

The Intrinsic Value of God / God's Intrinsic Value of Man: Heads Up

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." - Jesus
(Matthew 13:44)*

The following is an excerpt from Winkie Pratney's *The Nature and Character of God*:

Why do you choose what you do? What is there about a person or a thing that makes us prefer it above another? When we say "It was *worth* it!" on what basis do we make our decision? Whether we have ever seriously thought about it or not, and whatever we assume it is, we use our idea of worth as the basis for every decision, small or great, that we ever make in life. In earthly society we attach value to people and things that show properties such as:

Beauty - We value fitness, proportion, loveliness, worthwhileness, attractiveness and form.

Permanence - We all like things to last. Precious metals and gems communicate this.

Luminosity - We are fascinated with the interplay of light and color.

Uniqueness - We seek the one-of-a-kind because an original is worth more than its copies.

Rarity - Our society attaches value to something scarce or uncommon, and its worth usually increases. The world's rarest - and most valuable - stamp, the *Penny Magenta*, is the only surviving copy of that stamp known to exist.

Power - Man covets anything that provides a source of energy or power in a world with constant energy needs.

These are at least some of the things we look for in what we call *treasures* on earth. But this is a serious, all-consuming question to pose to everyone: *Why should we seek what we seek?* People have given their lives for things that represent in their minds and hearts the fulfillment of just one of these attributes of worth. Right or wrong, individuals have sacrificed or struggled, armies have marched, nations have competed or gone to war, people have risked death and dishonor to obtain or defend a person or property. Those who have done this voluntarily would have only one answer when asked why they did it: they were convinced it was "worth it."

Try to imagine the impossible: think of all the lovely things you have ever seen, all the most wonderful times and places and people you have ever known; and imagine you could contain *all* of that beauty and loveliness, concentrate and distill all those experiences of awe and wonder and happiness in your life into one moment. It would be so painfully lovely, so breathtakingly beautiful that you could not bear for it to go on any more or you would die, nor could you bear having it to cease for the same reason. What would you give to be part, even for a moment, of something so utterly wonderful as that, so intensely joyful?

Take any of the other treasures we value highly, take them all to their ultimate essence. We have not yet begun to approach the truth: power beyond conception, radiance of inconceivable splendor and brightness, stability beyond imagination, a one-of-a-kind, absolutely uncommon Reality.

Paul knew it. He declared, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden

wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. 2:7-9).

C. S. Lewis noted (in *The Weight Of Glory*): "We usually notice...just as the moment of vision dies away, as the music ends or the landscape loses its celestial light. For just a few moments we had the illusion of belonging to that world. Now we wake to find that there is no such thing. We have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken in to the dance..."

"It is not the physical objects ... but that indescribable something of which they become for a moment, the messengers... We want something else, we can hardly put in words; to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it ... someday, God willing, we shall get in. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be like to taste at the fountain-head of that stream of which even these lower reaches proves so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us."

The mystics, the God-lovers, those people raptured by His presence, all wrote like this. Some may say they seemed too subjective, too pietistic, too other-worldly, too "heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good." But it is debatable whether we can ever get too heavenly-minded. Men and women who truly live in the heavenlies are building for a kingdom that never passes away. Perhaps their language is not too extravagant but, rather, our vision is too small.

"Two men please God; he who loves Him with all his heart because He knows Him; he who seeks Him with all his heart because he knows Him not. Power is honored by submission; merit, by respect; and beauty, by admiration. In God the three are to be honored by worship." (The Writings of Ivan Panin)

God is the only being or thing truly worth our worship. George Otis, Jr., writes in *The God They Never Knew*, "God recognizes the intrinsic value of His own being as the ultimate value in the entire universe. As a result He unselfishly requires us to choose Him supremely for our own well-being." He is altogether beautiful, eternal (permanent), glorious (luminous), unique, rare, and powerful. There is none like Him, Scripture repeatedly pours forth and that is reflected not just in His nature, but His character as well. He is the epitome of holiness, as well as, compassion; justice, in addition to grace. This is why Panin essentially tells us, "Heads up". Lift up our minds and our hearts. Lift up our attentions and affections upon Jesus. Set your eyes upon Him. "In God the three are to be honored (power, merit, and beauty) by worship." Heads up. "Choose Him supremely for [your] own well-being." God has ultimate intrinsic value.

We see Jesus' power, merit and beauty at work even in the simplest of interactions with others. Luke 20:20-26 (NIV) records one such case:

20 *Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the power*

and authority of the governor. **21** So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. **22** Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

23 He saw through their duplicity and said to them, **24** "Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

25 He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

Jesus' question cut through their authority (power), their perceived value as learned men. His response was beautiful...winsome even. Jesus saw no issue in respecting a man's place of authority, even if that man (and all he stood for) opposed you. But His question to them revealed an even deeper issue. Whose image and inscription are on the denarius? Caesar's. Whose image and inscription are on you? Whose image and inscription are on others? These are the deeper questions.

Repeatedly in Scripture we are confronted with people who do not seem to "deserve" Jesus. Paul was a murderer, responsibility for or in support of many of the first Christians being martyred. The Samaritan woman had 5 previous husbands and a current live-in "boyfriend". The man filled with a legion of demons was, well, already filled up with something else. None of them fit the points of value that Whitney outlined above. But that description could fall upon each one of us as well. Who of us deserves anything from Jesus except judgment? Scripture is clear, "There is no one righteous, not even one...all have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10,12,23).

"The value of the individual does not lie in him. He is capable of receiving value. He receives it by union with Christ. There is no question of finding for him a place in the living temple which will do justice to his inherent value and give scope to his natural idiosyncrasy. The place was there first. The man was created for it. He will not be himself till he is there. We shall be true and everlasting and really divine persons only in Heaven, just as we are, even now, coloured bodies only in the light." - Essay "Membership" in *The Weight of Glory* by C.S. Lewis

Whose image and inscription is upon you? Whose image and inscription is on others? Jesus response to them was, "Give back to Caesar's what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." All people are made in the image of God. All people are stained by sin. And Jesus died for all people. All people.

The radical nature of the Cross is that through Jesus' blood, God can effect a supernatural conversion of people. Spiritual DNA is rewritten. People become new creations, totally different. There are no asterisks. There are no limitations to whom this is available. For each of us this should be ultimate joy in the One who has supreme intrinsic value. How powerful and pure He is! And then we are given a gloriously privileged purpose to help others to "Give back to God what is God's." First, we lift our heads up to Jesus, who is of ultimate worth. Then, we lift our heads up to look around and see who has God's stamp upon them (everyone) that they can respond to God's unselfish call of them to Himself. Look around. Heads up.

Questions for Discussion:

About God

1. How would you describe God's beauty, permanence, luminosity, uniqueness, rarity and power in your own words?
2. Which of these characteristics is most surprising to you or most difficult to get your mind around?
3. How do you respond to this? How can you live "heads up" toward God?

About People

1. Whose image and inscription is on you? What does that mean for your life?
2. How does someone's outside appearance/behavior/past affect how you interact with them?
3. What "types" of people do you disqualify yourself from being a light to? Why?
4. How can you live "heads up" with respect to others?