

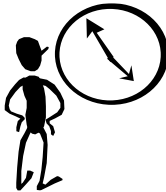
THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Every other Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.

OR

Bible Study	4:00 p.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study	7:00 p. m.
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'Essential'

By Al Diestelkamp

Words have meanings! Ever since the emergence of the coronavirus epidemic, we've been hearing the word essential used frequently by politicians, scientists, reporters, and neighbors. It's a good word, but the way it is being used during this crisis leads me to borrow a memorable line from a once-popular movie: "You keep using that word; I do not think it means what you think it means" [The Princess Bride].

I was pretty sure I knew the meaning of the word essential before I looked it up in the dictionary, but I wanted to be sure. The definition includes words like absolute, "necessary, indispensable, and required. Since my dictionary is over sixty years old, I googled the word just to make sure I hadn't missed a change in its meaning over the years. The New Oxford American Dictionary defined the word as an adjective meaning "absolutely necessary; extremely important," or as a noun referring to "a thing that is absolutely necessary."

Some of the recent governmental mandates declaring certain businesses or individuals as "essential," (and by implication declaring all others "non-essential") would be laughable if they weren't so sad. The question that remains unanswered is, "deemed to be essential and non-essential to whom, and by whom?"

We all recognize that some essentials can and should be suspended under unusual circumstances, but they must not be suspended indefinitely. Food is essential to life but even our Lord fasted forty days and nights before enduring intense temptation from the devil (Matt. 4:1-2). The apostle Paul's instructions to husbands and wives clearly imply that sexual intimacy is essential in a healthy marriage, but the apostle Paul indicated that it was permissible to consensually forego it "for a time," only to "come together again" to avoid temptation (1 Cor. 7:4-5).

It should not surprise us that many of the “powers that be,” and even much of the world place assembled worship in the “unessential” category. All of our lives we’ve heard people say, “I can worship God by myself—I don’t have to go to church.” While private worship is good and should be encouraged, it is never a substitute for assembled worship.

There is a good reason given by the Word of God for assembling with other Christians. We often quote Hebrews 10:25 to prove this point without reading the verse right before it which reveals a God-given reason for assembling together—that being to “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.” While an online meeting may be a temporary measure under unusual circumstances, it is a poor substitute at best and does not fulfill the essential practice of coming together as a church in one place (1 Cor. 11:18,20).

Readers may mistakenly think that I am being critical of decisions to suspend in-person worship assemblies during the height of the coronavirus shutdown. Such is not the case. What I am concerned about is a willingness to be satisfied with accepting the claim that in-person assemblies are not essential and to be comfortable with so-called “virtual assemblies” (an oxymoron). The essentiality of in-person assembling demands that we find a way to make any suspension of such very temporary.

Many religious leaders also have a problem with the word essential. They agree that water baptism is important, but deny that it’s essential to salvation. However, Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5), and confirmed it in the parting commission to His apostles (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16); and His apostles clearly understood the essentiality of baptism as seen in their response to the question “What shall we do?” (Ac. 2:37,38).

Jim’s Old Pickup Truck

By David Diestelkamp

The old pickup truck was white - sorta. It had been sprayed entirely with cans of paint long ago. I couldn’t tell anymore if it was gloss paint or not. But at least it ran - sorta. I was given a complicated starting procedure and the sweet spot for depressing the clutch. Finding the gear pattern was somewhat of a game of hide and seek, and there was no third gear. I discovered for myself that the parking brake didn’t work when it rolled into the street off of my driveway even though I left it in gear. And the handling? I’ll just say it was like driving a sumo wrestler and leave it at that. But I loved that truck! I borrowed it occasionally for dirty jobs. It was a dirty-job truck. You couldn’t hurt it. But I loved it even more for its service. It was in its worn condition from use, not from abuse. It could have been in perfect condition, but that would have required that it not be used, that it not live for what it had been made. It would not have served the pur-

pose of its existence. I loved it because it could be used without reluctance - as a truck.

Jesus said, "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings" (Lk. 16:9). I understand this to mean that someday material things will all be useless and gone; therefore, we are to use our physical "stuff" in life in such a way that it will impact our eternal future.

