

The Value Of Man

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Richard Ritenbaugh introduced his sermon of July 7 of this year with comments about the Founders' conceptions of human nature ["Human Nature: Good or Evil?"]. He showed how liberals view human nature as good or at least perfectible, while conservatives take a more Calvinistic view, seeing human nature as evil.

Richard's comments started me thinking about a well-known sentence that was penned by Thomas Jefferson. He writes in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Jefferson's assertion that men "are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights" suggests that mankind has value, and that *that* value, like the rights which supposedly spring from those values, is unalienable.

Now that is a word that we do not often use anymore; a word that we can easily intuit its meaning, however, if we think about it a little bit. "Alien," as an adjective, means it is separated from a larger population. So "unalienable" simply means not capable of being separated.

One dictionary defines *unalienable* as protected from being removed or taken away. Synonyms include the adjectives unassailable, inviolable, natural, inherent, basic, and absolute. The word is generally used in philosophic contexts, and is quite a bit abstract, but we can bring it down to earth if we want to by comparing it or combining it with scripture.

Proverbs 22:15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him.

Using this scripture, we can properly say that children have an unalienable ability or penchant or a proclivity to behave foolishly. Now they do not have to behave that way when they reach adulthood, hopefully; yet as children we can say that such behavior is innate, inherent, built into them; it is natural to them. That should give us a pretty good idea of what the word unalienable means.

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Was Jefferson right when he said that mankind possesses built in value? Natural value? Value that cannot be removed or abnegated? If so, how did mankind get it? I want to discuss or address the question of the value of mankind. What it is? Where it comes from? And what are its implications?

So, let us define the abstract noun, "value." It has a number of meanings. I want to read from Webster's 1828 edition. This is, by far, the best definition, the most complete definition, I have found on "value." It is an oldie, but a goodie.

He defines it as,

worth, property or those properties of a thing that render it useful or estimable. The real value of a thing is its utility, its power or capacity of procuring or producing good. The real intrusive value of iron is far greater than that of gold, but there is in many things an estimated value, depending on opinion or fashion, such as the value of precious stones.

As the old Webster's editions so often did, the editors here quote scriptures from the old King James Version of the Bible. Here are a couple of uses of the word "value," in our Bible tour.

Job 13:4 You are all physicians of no value.

Matthew 10:31 Do not fear therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows

Modern versions often render that as, "Your worth, more than many sparrows."

Think of "value" as worth or usefulness. Now, value, worth, usefulness, as Webster points out, is subjective. It is generally based on opinion or fashion. We evaluate something. Notice that when we evaluate something, the word "value" is right in there; we evaluate something and assign to it a value. Not everyone may agree with our evaluation; many of us have been to an "antique" store, which are really just a junk store—it depends on how we evaluate it.

With that in the background, I think we are ready to ask the questions, "Who put the

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price on our head? Who assigned value or worth to us as a people? Who determined that we are useful? Given that there are six billion people or so on the planet, can an individual be of any value or any use as an individual?"

As an approach to these questions, let us first consider Jefferson's thoughts on the topic. He wrote, remember, that people are endowed by their Creator. Let us be clear, Jefferson was not an individual who bore respect for the God of Abraham. He was steeped in pagan mythology; if you have ever been to his home—Monticello—you will know that the front door is carved with all kinds of images of pagan gods and goddesses.

In 1804, he produced a version of the New Testament called the Jefferson Bible—basically a version of the Gospels which expunged all illusions to the supernatural. What you have is a New Testament without references to Christ resurrection or something like that.

Jefferson was a product of and chief exponent for Enlightenment thinking. The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement in Europe beginning in about 1650. It became an extremely important political movement as time went on in many European countries and formed the philosophical backdrop to the American government. It touted the importance of reason over religion.

Thomas Paine, who was in prison at the time, actually wrote a pamphlet called the "Age of Reason." It was not long; but in that pamphlet, he questioned the legitimacy of the Bible and argued for Deism. You know that this was going on for a long time before the 1900s. This was going on in the latter 1700s.

Now what is deism? Deism is the idea of the watch maker, or clock maker, God—that God simply built the universe—a nice, working universe, and then just walked away. Deists, such as Franklin and Jefferson, did not see God as the ongoing, sovereign ruler of the universe.

They certainly did not have any vision of God as sovereign in history and in the affairs of men. They did not see God in the lives of individuals in any way. They certainly did not see Him fulfilling promises and working to bring about His plan, as we do. In other words, they rejected our God, the God of Abraham, the God of promises.

