

"Values Series" Bible studies

UNDERSTANDING THE "VALUES CHART"

The first thing you need to do is familiarize yourself with the "Values Chart." The following link takes you to the chart, as well as to an explanation of it. After you understand it, you will be ready for studying the verses listed below. (If you do *not* understand the chart, you can still study the verses - but you might not be able to answer some of the questions.)

- Values Chart (with detailed description)
- A blank chart
- Explanation of the chart
- Some examples.

A SELECTION OF VERSES THAT ILLUSTRATE VARIOUS VALUES PRIORITIES

In each of the following verses are statements which focus on two (or more) different "values levels." In each instance, the Scripture passage shows us the priority of the one "value level" over the other(s).

1. ***Verses that are used to explain the "Values Chart"*** - If you have studied the explanation of the chart (using the link given above), you have already seen how various values are expressed in the following verses:
 - 1 Samuel 15:22 (this verse is also in the following list); Matthew 23:23-24; Mark 12:28-31; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33
2. ***Verses that belong to separate Bible studies*** - In these studies, you are not *told* how the various verses fit in the "Values Chart." Rather, having learned how to use the chart, you are to determine *through your own study* where they belong. (In addition, there may be additional study and application questions.)
 - 1 Samuel 15:22 - Obedience vs. Religion
 - Job 23:12 & Matthew 4:4 - The Importance of God's Word
 - Matthew 4:10 & Luke 4:8 - Worship
 - Matthew 5:43-48 & Luke 14:26 - Love and Hate

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

You may wish to look for other verses that show the relationship between different values. (There are quite a few.) Many of these verses will contain words or phrases that express a comparison. Some examples of these words are: *better, more than, greater than, first, most important, only, etc.*

Additional studies related to the issue of "religion"

Most of the articles on this website are related to values, in one way or another. However, the following link has been included on this page, because so many people confuse the relationship of "religion" to the other priorities in life. Because of the world's *false* definition of "religion," many people (even those who claim to be "Christian") give "religion" a much higher priority than it should have.

According to the Bible, loving God and obeying him are *not* "religion." When people practice "religion," yet fail to have a greater emphasis on love for God and neighbor, they actually offend God and bring his judgment upon them. (Matthew 23 illustrates God's reaction to religious leaders who do this.)

- Religion and Religious Activities
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Additional studies related to the issue of "hate"

Even though God commands "hate" in certain contexts, many people totally reject it, as being "always sinful." If you show them the Bible, they will explain it away by denying that the Bible came from God, or by claiming that it is a "figure of speech," an "exaggeration for emphasis," a "human viewpoint" that does *not* reflect God's view, or something similar. But God's Word remains firm and consistent on this matter, and does not back down from its message, when humans don't approve of what it says.

- Various studies related to the word "Hate"

VALUES CHART

The values that are expressed in the Scripture passage you have selected would be written in the "description" column. [See the links at the bottom of this page, for further explanation of how to use this chart.]

PRIORITY LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
<p><u>Good things: #1 Priority (= Mandatory)</u></p> <p>Must always be done.</p>	
<p><u>Good things: #2 Priority (= Mandatory)</u></p> <p>Must be done, but anything with a higher priority (Level #1) must be done first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is a conflict between Level #1 and Level #2, the higher level takes precedence. 	
<p><u>Good things: #3 Priority (= Optional, but may vary according to circumstances)</u></p> <p>Can be done (depending on circumstances) but anything with a higher priority (Levels #1 and #2) must be done first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is a conflict between this level and Level #1 or #2, the higher levels take precedence. <p>For any specific individual, the things that belong to this level may <i>become</i> mandatory or forbidden, depending on circumstances. Because of this, we can divide this level into three subcategories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3A - Good things that have <i>become</i> mandatory because of a commitment to do them (a promise, covenant, agreement, etc.), or because of some connection to a higher value. (They may or may not be mandatory for other people, depending on their own specific circumstances.) • 3B - Good things that remain optional, with no commitment to participate or to refrain. (They may or may not be optional for other people, depending on their own specific circumstances.) • 3C - Good things that have <i>become</i> forbidden (and are no longer considered "good") in your specific circumstances, because of a commitment or promise to refrain from them, or because of some conflict with a higher value. (They may or may not be "forbidden" to other people, depending on their own specific circumstances.) <p>See: Explanation of the chart, for more details about Levels 3A and 3C.</p>	
<p><u>Bad /sinful things (= Forbidden)</u></p> <p>Must never be done.</p>	