What if we truly looked at everything we have as something to be used in view of our eternal destination? This means more than just not obtaining sinful things by sinful ways. It means thinking of our cars as tools to help people, our houses as a means to be hospitable, our video games as a way of getting good young people connected, our food as a way of helping someone in need, our phones as a way to encourage the discouraged, social media as a way to spiritually connect and invite, our jobs as a means of connecting and making money to serve others, etc.

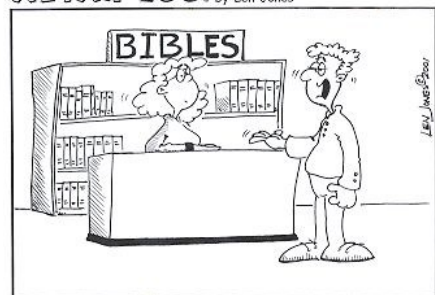
What if you pick up something within arm's reach of you now and say to yourself, "God gave me this. How can I use it in service to Him and others?" We have to start thinking differently about stuff.

"Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox" (Prov. 14:4). The only way to keep a completely clean barn is to keep the oxen out, but that defeats the purpose of the barn, and there will be no harvest without an ox. Serving means that our houses and cars will show wear. Sometimes our clothing will get dirty, the screens on our phones will get cracked, and our game controllers will get worn out. Our budgets will be strained and our pantries will be a little more empty because we are using them. Because that is why God gave them to us - not to be saved and preserved in pristine condition, but to be thoughtfully and prayerfully used and used up in view of eternity.

I fear that some of us will learn too late that trying to preserve what we have been given makes us the one-talent man of Matthew 25:4 who thought it was enough to return what he was entrusted with in good condition. "You wicked and lazy servant," was the master's response. Then Jesus warned, "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:29-30).

I hope my truck looks like Jim's truck someday - and for the same reason.

ALTAR EGO by Len Jones



"What I really need is a translation that won't leave me feeling guilty, convicted, or in need of making some kind of decision."

The Failure of Moral Relativism

By Doy Moyer

(By “moral relativism,” I mean in this context the idea that morals are merely human conventions and are relative, non-absolute, and changing according to our own personal or societal situation and desires. Morals are subjective, with no ultimate line or standard by which moral behavior is to be judged other than what we decide for ourselves.)

We live in a confused culture. We have been told for many years that morality is relative. Then, when we see an obvious injustice, morality is no longer seen as relative. Nor should it be. We have been told that we are products of evolution, that God is dead. Then, when people act without a moral foundation, we wonder how this has happened. We are clueless about the reasons that we have become so greedy, brutish, vile, and murderous. We have become the epitome of Paul’s list in [II Timothy 3:1-5](#).

We reap what we sow ([Galatians 6:7](#)). That’s a biblical principle that we don’t like to face. We have been told for so long that morals are relative, that there is no ultimate right or wrong, that we need to do what makes us happy, and we have lost sight of the fact that ideas have consequences.

We are good at pointing the fingers of blame. Blame politicians. Blame guns. Blame people across the aisle. Blame various hate groups. Blame “the others,” but just don’t blame “us.” It’s never our fault. We want to blame just about anything without ever looking at ourselves in the mirror and owning up to the principle that we are reaping what we have sown.

We cannot afford to gloss over the doctrines that have brought us to this precarious position in which we find ourselves. This has become obvious in many recent events. Over the years, attention has increasingly been drawn to multiple cases of racism, sexual harassment, police brutality, and murder, rioting, and lawlessness. Something is wrong. We know it’s terribly wrong, and we cannot get by with thinking or teaching that morals are relative. That ship has sailed and sunk, and those who uphold it are enablers of evil.

Racism is an unmitigated evil. Sexual harassment is heinous and evil. These actions and attitudes dehumanize and dishonor the image-bearers of God. They shred the dignity of all involved and make us little more than brute beasts without hearts. As C.S. Lewis put it so well:

“In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.” [C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 35].

Let that sink in. Why then? Why is racism evil? Why is it so wrong to sexually

harass another? Why is it evil to oppress the weak? Why? If we cannot provide legitimate answers, then all we can do is shout out personal preference and continue to be frustrated by our failure to understand why the world is as it is. The heart has been removed, but we still expect it to beat. We are dead and don't know it.

