizing a significant increase in the amount of information that a student is expected to learn and retain. Technology is moving at record speeds and educators are looking to help students stay competitive on both a national and global scale. This is not only a pace being set by educators but rather a pace being set by lawmakers and passed on as mandates to educators. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has made public school systems accountable to the Federal

government for their progress. It “establishes requirements for the standards and assessment systems of states” (NCLB, 2001, para 9). This means that Americans are now in an age where our education system must teach students to meet certain required standardized testing standards or face consequences. The consequence of not meeting the requirements in the schools includes decreased federal aid or federal aid with stipulations placed on the school systems.

The State of Character in Students

According to an ABC News 2004 survey of twelve to seventeen year old high school students, cheating is a huge issue on public school campuses. Out of this sample of 504 randomly chosen twelve to seventeen year olds six in ten students say that they have friends who cheat. One in three students admitted to cheating on their schoolwork. An astonishing 34% of students admitted that they would be willing to cheat if they knew they would not be caught. This survey showed that only one in three students has ever had a conversation with a parent about cheating on their work (Sussman, 2004).

The 2006 Josephson Institute Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth released its report card for 2006. At the top of the report card read, “Young people are almost unanimous in saying that ethics and character are important on both a personal level and in business but they express very cynical attitudes about whether a person can be ethical and succeed” (Jarc, 2006). This report card goes on to demonstrate this very truth with some very telling statistics on the state of American education today. In this survey it is demonstrated that 98% of students say that it is important to them to be people of good character. 83% of students say that it is not worth lying and cheating to ruin your character. 89% of students expressed that it is more important to be fair and

honest than wealthy. Students overwhelmingly believe that there is a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things. However, as the next part of the survey will demonstrate there is a disconnect between how students think things should be and how they perceive them to be.

Despite being relatively optimistic about the state of their character and moral compass more results from the survey show that 59% of students agreed that, “In the real world, successful people do what they have to do to win, even if others consider it cheating.” Another 42% believe that “A person has to lie or cheat sometimes in order to succeed” (50% males, 33% females). More than one in five (23%) believe that “People who are willing to lie, cheat or break the rules are more likely to succeed than people who do not” (30% males, 16% females). 82% of students admit they lied to parent within the past 12 months about something significant and 57% said they lied two or more times. 62% of students admit they lied to a teacher within the past 12 months about something significant and 35% said they lied two or more times. 33% of students copied an Internet document within the past 12 months – 18% did so two or more times. 60% cheated during a test at school within the past 12 months – 35% did so two or more times. 23% stole something from a parent or other relative within the past 12 months – 11% did so two or more times. In 2002, 28% admitted stealing from a parent or other relative. 19% stole something from a friend within the past 12 months – 7% did so two or more times 28% stole something from a store within the past 12 months – 14% did so two or more times (Jarc, 2006).

This information on cheating is becoming more and more troublesome to many educators in America. No singular force is causing this cheating epidemic striking high

school and middle schools across the country, but rather it is a result of several factors. It most likely has a lot to do with the pressure to succeed being placed on students. More students than ever before are enrolling in post-secondary schools and the competition is becoming fiercer for a limited number of spots. The marketplace is demanding that workers have a degree in order to get a decent paying job. Students and parents and educators are seeing these trends and there is a sense of urgency to keep up. Students who are not able to keep up are faced with the option of being honest and falling behind or cutting corners and keeping pace. Corners are being cut at alarming rates right now on public school campuses.

However, it is more than cheating that has led educators in our country to set off an alarm. Violent crime rates are too high among middle school and high school aged students. From 1978 to 1988 the number of 13-14-year old males being arrested for rape doubled (Lickona, 1991, p. 4). According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse the statistics for teenage substance abuse are high. Alcohol use for tenth graders in 2007 is at 45.9%, while lifetime use of alcohol is at 77% for twelfth graders. 46 % of twelfth graders reported having used illegal drugs in their lifetime. Methamphetamine use is on the rise and the use of prescription drugs is on the rise. The good news is that in recent years some of the problems facing teens have been on the decline.

