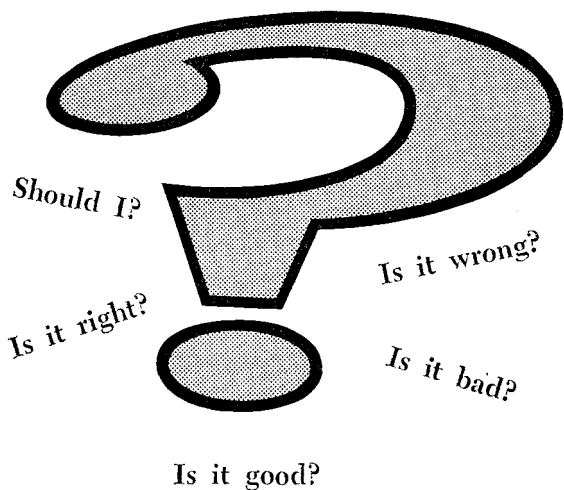


Moral Values In Today's World

A Guide for Study and Discussion



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Moral Values

In Today's World

As an approach to the topic of moral values, complete the self-test which follows.

- I. Make a check (✓) by every statement which you believe to be true.
 - A. It is wrong to take something that does not belong to you.
 - B. You should tell the truth.
 - C. It is important to be loyal to one's family, friends, and country.
 - D. A nice girl should not visit in a boy's apartment.

- II. Make a check (✓) by the statement which you think reflects the *most* moral behavior.
 - A. Bill and John, age 9, are playing. John accidentally breaks a window. The boys leave the scene for fear of getting into trouble. Later, Bill's mother hears of the broken window and asks Bill if he knows anything about it. What should Bill say?
 1. I don't know anything about it.
 2. John broke it.
 - B. The nation is at war and is occupied by the enemy. Hilda knows her husband is a member of the resistance movement and has been involved in destroying a bridge. The enemy arrests her and asks her who destroyed the bridge. What should Hilda say?
 1. I don't know.
 2. Name the people involved, including her husband.
 - C. Mary dialed a number on a pay telephone and got a busy signal. When her dime was returned, she found an extra dime in the coin return. What should she do?
 1. Keep the extra dime.
 2. Leave it in the telephone.
 3. Return it to the telephone company.

- D. A clerk in a store gave Alice three pairs of hose when she only paid for two. What should she do?
1. Keep the third pair.
 2. Return the third pair to the clerk.
- E. Allen and Margie are 21 and 20 years old. They are going to a movie and afterward they plan to be together from 10 p.m. until midnight. If they are going to spend the two hours in either Allen's car or his apartment, should they stay in:
1. Allen's car.
 2. Allen's apartment.

III. Check (✓) the statement which would be the most moral action *for parents* to take.

Wilma is 16 years old, a junior in high school, unmarried and pregnant. Bill, the alleged father, is also a junior in high school.

- A. Encourage Wilma and Bill to marry.
- B. Insist that Wilma and Bill marry.
- C. Arrange for Wilma to go to a home for unwed mothers and place the baby for adoption.
- D. Arrange for Wilma to have an abortion.
- E. Encourage Wilma to keep the baby without marriage.
- F. Leave it up to Wilma and Bill to decide what to do.

IV. Make a check (✓) in front of those values which you think most people hold as important in America today.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| • religion | • dignity and worth of each individual |
| • education | • financial success |
| • honesty | • the good old days |
| • change | • individual liberty |
| • conformity | • age, as a stage of life |
| • grades | • youth, as a stage of life |
| • equality | • childhood, as a stage of life |
| • freedom | • saving for the future |
| • leisure | • faithfulness in marriage |
| • children | • stable family |
| • loyalty | • individuality |
| • initiative | • pre-marital chastity |
| • obedience | • respect for authority |

A. Put a plus sign (+) by the values you think are more nearly achieved today than they were 50 years ago.

Put a minus sign (—) by the values you think are farther from achievement today than in the past.

V. Complete this question *after* your meeting.

A. Find all the evidence you can to support the way you marked your choices in No. IV.

B. Talk with family and friends to see if they agree with your choices.

Consider Your Answers

I. Was there any question in your mind about how to check these statements? Which of these statements required the most thought on your part?

II. *A & B*: These two situations indicate a conflict between the values of truthfulness and loyalty and raise a question about tattling.

- Does your response pose a problem in teaching children to tell the truth? To be loyal? To tattle?
- Should children be taught to tell the truth always? What happens to them when they do? What happens to them when they do not?
- At what age can a child cope with the idea that truth is sometimes altered to fit the circumstances?
- If children learn from what their parents do as well as from their admonitions, how can you teach the concept of truthfulness to children?
- What do you as a parent want to teach your children?
- Was it easier to answer the question about Bill and John or the one involving Hilda?
- From Bill's point of view, is this decision as clear an issue as Hilda's decision probably is for her?

II. *C & D*: These two situations involve the teaching and practice of honesty.

- Is the way you marked the statement regarding the pay telephone in harmony with the way you checked "A" in No. I?
- Is there a difference in the situation with the telephone and the hose? If there is, how can you explain the difference in such a way that children can use it as a guideline for their own behavior?

II. *E*: What was your primary concern as you marked this statement?

- Was it concern about what people would think?
- Or concern about what Margie and Allen may do?
- Or behavior which was considered appropriate when you were young?

III. The dilemma faced by the parents of Wilma and Bill suggests that the way pre-marital pregnancy is handled has moral implications as well as does the pregnancy itself.

- Do you see this as Wilma and Bill's problem or a problem for their parents?
- How can the needs of the unborn child best be served? Of Wilma? Of Bill?
- What likelihood do Wilma and Bill have of making a sound and enduring marriage? Of being able to provide for the needs of a child?
- Have Wilma and Bill enough experience and knowledge of alternatives and consequences to make a wise decision?
- What kind of professional assistance is available to help all the people involved make a wise decision?
- How can the recognition of the value of the dignity and worth of each human being assist in making a decision in a case such as this?

