

Discovering Values

- values-based Christian ethics

THINKING – VALUES

Encountering values ¹

Jesus tells us a couple of mini-stories (parables) about two quite different people:

▪ Story 1: ‘The Chancer’

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field,
which someone found and reburied;
then in their joy they go and sell all that they have and buy the field”
(Mt 13:45)

A day-labourer, working for a local landowner, struggles with sweat and sinew in a field for a meagre day’s wage to put food on the family table that night. Suddenly, the spade strikes something unusual, perhaps a bag or box. Dragging it from the soil, it is opened to reveal a treasure horde! Probably buried in a hurry during time of war or personal crisis, perhaps many years before. Long since forgotten. Here was the stuff of dreams! Carefully reburying the find, they take the chance and sell everything, scraping together what is needed to buy the field. It costs them everything, but what they gain is very much more!

▪ Story 2: ‘The Connoisseur’

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;
on finding one pearl of great value,
they went and sold all that they had and bought it”
(Mt 13:45)

Here is a collector, a connoisseur of pearls, always on the lookout for new, rare and fine examples. A trading caravan has just arrived in from the east, promising fresh treasures, and it does not disappoint! A dealer, knowing the collector’s passion, beckons, and with the words, “I think I might have something of interest for you here,” opens a leather pouch. Into a gnarled palm rolls a pearl, with a size and beauty the like of which the connoisseur has never even imagined, let alone seen before. This is the dream-pearl! The price is understandably frightening but the opportunity cannot be lost. Everything is sold so that this one pearl might be gained!

These two contrasting stories carry an identical message: there is ‘treasure’ out there, if only you can recognise it, it will cost you absolutely everything to make it your own, but once you have it you will discover it is priceless, worth far beyond what it cost you to get it.

¹ In my opinion Bob Dylan’s song ‘Hard Rain’ is the greatest song ever written. Yet I am nervous every time I play it to someone who has never heard it before because they are most likely simply to shrug and say, “Yes, its OK”. No, it is not OK; it is quite astonishing! I feel the same way introducing the subject of ‘values’. This is simply the most important of subjects, but will everyone recognise that?



On a number of occasions Jesus uses the image of 'treasure' to describe the experience of God that he is offering,² something of great value:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ...
but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...
For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.”
(Mat 6:19-21)

This treasure is to do with 'heaven' and the 'heart', the two most intimate dimensions of both God and personhood:

The good person,
out of the good treasure of their heart
brings out good.
(Lk 6:45)

'Treasure' is about what is most precious, about what has value.³ This treasure, about which Jesus is speaking, is referring to the 'values' of God's kingdom. To speak of values as 'treasure' has a universal sense about it, a way of thinking that all cultures can connect with.⁴

‘Followers of Jesus are called to live by values not by rules!

To understand more clearly what Jesus is saying we need to explore more fully the world of values.

Exploring values

In thinking about values we move into an exhilarating and complicated world:

- On one hand, it is a place where children can be very comfortable, a somewhere that feels like storybooks, chunky building blocks and splashes of brightly coloured paint
- On the other hand, it is a place where adults may often feel uncomfortable, somewhere that can seem like a room made up of distorting mirrors and uneven floors

Values are something we each feel rather instinctive about. They are part of who we are, we take them for granted, we don't really think about them. We 'just know' what is right and wrong, good or bad. However, if we do start thinking about values and questioning what they are, they can suddenly become nebulous and vague. One of the reasons for this complexity is that values are both very practical yet deeply philosophical, both at the same time!

So, “What are values?”⁵

² Jesus speaks of this in terms of the 'kingdom of God' - the experience of living under God's rule and in harmony with God's character, which is of the very essence about how we shall be reflecting on values.

³ Other passages that refer to 'treasure' are Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 18:22; 2Cor 4:7.

⁴ The Rev Maori Marsden says, 'There is no specific term in Maori for value. With his holistic view of the Universe the Maori idea of value is incorporated into the holistic term *taonga* - a treasure, something precious; hence an object of good or value. See ***The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev Maori Marsden*** pub in NZ by the Marsden Estate 2003 p38

⁵ This following list has been compiled out of a number of lists and observations from a range of sources. They have been placed in alphabetical order from the point of view of convenience, as it is not possible to prioritise them in any meaningful way. With a list like this, which is working with such subtle distinctions,

This is a very simple question to ask, also an important one, but a complicated one to answer. Values are hard to distil and subtle to define. Among the range of responses that we might give some of the most obvious ones would be:

- **Assumptions** that we make about value and worth;
- **Beliefs** that direct our actions;
- **Concepts** to which you aspire and wish to emulate;
- **Connections** that link people together as a group;
- **Convictions** that shape decisions;
- **Criteria** by which we make those decisions;
- **Directions** that point towards practical achievements and results;
- **Evaluations** by which we judge ourselves and others;
- **Guides** to behaviour for individuals and communities;
- **Ideas** of what is intrinsically good, desirable and right;
- **Ideals** that inspire a person towards perfection;
- **Motivations** towards achieving 'ends' and 'goals';
- **Principles** that form a guide for conduct and belief;
- **Qualities** that make something desirable or valuable;
- **Standards** against which to check or measure things.

A single compact definition of a value might be:

‘A conception held by an individual or a group of what is good and desirable,
which influences their choices and their actions’

Some other general reflections we can make about values are: ⁶

- **Values are about beliefs, behaviour and beauty.**
- **Values develop in the very earliest stages of life.** They become like our ‘moral mother tongue’ with powerful emotional connections. That is why they are usually intuitive and instinctive rather than carefully thought out. Because of this they are strongly resistant to change. We ‘treasure’ them.
- **Values become internalised, deep within us.** They develop out of our experiences with those closest to us, and are based on their behaviour every bit as much as on their instruction. They are part of the essential fabric of our personal worldview.
- **Values are buried within our behaviour,** they determine and define for us what we believe is right and wrong. They provide the moral framework within which we move. They provide the bridge between the principles of belief and the practicalities of action, between the philosophical and the pragmatic.

there is bound to be a sense of overlap between at least some of the definitions. Nevertheless, it is felt that each of the definitions is making a distinct and significant point about values.

