

What They Didn't Teach You in Civics

Purple Part 3

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9“This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, *10*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. *11*Give us today our daily bread. *12*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. *13*And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.’

Matthew 6:9-13

Introduction

Today I want to talk with you about sinkholes. Sinkholes are dangerous, scary, and shockingly enough, predictable. To give the simplest explanation that is accurate, sinkholes form when the foundation beneath the surface gets swept away. Typically, this happens because of moving water underneath the ground. When the ground beneath the surface shifts and moves, a sinkhole is created. The reason why sinkholes are unpredictable is we can't see what's going on beneath the surface; if we could see what was taking place beneath the surface, we could easily tell where and when sinkholes were forming. Now I just want you to hold on to that idea, because it's going to be important for where we're headed today.

How Behaviors Form

Many people don't give much thought to why they act how they do, but this is a predictable pattern as well. Your behaviors stand on the foundation of your values and your values stand on the foundation of your beliefs. Every single thing you do works its way out of

your life through a subconscious processing that is filtered through what you value, and those values are determined by what you believe. Let me make sense of this.

If I'm going out to eat with friends, I may have preferences on the restaurant we go to but I have never stayed home because I didn't like the restaurant. Why? Because I believe that people matter, that they are made in the image of God, and that God created us for community. These are foundational beliefs to who I am. From these beliefs are a set of values. I value friendships, relationships, and community. So, when a group of my friends say, "We're going to go *here*", it may not be my preferred place to go but without even thinking, my decision is filtered through my values because of my beliefs, and I choose to be with people even if it's not my preferred place. Here's the process: My belief is people matter, my value is community, my behavior is choosing people over preference. Let me give you another example and then we'll make sense of this. I take notes every time I hear a speaker - every time. It's a constant behavior for me and I don't have to remind myself to do it. I have an unbelievably high value not just for learning, but to ensure that I don't quit growing. There's a little difference, but it's not super important. I don't want to hit a ceiling because of a lack of desire or a lack of humility in my life. The belief that I have is that pride is the great sin. C.S. Lewis said, "Pride is spiritual cancer." So, because I have a desire to be humble, or maybe more clearly a desire not to be proud, I have a behavior that I will always take notes regardless of how much I feel I know about the topic or how effective the speaker is. I always told my youth group that note-taking is a better indication of the posture of the learner than the quality of the speaker. Do you see the process: My belief is that pride is the great sin, my value is learning, my behavior is note-taking.

There is a process that takes place every time you make a decision. All you see is your behavior, but there is something more significant taking place. Your behavior is the result of your values; your values are the result of your beliefs. When you have a belief, a core truth that

you hold deeply, it will instantly begin to shape your values. Those values become a filter for your behaviors. When your behaviors are unhealthy, it is because you do not value what you must for that behavior to become a habit. When you do not value what you need to for the behavior to become a habit, it is because your beliefs are incorrect. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 it says, *“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* This is why taking thoughts captive is so important because what you believe will eventually make its way out into how you act. Let me press on two areas, physical health and financial health.

So many people have a desire to get physically healthy. They have a desire and a hope for physical health; they do not have behaviors that result in physical health. Why not? Because they do not yet value their physical health. Many people look at that and say, “Yes, I do! Nothing has worked.” Well, let’s go a little deeper. Many people don’t value physical health because they do not have deeper beliefs about their health other than looking good. So let me give you some beliefs. First from Scripture in *1 Corinthians 6:19-20*: *“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.”* The very Spirit of God lives in you, so the way you treat your body is how you treat God. Now, what if you woke up every day with that belief: “The way I treat my body is how I treat God.” Another belief: your energy level is the ceiling of your potential and your impact can never rise above your physical health. Now here’s the thing...if you woke up every day and read those beliefs, and you began to focus on those beliefs eventually you would have a high value for physical health. Once that value was high, it would be harder to skip exercises than to get up and do them.