- IV. • Do all these listed items reflect values? Are some virtues? Is there a difference between a virtue and a moral value?
- How do your own values tie in with those you marked as being the ones “*most*” people hold as important?
- V. Discussion of these questions within your family may help you and your children to greater understanding of what you believe and hold important. Young people may have different ideas than you have. Open discussion can aid in greater understanding between generations if each generation is willing to think about why they believe or feel as they do.

What About Moral Values?

A moral value is an idea, a belief, or a concept of what is right or wrong, good or bad, worthy or unworthy, desirable or undesirable. Understanding of values is important because people use their values to determine goals, to set courses of action, and to judge themselves or others. Values become invested with feelings and become a part of the personality of each individual. A person's values are influenced by the significant people in his life and the society in which he lives.

Every human group or society develops a set of values in order to maintain itself. These values must be ones in which most of the members believe and which are appropriate to the time in which the society exists. Laws, customs, and practices are developed to enforce these values. Values become an integral part of the individual or of the society.

The prevailing moral values in this country are based on our Judeo-Christian and democratic heritage. The Ten Commandments reflect the Judeo-Christian values. Other values relating to the dignity and worth of each person were set forth in the New Testament.

The Bill of Rights of the Constitution reflects the values of our forefathers. Some of these values were necessary to enable a young country to survive. Others reflect opposition or rebellion against practices in the

home countries of the colonists. Present interpretation and application of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution represent current values.

Values can be classified in terms of an ultimate or an ideal value or in terms of instrumental values. Ultimate or ideal values determine one's goals. Instrumental values are those which are used to attain the ultimate goal. It is generally accepted that the ultimate value for our culture is the dignity and worth of the human being.

Values at work

Values are revealed through our feelings and our actions. They are part and parcel of our everyday living experiences.

Two or more values may be involved in any one situation, so that if one is achieved, the other cannot be.

Values are never completely developed in an individual or in a society. An individual's values change as he grows and develops and as he has new experiences and meets new people.

Values are relative rather than absolute. That is, one action may be more moral than another, or less moral than another.

Official or established values may not be practiced by certain segments of the population. In a population with different backgrounds, not all people will agree on any one value.

The behavior of individuals may be different from what they profess to value. In fact, behavior and even some laws may be out of harmony with our basic or ultimate values.

Values change

Values change when conditions in society change and some people begin to question, or no longer adhere to, existing values.

Thirty years ago there was a clearly defined set of rural values as compared to urban values. Today, this difference is rapidly disappearing except in a few isolated areas.

Jet travel, Telestar, TV, and other communications methods have shortened distances between countries and brought exposure to many different value systems. No longer can we hold to the point of view that there is only one way of life or one way to believe or one way to act. However, at the same time that we accept and recognize other points of view, we can still establish our own values and maintain our own integrity.

The breakthrough in scientific knowledge, the development of a questioning attitude, and social and technological changes have contributed to a widespread questioning of values.

A change in emphasis in the economy from production to consumption necessitates some different values than those held in the past.

Automation and the shift from personal contact to machines, from small business to big business, and from a small personal unit of government to big government have caused us to wonder whether the same values hold when dealing with a machine, a business, or the government, as when dealing with a person.

In times of rapid value change, three questions must be considered:

1. What moral values are necessary if our society is to survive?

2. What moral values are appropriate to ensure the kind of family which will develop people who can function in the world in which they will live?

3. How do we teach values to children, and what values do we want to teach them?

Values are learned

No one is born with a set of values or moral standards. Parents are the first teachers of right and wrong, good and bad. Children learn through the system of rewards and punishments. Parents teach as they smile, scold, approve or disapprove, reward or punish.

Children also learn by identifying with their parents and by imitating their behavior. The values of the parents become a part of the child in the first six years of life and ever after color his feelings, his attitudes, and his beliefs.

As the child moves out into the neighborhood, church, and school he learns values from classmates, teachers, religious leaders, and others in the community. He also gains values from books, radio, television, newspapers, and magazines.

Eventually, the child moves into a period of reflective thinking as he begins to compare the values of his friends with those of his parents and to question values of his church and his community. From this thinking, he begins the process of integrating his own set of values.

A continuous evaluation process goes on as he moves into the world of work and as he is exposed to differing values.

Each person brings his own value system to marriage. In some marriages, the value systems are similar and the couple can form "their" value system with a minimum of disruption. This family value is then transmitted to the children.

In other marriages, each person's values are different. They cannot find a common area of agreement and operate with a "his" and "hers" system. They may have some areas of agreement which become "their" values.

Husband and wife do not live in a vacuum. Enveloping them is the value system of two parental families, friends, community, church, business, government, and other forces.

Confusion and conflict may result when these various value systems are at odds. Parents caught in this swirl have a difficult time reflecting a value system and a code of behavior to their children. And no matter how well the parents have assimilated their own value systems, young people are going to test their values in the light of reality *as they see it*.

What can you do at a time of value change?

1. You can stimulate your family to talk about values and goals and determine your individual and family values. You can evaluate your actions in terms of your values and the values of your family.

2. You can encourage groups of people to discuss and examine certain values. Some questions groups can consider in relation to identified values are:

- What purpose has the value served?
- Is it still an important value for individuals, families, and the society?
- How does it relate to the ultimate value of the worth and dignity of each human being?

3. You can initiate action. Groups and individuals can change laws, customs, and practices which are out of harmony with the values and beliefs of a majority of the population and which do not contribute to the ultimate value of the dignity of the human individual.

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