VALUES CHART

PRIORITY LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
<u>Good things: #1 Priority (= Mandatory)</u>	
<u>Good things: #2 Priority (= Mandatory)</u>	
<u>Good things: #3 Priority (= Optional)</u> (May vary according to circumstances) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3A - Good things that have become mandatory • 3B - Good things that remain optional • 3C - Good things that have become forbidden (and are no longer considered "good," under these circumstances)	
<u>Bad /sinful things (= Forbidden)</u>	

An Explanation of This Chart

This chart contains four priority levels. The first two levels represent *mandatory obligations*, the third represents things that are *optional* (though that may change, depending on various circumstances), and the fourth represents things that are *forbidden*.

Levels 1 and 2

The first level represents our highest obligations: those toward God. These must always be given the highest place in our lives. **The second level** also includes mandatory obligations, but these represent obligations such as those we have toward other people. We must remember that these are *second* in priority and must not be exalted above our obligations toward God. In most circumstances, there will be no conflict between these two levels. But if a situation ever arose in which there was such a conflict, the first level would take precedence over the second.

Level 3

The third level represents optional matters. By themselves, Scripture neither commands nor forbids these things. This does not mean, however, that we are free to indiscriminately live as we please. We must remember that all we do occurs within the context of the rest of our lives. (Things do not really exist "by themselves.") Normally, things in this "free" category will be associated with a higher priority value, which we must first examine. Sometimes (because of the association with a higher value) participation in a "free" matter may be sinful for one person, and perfectly acceptable and good (or even mandatory) for another. At other times, a *failure* to do something may be sinful for one person, though perfectly acceptable to another. (At the day of judgment, our deeds will be evaluated as "good" or "bad." There will be no "neutral" category.)

Many of the religious practices of the Old Testament belong to "Level 3." They had become mandatory for the Jews, because of the covenant (promise or agreement) made between them and God, but they were optional (*not* mandatory) for non-Jews.

As listed in the chart, this category has been broken-down into three sub-categories, reflecting whether or not the matter has become mandatory or prohibited in a specific given context (specific circumstances and values), or if it remains optional (something that is good but not mandatory).

Level 4

Perhaps we could call **the fourth priority level** a "non-priority," for it includes those things which must *never*, under any circumstances, be done. Participation in these is always sinful.

Additional comments about Levels 3A and 3C

Level 3A

Though these may have become mandatory, the obligations of Levels 1 and 2 still take precedence.

Be careful about making unnecessary promises and commitments! Sometimes it may be necessary or good for you to do so. But if you make careless commitments, you may find yourself obligated to do something you *don't* want to do. You may have to keep your undesired commitment, just because breaking it could be a violation of an even greater obligation - the requirements to be faithful (to your promises) and to speak the truth (and *not* lie).

Also, if you make a commitment you *can't* fulfill (which is different from merely not wanting to fulfill it), you could create for yourself a situation that causes unnecessary irresolvable conflicts between a Level 3A value and a higher one. In such a case, there might be unpleasant consequences no matter what you do.

Level 3C

If, through commitments or circumstances, something *becomes* forbidden to you, you can no longer consider it "optional and good." However, if the commitments are fulfilled or the circumstances change, what is forbidden might once again become "optional and good" for you.

Refining your chart

As you further study the Scriptures, you may find that you need to make slight revisions in the way you classify various values. For instance, you may discover that something you thought was a "Level 2" value is actually described elsewhere as *not* mandatory in certain other circumstances. In such cases, you would need to refine your chart - in this instance moving the specific value down to "Level 3A." (One example would be religious practices, which, though given as obligations in one context, might be condemned in another context. A person who mistakenly thought that religious practices belonged to "Level 1" would run into a problem with verses that condemned them - until he lowered them to "Level 3A.")

