

CHAPTER ONE

Values Gone Awry

*“... their foolish hearts were darkened.”
(Rom. 1:21)*

WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT “FAMILY VALUES”: from politicians, Hollywood, talk shows, and the news media. But do people know what “family values” are, particularly with respect to moral standards?

The Dark Side of “Family Values”

Bonnie Lynn Matthews and Elaine Kohler, recently pictured in the *Florida News-Press*, are admitted lesbians, living together, and are suing the state for taking a six-year-old child from them. They want to become foster parents. “He is our kid, we are his moms [plural],” they say. Both are mental health counselors. Kohler is an “in-home” therapist to foster children. Matthews is a therapist for emotionally disturbed and abused children. They have their own idea of “family values.”

So does Murphy Brown. But her values exclude the seventh commandment. Likewise, homosexual men who marry men and want to adopt children also have “family values,” but they deny any fixed, objective, absolute standard of right and wrong. And what about sports heroes who get AIDS through sexual immorality? They become heroes and are treated as role models of domestic virtue.

Woody Allen has his own version of “family values.” He made the cover of *Time* for what the magazine called his “unconventional family,” in which he had an affair with the adopted daughter of his paramour. *Time* quoted Allen as saying that he saw no moral dilemma in having an affair with Mia Farrow’s child. If having sex with Farrow is acceptable, who is to say it is wrong to have sex with Farrow’s daughter?

What sort of “family values” does the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, have? She was photographed topless with a man not her husband—while her children looked on. That is “family values” of the wrong kind!

In the seventh commandment, God almighty condemns such behavior regardless of what it is called. “Woe to those who call evil good; and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20). The Lord has given us a fixed, objective, perfect, eternal standard of right and wrong, and it does not square with just any definition of the family and its values. But our society is rapidly falling away from that standard. We may have won the cold war against communism and the short war in the Persian Gulf, but we are losing the moral war in the home, the school, and the church. Why? We no longer hold to an absolute criterion of right and wrong.

For fifty years our educational system has consciously or unconsciously been pressing for an amoral society by teaching that all morals are relative. How can any politician, Republican or Democrat, push for “family values” without a fixed, objective standard of righteousness? It is folly to think we can engender character in men and women by taking away from them their duty and responsibility to the Creator of all the earth, who will judge the world in righteousness. God has given us His definition of “family values.” They are the values summarized in the Ten Commandments.

God Gave Them Up

Immorality is promoted not only in public schools and universities but through the entertainment media. Movies and television romanticize macho violence and naked women. Rock concerts and rap music stir up raw lust and violence. Pornography is all over the magazine racks.

Social programs and rehab centers do some good in curtailing certain vices, but they cannot touch the root of the problem. Programs will not transform evil men and evil women into good men and good women. Why? They do not reach the heart. They are not spiritual. They do not have the right moral standard. They are disconnected from the principles and power of the Creator God.

The Bible offers this explanation of the moral crisis we are experiencing today:

Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanliness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in

their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. . . . (Rom. 1:21–28)

Paul's words sound like a summary of the daily news. We could give them the heading, "What Happens When a Privileged Society Abandons God?" The answer is found in verses 24, 26, and 28—God abandons that society.

- "Therefore God gave them up" (v. 24).
- "For this cause God gave them up" (v. 26).
- "God gave them over" (v. 28).

In this passage, we find mass apostasy as people turn from the worship of the invisible, true, and living God and embrace grotesque idolatry. No other Scripture addresses our present society more pointedly. Here the great apostle teaches us what happens when a privileged society such as ours abandons God. In a solemn act of judgment, God abandoned the people described in Romans 1. If He gave that sinful people over to its own corruption, should we be surprised if He sends judgment on us? Surely AIDS is the judgment of God, but it is minute compared to the judgment mentioned in verses 24, 26, and 28. God abandoned them. He did not make them sinful; He merely removed the restraints. But when God gives a society over to its own lusts and corruption, that society is under the most awesome and terrible judgment that can come upon any people, short of hell itself.

Marks of an Abandoned Society

When a privileged society abandons God, three things emerge, all of which are very evident today: (1) There is *rampant sexual perversion*. A great deal of this passage in Romans has to do with the sexual perversions that characterized the Gentiles in Paul's day.