Enlightenment thinkers shunned a belief in any single authority, whether that was God, the pope, or the king. So who or what was Jefferson's creator as he mentions there in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence? You will find a clue in the

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first paragraph of that document, where he makes reference to the laws of nature and of nature's God. In Jefferson's formula, God becomes connected with nature.

Since these Enlightenment philosophers left the knowledge of the true sovereign God, the God of Abraham, out of their knowledge, they were left only with a god of nature. This was the god that people like Jefferson, Franklin, and Paine recognized. When it comes down to brass tacks, God, to them, was really little more than a vague god of nature. By nature, they meant more than just a tree, they meant human nature, the nature of man.

So, we all know we are talking about human nature. They would actually use that phrase, human nature, at times in some of their philosophies. So we all know that the god they are really talking about is the god of this world.

Please understand I am not talking about the common people who still had deep roots in Puritan thinking—most of them were quite Bible believing. But what most of these leaders believed in, in general, had come to be a modern version of a god modeled after ancient pantheistic predecessors; they believed in a god of nature.

That idea trickled down to the lower level in later years. Now we have a common people who reject the Bible. They have gone through the public education system. But in those days the common people did not do that so much. The leaders were beginning to do it; they were turning by that time to out and out paganism. It started with them back then.

Now what is the problem with all this? The problem with Enlightenment thinking about nature as at once the giver and the guarantor of human value or human rights is this: nature is a personification. It is not a person. It is not a rational being. So, how can nature impart value to mankind, or to people? How can it determine usefulness? How can nature, which lacks cogitative abilities, give mankind any value or any rights?

Think about it...we, as thinking beings, impart value to things all the time. Let us say we look at a car to buy. We ask, is it worth it? We decide this car is worth \$4,000, but no more. Now, I understand that the thinking behind any particular evaluation may be illogical. It may be selfish; it may be based on covetousness; but my point is that a thinking being makes the evaluation and determines value. How can nature (whether you spell it with a capital *N* or a small *n*) do that when nature does not think?

It takes a thinking being to impart value, to impart worth. In the case of man it is God, not nature, who imparts value. Notice in Genesis 1:26.

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Genesis 1:26 Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to Our likeness. . .

God, a thinking family, declared man to be of value because He wants us to be like them, like God. God is valuable—the most valuable family in existence. Let us take a little bit of a walk through the scriptures to see how valuable God is. We will begin in Deuteronomy 10:14. I am just going to read some of these scriptures that indicate the value or worth of our God.

Deuteronomy 10:14 Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.

God's ownership is so inclusive that it can only be described in words like "all" and "everything." We will see that over and over again.

Psalms 24:1 The earth [and everything in it] is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell in therein.

Psalms 50:12 If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world [and everything in it] is mine, and all its fullness. [The implication being that if God were hungry He could find plenty to eat.]

Psalms 89:11 The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours, the world and [everything in it] all its fullness, You have founded them.

God owns everything because He created everything.

I Chronicles 29:11-12 [David makes it clear that God's greatness is exhibited not only in His greatness but in His out-working of history, even in the fortunes of individuals] Yours, O Lord is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty, for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all. [Notice that God is not just the Creator of nature but of a kingdom, of a government:] Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might. In Your hand it is to make great and to give

strength to all.

God is not only the most expansive Being in the universe, God is the most valuable Being as well. His net worth, if we can put it that way, is of course incalculable. Yet, as David touches upon here in I Chronicles 29, God interfaces with mankind, enriching, and ennobling mankind on a person level.

When God said He was going to create man like Him, He was saying that He would add value to mankind, make him valuable. Importantly, God did not just say He was going to add value to man. He did it.

Genesis 1:27 [NIV] So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him. [He did it].

Well, all this leads into a question that is asked a number of times in the scriptures. I think we need to ask and review those times as we take another walk through the scriptures. What is mankind?

Job 7:17-18 [NIV] [This is part of Job's response to Eliphaz:] What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment?

Interesting passage, God tests us from the moment we wake up. Now, if you were to study this entire passage, you would see that Job was unhappy with God at this point in his course. My point is that Job, even in his affliction, understands that God thinks highly of man; he understands that God values man, that God pays attention to man.

Job 15:14-16 [NIV] [This is the response of Eliphaz, it is really quite interesting to see how he picks up on Job's question in Chapter 7:] What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up evil like water.

Eliphaz does not blatantly, explicitly deny God's interest in man here, but asserts that God's relationship with man is distant and untrusting. According to Eliphaz, mankind has

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no chance of becoming clean or pure in God's eyes. We can certainly see why God was not particularly happy with comments like that. Eliphaz is saying that man has no value, no worth, in God's sight.