There is good news as the violence rates have been decreasing. The bad news is that rates of teen violence in schools is still over 30% and hazing is at 50% among those belonging to a high school organization. While teen murder is down, it is still five times higher than that of Canada. Suicide rates among teens have decreased since 2000. The bad news is that suicide is still the third leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds.

Alcohol and drug abuse has declined since 2001 but the numbers are still incredibly high as evidenced by previously reported data (Lickona and Davidson, 2007, p. 32).

The bottom line with the statistics is that the overall numbers are too high. Compared to our country fifty years ago crime rates, drug use, cheating, and suicide are all dramatically high. Many opinions exist about the reason behind such a dramatic increase in the crime rates among students over the past fifty years. A combination of a naturalistic and evolutionary worldview and moral relativity can be blamed for much of the problem. However, if taken on their own these factors alone cannot be the cause of all of the problems. After all, students spend up to six or seven hours a day at school for five days a week accounting for up to thirty-five hours in a week of being influenced by educators espousing this way of thinking. If students get a nightly eight hours of sleep this still leaves seventy-seven hours worth of time for students to be impacted by alternate opinions and worldviews. This is more than twice the time that is spent at school each week. This revelation begs the question, who is influencing students in these remaining seventy-seven hours?

The obvious answer is that the parents are the ones who are influencing these students. The next logical question would be, what is happening at home that is either causing, or not preventing students from dangerous habits and situations? The breakdown of the traditional American family is a well-documented phenomenon. Right now 31% of school-aged children are living in a single parent home (US Census, 2000). This generally leaves the single parent with a single income; some households receive some form of child support. The consequence of these high numbers is that a single parent must work in order to support their children. With children usually getting home

from school several hours before parents get home from work this is leaving a gap in time for students to be open to outside influences. These kids are being left unsupervised and often times wide open to negative peer influence.

The causes for a breakdown in morality among school-aged students are many and varied. The general consensus among educators is that there is definite room for improvement in both the way students perform in the classroom and behave on schools campuses and in the community. One of the important movements to counteract the negative trends that are being seen in adolescents is a move toward a character based education curriculum. Proponents of a character based education program believe that incorporating universal values into a students educational experience will better equip students to function as upstanding and well adjusted citizens of the community.

Values Clarification

Character education has been around for as long as education has been around. It has been shown that in the past education was a character building experience. Since 1960 schools have been trying an approach that will help students to make good character decisions in a process that William Kilpatrick (1992) calls in his book, “values clarification” (p. 16). This approach has been implemented in most public schools for the past forty years in a decision-making model. Students are asked a morally based question and then asked to think through and verbalize their responses to the dilemma. This method is meant to help students better understand the reason behind the moral value helping them to internalize it and believe in it. However, this approach has largely left students with a good discussion of both sides and no answers. Kilpatrick says,

It has resulted in classrooms where teachers act like talk show hosts, and where the merits of wife swapping, cannibalism, and teaching children to masturbate are recommended topics for debate. It has resulted in nonjudgmental drug education programs in which drugs are scarcely mentioned except to say that taking them is a personal choice (p. 16).

This method has done more to confuse students and make them question their values than it has to help them clarify right from wrong. The result of this method has really been a free pass for students to take whatever moral road they want and call it a subjective decision on their part. The results of this type of teaching have been well documented in the behaviors and wellbeing of students (p. 16). The bottom line is that this type of teaching is ineffective and irresponsible.

Character Education

Universal Moral Values

These methods have been slow to change in the education system even though the results have been less than desirable. Proponents of a character based education program in public schools for the most part seek to distance themselves from this form of values clarification. They seek a more direct method of teaching students right from wrong. This is a method that recognizes universal values that all people should exhibit. It seeks to instill in young people virtues that are desirable in both a person's life and in the community at large.

The Josephson Institute of Ethics is a leading proponent of character education focusing on virtues. This is a popular source of information on character education and ethical decision-making. Their mission is as follows, "To improve the ethical quality of society by changing personal and organizational decision making and behavior" (Josephson, 2007). This organization has been working in the business and education

world for twenty years doing research and seminars about the importance of ethical decision-making. They have come up with six pillars of character which they believe are universal values which can help to unite a fractured society. With a culture that believes in moral relativity these values are designed to be a filter through which ethical decisions can be made more effectively.