⁶ The study of values is a recognised area of philosophy called Axiology (from the Greek *axia* – ‘value’ and ‘worth’). It is ‘the study of the ultimate nature of reality and the significance of values’. (Chambers English Dictionary). This is a definition I particularly like! Axiology finds its place within the area of philosophy relating to ethics and aesthetics – behaviour and beauty. Value thinking is to do with ‘meta-ethics’, which tries to understand the most basic nature of moral or ethical properties - such as “What *is* goodness?” While ‘normative ethics’ deals with the applied questions - such as “Is this action good?”



- **Values are both the foundation and essence of culture.** They are the spiritual core at the heart of culture. They guide and motivate human behaviour, determining attitudes, shaping the individual and group's philosophy of life.
- **Values are of primary importance.** They are at the very centre of all human existence, where they motivate and direct all human activity and choice. It is impossible to exaggerate their significance, yet it is very hard to put exactly why this is into words. They are both subtle and subversive in their expression, while dramatic in their impact.⁷

Engaging values

Values exist! Individuals and societies simply cannot function without them. But what actually are they? We observe people, groups and cultures living in a way that shows they value, for instance; love, courage, happiness, peace – and so forth. But “What is the source and origin of these values?” This is one of the most important questions we can ask.

This is because there is a very popular argument that suggests that much value thinking is overrated. It agrees that values - along with the physical environment plus human relationships and ingenuity - are the main forces that shape cultures. But it also argues that values themselves have simply been created by particular cultures to meet their specific needs in the light of their practical circumstances and particular historical experience. Values, therefore, do not and cannot, transcend culture. As Spinoza said:

“We don’t strive for things because they are good,
but call the things we strive for good.”

If this sceptical position is true, then all values are entirely relative. All religious and faith systems, rooted in a belief that values have a universal spiritual source, are swept away at a stroke. This is an issue that we must resolve or everything we believe is lost.

⁷ This subject of values has laid the foundations to almost everything I believe. In 1967 I was reading through Matthew 24 when I was struck by verses 23-27:

‘Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’ or ‘There he is!’ - do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Take note I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look! He is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look! He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.’

These are not the kind of words one would expect to ignite a dramatic spiritual encounter! Nevertheless, in my case they set me on a journey that has haunted and energised my life ever since! The first question that struck me was:

“How do you tell the difference between false messiahs and the true Messiah?”

The answer was clearly to do with their real character and the quality of their message. This inspired me to begin to explore, and become a zealot for, the whole concept of the kingdom of God. This in turn led me to ask a second question:

“What are the values of the kingdom of God; what makes it distinctive?”

The pursuit of this question took me into uncharted territory, and to the life-changing discovery of the vision of *shalom*, which I have come to see as the fundamental value. The vision that I believe provides the paradigm for all biblical values and human value thinking.

At one level, it is quite true that, what one culture values another may despise. What one considers moral another may abhor:

- One group will value equality while another esteems hierarchy
- One group may stress freedom, another discipline
- One group will honour bravery while another thinks more highly of respect for parents
- One group may care for the aged, while in another the old may be expected to take their leave and die

It is obvious that different cultures understand, interpret and express values in different ways. So to a certain extent there is *some* truth in the idea that values are constructed by culture; but is there more to it than this? Does this exclude the possibility that there are universal 'core-values' that are shared and understood across all cultures that point towards a source that is beyond any particular culture and even culture itself?

We want to argue that there are good reasons to believe that there are 'universal core-values', shared and understood across cultures, which point towards a source beyond culture. These would be some of the reasons for believing this to be true: ⁸

- **Values are shared across cultures.** This is true even when there are other values that the same cultures do not share. There is a real sense that values are a 'universal language'; eg: love and kindness will be recognised even in a culture that honours violence. Certain values, like 'truth-telling' for instance, will often communicate even if it seems to challenge a particular understanding of 'honour' and 'saving face'. It seems to connect with a 'primal morality' deep inside every human heart irrespective of culture. ⁹
- **Values are experienced in relationship.** We can speak of values as an 'idea' or a 'concept', but they do not exist in some ethereal form in and of themselves. Values need human personality and behaviour to be authentically revealed, they are only truly present in relationship. Values are more than the relationship, but they need relationships to find expression. From a Christian perspective this points to the biblical truth that all value is rooted into the character of God from where it flows out to humanity and creation.
- **Values are always related to a 'centre of value'.** This will be different depending on the culture concerned; eg: 'humanity' for the humanist, 'nature' for the animist, even conflicting 'gods' for the polytheist. So values point to a centre beyond themselves, and by implication, beyond that particular culture. As Christians we would want to argue that this is ultimately a transcendent centre rooted deeply in the person of God.
- **Values are to do with the spiritual and the moral.** This is a dimension of experience evidenced in every person and culture across the globe, but transcends persons and cultures. It suggests a spiritual moral structure to the universe that parallels the physical and material structure of the cosmos. And for many, including Christians, would point to a 'source of value' in some understanding of God or the divine.