A few things need to be said about human sexuality: (a) Sex-

uality is a God-given reality. God made men and women sexual beings. (b) Sexuality is one of the strongest forces within a normal human being. It is necessary for the continuance of the human race according to God's purpose. The first command in the Bible, is to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). You cannot do that without sex. (c) Because human sexuality is God-given, it is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about when it is enjoyed within the God-given bonds of marriage. But because of the power and force of sexuality, nothing has been more corrupted and abused by sinful men and women. When ever people have abandoned the revealed truth of God concerning sexuality, perversion and shame have been the inevitable results.

(2) A related mark of an abandoned society is *homosexuality and lesbianism*, which are clearly an abomination in the sight of God. Nevertheless, groups within our present-day society are putting forth intense efforts to make such lifestyles acceptable. There are serious efforts to change social attitudes toward homosexuality. The homosexual lobby is well organized and powerful enough to succeed in its appeals for tolerance, all the while showing intolerance of those who believe as a matter of principle that homosexuality is wrong. Christians should make their convictions known with clarity, kindness, and compassion.

(3) A third mark of an abandoned society is *social breakdown*. That is because you cannot divorce morality from true religion, which is first of all a relationship with God. In Western civilization, our laws and our way of life on the whole have arisen out of the teaching of the Bible. Many people lament the increase in crime, the decline of law and order, and the break-up of the family without recognizing that these painful realities result directly from our society's rejection of biblical morality found in the Ten Commandments. Is it not obvious that the common good and countless blessings flow from walking with God according to His commands? Imagine what it would be like if everyone obeyed the commandments; if every one loved God and his neighbor as himself; if all children obeyed their parents; if no one took the Lord's name in vain, or stole, or murdered, or committed adultery, or lied; if no one coveted his neighbor's house,

his wife, or his possessions. It would be wonderful—it would be perfect—it would be heaven! The Ten Commandments are for our good as well as God’s glory. But a society that abandons God’s law, also abandons the blessings of His presence.

My point is not that law keeping is the way of salvation. There is only one way to be saved, and it is not by keeping the commandments but by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But He calls all humanity to obedience. And there is a general connection between the extent to which a society as a whole obeys God’s absolute moral standard and the degree to which they enjoy His blessings. There is no other true standard of right and wrong, and there fore there is no other way to live.

Even among the unconverted, the law has the positive role of restricting evil and convicting hearts so that sinners turn to Christ for salvation. Without the moral law, there is no awareness of sin. “For by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). If there is no law, there is no sin, for “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4 KJV). Paul said, “I would not have known sin, except through the law” (Rom. 7:7). The man who does not know the nature of the law cannot know the nature of sin. And he who does not know the nature of sin cannot know the nature of the Savior.

The cross makes no sense apart from the law. The cross without the law is like a jig-saw puzzle with the key piece missing. The evangelical prophet Isaiah said, “He [Christ] will magnify the law and make it honorable” (Isa. 42:21). Christ magnified the law by His perfect life and in His death on the cross.

Three Responses to the Law

As we look out over our society, we can notice three kinds of response to the Ten Commandments. There are, of course, many shades of difference within these three responses, but all people will fall into these three general categories:

1. Those Who Ignore and Despise the Law

I need not say much about this group. Just look around in our

society, read your newspaper, or watch your television. This group has neither the time nor the inclination to consider the law. Many people have no scruples because they have no regard for God's law. In the past their conscience may have accused them because the law was written on their hearts; "for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them" (Rom. 2:14-15). Now their conscience excuses them. Some are already reprobate. Such people are described in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28.

2. The Half-hearted Rationalizers

The "half-hearted" are those who compromise and rationalize their violation of the Ten Commandments. This group represents the largest part of unregenerate church members. By their unholily living, they deal the most serious blow to true religion.

Having despaired of ever obtaining personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, the half-hearted have drawn up their own moral code, a less stringent line of conduct that will not offend their conscience. They have set their own standard, selecting only the commandments they consider important.

Though they would not murder, they may think nothing of breaking the ninth commandment and lying. They would not steal goods off the store shelf, but they may have no regard for the fourth commandment. Many think nothing of breaking the third commandment; they take the Lord's name in vain without blushing.

They habitually look for ways to soothe their conscience. For example, they may argue that it is simplistic to divide mankind into two classes, the righteous and the wicked. So they invent a third class, those who are not good enough for heaven and not bad enough for hell. And, of course, they place themselves in this category. Such compromise has always been, and always will be, a serious enemy of true religion.

Another tactic of these compromisers is the claim that