The list of the six pillars of character is by no means an exhaustive list of moral virtues. Most of these pillars are in other character education curriculum not put out by the Josephson Institute as well. It is meant to be a starting point to help guide people in making better decisions. These six pillars of character have close Biblical parallels behind which Christians can rally. The names and terminology may be different but the idea behind these universal ideals comes from the Bible and sometimes they are characteristics ascribed to God Himself. A close examination of these pillars and their Biblical parallels should help to clear up any doubts a Christian may have about supporting this form of character education.

The Six Pillars of Character

Trustworthiness

Being trustworthy involves several different aspects in and of itself. When a person is deemed trustworthy they are held to higher standards. A person who is held to a higher standard must continue to do well to earn a trustworthy label. That person is also given greater leeway in decision-making processes and to fulfill their obligations. According to the Josephson Institute honesty is one of the foundational values that will help a person to be trustworthy. Honesty can be broken down into two categories, communication and conduct (Josephson, 2007).

Being honest in communication is one of the essential elements to becoming a person worthy of trust. This involves being truthful in what a person says by presenting the facts as they are known. Also, a person must be sincere in their communication, not presenting half-truths, out-of-context statements or even silences that really give a person a dishonest impression about something. Honesty also involves candor, in which a person must be willing to be up-front with someone else in order to not mislead him or her or misplace his or her trust (Josephson, 2007).

Biblical parallels for honesty are abundant. God makes it clear through his character that he abhors liars. Revelation 21:8 puts liars on the same plane as murderers, those who practice black arts, and sexually immoral people. In this verse God says, "...their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (New International Version). In Exodus 20 God is giving the people of Israel rules to live their lives by. These rules fall into what are known now as the Ten Commandments. These are universal laws that should not be broken. Exodus 20:16 says "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." God is saying that a person should not lie. God picked ten rules to give to the children of Israel and one was that they should not lie.

Honesty in conduct involves playing by the rules. This can have to do with a competition of life in general. Cheating is one of the biggest wrongs that a person can do. A person who cheats is not only hurting their own character, but they are hurting others by taking advantage of those who are playing by the rules. An unfair advantage through cheating really benefits nobody in the long run. There may be occasions where dishonesty is not unethical, but these instances must involve a high purpose such as saving a life (Josephson, 2007).

Another aspect of trustworthiness is integrity. A person of integrity is someone who will not sacrifice what is right for what is easy. Integrity has to do with being someone who is undivided in their character; completely dedicated to doing what they feel is the right thing to do. Having integrity usually means having a clear understanding of a person's own beliefs and what makes something right or wrong. It requires judgment and reflection in order to have the fortitude to remain intact in difficult situations (Josephson, 2007).

In order to be trustworthy a person must also be reliable in their promise keeping and loyal to their word. A person who makes a promise should do everything that they can do in order to fulfill that promise. If a promise cannot be fulfilled, honesty and candor are required for the person to whom the promise was made. Wisdom in promise making should be used because a person should make sure that they are able to meet their word before they make a promise. Loyalty requires a person to remain true to their word and to those counting on them. In order for a person to be trustworthy they must be shown to have the interests of other in mind in decision making. One should also avoid conflicts of interest when possible and should keep the secrets of those who tell them (Josephson, 2007).

One of the best examples of what it meant to be trustworthy can be found in II Kings 12. In this portion of Scripture it is noticed by King Joash that the temple has been neglected and is in need of repair. Money is given by the people and collected by the priests and designated for temple repair. II Kings 12:11-12; 14-15 says,

When the amount had been determined, they gave the money to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. With it they paid those who worked on the temple of the LORD -the carpenters and builders, the masons and stonecutters. They purchased timber and dressed stone for the repair of the temple of the LORD, and met all the other expenses of restoring the temple... it was paid to the workmen, who used it to repair the temple. They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty.

Here the results of honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity can be seen. The workers on the temple were largely unsupervised. These men were worthy of respect because they were said to have acted with complete honesty. This is an incredible example of a societal situation in which trust makes people's lives better and easier. It all started with the complete honesty of those working on the temple. The value of trustworthiness is definitely a value that a Christian should rally behind.