Now let’s talk about financial health. Let me give you two foundational beliefs and I’m going to work through this one quickly. In *Leviticus 27:30* it says, *“A tithe of everything from the*

land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord: it is holy to the Lord.” The tithe is the first 10% of what you earn given back to God through his Church to further his kingdom. I could spend 20 minutes answering all the unbiblical objections to that idea, but this is not our focus for today so I won’t take that time. Here’s where this begins to shape how we live: everyone thinks they value generosity, and most people think they are generous. Scripture teaches that 10% is a minimum. Generosity isn’t simply an attitude or a posture; it’s actually a percentage. If 10% belongs to God, then I can’t be considered generous if what I give is below that. Another belief in Malachi 3:10 says, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this”, says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”* The belief: you cannot outgive God. Now, if I believe that generosity isn’t a posture and it’s a percentage and that I cannot outgive God, and I mean really believe it, it will create the value of financial generosity towards his kingdom in my life. This will translate into my actions. Let me explain: I have given at least 10% of what I have earned since I was 5 years old. When I was a kid, I received an allowance of 10 dimes, and I put one dime in. When I was a teenager and worked at a golf course and then a moving company, I gave 10%. To this day we give at least 10% and then at the end of the year, we pray and discuss how much on top of that we’re going to give. The end-of-the-year offering does not help us hit our 10%, because 10 percent isn’t considered generous; it’s what I believe I rightfully owe to God. The behavior of giving isn’t difficult because I have a value for financial generosity rooted in beliefs that generosity is a percentage and that I cannot outgive God.

Every behavior comes from a value that is created from your beliefs. When you repeatedly do what you don’t want to do, you can trace it back. You can ask, “What have I started valuing that is destructive?” Then you ask, “What do I believe that has created this value?” Here’s the really tricky part of this: beliefs don’t have to be true to be believed. Just

because you believe it to be true doesn't mean it's true. This is why the foundation of our behaviors is our beliefs and why believing what is true is so incredibly important.

The Role of Scripture

Now what you will find throughout Scripture isn't extensive application ideas for how to live our lives. There's definitely some of them in there, but not nearly to the level that many of us would desire. Is it because God doesn't care what we do? Absolutely not! The reason the application isn't in the text is because the right applications will eventually work themselves out when your beliefs and values are aligned with God. Throughout Scripture you will find beliefs, absolutely; and you will also find values. Let me show you one of the clearest examples: the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Let's read it through.

9"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, *10* your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. *11* Give us today our daily bread. *12* And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. *13* And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.'

Here's what's interesting to me: in the Lord's prayer, Jesus isn't attempting to communicate beliefs. Yes, there are some we could draw for sure - God is in heaven, his kingdom is returning, and our daily bread comes from him. Far more clearly is the communication of values. Here's what we should draw from this: 1) Jesus' name is sacred. Not just important, not just a priority - sacred. It is revered and honored. So, I do not approach Jesus lightly or speak about Jesus carelessly or speak for Jesus ever, because he can speak for himself and already has. I am to value the representation of Jesus, the power of Jesus, the name of Jesus. 2) I am meant to value his kingdom. His kingdom that is coming on this Earth. 3) I am to value the forgiveness that I have received and the forgiveness I get the opportunity to extend. These are all values that are being communicated through this prayer. Scripture does

not simply communicate belief; it communicates values as well because our behaviors are the result of our values, and our values are the result of our beliefs.

When your beliefs are truth (not just opinion that you believe as true, but actual truth), your values will look like the kingdom of heaven and your behavior will be of one who is following Jesus. When your beliefs are false and your values are disordered, you can expect your behavior to be selfish or destructive. Now here's the question: What happens when we have a behavior built upon a value that is built upon a belief that we no longer believe? Let me make it more clear: What happens when we remove something from a culture that we previously believed? The values and behavior aren't extinguished immediately; they will be eventually, but not immediately. When a belief that was commonly held is removed, the result is a sinkhole is created. A sinkhole, culturally, is a place in which values and behavior are sure to crumble because the beliefs beneath them are no longer present. What they didn't teach you in Civics, if you ever had a Civics class, is that we are standing on a sinkhole.