⁸ Some of these ideas are freely adapted from RH Niebuhr *'The Responsible Self'* Harper Row 1963

⁹ I would argue that this is because every person is made in the 'image and likeness of God' and that one consequence of this is that the 'manifesto of the kingdom of God' is written on every human heart and that this is linked to the provocative biblical word 'conscience' – here we have the building blocks of a 'primal morality'

- **Values possess an objective quality.** It is often argued that values are essentially subjective and that objective ‘proof’ statements cannot be made about them. People making ‘value judgements’ are seen to be saying things that cannot be verified. But there *is* ‘objectivity’ about values; you can see and confirm if an act is ‘loving’ or ‘courageous’, whether a person is ‘joyful’ or ‘gentle’, others can also confirm this.
- **Values are dynamic.** They are expressed as nouns but need to be understood as verbs! The Hebrew noun *shalom* was almost certainly created from the Hebrew verb *shalem*. So *shalom* begins as a verb and even as a noun must be treated as a verb!¹⁰ This must be the understanding behind all values.

For Christians all this is very exciting. While individual cultures are able to create their own values they cannot obscure the nature of value itself. However, a belief that there are ‘universal core-values’, shared and understood across cultures, which point towards a source beyond culture, is nevertheless a faith position.¹¹ While it cannot be proved or disproved, we believe that there are sound logical reasons for believing it to be true.

Eternal values

So universal core-values exist! Just as we recognise that there is a physical and material structure to the universe, values reveal that there is a parallel, totally interconnected moral and spiritual structure to the universe also. The spiritual and physical flow without distinction into one another, just as the *shalom*-vision confirms. Both have their origin and sustaining source in God. These values are eternal values. They are ‘universal creation values’!

Values are the moral and spiritual ‘sub-atomic particles’ of the cosmos; values are the spiritual DNA of life. Just as particles interact and interrelate to create energy and matter, the same is true in the moral and spiritual dimension where all values flow into one another and interconnect creating a fabric of wholeness. In physics, the microcosm (particles) and the macrocosm (cosmos) appear to be analogical, with so many parallels between the two. The same is true of values. Within the material universe there is an awesome simplicity within the complexity. Likewise, values have a deep simplicity that can fully and perfectly express itself within all the complexity and challenges of living. Within both structure and chaos.

Christians understand that values are the very foundation of *shalom*. We would argue that *shalom* is the primary value, the source from which all other values flow. Therefore values are the bedrock of ‘*shalom* activism’. They are the essence and substance of the kingdom of God, Which is why Jesus speaks of ‘treasure’ when referring to God’s kingdom. They are the moral and spiritual fabric of the universe!

▪ Identifying values

It is essential that we take time to identify these universal core-values clearly. We have said how a first encounter with values can seem straightforward and comfortable; like a child’s world. Words and ideas such as love, justice, trust, truth, freedom, peace, joy, goodness, and many more, can seem like chunky building blocks or splashes of brightly coloured paint. But looking more closely, and actually working with them, they suddenly

¹⁰ See the discussion in ‘*The Vision of Shalom: exploring the biblical vision of peace*’ pages 7-8

¹¹ This is of course equally true for those who disagree and hold the opposite viewpoint!



become more subtle, supple and complex. We discover values are not isolated units, but rather flow together, into one another, creating a unity that depends upon the presence of the whole. To illustrate this, notice how the biblical text is full of 'value clusters'. A few examples are:

You know O mortal what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, to love kindness
and walk humbly before your God.
(Mic 6:8)

'The Lord ... will fill Zion with justice and righteousness;
and he will be the stability of your times,
abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge;
the fear of the Lord is his treasure.'
(Isa 33:5-6)

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground
righteousness will reach down from the sky. ...
Justice will go before him, and peace will make a path for his steps.
(Ps 85: 10-11,13)

The kingdom of God is not food and drink,
but justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
(Rm 14:17)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.
(Rm 15:13)

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,
willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits,
without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.
And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.
(James 3:17-18)

For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness...
knowledge ... self-control ... endurance ... godliness ... mutual affection ... love.
(2Pt 1:5-8)

Note how often the biblical text speaks of values in terms of 'fruit' and 'clothing':

- **Fruit -**

... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
(Gal 5:22-23)

... for the fruit of light is found in all that is good, right and true.
(Eph 5:9)



... so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,
having produced the harvest of righteousness that
comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.
(Phil 1:11)

- **Clothing -**

I put on righteousness and it clothed me;
my justice was like a robe and a turban.
(Job 29:14)

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
(Isa 11:5)

He put on righteousness like a breastplate,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of justice for clothing,
and wrapped himself in zeal as a mantle.
(Isa 59:17)

... he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.
(Isa 61:10)

... to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
and to clothe yourselves with the new self,
created according to the likeness of God
in true righteousness and holiness.
(Ep 4:23-24)

Values are the fruit, fragrance and fabric of *shalom*.

