

Current Attacks On Decency

Janet Jackson's "wardrobe malfunction," Nicollette Sheridan's towel malfunction and naked leap into the arms of Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Terrell Owens in a promotion before ABC's "Monday Night Football," and the recent Detroit Pistons/Indiana Pacers game melee are just the most recent signs of a new culture that has emerged among Americans, and I fear it is just the beginning.

Years ago, men would not use the kind of language that is routinely used today not only in the presence of women but often to women. To see men sitting while a woman was standing on any form of public transportation used to be unthinkable. Children addressing adults by their first name was also unthinkable, not to mention the use of foul language in the presence of or to adults.

What might explain the differences in behavior today versus then? A significant part of the explanation is seen by recognizing that society's first line of defense is not the law but customs, traditions and moral values. Long ago, the Israelites were taught to instruct their children about the Law of God. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, *"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."* This was a truly unique situation in that the Israelites were governed by a law that was both civil and religious. Today, we have done everything we can to separate the two!

When the gospel was first proclaimed in Acts 2, it was never used to promote societal change in the form of legislation. The apostles were not crusaders for enacting morality through laws. The gospel changes the heart and produces Christians who are sanctified to God (1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4). People have been gradually turned away from this code of ethics revealed by God. But the effectiveness of this code as a means of regulating behavior is seen in the fact that people behave themselves even if nobody's watching.

There are not enough police officers, and laws can never restrain personal conduct enough to produce a civilized society. At best, the police and the

criminal justice system are the last lines of defense for a civilized society. Unfortunately, too many of us see police, laws, and the criminal and civil justice systems as society's first line of defense.

For nearly a half-century, a war has been waged on our morality. We have been told to believe that there are no moral absolutes. Instead, what is moral or immoral is a matter of convenience, personal opinion, or what is or is not criminal. During the 1960s, the education establishment undermined lessons children learned from their parents with teachings like "values clarification." So-called sex-education classes were simply indoctrination sessions that sought to undermine godly prohibitions against premarital sex. Lessons of abstinence were ridiculed, considered obsolete, and replaced with lessons about condoms, birth control pills, and abortion. Further undermining of parental authority came with legal and extra-legal measures to assist teenage abortions with neither parental knowledge nor consent.

Again, the righteous behavior that tempers a civilized society is taken from the word of God. But for these teachings to mean anything to society, they must be taught and lived. It is imperative for Christian parents to raise their children "*in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). It is imperative for other Christians to make sure they always live in a godly and righteous manner (Matthew 5:13-16). It is imperative that we have Christians who have truly "*obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine*" (Romans 6:17). That truth dwelling within the heart will produce godly people who will contribute immensely to a proper, civilized society.

Customs, traditions and moral values have been discarded without an appreciation for the role they played in creating a civilized society, and now, we are paying the price. What can we do? Can we pass a law? Sure. But in the end, what would it gain us? What we need to do is repent of sin and begin acting righteously so that once again our country will be exalted (Proverbs 14:34).

Adapted From Walter Williams