Civics

We need to quickly redirect a really unnecessary and really old debate. The debate is "Were we founded as a Christian nation?" Obviously, there is a separation of Church and state, which as a quick note is one of the most misunderstood parts of the constitution. The separation of Church and state has nothing to do with the involvement of religion and politics or even the legislation of morality, because morality is always legislated; the question is whose. There is no such thing as a neutral morality, and we'll get to that in just a second. The separation of church and state was meant to protect the country by saying the leader of the government could not determine the leader of the church. Case in point: Hitler and part one of this series. So back to our question, "Were we founded as Christian nation?" Some people scream "Yes, the Christian faith was important to the Founding Fathers, most of whom were devout believers." Others scream, "No, we couldn't be, because there were members who

didn't care about religion like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, and many of them had slaves." What we need to see is that we're asking the wrong question. The better question is, "Did those who designed our government view religion as important to sustaining our society?" That answer, without any possible rebuttal, is absolutely yes. Let me show you.

Benjamin Franklin, who is not a Christian, wrote, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom." Franklin saw virtue as the necessary prerequisite for a society to be free. George Washington echoes this idea when he wrote, "The foundation of our national policy, will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality." John Adams clarifies this further when he wrote, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." They believed that it was impossible to govern a nation of free people who could not govern themselves. If you cannot govern yourself, how can you live in freedom? It would be impossible to legislate every possible issue in the world. No, freedom only works when virtue and religion are present.

Three interdependent ideas exist within our society: Freedom requires virtue, virtue requires some form of religion that serves as the basis for that virtue and works to create an indisputable morality, and religion desires freedom. If you remove religion, you remove the basis for virtue. When you remove virtue you remove the possibility of freedom. When free people are bad people, they will quickly lose their freedom. Now you may look at that and say, "You're overstating the value of religion; they didn't actually view it that seriously. I don't think the Founding Fathers viewed religion as important because it's done so much evil." Then why did Benjamin Franklin say, "If men are so wicked as we now see them with religion, what would they be without it"?

When religion is removed the basis and source of virtue is removed. When virtue is scarce in a society, laws will have to be passed at a rate never seen before because everything will have to be detailed out. That amount of laws will equate to a loss of freedom.

Further Implications

Now if you thought that was bad, I assure you it gets worse. We assume that even as our beliefs fade and our virtues fade, our values will as well. We don't have time to explore the depths of this, but I just want to show you one deeply troubling example. "Love your neighbor" is incompatible with the evolutionary belief of "Survival of the Fittest". When you believe in strict evolution without participation of a Creator, one of the five tenets of Darwin's philosophy is survival of the fittest. Survival of the fittest is incompatible with kindness, and survival of the fittest is incompatible with loving your neighbor.

Yuval Noah Harrari is a secular anthropologist who is an atheist. A number of years ago he wrote a book on the secular history of the world. In his book, "Sapiens" he describes the influence of Christian thought on the Declaration of Independence and explains that because Christian thought is no longer dominant in America, the Constitution needs to be rewritten. He proposes his own rewriting from the perspective of an atheistic secular anthropologist. And I want you to read this with the paradigm of behaviors from values from beliefs in mind. The declaration reads as written, "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." Harrari says that this is not accurate and his proposed rewriting states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men evolved differently, that they are born with certain mutable characteristics, and that among these are life and the pursuit of pleasure."

This may seem a simple rewording but I want to you to look closer at how he is proposing we should act based upon what we really believe. When "created" is removed, so are rights. If you only evolved, you have characteristics of your evolution. But if you were created you automatically have value and therefore rights. If Christian belief is removed, you no

longer have the right to liberty, and you no longer have the right to life. Your liberty and your life are worth removing if it is deemed beneficial by the rest of society.

Conclusion

That is where we stand today, where the beliefs that once shaped our society, even though they were immensely flawed in how they were lived out, have been removed. And people think the values will remain. They can't. Eventually the weight is going to give in; it's a sinkhole. When the belief in creation is removed and someone's rights become their characteristics, it will be deemed not just appropriate, but essential, to silence those who are problematic for society. To strip them of their freedom. To even take away their lives. We begin creating divides that are wholly untrue; if you do not tolerate, it means you hate. If you do not agree with me, you are therefore my enemy. If you are hateful and my enemy, you should be silenced. That's where we stand right now, but don't assume it stops there.

I want to ask a question and then propose a solution. The question is this: "Is the world that Harrari proposes better?" One without inherent liberty or rights? I'm chilled by one of the final statements of Christopher Hitchens, a devout and outspoken atheist, who said, "If I could convince everyone in the world...to be a non-believer and I'd really done brilliantly and there was only one left. One more, and then it'd be done. There'd be no more religion in the world. No more deism, theism. I wouldn't do it. I don't quite know why but I wouldn't do it. Somehow if I could drive it out of the world, I wouldn't do it."

