

# “Values Clashes and Christianity”

Acts 11:1-4; 18

October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

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The new idea of permitting non-Jews to become Christians was unthinkable. Peter had to talk long and hard about how God directly told him, in a dream, to **allow Gentiles to follow Christ**. They had a gathering of the whole church to argue about this issue for some time. Believers in several countries fumed about this and some probably never accepted it in their lifetime.



Today we are fortunate to live in such a free society and we enjoy the marvelous rights to worship as we please. We don't fear persecution on account of our faith. We can not identify individuals from whom we fear persecution for our Christianity. But today we have found fear and alienation to exist because of differences of opinion and values, because of the different generation clusters, our socio-economic and educational differences and the differences in our personality types. In every ethical discussion involving controversy, churches, denominations and individuals have **bitterly clashed not because one side or the other has been less attentive and diligent in their Biblical studies or commitment of faith**.

The clashes have always been predictable in their outcomes and the church, being a conserving institution, is usually one of the last institutions in society to change. Sometimes this has been good in that the church has influenced a moral restraint in the larger society. Other times this reluctance to change has left each of us noticing that we are not as uptight or judgmental as those who have gone before us. Things do change in time but not without a lot of work, personal risk (in daring to question the status quo) and enormous arguments that seem to threaten the end of what we call the church.

Funny thing, though. *If* the people who say the church has continually sold out to an increasingly secular and godless trend away from God were right, by now the churches would be regularly involved in demon worship. So much for that theory.



What I hope to do is place before you many things our culture has learned about the different values clusters and personality types. In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our educators made tremendous findings in the fields of psychology and sociology and not only have educators benefited but also the

business world. Unfortunately, not the church to the same extent.

## First there are our General Fears and Alienations

What kinds of things separate Christians from achieving a consensus on certain issues? To start with, there are **socio-economic differences**. Someone else is judged as too rich or “snooty,” as having too much education – someone who is clearly “not one of us.” A person or group could be judged as not having the right credentials or friends in the “right” or “important” places. People question where they received their training and what accomplishments they have to their credit.

There are even **occupational** and **religious** barriers that estrange us. If I was a plumber, an electrician or a homemaker, it is unlikely that I would ever be standing before you speaking. If I was a Jew, a Roman Catholic or a Buddhist, it is somewhat unlikely that I would be more than a one-time speaker. Then there is **race** and **gender** that cause individuals to be alienated. What are the chances of your next “Senior Pastor” being an African American, a person from the Pacific Rim or a woman who leads you in worship every Sunday?

In society and in gatherings of church members, then, there has been **an historical resistance to change**.

## There are Fears and Varying Levels of Information on Issues

Take any religious issue. Whether or not to take communion in a Catholic Church, birth control, the sexual orientation of your daughter or son or the next minister your church hires, . . . divorce, the right to die without horrific pain and suffering or the matter of genetic engineering. Any issue hotly disputed by individuals and groups always involves individuals and groups with **varying levels of knowledge**. **Stereotypes and wide-spread myths** cause some to argue as if their personal life depends upon it.

Remember the old days when nobody dared break the **social taboo** about telling other people that your husband beats you? Remember the days when people would actually argue that a woman couldn't be President or a Chief Executive Officer of the

corporation because women couldn't handle the pressure? Remember, before the 1950's, the Presbyterian church, like the rest of the faith expressions, prohibited women from being ordained elders and ministers? All these things changed but not without a lot of arguing and dispelling of myths, stereotypes and prejudices. **As people were given time to present facts from the fields of science, history, sociology, biology, language and archeology, things changed.**

They never changed overnight. They never changed without debates and struggle. They never changed because groups of people held guns to the heads of dissenters and forced them to change their minds. Minds and hearts were changed because people changed their minds, their hearts and how they valued things. People, as individuals and as a larger culture, changed because they learned things.

### **But there are Personality Differences<sup>1</sup>**

Our culture has also learned much about personality preferences. Successful corporations (and church denominations) take advantage of the wealth of human behavioral understanding gained in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Those of you familiar with the Myers-Briggs personality indicator, and all of us who have been around people all our lives, admit that each of us exhibit thoughts, feelings and behaviors that can be generally described. Admit it, . . . some of us are **inner world oriented** people who prefer to mull things over internally before we get around to talking about it. Others of us **verbalize what comes to our mind externally**, preferring to process our thinking in the dynamic of a conversation. (*How upsetting it has to be for introverted people to find themselves in a public discussion on a sensitive issue and not having enough time to think out where they are before saying it.*)

In your own family clan or office or neighborhood, there are people who highly **prefer to work with facts that are obvious, proven, tried and true**. They simply don't want to hear about the future, the possibilities or any abstract concept or principle.

<sup>1</sup> The initial personality descriptions of Introverts & Extroverts; Detail or Big Picture Data Preferences; Rational or Empathy Decision Makers and Task or Process preferences are drawn from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

They greatly prefer to deal with the here and now, the knowable and verifiable facts. They prefer detail, none of this "what if."

In great contrast, there are those of us who **prefer the forest over the trees, . . . the big picture**. They see trends and gradual change over time and prefer to operate on concepts and general guidelines rather than rigid rules. They could stand in line at the supermarket and make up a children's story about wizards, fairies, talking animals and lands where magic thrives. Which personality type would you pick to vote on an ethical issue?