Respect

Respect is the second of the pillars of character recognized by the Josephson Institute. Respect is important because it gives value to everyone. Not everyone is worthy of the same amount of respect as others but it is important to treat everyone with dignity. People are important regardless of their situations and being respectful to them regardless of their situation is an important part of building positive character traits. Almost everyone has heard of the golden rule at some point in his or her lives. This simple mantra of 'doing to others as you would have them do unto you' really does a good job of illustrating what respect is all about. "Respect prohibits violence, humiliation, manipulation and exploitation. It reflects notions such as civility, courtesy, decency, dignity, autonomy, tolerance and acceptance" (Josephson, 2007).

Other characteristics of respect include allowing people to make their own decisions. A person should have the right to have a say in decisions that will impact their

lives. It is important to listen to those in authority, being attentive and patient. Respect also has a great deal to do with tolerance and prejudice. People will hold differing opinions and it is important to not degrade someone even if their views may seem outlandish. Respect is something that can be given and to an extent is something that is deserved. However, most would agree that respect is mostly something that is earned. If a person wants to be treated with more respect then they should do their best to shown themselves worthy of respect.

The Bible has a good deal to say about respect. Acts 10:34 says, “God is no respecter of persons.” This verse can be misconstrued if it is misunderstood. When properly understood it underscored the importance of a person’s actions determining the level of respect given.

The Greek word translated “respecter of persons” in the King James Version of Acts 10:34 (“God is no respecter of persons”) is *prosopoleptes*, a word that refers to a judge who looks at a man’s face instead of at the facts of the case, and makes a decision based on whether or not he likes the man (Lenksi, 1961, p. 418). Under Roman law, for example, a defendant’s societal status was weighed heavily along with evidence. Any human judge might show undue favor to a plaintiff or a defendant because of private friendship, bribery, rank, power, or political affiliation, but God, the perfect Judge, cannot be tempted by any of the things that might tempt a human judge to show unfair partiality (Colley, 2004).

Here it can be seen that God is someone who will weigh the evidence carefully. God graciously gives the gift of salvation and a person will be judged based on their acceptance of that gift. Social status has nothing to do with respect but in God’s eyes respect has to do with the heart.

Another relevant example of respect in the Bible has to do with young King David and King Saul. God had rejected King Saul for his disobedience in taking plunder from the Amalekites. God appointed David, son of Jesse to be King of Israel through His prophet Samuel. Although David had been anointed as King he still served King Saul out

of respect for him. There came a point in their relationship where Saul hunted David with 3000 men into the desert. I Samuel 24:3-7 tells a story illustrating the respect that David had for Saul

He (Saul) came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. 4 The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. 5 Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. 6 He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." 7 With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

King David gave respect because it was the right thing to do. He showed integrity and followed his own conscious in spite of peer pressure to go against what he thought was right.

In the case of students it is important that students understand that respect is due their parents regardless of how just or unjust they may seem. Extreme cases of neglect or abuse require special circumstances. However, God has shown the importance of respecting parents when he included the command to "Honor thy father and mother..." in Exodus 20. Once again, God chose Ten Commandments to give and one of them involves respect, this should be a clear sign that respect is important in the eyes of God. Because respect is clearly a characteristic that God desires of Christians it should also really be a value that Christians support being taught because of it's Biblical basis.

Responsibility

Winston Churchill once said, "The price of greatness is responsibility" (Churchill 1993). Responsibility is a requirement of everyone in a successful society. A person must be willing to recognize that decisions, and even the choice to not make a decision has consequences. Responsibility is recognizing the ability to make a choice, and that

choice should be made with ethical and moral consequences in mind. Being responsible is something that allows a person to either pursue excellence or decide for mediocrity.

An accountable person is someone who is willing to deal with the consequences of their actions without placing the blame on someone else. That person also must recognize that there is a responsibility that everyone has to stop wrong and pursue right. Inactivity in the face of a moral wrong does not lessen accountability to do right (Josephson, 2007).

