



What is a "virtue"?

This question came up during one of our recent Fruit of the Spirit studies after I had referred to one of the fruits as a "virtue."

Here's how I defined it:

A virtue is a quality or characteristic that is inherently good.

Any of the fruits of the Spirit would fall under that definition - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, etc...

But that definition gave rise to a conversation about the difference between a "virtue" and a "value."

We hear a lot about "values." It seems that "values" is a popular word every group wants to have connected with their cause. We are told to vote for this person or that person because they have "values." We are encouraged to support this group or that group because of their emphasis on "values."

The problem is that every person and every group has something they value. And not everything that is valued is good. For example, maybe a certain person values "winning at all costs." That's not really a good thing to value. Another group may value huge profits - no matter how they are attained. Again, that's not a good value. It could be truthfully said Satan has "values." He values evil and deception. Neither of which are ever good.

The basic problem with values is that they are determined by us! We - individual human beings and groups of human beings - define what is valuable to us. And because sin is a reality in all of humanity, that means not everything we value is going to be good.

I told the group that since a virtue is something inherently good, this means only the One who is inherently good (God) can truly determine what a virtue is. Honesty is a virtue. Forgiveness is a virtue. Justice is a virtue. Unconditional Love is a virtue. All of those things come from God.

Bottom line: Don't allow yourself to get fooled into believing in some 'cause' just because it claims to have "values." The real key is this: Is the value also a virtue - something inherently good - as defined by the One who is inherently good.

Thank God He hasn't left us in the dark concerning virtues. He's tells us and shows us in His Word the things that are inherently good, virtuous. So as you read or listen to God's word, see if you can pick out those things God would define as virtues - things He values, because they are inherently good.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net