David answers the cynicism of Eliphaz with a magnificent statement of God's concern for man in Psalm 8.

Psalm 8:1-8 [Amplified] O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, You who set Your glory on [or above] the heavens. [skip to verse 3] When I view and consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, and established, What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of [earth born] man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands. You have put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.

In David's view, God considers mankind valuable enough to rule His creation; although, as we all know, mankind, following the paths of Satan, has failed to rule adequately. We will see in a moment that Paul quotes this passage in Hebrews and makes a very important point about the value of man.

Before we get there, let us stop at Psalm 144; this is Davidic Psalm as well.

Psalm 144:3-11 Lord, what is man, that You care for him, the son of man, that You think of him? Man is like a breath. His days are like a passing shadow. [We will skip down to verse 7 where David expresses his understanding that people are valuable enough to God that He will help them.] Reach down from heaven, rescue me from deep water, and set me free from the grasp of foreigners who mouths speak lies, whose right hands are deceptive, God, I will sing a new song to You. I will play on a ten stringed harp for You are the One who gives victory to kings, who frees His servant David from the deadly sword. Set me free and rescue me from the grasp of foreigners.

This is interesting. David understands that man is short lived; his current life is vanity. Yet, God places enough value in man to respond to people's cries for help. God cares

for people, in this case, delivering the righteous from lying foreigners. There is something else, here; I am sure you caught it. David looks forward to the time when he will sing a new song. I am not sure if he specifically knew about the Sea of Glass. But, he certainly looked forward to the time he would live forever in God's house. He understood that mankind was so valuable to God that he had the potential for eternal life with God.

OK, let us go to the New Testament, to Hebrew 2:5.

Hebrew 2:5-11 [Here, Paul quotes Psalm 8, where we were earlier. Speaking of God, Paul writes:] For He has not subjected to angels the world to come that we are talking about. But one has somewhere testified. What is man that you remember him, or the son of man that You care for him? You made him lower than the angels for a short time. You crowned him with glory and honor and subjected everything under his feet. For [Paul continues] in subjecting everything to him, he left nothing that is not subject to him. As it is, we do not yet see everything subjected to him. But we do see Jesus made lower than the angels for a short time so that by God's grace He might taste death for everyone, crowned with glory and honor because of His suffering in death. For in bringing many sons to glory, it was entirely appropriate that God all things exist for Him and through Him. Should make the source of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

Here we have reached the heart and core of the question of value. For Paul, here, zeros in on Christ's sacrifice. God subjected the world to come to mankind. We do not see that yet, Paul continues, but we do see Jesus, who died that He might bring many sons into glory. Paul concludes that both Christ and man have the same Father and that, for this reason, Christ has no problem calling mankind His brothers.

It is there, at heart...mankind's value, the worth of mankind, rests in God. No, mankind has no intrinsic, innate, inherent, natural or unalienable worth, or value placed in man by a creator who built nature and then just walked away. Mankind is not valuable just because he is mankind. Mankind has value because God died for mankind.

The most valuable Life in the entire universe voluntarily terminated for mankind. The fact that the Father and Christ would pay that price to redeem mankind indicates the value they both place on man. They paid no such price for animals or fish or birds. They

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paid the price for man. In other words, mankind has value because of God's grace. Nothing else.

Indeed, mankind, corrupted by Satan, deserves only death. People, while in the grave, have no value; they cannot move; they cannot think; they cannot speak. They will when they are resurrected... Apart from God, mankind has no worth whatsoever. If you are developing, as I am, a list of the privileges or benefits we receive from God's grace, here is another one to add. We are valuable because of God's grace.

As I wind down this afternoon, I want to talk about two implications of all this.

First, what does all this say to us about an atheist or about those who do not worship the true God of Abraham? The Buddhist or Hindu, I pick theses as examples, we can talk about anybody who does not worship the true God of Abraham, who does not understand the true God that we understand and worship. They may have some conception of a god or gods, but they reject the idea that God created man in His own image. They certainly have no room in their belief systems for the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for mankind. The atheist, recognizing no God at all, is convinced that people have no future after death.

For example, consider the implications of evolutionistic thought. Evolutionists' thinkers state that people are just the result of randomness; they say we come from mutations. We are the result of randomness, they say. We came from nature, as they use the word, and return to nature at death. In this thinking, where is there any support for the concept of rights, usefulness, or individual worth? It is not there at all.