Now a solution: Cultural sinkholes don't get replaced by drawing battle lines and naming enemies. They only get filled in when people begin to believe, and then begin to value, and eventually their behavior shifts. The sinkhole we're standing on isn't rebuilt by "taking back America". It's rebuilt when we're Obsessed with the One.

Here is where I need your attention and your energy to begin to be driven towards. The founding fathers said that our government was only made for a moral and religious people. It is

not possible for it to stand if people do not inherently pursue a common morality because of what they believe. Let me tell you what every society has figured out: You cannot legislate the wickedness out of an individual. Oh, it's there. Even though we live in a world that believes evil isn't a thing right as we exited the bloodiest century in human history. You cannot legislate it out, only God can do that. How will God do that?

Here's what he says, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The reason why you can't make laws that enforce everyone to behave perfectly is because the primary problem is with someone's heart. Something only God can change, and that he sent you here to do. Your purpose on this Earth to come to know Jesus, live like him, and help others do the same. What happens when you give up your role? What happens when you abdicate the responsibility Jesus himself has left you with? The sinkhole emerges.

What gets missed when we point out the hypocrisy of those who came before us is we don't grasp how much Christians revolutionized the entire world. Did you know all of the first hospitals were created by Churches? No, before Christians those who were sick and dying were to be discarded because they no longer had value. The origin of hospitals happened because during the plague in the Roman empire, it says that while the rest of the world was running out the Christians ran in to care for the sick and dying. Dionysius writes, "Very many of our brethren, while in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness, did not spare themselves, but kept by each other, and visited the sick without thought of their own peril, and ministered to them assiduously and treated them for their healing in Christ, died from time to time most joyfully...drawing upon themselves their neighbors' diseases, and willing taking over to their own persons the burden of the sufferings of those around them." The first universities were all created by Churches out of the belief that history is not cyclical it's linear because God is

about progress and wants to be known as a creator. Every university before the Revolutionary War except was started by Churches. There is no evidence anywhere of homes to care of the elderly before the Church existed. We take for granted the fact that women are not required to marry because they are ordered to and child brides are outlawed, two things that are still a common occurrence today in countries in which Christianity has no real presence. In ancient times it was perfectly acceptable to leave on the side of the road to die a baby you did not want. Perfectly acceptable. Christians believed these babies had value so they started the first orphanages. The surrounding communities were so shocked by this behavior that they assumed Christians were eating the babies because they could not fathom why someone would care for a baby that wasn't theirs. Speaking of eating people, during World War II on a remote island in the Pacific, an American soldier met a native who could read, and the native was carrying a Bible. Upon seeing the Bible the soldier said, "We educated people no longer put much faith in that book." The native, from a tribe of former cannibals, replied, "Well, it's good that we do, or you would be eaten by my people today".

Are there massive, colossal, make-you-sick errors in the history of Christianity? Yes! We are very aware that we follow Jesus poorly at times. But for the people who have the pre-programmed arguments of the Inquisition, the Crusades, and the slaves that Christians owned fail to do two things. One, acknowledge that many people have sought to use Christianity for their own gain even when they did not truly believe in Christianity. See Part One of this series for evidence on Hitler. The second thing, is the unbelievably world-altering amount of good that has been done by Christians. The world you live in is so radically different because of the witness and lives of those who follow Jesus that even when we read through our own bibles we cannot grasp the world that we see depicted in the Old Testament. The polygamy and genocide that are present in our text are eliminated because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

I need you to see that Christianity already changed the world once. Now it stands upon a sinkhole, and so it must be remade again. We've done it before, it's time to do it again. What blows me away in all of this, is Christians never set out to change the world. They simply had to live differently once they were aware of who God is and what he had done on their behalf. There was no grand attempt to change everything, we believed differently, and so we valued differently, and so we behaved differently: and the world shifted because of it. We are Americans best when we are not Americans first. We are not red, and we are not blue; we are purple. Not the color between, the kingdom above. The color of majesty, of royalty, of our King who is still seated on the throne and is returning again.