- **Cascading values**

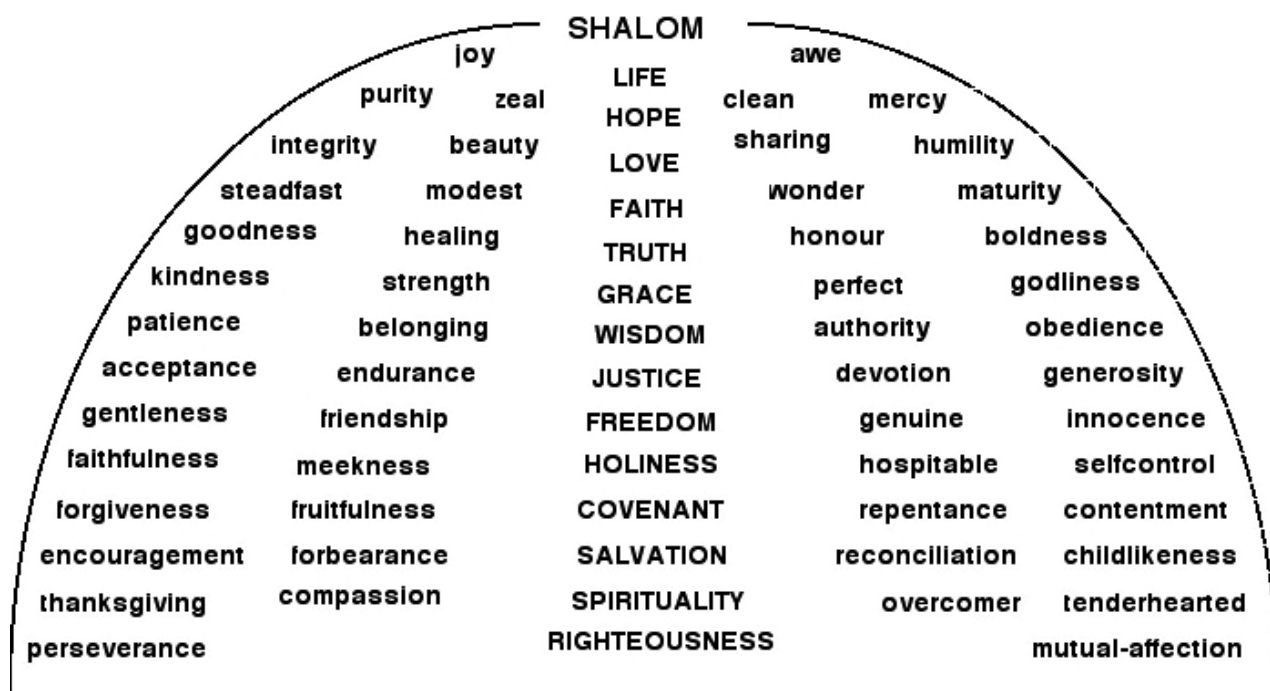
Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream
(Am 5:24)

Eternal values bubble up from their source at the centre of God's character. Amos has this wonderful vision of a waterfall that tumbles and streams through human hearts, rises like a tide across communities, and finally engulfs the whole cosmos in a flood. Inspired by this image we imagine values as a 'cascade':

We have placed *shalom* at the head of the cascade, almost like a bubbling spring from which all the other values flow. This is because, biblically, it is quite clear that *shalom* is the all-embracing value - overarching and undergirding everything else. Its expression of the 'wholeness' and 'integratedness' of all things flowing and moving together in perfect creative harmony, reveals *shalom* as the totality of all that God is, gives and purposes.

Remember that this is not in any way a 'complete' list, but it does mention some of the major biblical Christian values. The values in the centre that are in capital letters are probably significant core values that are a point of connection and focus for many other values. They are of course all totally interconnected into an inseparable holistic completeness:





So values are holistic. Those values that make up the centre of the cascade are those that tend to be the 'core-values' or 'gathering' principles. They form the framework and structure that interconnects and draws together all others, each value inseparably linking with every other one, creating the sense of a whole.

There are, however, two real dangers when confronted with values:

- We must not over *personalise* values; of course they are profoundly personal and must be incarnated in each individual life, but they are also fundamentally social and corporate working out in community, society and the environment
- We must not over *individualise* values; they exist as a totality, we cannot isolate one or two and ignore others, scripture speaks of the 'fruit (singular) of the Spirit' not the 'fruits (plural) of the Spirit' (cf Gal 5:22)

▪ Sourcing values

We have stated clearly that all true values have their source and origin in God, and it is from there that they flow out into the whole cosmos. Nevertheless, this can still leave us with a rather vague sense about values. How do we come to really understand them and access them? To make things clearer:

- From a Christian perspective, it is important that we begin with the person of Jesus. Christians see him as the incarnation of the character of God, and from this reality through his words and his works, values flow;
- In our imagination, behind Jesus, there is projected the vast biblical vision of *shalom*, from which a flood of values cascade.
- If we then bring these two points of reference together (the incarnation of Jesus and vision of *shalom*), as the source and understanding of values, we then have a helpful starting point in actively connecting with values and practically expressing them in daily living:





▪ Naming values

A number of points to make:

- We are all familiar, within both society and the local church, with people simply and boldly referring to, 'Family values', 'Political values', 'Christian values', 'Biblical values' and so on. They rarely say any more, and on the few occasions they do, their comments are usually superficial. Everything is based on 'assumption', with the implication – "You know what these values are so I don't need to spell them out." Well you do! We live in a vacuum of unarticulated values. One of the most urgent tasks for the 'Jesus community' is to identify and articulate values.¹²
- Values exist, but they have to be named. We encounter values through globally shared experiences, emotions and actions, but how do we understand them? In biblical thought 'name' means 'character'.¹³ We know, for instance, that 'peace' is a universal core-value, yet our studies of *shalom* have shown¹⁴ that completely contrasting views of 'peace' are to be found. This will be true of most values.

¹² In all the years since 1967 I have yet to find any book, secular, religious or even Christian that makes a serious attempt to identify and draw out the significance of even 'core-values'. A first step in this long overdue task is happening with the 'Tree of Life' matrix as part of the Peace School programme. In many senses this is unexplored territory.

¹³ Historically, in many of the world's communities, when a child is born it is given a 'birth name' by which it is known in the family and community until puberty, by this time everyone knows what is distinctive about their character and they are given their 'recognised name' that makes a clear statement about their character. In the Bible, the name "Jacob" meant 'supplanter, twister' (Gen 25:26), all references to 'God's name' are a euphemism for 'God's character'. So naming values says something significant about their character.

¹⁴ See '*The Vision of Shalom: exploring the biblical vision of peace*' and '*The Hope of Shalom: the Christian hope and the implications for shalom activism*'.