In the Garden of Eden God told Adam and Eve that they could eat from any tree except for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent tricked Eve, and Adam also decided to partake in eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. It is then that responsibility is demonstrated as a desirable character trait. When Adam and Eve are confronted by God about their sin Adam tries to place the blame for his sin on Eve. He says, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Genesis 3:12). God replied to Adam's excuse by saying, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life (Genesis 3:17). God had no tolerance for Adam's excuse that Eve made him eat of the fruit. God is clearly saying that Adam is accountable for his own choices whether there was pressure or not. The result of his disobedience was punishment.

Throughout the Bible there are examples of other people doing what is wrong and blaming others for their decisions. Eve tried to blame the serpent for eating the fruit. Sarah was upset with Abraham because he slept with Sarai even though she had told her

to go to her husband. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob and then tried to claim that Jacob had done something wrong even though he gave up his birthright. Aaron tried to blame the people for making the golden calf when he was the priest and gave into temptation. King Saul tried to rationalize his decision for disobeying God by blaming his men for wanting to carry off plunder. Finally, Pontius Pilate blamed the crowd for his decision to crucify Jesus. The common thread with all of these people was that they did not want to be held accountable for the decisions that they made. Each and every time that they tried to get out of the consequence of their decision God honored them by giving them the consequence of their action (Naves Topical Bible, 2008).

Responsibility can also include such things as perseverance. A person who is responsible will finish what they said they would finish. That person will not use excuses in order to leave something half-done. A person who is responsible will also pursue excellence in their lives and working making good use of the abilities that are given to them. "Responsible people exercise self-control, restraining passions and appetites (such as lust, hatred, gluttony, greed and fear) for the sake of longer-term vision and better judgment. They delay gratification if necessary and never feel it's necessary to "win at any cost." They realize they are as they choose to be, every day" (Josephson, 2007).

Accountability and responsibility are really two of the central themes of Christian thought. The Bible clearly teaches that all men are going to be judged someday by God. They will be held accountable for the sin in the lives. Christians will be held accountable for telling others about Jesus' saving gift. Everyone is born with a sinful nature and sin in their lives. God is perfectly just and therefore must judge sin according to His justice. The punishment for sin is death and damnation of the soul. Jesus came to provide a way

to satisfy God's justice and reconcile our sins to God. If a person has rejected or accepted is an individual choice, but the consequences of that decision are very important. The bottom line is that decisions have consequences, and people are responsible for their actions. These are truths that children in society need to learn and that Christians should rally behind.

Fairness

Thomas Lickona (1991), a respected authority on character education, cites fairness as an important character trait to teach students (p. 46). Fairness has to do with treating people in an impartial manner. A person should not favor one person over another to someone's detriment. It involves being open to ideas and other's points of view and doing the best that a person can with the information provided. A fair person is someone who will treat people in the same situation in the same manner. A fair person will not impose a punishment on someone that is much harsher than the offense (Josephson, 2007).

Fairness is a notoriously tricky concept to really put in concrete terms. Different people will generally have differing views on what is deemed fair or unfair. Most people will think that their idea of fair is the right idea. Being truly fair involves being open and honest about a situation and doing the best that can be done to resolve it to the benefit of all parties. Fairness will involve being accurate with reporting of information or correcting mistakes.

Fairness in the Bible is difficult to judge. The Bible does not tend to speak in such terms as fair or unfair but rather in terms of right and wrong, or just and unjust. God is perfectly just. This means that he will never be unjust in his treatment of people. The

hard thing about justice is that the human sense of justice can be obscured by a finite nature, emotion, or misunderstanding. God looks at the heart, which cannot lie; therefore He truly knows the intentions of man. When God sent Samuel to anoint the future king of Israel he taught Samuel a valuable lesson on the way in which God judges. He said in I Samuel 16:7, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." To many it might not seem fair that David was picked as king over his older brothers. However, it was perfectly fair and just because it is what God had decided was best.

God has the ability to look at the heart, and a perfect sense of justice in order to determine what is just or unjust. Fairness is trivial compared to right or wrong, just or unjust. However, sometimes fairness is the best that a person can do. God says in Leviticus that Israel is to use honest scales and weights when dealing in business. Proverbs 29:14 says, "If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure." It is consistent with God's character that being fair should be something that a Christian should attempt to be. Although it is notoriously difficult to judge and takes a backseat to moral right and wrong or justice, fairness is an important aspect of Christian character.

