

## Lecture 8 – The Primary Forms of Love

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” Matthew 23:23 (NIV)

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8 (NIV)

### Key Terms

Justice (*mishpat* -- TpXm), mercy (*chesed* -- Dsox), faithfulness (*emunah* – hnwma), subordination, righteousness (*tsid'qah* -- hqdc)

### Objectives

- \*List and distinguish between the various forms that love takes.
- \*Identify some implications of the forms of love for issues facing us today.

### The Primary Forms of Love

#### I. The Embodiment of Love

In the practice of:

TpXm (*mishpat*, justice)

Dsox (*chesed*, mercy)

hnwma (*emunah*, faithfulness)

Matthew 23:23 / Micah 6:8

Characteristics of these practices

Attributes of God

Micah 6:8

A. Justice – to render to each his/her due

1. Maximize Christian liberty
  - a. Definition of injustice
2. “Righteousness”
3. Forensic justice
4. Protective justice

B. Mercy – not constrained

1. Ephesians 2:4-7
2. Different interpretations/terms
3. Different domain from justice
4. Matthew 5:7 / Luke 6:36

C. Faithfulness – responsibility in relationships

1. Faithfulness of God
  - a. II Timothy 2:13, et al
2. Faithfulness of God’s people
  - a. Malachi 2

## The Character Education Movement

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One remarkable trend in American culture over the last decade has been the renewed emphasis on “the content of our character.” *The Book of Virtues*, compiled by William J. Bennett to assist the character education of children by providing the materials of “moral literacy,” was published in 1993 and remained for over a year-and-a-half on the *New York Times* best-seller list.<sup>1</sup> Around the same time, a number of national organizations for character education were launched, notably Character Counts! Coalition (1993) and The Character Education Partnership (1994) which have similar goals and some overlapping membership.<sup>2</sup>

Character Counts! supports character education in schools and human-service organizations, especially those that serve youth. It has attracted an institutional membership of around 300, including such high profile agencies as the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the YMCA, Little League Baseball, the American Red Cross, and the United Way. In addition, it claims the endorsement of some 40 states and nearly 1,000 municipalities, school districts, and chambers of commerce, not to mention the President and both houses of Congress. The program is rooted in the core belief that “[t]here are enduring, universal moral truths—principles of thought and conduct—which distinguish right from wrong and define the essence of good character.” While character education is “always a parent’s job,” others play supporting roles in strengthening youth in the “consensus ethical values” of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These are the “Six Pillars of Character” of our common humanity that transcend divisions of race, class, gender, or creed. They are “unpacked” as follows:

Trustworthiness: Be honest. Don’t deceive, cheat or steal. Be reliable—do what you say you’ll do. Have the courage to do the right thing. Build a good reputation. Be loyal—stand by your family, friends and country.

Respect: Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule. Be tolerant of differences. Use good manners, not bad language. Be considerate of the feelings of others. Don’t threaten, hit or hurt anyone. Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements.

Responsibility: Do what you are supposed to do. Persevere: keep on trying! Always do your best. Use self-control. Be self-disciplined. Think before you act—consider the consequences. Be accountable for your choices.

Fairness: Play by the rules. Take turns and share. Be open-minded; listen to others. Don’t take advantage of others. Don’t blame others carelessly.

Caring: Be kind. Be compassionate and show you care. Express gratitude. Forgive others. Help people in need.

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Bennett, ed., *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). Other Bennett compilations: *The Moral Compass: Stories for a Life’s Journey* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) and *Our Sacred Honor: Words of Advice from the Founders in Stories, Letters, Poems, and Speeches* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The California Department of Education maintains “Character Education On-Line Resources” <[www.cde.ca.gov/character/resources1.html](http://www.cde.ca.gov/character/resources1.html)> where information on these and other organizations may be located, including “Children of the World,” the character education initiative of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Citizenship: Do your share to make your school and community better. Stay informed; vote. Be a good neighbor. Obey laws and rules. Respect authority. Protect the environment.

The Character Education Partnership, which includes on its advisory council persons with such high name-recognition as Barbara Bush, Stephen Carter, Amitai Etzioni, George Gallop, Jesse Jackson, and Colin Powell, concentrates on character education in the public schools. It includes among its nearly 100 organizational members the AFT, NEA, National PTA, and National School Boards Association. The role of the school, however, is placed in a larger context: “We recognize and affirm the primary role of the family in shaping the moral character of children, the vital task of schools in teaching and inspiring civic virtue, and the shared responsibility of each individual and community to model moral character and civic virtue.” Schools committed to character education should explicitly declare in their mission statement that “[p]arents are the first and most important moral educators of their children.” The first of CEP’s Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education is practically identical to Character Counts!: “Character education holds, as a starting philosophical principle, that there are widely shared, pivotally important core ethical values—such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others—that form the basis of good character.”

Although it has spawned a growth industry in recent times, the idea of “nonsectarian” character education on the basis of common ethical values is not new. The Character Education Institute, founded in 1942 and recently absorbed by Learning for Life, in 1969 produced the Character Education Curriculum based on twelve “universal values”: honor, honesty, truthfulness, kindness, generosity, helpfulness, courage, convictions, justice, respect, freedom, equality. The difference between this list and the ones typically offered up in the 1990s is the harder edge given to it by the inclusion of courage, convictions, and justice. Why do these not show up more often? Are they perhaps more difficult to present without being divisive? Has character education gone soft in accommodation to the spirit of the age? What happened to the compelling vision of the civil rights movement? Martin Luther King’s second book was *The Strength To Love* (1963). Having the courage of one’s convictions about justice and love emerged as the chief measure of character in those days. Has it lost its relevance in today’s cultural environment?