- We not only need to name and list values in a way that shows their interrelationship with each other, but we also need to spend time looking at their meaning, not only biblically, which is essential, but inter-culturally and globally. Every culture and language has had their own encounter with each of the universal core-values, they will each have something significant and insightful to say about each value from their own unique and distinctive experience and understanding.
- We are looking for the skin in which each universal core-value dances. Each word, name, definition and meaning we discover helps towards touching that skin.
- Because we recognise that true and authentic values are universal and eternal, and we also wish to acknowledge the fact that every culture and language has something significant to bring to our understanding, we refuse to talk about 'Christian values'. Instead it is much more appropriate to speak of 'a Christian understanding of universal creation values'.

▪ Authenticating values

We have said repeatedly that values flow from the innermost being and character of God. This being so, values are 'holy'. An awkward English word usually used to translate the astonishing Hebrew word *qadosh*. It has a double meaning, 'belonging to' and 'separate from'.¹⁵ The better word to translate *qadosh* would be 'unique'. Values are unique because they are sourced from God. This makes them authentic and true. True values then are eternal. Knowing them is dependent upon revelation, experiencing them upon a relationship with the living God.

It is important to make this point, because we must not forget that it is quite possible for us to have false values. This may seem to be a contradiction in terms, but it is not. Many people highly value ideas and principles that are in complete conflict with the character of God (eg. 'revenge', 'might is right' etc). They may even speak of their values in seemingly acceptable terms, such as 'love', 'joy', 'peace' etc; but when their understanding and practice of that value is examined closely - selfishness, indulgence, injustice and much more are revealed as the true characteristics of the value. Jesus speaks of 'not laying up treasure on earth where moth, dust and rust corrupt (Mt 6:19) and being unable to 'serve God and mammon' (Mt 6:24). In both cases there is a clear inference to false values. Paul speaks about the 'works of the flesh' (Gal 5:19-21), in contrast to the 'fruit of the Spirit', quite clearly a reference to false values. Superficially they can often appear very attractive and plausible but in reality they fail to match the unique character of God. Jesus even speaks about 'good treasure' and 'evil treasure':

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks"
(Lk 6:43-45).

¹⁵ *Qadosh* originally had absolutely no 'religious' connections at all, those only developed much later and have come to dominate popular thinking, which the use of the word 'holy' only perpetuates.

For this reason it is so very important to have a correct biblical Christian understanding of the true nature of 'universal creation values as revealed' in Jesus.

▪ Applying values

There is something wonderfully free, spontaneous, creative and certain about living by values:

‘And (Jesus) said to them,
"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven
is like a householder who brings out of their treasure
what is new and what is old."
(Mt 13:52)

Here is a remarkable picture of a person with a storeroom or cupboard filled with an astonishing 'treasure'. Whatever the need the resource was there; sometimes it is old, trustworthy, tried, tested and honoured, on other occasions it is fresh, new, surprising, unexpected. Every time it is appropriate, it is exactly what is needed.¹⁶ This is the most wonderful picture of 'values-living'! Every requirement for every need is there, and they are accessible to those 'trained for the kingdom of heaven'. So 'shalom activists' living by values are to be truly resourceful - in the sense of 'resource-full' - in every situation they meet. But it is something we learn as we mature – 'every scribe trained'.

▪ Incarnating values

For values to move from 'concept' to 'reality' they have to be incarnated. Values can only be encountered and experienced within relationship. This is why we have stressed that a Christian understanding of the eternal universal core-values that flow from the character of God can only begin to be fully understood as a result of the incarnating life of Jesus.

This principle of incarnating values is absolutely central to 'shalom activist' understanding. The only way that people and creation will encounter values is as they are expressed through the lives of individuals. It is not just concepts but consequences, it is not just words but works, and it is not just ideas but incidents. This is what we see in Jesus and it must be true of us.

The good person,
out of the good treasure of their heart
brings out good.
(Lk 6:45)

¹⁶ My father used to tell stories about a remarkable shopkeeper called Bachhi Ram who had a tiny store high in the Himalaya yet always seemed to have whatever he needed. "I was there twenty years, I don't want to give the impression he always had what I wanted. But the thing I never thought he'd stock – somewhere in the back of that shop, there it was. Oh, we had some fun. In fact over the years it's been a bit of a competition as to whether he had everything I needed. I will be honest; 80% of what I wanted, he had in that shop. How he got that stock list, don't ask me." See Pat Wraight *'On To The Summit: The Len Moules Story'* Kingsway 1981 p 63-66

▪ Radical values

A major problem with value thinking is, not only that they are imagined as a pile of children's building blocks, but also the bricks are painted sweet pastel colours! Values are seen as nice, cosy, comfortable and reassuring. Even much Christian teaching on the 'fruit of the Spirit' has a tendency to reinforce this image!

Values are radical! Properly understood, they are disturbing, dangerous and totally life-changing. At a glance they may look like bags of harmless inert chemicals, but mixed together they form a highly explosive and volatile cocktail! If ideas like 'forgiveness', 'compassion' and 'hope' don't deeply disturb you and probably terrify you, it is unlikely you have really begun to understand them!

The values of the kingdom of God transfigure the mind and thinking and as a consequence the whole way that we live:

Do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God
- what is good acceptable and perfect.
(Rm 12:2)

In the early church, 'the person who became a Christian was converted to the edges of their society. They saw themselves as *paroikoi*, or 'resident aliens'. They were embracing 'deviant values'; out of joint with those upheld by the culture of the day. However, even though they were a marginal minority they had an enormous self-confidence that God was using them to build a new world.'¹⁷ Eternal values are about transfiguration!

Values are radical! We saw at the outset that embracing the values of the kingdom of God will cost you everything, but they are cheap at the price! Many Christians down through history have paid with their lives for embracing the values. However, we are constantly being told that, "The gospel is free!" and we live as though grace is cheap.¹⁸ Values are about worth and price, and the cost involved.