Caring

Caring really gets to the heart of ethical decision-making. Caring has to do with a response to people's need and a respect for their welfare. Ethics is really necessary because people are not alone in the world but they share it with a multitude of other people. Recognizing that other people in this world have needs that are important and

that matter is an important part of caring. Recognizing that a person is so much more than an instrument through which to accomplish a task or get something is important. Although caring sounds fairly straightforward it can sometimes become tricky when it needs to be practiced in the real world (Josephson, 2007).

Michael Josephson of the Josephson Institute of Ethics had this to say about caring,

It is easier to love "humanity" than to love people. People who consider themselves ethical and yet lack a caring attitude toward individuals tend to treat others as instruments of their will. They rarely feel an obligation to be honest, loyal, fair or respectful except insofar as it is prudent for them to do so, a disposition which itself hints at duplicity and a lack of integrity. A person who really cares feels an emotional response to both the pain and pleasure of others (Josephson, 2007).

This statement brings up an interesting point about caring; it requires empathy. Empathy involves being able to recognize the needs or emotions of another person. A caring person will not just see that a person is hurting and de-humanize that person. They will recognize that emotion in themselves and attempt to do something in order to ease the pain of the other person.

Many people give to charities. Some give a little bit of money and others give millions of dollars. People may be tempted to believe that the person who gave the millions of dollars is a more caring person than the person who was only about to give a small amount. However, caring does not look at amounts but rather at motives. A caring person will give in order to benefit another. Today some people give in order to benefit themselves. It could have to do with tax write-offs or investments, but it is not given for the benefit of others. This is not really caring at all. The caring person is one who gives from their heart in order to help another. Therefore, caring is not really something that can be easily faked.

The Bible has hundreds of examples of the importance of caring for people. Jesus was the ultimate caring person. Jesus healed many people in his earthly ministry. He saw people suffering and decided that he would ease their pain. There are recorded accounts of Jesus healing the blind, mute, lame, deaf, a man with a withered hand, a lady who bled, people with leprosy, and even raising the dead back to life. Jesus was the ultimate healer.

It can be argued that Jesus was really trying to demonstrate that he was indeed God through these miracles or trying to prove a point and was not as interested in the welfare of the people he healed. This would mean that he healed, not because he cared, but because it would show him to be God. A person who is shown to be God could really benefit Himself instead of others. This argument does not work for three reasons.

The first reason that the argument does not work is that although Jesus was trying to show he was God he performed many more healings than would be needed for such a demonstration. Jesus healed people in very unusual situations and not always out in the open in view of everyone. Sometimes Jesus would heal and then tell a person not to let others know that he had healed them. This was done in several instances, possibly in order to keep the word from spreading about his miracles. These are both a demonstration that Jesus really saw a need and cared for a person and met that need.

The second reason that the argument does not work is that Jesus was not concerned with only meeting the physical need. Often when he had met the physical need Jesus would then address the spiritual need of that person, demonstrating that he really cared about their well being. If he had been concerned only with demonstrating He

was God he would only address the needs that could be seen by others. Spiritual needs largely go unnoticed because they are internal.

Finally, even if Jesus healed in order to convince people that he was God, he is still doing it just because he cares for us. By convincing people of his equality with God Jesus is really helping people to accept him as the messiah. This means he is saving them from the death in sin and allowing them to be reconciled to God. This is the ultimate demonstration of caring. Jesus gave up his seat in heaven for 33 years in order to come live on Earth. He did this because he loved people and wanted to make it possible for people to live with Him in eternity and have better lives on Earth. Caring is really one of the underlying themes of Christianity.