So, can an atheist or a pagan, as an example, find any value in mankind? Now, admittedly, some of these people may give lip service to the idea that mankind has value by subscribing to such artifacts as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights or its Muslim counterpart, the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam.

But, for all the issued statements, for all the ratified treaties, for all the conventions, for the declarations, and for all the endless artifacts, at the end of the archipelago we see only piles of unburied corpses. So much for the dignity and value of man as recognized by the godless and the pagan.

You see, the atheist, the evolutionist, or the pagan may develop or subscribe to a philosophical system just as Jefferson did, which seems to support the idea of human value. But, are those philosophies any more than untempered mortar, holding up a wall? Ezekiel mentions that in Ezekiel 13:10.

Ezekiel 13:10 Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, Peace when there is no peace and one builds a boundary wall, and they plaster it with untempered mortar.

These documents and the thinking which spawns all of these documents are in reality only whitewash, like that mentioned by Christ in Matthew 23:27.

Matthew 23:27 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead man's bones and all uncleanness.

Will these philosophies, this useless whitewash, stand up under the ravaging storms of war, the challenges of failing economies? When food grows scarce, will the United Nations Declarations assure the starving of as much as a decent burial? They will not.

Well, we obviously cannot address here the historical failure of mankind to value mankind. I think you all recognize that the record is pretty clear, pretty dismal. It may be worthwhile to point out the utter failure of communism and socialism in this regard.

Communism lives across the street from secularism, in the domain of out and out atheism. Communism is intrinsically atheistic. It believes that people's sole value is as agents of the state.

Socialists and communists believe that an individual is worth only what he or she is capable of producing, are able to contribute in terms of military strength, food, ideas, industrial output in his healthy years and, after that...? Well, to them, euthanasia is the only best practice after that. A person is worth only what he can be harnessed to produce, and after production is impossible due to age or disease, get rid of him.

The practice of these governments belies their hypocritical Declarations. It is indeed impossible for it to be any other way. Without recognition of God's grace, without believing that He imparted value to mankind through the sacrifice of God, these atheistic systems can only fall prey to the worst of atrocities and violations of human dignity.

In communistic and socialistic systems, we see clearly what mankind, deceived and under the sway of Satan, really thinks about the value of man. This is the danger of secularism that is such a major factor in American's lives today. Always remember, secularism is merely atheism in sheep's clothing.

The second implication pertains to us as members in God's Church. Here, I need only perhaps offer some parting notes of clarification. The *Parables of the Pearl of Great Price* or of the *Treasure Hidden in the Field* illustrate how much value God places on us, His people. Another excellent example, which I will not have time to discuss in detail, is the *Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*, recorded in Matthew 25:31.

Matthew 25:31-46 When the Son of Man comes In His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took Me in. I was naked and you clothed Me. I was sick and you visited Me. I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying Lord when did we see You hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick or in prison, and come to You? And the King will answer and say to them, assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angles. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me. Then they also will answer Him, saying Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to You? Then He will answer them saying assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Briefly, Christ when He returns, separates the goats from the sheep. He rewards the sheep for providing Him with food, water, clothing, visiting Him in prison, and for caring for Him when He is sick. In answer to the sheep's question, "When did we find You to be hungry, or thirsty, or sick, or in prison?" Christ answers that they did this when they cared for other Christians who were hungry, thirsty, sick, or in prison. That care was tantamount to providing for Christ Himself. He is indicating that His people are as

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valuable, in God's eyes, as He is. When the Father looks on us, He sees Christ, for we are part of His body. As Colossians 3:3 points out, we are hidden in Christ.

We do not have Christ's office, of course, but we share His value, His worth. This should be encouraging. But, it gives us no reason to become swollen-headed. Our worth comes solely from God's grace, from what He did, not from anything that we ever did or anything that we were born with because we are mankind. We may want to sound a warning—all of us have value, and in that sense, everyone is equal in God's eyes. Yes, talents, gifts, differ. And rewards will vary. Some will receive more of a reward than others, yet God places the same value on all of us.

I Corinthians 12 points out that there are many different gifts, but they all aid the single body. The eye is not of more value or worth more than the ear; the hand is not worth more than the foot.

I Corinthians 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.

Paul says God has constructed the Body, His church, so that all the members should have the same concern for each other. That quality of sameness springs from the fact that all have the same worth, same value, or perhaps we could say, the same ultimate potential in God's eyes.

No, brethren, the idea that all are equal, but that some are more equal than others, does not ultimately fit into God's thinking at all.