A shopper in New York inadvertently walked into a clothes and jewellery store for the mega-rich. Browsing the items they noticed none of them had any price tags. Enquiring why, was told dismissively by the assistant:

"If you have to ask how much it costs then you can't afford it!"

Is this a reverse form of message of the two stories we began with? To make the eternal values of the kingdom of God your personal treasure price is no object. 'Shalom activism' requires a radical recklessness.

We are all familiar with the rather chilling adage:

¹⁷ Alan Kreider ... '*Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom*' published by Grove Books - previously quoted in the session: '*The Hope of Shalom: the Christian hope and the implications for shalom activism.*' p 15.

¹⁸ This is of course the issue that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrestled with in '*The Cost of Discipleship*' SCM Press 1964 p 35-47.

“Everybody has their price”.

However, ‘shalom activists’ embracing authentic values are never be open for betrayal.

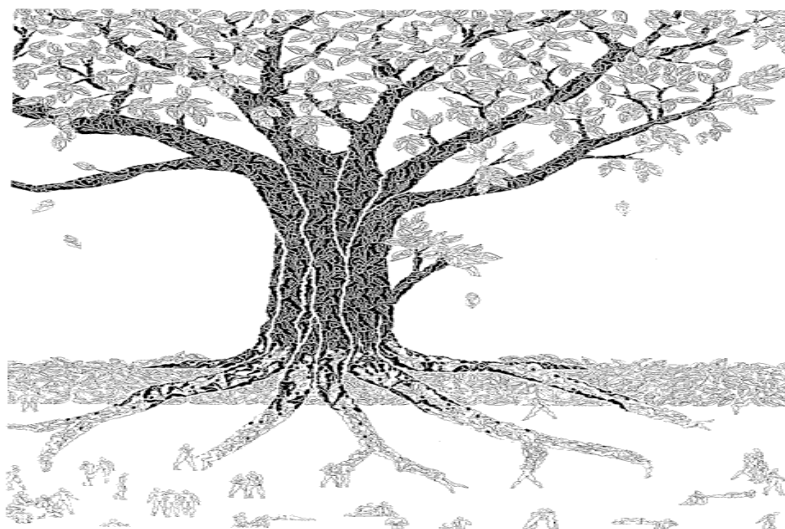
Values are radical! True values work from the roots *up* and from the inside *out*. To try and impose them from the top *down* or to press them from the outside *in* is to pervert and destroy them. Values can never be a legal structure, only a source of life. They are in fact a primary expression of the ‘Tree of Life’.

LIVING - VALUES

‘Tree of Life’

‘Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,
flowing from the throne of God ... on either side of the river,
the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month;
and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations ...
Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life.’
(Rev 22:1-2, 14)

One of the most powerful biblical images in relation to values is the ‘Tree of Life’. From the very beginning its fruit is available for eating,¹⁹ offering life for all who do. Those who eat, themselves, become a ‘Tree of Life’ to others.²⁰ Ultimately it is the centrepiece of the new heaven and earth.²¹



We have already referred to values as ‘radical’ shaped from the Latin ‘radix’, meaning ‘root’, and is directly connected to the idea of a tree. It has two main senses:

- ‘Going to the root’; discovering what is foundational, fundamental, original, inherent, essential and primal. There is something deep, dark, earthy, hidden and mysteriously wonderful in this sense of the word.