Moral relativists, staying consistent with the teaching, cannot answer the above questions in any meaningful way. They might say, "Because we should never mistreat another human being," or "Doing something against the consent of another is immoral." Yet that doesn't answer the real question. It just proves the point that they are not consistent with their morally relativistic views and it kicks the can down the road further. Why should we never mistreat another human being? Why is doing something against the consent of another immoral? Who says, and why should it matter?

The same can be said of murder. While most people would not defend murder, the problem for moral relativists still stands. Why is murder wrong? Because the government says so? Because society says so? Because you say so? Why does any of that matter if, in the end, we just cease to exist and become part of the rubble of the universe, never to know another thought again?

I'm not saying that unbelievers cannot be moral. They can be, and they often are. What they cannot do, however, is argue for moral relativism and consistently live by it. Everyone has lines they don't think others should cross, but without a set standard, those lines are arbitrary and subjective. What these recent issues demonstrate once and for all is that moral relativism is a failure. It is dead. No one can legitimately argue that racism, harassment, or oppression are evil then turn around and argue for moral relativism with any kind of credibility. If they want the world to condemn racism, oppression, harassment along with them, as we should, they need to quit telling people that there is no absolute truth or ultimate standards for morality. Instead, they need to seek that standard and uphold it.

We are collectively reaping what we have been sowing for so many years. People are trying to do what makes them happy. They are living by their own standards. They are doing what is right in their own eyes, and that sounds eerily familiar to the student of Scripture (cf. [Judges 17:6](#); [21:25](#)). People are aghast at the story of a man offering his concubine to evil men, who rape and kill her. The man cuts her up and sends her pieces throughout the land; the whole episode is sickening and difficult to read. How can the Bible contain such a story? Because it illustrates in a most poignant way what the book of Judges was conveying. Everyone was doing right in his own eyes. Now here we are, products of the doctrine of moral relativism, wondering why our world has reached such a low point. We are reaping what we have been sowing all along. We are that man. We are cutting up the members of a dead culture and wondering where to send the pieces. We are sick, and we know not where to find healing. Keep blaming others. Keep blaming guns. Keep blaming the government. We aren't

getting it. What will it take?

We must recognize that we have all been part of the problem. Make it personal. I have contributed to the problem through my own selfishness, greed, and works of the flesh. We have played the harlot right along with the rest of the world, and it's time that we quit pointing fingers at others so that we can see our own complicity. We have loved the world while professing love for God, and in so doing we have destroyed our own credibility. Does that make us defensive? If so, may God help us.

There is precedent for this recognition in Scripture. Though ancient Israel and America are hardly comparable, there is still the principle in play that we have rebelled against God. Daniel, though we think so highly of him, still included himself in the prayer for his nation:

“To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets” ([Daniel 9:8-10](#)).

Is there an answer to any of this? Yes, there is, but people still don't want to hear it. Hearing, they don't hear or understand. Sometimes I don't want to hear or understand because of how effective culture has been at dismissing what's ultimately important. Since God has been so effectively pushed out of the arena of legitimate public discussion, those who offer the solution are seen as part of a fringe element. One day, I pray, we will come to our senses and realize that we have been wallowing around in a pig pen for far too long, filling up on the food of the swine. It is time to come to our senses, get up, and come home to the place where our Father is still gazing in our direction and awaiting our return. He will run to us if only we'll come to Him. There shall be no excuses, no attempts to downplay evil, no efforts at self-justification. We stand before God bare, unhidden from His sight, and allowing His powerful Word to pierce us to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging our thoughts and intentions ([Hebrews 4:12-13](#)).

The answer is indeed found in God. Why is racism wrong? Because it is a violation of the human dignity of being made in God's image. The same answer should be seen for sexual harassment, murder, or any other violation of basic human dignity. Yet in Jesus there is healing.

Herein is the gospel. The good news is still here. When the world has finally gotten fed up enough with evil, the message of the gospel will still be here, crying out to be heard, longing to be applied. *“We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* ([II Corinthians 5:20-21](#)). Healing is available. Peace is offered. Grace and rest in Christ are on the table.

Forgive us, Oh God! Forgive me, Oh Lord! We are not worthy — I am not worthy — to be called your children. Heal us, and we will be truly healed. Restore us to You!