Citizenship

Citizenship really has to do with a person's obligation to society as a whole. Some people do not believe that they have an obligation to society or that their decisions do not have an impact on society. A good citizen will recognize that decisions that they make or do not make can have a greater impact than just on their lives. They are concerned with obeying and enforcing laws, taking part in a democracy, and making society a better place for future generations. Citizenship involves staying informed on issues that will have an impact on society. A good citizen recognizes that they are a part of numerous communities on the local, state, and national level and takes interest in their part in all of these communities. A good citizen cares about conserving resources, pollution, and litter. They will give of themselves instead of looking to always take (Josephson, 2007).

The Bible does not really talk about participating in democratic government or picking up litter or being concerned with pollution. So finding an exact parallel for what it means to be a good citizen today will be difficult. However, the principles behind good citizenship are demonstrated several times in the Bible through people being bad citizens. In II Samuel 20 a man named Sheba rebels against the government and decides that he will become a rebel. Eventually other citizens, who do not want to become collateral damage in Sheba's rebellion, cut off his head, ending the rebellion. Another instance of a bad citizen can be found in the New Testament. Barabbas, the Bible tells us, was in prison because he had committed murder in an uprising. These two men are shown in negative contexts as people who are not good citizens.

Citizenship may be the most difficult of the six pillars of character for which to demonstrate a Biblical parallel. However, when looked at objectively the choice is really to be responsible with natural resources or irresponsible. It is to respect the Earth or disrespect the Earth. The choice is to give back to a community that gives things to others or always be taking charity. One does not need a Biblical parallel to support these principles. A Christian can and should rally behind the idea of producing good and responsible citizens in public school districts.

It has been clearly demonstrated that Biblical parallels exist for all of the nationally recognized pillars of character. Four of the six pillars have very strong parallels, the parallel for fairness is not quite as clear cut, and the parallel to citizenship is more in principle than anything else. However, there is enough information here that a Christian should really be able to support character education in public schools as a way of getting values that Christians hold back into the lives of students everywhere.

Whether or not Christian values have the same name as those used in Character education the ideas themselves are ideas supported by God in the Bible. The question for the local church and Christian should not be should character education be supported; this should be fairly obvious. The question should rather involve how a Christian can help a student understand that the values they are being taught are not just universal values but values that come from the universal God. One of the ways that a church can begin to have an influence on students is to make its influence felt somewhere other than in the church building.

Character Education and its Impact on Campus Ministry

For years youth ministers have sought to have some sort of presence on public school campuses. For most youth ministers the idea behind seeking to be a presence on a public school campus are numerous. Most believe that they can gain a higher level of acceptance with parents in the community if they show themselves to be a part of the schools. Also, it is a great way to meet students and get to know them. A great deal of youth ministry really involves contact points with students. If a minister can have a contact point with a student then there is the possibility that at sometime or another there will be the opportunity to influence that student's life. The main goal of many ministers on campus is a comfort level and familiarity with teachers and the student body. This familiarity could lead to discussions about faith and Jesus. Also, being on campus gives the minister a chance to demonstrate to students what it means to live like Jesus in a secular world.

Some youth ministers have found that they are allowed easily on campus while others are completely rejected. The legality of the issue has many administrators afraid

of potential litigation because they cannot be sure what is legal or illegal. The court has been inconsistent so the schools have been inconsistent. The local church Christian youth minister can help to alleviate the pressures facing administrators by using language that is familiar and acceptable. They must approach the administrator with humility, recognizing that what they do on campus can have a direct impact on the administrator who allowed them there. If the youth minister approaches the administrator using terms such as trustworthiness, honesty, caring, respect, responsibility, and citizenship that administrator will most likely be more at ease than if the minister uses words that are acceptable at church but could be controversial on campus. If a minister wants to develop a ministry on campus they may have to recognize that their ministry will be to serve the school and not their agenda. It is a great way to get to know students, gain a strong level of trust in the community, and gain the respect, trust, and even support of parents.

Conclusion

Character Education and its Alignment With Christian Values

It has been clearly demonstrated that the values that are largely considered universally good are values taught in the Bible. Character education is taking these values that are found in the Bible, taking God out of the equation, and teaching them to students. There is great reason for hope when someone is learning to behave as God would want them to behave. It falls to the local born again Christian to find the best way to teach students about the source of morality and not just about morality itself. Character education is a great way to start the discussion on morality and provides an opportunity to share Christian values with a secular culture.

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