¹⁹ Gen 2:9

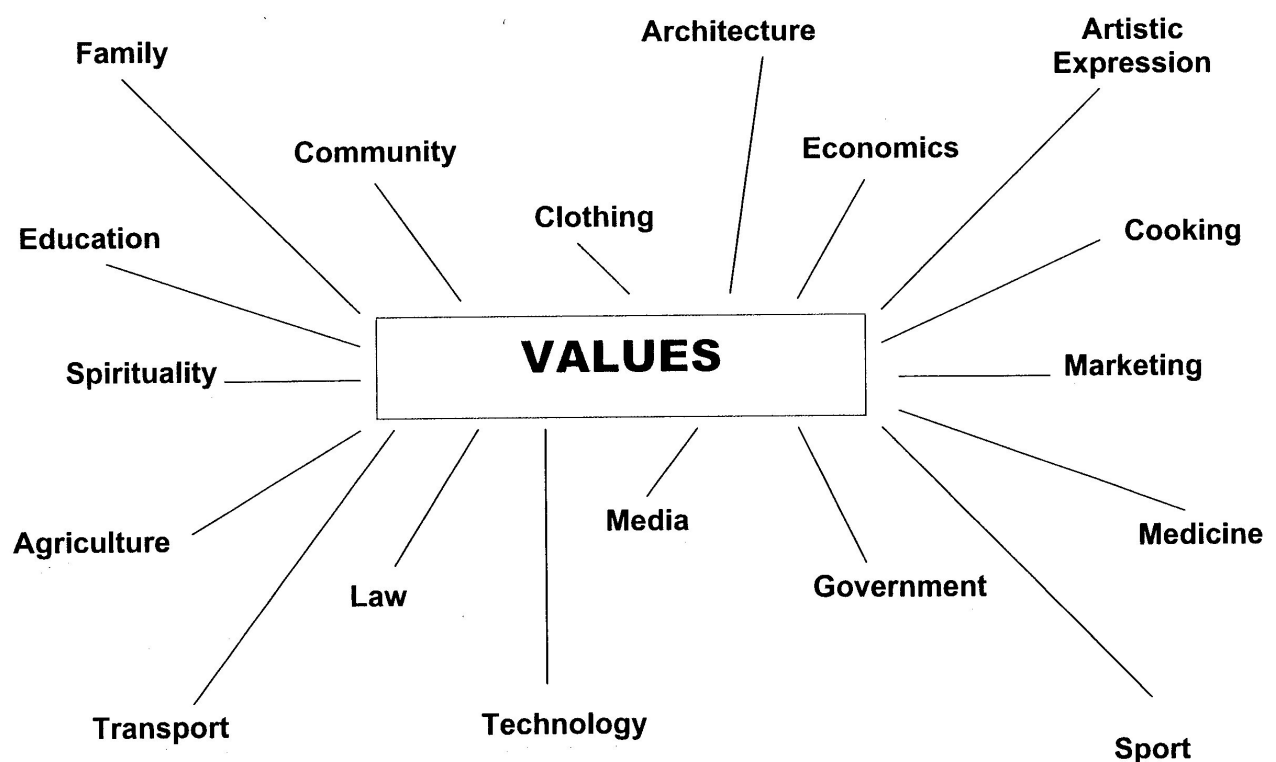
²⁰ Ps 1:1-3; Prov 11:30; 15:4

²¹ Rev 22:1-2, 14

- 'Flowing *from* the root'; encountering what brings structure, nourishment, security, growth and fruitfulness. There is something profound, life giving, energising, ethereal and eternal in this sense of the word.

A great tree has symmetry. Branches reach high and visible above the ground, matched exactly by its root system deep and hidden beneath the earth. This is a wonderful picture of reality. For everything that makes up the visible world there is a depth that is invisible; also, the visible is totally dependent on the invisible for its existence and meaning. These are not two parallel universes, but *one* completely integrated whole. This perfectly describes what we have been saying about values.

Values are about interacting, connecting and influencing every facet of humanity and creation, bringing about life and transfiguration. Wherever we are, what ever we do – our job, relationships; values touching everything:



There are myriads of interconnecting questions to ask, such as:

- How might joy influence architecture?
- How might goodness influence the law?
- How might truth influence cooking?
- How might justice influence media?

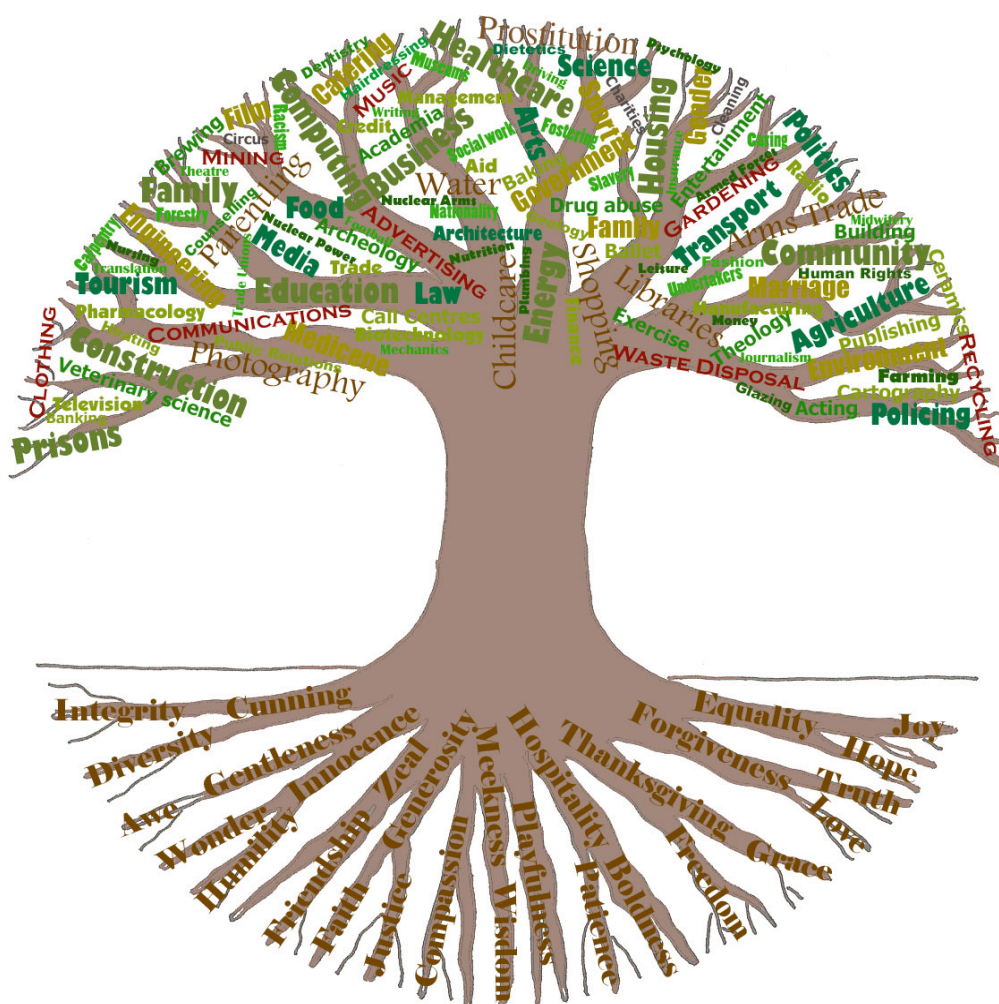
There are literally thousands of exciting permutations, each revealing new possibilities.

So let us work with the 'Tree of Life' image further:

- The roots represent values;
- The branches represent impact at every level in the world;



- The leaves and the fruit that flourish on the bough are also values. They of course eventually fall to ground to beautifully decompose into humus to feed the roots once more; a wonderful endless cycle of values emerging, expressing, impacting and nurturing;
- The fruit that is eaten contains within it the seeds of the tree itself, with the possibility of the ‘Tree of Life’ germinating again and again. In Genesis 1 we have this repeated phrase, ‘the seed with the fruit in it’ (v11,12). Those who feed on the fruit of the ‘Tree of Life’ (values) will themselves become a ‘Tree of Life’ bearing the fruit for others *ad infinitum*.
- The ‘trunk’ represents the point of integration and reflection. It is where all the dimensions of the tree, roots and branches, come together in strength. It is also the place, in shade and solitude; you can sit with your back against the bark and ponder deeply about ultimate value.