The widespread concern over moral declension in American culture in the 1990s provides the background for a recent report by the Council on Civil Society, a volunteer group of 24 scholars and leaders chaired by Jean Bethke Elshtain, professor of social and political ethics at the University of Chicago. According to their analysis, “Declining morality is reflected primarily in the steady spread of behavior that weakens family life, promotes disrespect for authority and for others, and insults the practice of personal responsibility.”<sup>3</sup> The most important task facing the nation today is “to strengthen the moral habits and ways of living that make democracy possible.” The report concludes with some forty concrete recommendations that speak to all the major institutions of civil society, but the larger issue is the need for the development of a public moral philosophy grounded in the belief “that moral truth exists and that it is accessible to people of reason and good will.” Civil society is not viable without “a guiding set of shared moral truths.”

One of the best cases for the existence of such a set of known moral truths is C. S. Lewis’s durable little treatise *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis defends what he calls the doctrine of objective value, “the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.”<sup>4</sup> The set of objective moral truths are known variously as Natural Law, Traditional Morality,

<sup>3</sup> *A Call to Civil Society: Why Democracy Needs Moral Truths* (New York: Institute for American Values, 1998), 5. Subsequent quotations, 15, 13, 14.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (1944; New York: Simon, 1996), 31.

First Principles of Practical Reason, or First Platitudes. Lewis prefers to call them the Tao, and he includes an appendix, “Illustrations of the Tao” divided into eight categories.

1. The law of general benevolence
2. The law of special beneficence
3. Duties to parents, elders, ancestors
4. Duties to children and posterity
5. The law of justice
6. The law of good faith and veracity
7. The law of mercy
8. The law of magnanimity

Some weaknesses of the “shared objective values” approach to character education are exposed at this point. The movement’s dogmatic assertion of core ethical values or moral truths is certainly superior to the subjective “values clarification” approach that dominated the 1970s and 1980s. It may even claim the support of C. S. Lewis: “A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny.”<sup>5</sup> But Lewis was not content with mere dogmatic assertion. Dogmas must have grounds, reasons need to be given, cases have to be made. Lewis did something that today is considered bad form: he constructed an argument. He argued that the transcendent ground of morality is the being of God, and furthermore that the Christian story is the truth.<sup>6</sup>

In the character education movement, the core values of common morality are appealed to without exploring whether or not they require a transcendent ground. In addition, they are abstracted from a narrative context that provides the content and motivation for their cultivation. Trustworthiness in the context of the Christian narrative is cultivated in response to the God of Trust (Dt. 32:4), who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the God who makes and keeps his promises, whose word is truth, who cannot lie, by trusting in whom the just shall live. Respect is grounded in God who made man in his image, male and female, and requires that dignity to be recognized in all, the God who commands honor and reverence for father and mother, and by extension to others who serve by exercising authority under God. Responsibility is developed in the context of what God is calling his people to be and to do in light of the coming of his kingdom. And so with the other “pillars of character.” They are inevitably narrative-dependent; if a religious narrative is excluded a civil narrative will be supplied.

Does Christianity provide any basis for social ethics (“moral action in society”)? The issue is how to express the sovereignty of God over nations as well as over individuals (John Courtney Murray). The challenge for Christians is how to participate Christianity in a religiously pluralistic society. As Paul Ramsey put it: “The chief problem for Christian social ethics is how we are to understand the relation between the law of nature and the righteousness of the covenant.”<sup>7</sup> Ramsey construed this as the relation between natural justice and redemptive righteousness, expressed as “love transforming the natural law,” i.e., “love converting, transforming, redirecting, extending, and reinvigorating natural justice.”<sup>8</sup>

“Ethics in the modern world is fundamentally a discipline of giving public reasons for action. ... To make a moral argument is to state one’s case in terms that require others either to concur in the choice or to offer better reasons for rejecting it.” “Theological affirmations make poor premises for public moral arguments precisely because they are held by a limited group of the faithful, while a moral argument aims to

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (1943) republished as Book One of *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

<sup>7</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Nine Modern Moralists* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 181.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 182.

establish a general obligation.”<sup>9</sup> “A public argument that seeks first to secure agreement on a course of action recognizes that people have many reasons for supporting an action, and it appeals to as many of these motives as possible.”<sup>10</sup>

In the field of education, the “principled pluralists” in the Reformed tradition have articulated the case of “disestablishment” of the present secular system in favor of parental choice on the grounds that American public (i.e., government) education violates both structural and religious pluralism.<sup>11</sup> The remedy is to empower families to exercise freedom of choice by tax credit or tax reduction as a matter of public justice. Stephen Carter concurs: “[O]ne of the strongest arguments in favor of public assistance for private school tuition is that only in that way can parents choose for themselves the education their children should have, rather than having some other entity, one over which they may have little control, make the choice for them.”<sup>12</sup> The issue deserves a national debate—minus cultural war rhetoric on both sides of the question.

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<sup>9</sup> Robin W. Lovin, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2-3. See also Lovin's *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rockne M. McCarthy, James W. Skillen, William A. Harper, *Disestablishment a Second Time: Genuine Pluralism for American Schools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982); Gordon J. Spykman, *Society, State, and Schools: A Case for Structural and Confessional Pluralism* (1981).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 170.