VALUES CHART - Examples

Mark 12:28-31 - One of the scribes came, and heard them questioning together. Knowing that he had answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the greatest of all?" Jesus answered, "The greatest is, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. The second is like this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The two commands in this passage represent the two highest priority values ("Level 1" and "Level 2" in the chart).

1 Samuel 15:22 - Samuel said, "Has Yahweh [God's name in Hebrew] as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Yahweh? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams."

Obedience to the Lord and heeding his word would be a "Level 1" priority. This must ALWAYS be done. Burnt offerings and sacrifices would be a "Level 3A" priority. Though not a mandatory obligation for all people everywhere (today, we do not have to sacrifice animals), it became an obligation to Israel, when the Covenant of the Law was made between them and God, at Mt. Sinai.

Matthew 23:23-24 - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!"

In this instance, we see a conflict between a "Level 2" value - things which are an expression of love toward "neighbor" (justice, mercy and faithfulness) and a "Level 3A" value (giving a tenth of one's spices - a religious practice). The Pharisees' focus was backwards because they were focusing on the lower-priority value and neglecting the greater one. [Note: the "tithe" was as much a part of Israel's required religious activities as were the sacrifices (mentioned in the previous example). But they were NEVER intended to be given a priority that was higher than love toward God and toward one's neighbor.]

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 - "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are profitable. "All things are lawful for me," but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own, but each one his neighbor's good. Whatever is sold in the butcher shop, eat, asking no question for the sake of conscience, for "the earth is the Lord's, and its fullness." But if one of those who don't believe invites you to a meal, and you are inclined to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no questions for the sake of conscience. But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," don't eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for the sake of conscience. For "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." Conscience, I say, not your own, but the other's conscience. For why is my liberty judged by another conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no occasions for stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the assembly of God; even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, that they may be saved.

This rather lengthy passage expresses values from every level on the chart. Because of the number of values being expressed, the chart will be used to arrange them:

PRIORITY LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
<p><u>Good things: #1 Priority (= Mandatory)</u></p> <p>Must always be done.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating and drinking (etc.) in a manner that glorifies God.
<p><u>Good things: #2 Priority (= Mandatory)</u></p> <p>Must be done, but anything with a higher priority (Level #1) must be done first.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerned about the good of others. Pleasing others rather than self. Living in a manner that doesn't hinder another's salvation.
<p><u>Good things: #3 Priority (= Optional, but may vary according to circumstances)</u></p> <p>Can be done (depending on circumstances) but anything with a higher priority (Levels #1 and #2) must be done first.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3A - Good things that have become mandatory because of a commitment to do them (a promise, covenant, agreement, etc.), or because of some connection to a higher value. 	<p>3A:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating meat without having questions about it (conscience), when invited to a meal.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3B - Good things that remain optional, with no commitment to participate or to refrain. • 3C - Good things that have become forbidden in your specific circumstances, because of a commitment or promise to refrain from them, or because of some conflict with a higher value. These can no longer be considered good, under these specific circumstances. 	<p>3B:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Things I'm allowed to do" • Eating meat (in general). <p>3C:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Things I'm allowed to do" that are <i>not</i> helpful, or do <i>not</i> encourage growth. • Eating meat if questions of conscience are raised by another (in this instance, by the host?).
<p><u>Bad /sinful things (= Forbidden)</u></p> <p>Must never be done.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being concerned mainly with one's own good. • Causing others to stumble. • Focusing on conscience-related issues, when invited to a meal.

Note: If two people individually examine a complex topic such as this one, there may be instances in which they end up with slightly different results (such as whether something belongs in "Level 3C" or in "Level 4"). This is not to say that Scripture is unclear, nor does it necessarily mean that one of the individuals is incorrect in his analysis. Sometimes this may be simply due to the word choices used to express those values. For example, the phrase "Focusing on conscience-related issues," *without* the second part of the phrase ("when invited to a meal") would belong to "Level 3C." There may be some other circumstances in which such a focus *wouldn't* be sinful.