This is the exciting journey for every follower of Jesus, discovering values that truly are the bedrock to everything.²²

²² See Appendix 2



Freedom - ethics as values

Freedom: Hebrew - *chuphshah*; Greek - *eleutheros*.

'The wind blows where it wants to, you hear its sound but you know neither its origin nor its destination; so it is with everyone born of the spirit.'
(Jn 3:8)

Freedom is the Bible word for living. A Christian is someone born of the Spirit, having made the choice to live following the example of Jesus. Christian ethics in a nutshell is, 'to live spontaneously in harmony with the character of God in the power of the Spirit':

- "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32)
- "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free" (Gal 5:1)
- "For where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom" (2Cor 3:17)

Freedom is the primary value on which Christian ethics stands, and authentic living is rooted; saturated of course in love, truth and the life of the Spirit. This understanding is absolutely central to the meaning and experience of Christian ethics. The gospel properly understood is a call to become a 'Messianic Anarchist', with no place for legalism of any kind. The paradox of the ethics of the Spirit has been described as the:

- Law of Christ (Gal 6:2)
- Law of liberty (Ja 1:25)
- Law of the Spirit of life (Rm 8:2)

Q

- How would you help a young Christian to learn to live by values rather than by rules?
- How would you help them to understand true freedom and not walk a path that was either legalistic or libertine?
- Why are so many religious people legalistic?
- How might living by values rather than rules, especially living by freedom, help a Christian?

Wisdom - creativity as values

Wisdom: Hebrew - *hokma*; Greek - *sophia*.

But the wisdom from above is first pure,
then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits,
without uncertainty or insincerity.
And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(Jas 3:17-18)

Wisdom is the Bible word for creativity. It is 'turning thought into action, and making covenant life work in practice'. Here our experience of truth, knowledge and understanding burst into action and creativity is born. It is not theoretical or abstract, but tangible,



measurable and effective. True wisdom harmonises with God's thoughts. It is also the product of maturity. It will be characterised by:

- **Skill:** described in the Hebrew Scriptures as 'the wisdom of the heart' - integrity, cunning, craftsmanship and deftness of action
- **Depth:** resonates with the qualities of God's character, expressing both insight and compassion
- **Edge:** sharpness, prophetic, 'wise as serpents, harmless as doves' (Mt 10:16)

Creativity should produce masterpieces that fit into God's ultimate masterpiece. Wisdom is not only an artistic skill, it is also the ability to think and act 'outside the box; words and deeds that take people by surprise. Helping them to see and perceive in a new way. Wisdom should fire and inspire, it should drive us further, deeper and make us sharper.

Q

- How would you describe wisdom? How might it help someone to live creatively rather than predictably?
- What other values would need to link closely with wisdom for someone to become authentically creative?
- Why do so few people appear to have creative wisdom?
- How might living by values rather than patterns - especially living by wisdom, help a Christian?

Truth - gospel as values

Truth: Hebrew - *emeth*; Greek - *aletheia*.

As the Lord lives,
in truth, in justice, and in uprightness,
then nations shall bless themselves in him,
and in him shall they glory.
(Jer 4:2)

Truth is the Bible word to be communicated, it is at the heart of the gospel as *shalom*. Truth is like a light to be brought to the peoples of the world. Truth is moral rather than cerebral and it is to do with:

- 'Personhood' rather than 'propositions'
- 'Character' rather than 'criteria'
- 'Disposition' rather than 'information'
- 'Right person' rather than the 'right ideas'

Truth has great respect for different cultures. God delights in diversity and truth celebrates this. It recognises that there can be no such thing as a 'Christian culture', but it looks for followers of Jesus within every culture. The gospel of truth is to be free of any particular cultural constraints. It is to communicate 'eternal values' in a way that touches the 'universals' common to all people, and it is to be clothed in every possible cultural fabric. It brings true values and embeds them in the hearts of people and cultures in a way that enhances everything that is good about their existing way of living, but shrivels to nothing everything that is destructive and inhibiting.



Q

- How would you put the truth of the Christian message into words in terms of values?
- How would you communicate the gospel as values to someone of a completely different culture?
- Why have so few Christians thought of the gospel as values?
- How might sharing values, especially living by truth, help a Christian to communicate?

AUTHENTIC VALUES

A summary of authentic values would be that they are ...

Spiritual

... universal life that is sourced in God

Good

... moral fabric of the universe

Life-giving

... always opposite to death

Interconnected

... each value contains all values

Incarnated

... otherwise they remain simply ideas

Global

... shared understandings of worth

Connecting Points

... across world faiths and beliefs

Creational

... they are not just human

Related to basic needs

... both human and creation

Represent Rights

... what the whole creation is entitled too

Subversive

... challenges legalism, inspires spontaneity

Disturbing

... if not you haven't understood them

Dynamic



... with transforming power

The Gospel
... good news demonstrated

Questions

1. 'Living by values rather than rules'; would you agree that this is what Jesus calls those who follow him to embrace? What are some of the practical challenges it presents?
2. How could values help to find both common ground and communication with people of other faiths, cultures and beliefs?
3. Do you agree that the proclamation and demonstration of life-giving values is at the heart of the gospel and evangelism? If that is true what are the implications for both our understanding and our actions?

Reading and Resources

T Dunn (Ed) '**Foundations of Peace and Freedom: The ecology of a peaceful world**'
Christopher Davis 1975
S Hauerwas & C Pinches '**Christians Among the Virtues**' University Notre Dame Press 1977
S Hauerwas '**The Peaceable Kingdom**' SCM 1983
S Hauerwas '**Vision and Virtue**' University Notre Dame Press 1981