In your home and at work outside of the home, you see people who **make decisions on mostly efficient logic and reason** with little regard to how people feel about the consequences. Some people call them "cold, calculating robots, and impersonal."

It is never totally one way or another but there are others who take a lot longer to make decisions because they **use the strength of empathy** with those affected by the decision. Some people call them "emotional" or "airheads," "inefficient" and too "mousy" to get anything done in a cost-effective way.

Which type of personality would we prefer to entrust in the discussion and voting on ethical issues relating to our faith?

Some of you make lists, keep track of the time and you intentionally move your life through your lists of things to do. You are **task oriented**. You check things off on your list and you add more things to do. You are a doer, an accomplisher and your life is one big to-do list.

Others of you don't care about the time and just **enjoy the process**. There's always one more person from whom you'd like to hear an opinion, no matter how long the meeting is getting. There's always one more thing to bring up in the conversation, even though it doesn't seem to relate to the task at hand but it does because everything seems related. Who cares about time because if we don't have each other, what else is there?

Which of these personality preferences could you demand be involved in solving the church's ethical issues?

### **Level II Personality Differences in Preference<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup> The Nine Personality Trait descriptions are from The Enneagram Profile.

Let's go deeper. Those of you who are familiar with Jungian studies and have benefited from the discovered personality preferences in the Enneagram, know about the nine general ways we prefer to go about our lives. These are obviously only generalizations and any individual is always greater than the sum of their personality tests. But these different preferences that we've found ourselves taking with our personality seem to be so accurate, that thousands of people have gathered in groups to study and discuss them because they contain tremendous insight on who we are. I'll just mention each of them, but as you hear these varying types, keep in mind that in any discussion or study of Christian ethics, your personality type and the eight others are right in there, toe-to-toe, trying to work or fight toward a resolution.

The **Perfectionists**, as their name indicates, want everything and everyone to be perfect. They are driven to make everything as good and as precise as humanly possible. "That just cannot be right" they sometimes say with absolutely thundering certainty. "Anything that is not quite right is WRONG!" a sign said hanging on my parents' wall in my youth. These folks gravitate toward accounting, stamp collecting and mechanical precision.

**Helpers** live to help others. If they aren't in a helping relationship with others, they feel they aren't in a relationship. They are driven to the helping professions and they are always in volunteer organizations.

The **Accomplishers** thrive on producing work and products. Whether you're a writer, a teacher, in the trades, the arts, construction or manufacturing, you think your personal worth is determined by what you've made or accomplished. You've accomplished so much that you end up being in competition with yourself. If you could, when you died, you'd like to accomplish just one more thing to prove to God that you are worthy enough to be let in heaven; . . . maybe two more things.

The fourth group are those who are **artistic, creative** and feel that they are **uncommonly unique** in life. They're driven by angst and because of their uniquely creative role in life, they think few would ever understand their plight in life or their artistic sensibilities. Life is hard for these folks because they're ahead of the culture and have the burden of making life more beautiful and creative than it already is.

The **Information Gatherers** are often news junkies. They thrive on gathering and storing information. Knowledge and information is survival. They are the folks who research everything before making a decision. To know and to be able to find out is to live. They hate unknowns and feel that if they were ever not in "the know" they would die.

**Compliant Company People** live and die for the good of the group. They are loyal and trustworthy as well as the rest of the traditional list of Boy Scout virtues. They don't question authority and they thrive on doing whatever it is that has to be done to perpetuate the group or organization.

**Partiers** live to enjoy life. They hate going into hospitals where people are in pain or have unresolved or unknown problems. Instead, they seek out light and more enjoyable social settings and if there aren't any around, they create them. They make the good times happen.

**Dominate** people put themselves in leadership positions no matter what. They dominate conversations and there isn't anyone in a group who doesn't know where they stand on issues. They thrust themselves into leadership positions and they usually find that no one around them can match their drive to do things the way they want things done. They dominate in the home, in the church, at work and in society.

**Peacemaker and Mediator** types work to resolve the tension. They hate arguments and conflict and if anyone is feeling the least bit bad about anything, they will say and do almost anything to make them feel that it is "no big deal" and that "things will work out just fine." They are drawn to making people feel better in any group and they stay away from conflict situations where they would have to argue one way or the other.

Now of these nine types of people, of course you would greatly prefer people with your own preference to be solving the ethical issues for the Church and Society. It doesn't happen that way but many of these diverse personality types are right there on the front lines in any ethical discussion in the church.

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**There are Values Clusters that separate us.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> The Demographic Values / Lifestyles Market Analysis materials are taken from the Stowell Research Inc. studies of the Buffalo and Western New York market research. The material on the generation values clusters are based on the work of Morris Massey, produced in his series "What You are Is", and available in the Performax System's

Some of you may remember the old Dustin Hoffman movie “The Graduate.” A young man is attending his graduation party put on by his parents in the back yard of their affluent home. His parents’ friends are standing around, talking about business and drinking cocktails. One old boy comes up to Dustin Hoffman’s character and says, “Think Plastic.”

Of course this traditionalist was saying that this young man’s life and his career would be infinitely improved if he committed himself to a company dealing with plastics. The newly graduated baby-boomer’s repulsion of that goal for self worth was aptly symbolized by his putting on a scuba-diving suit and sitting at the bottom of the swimming pool for the remainder of the garden party in his honor. For the post war baby boomers, the social values shifted so thoroughly that it was no longer what you do (in a career or your membership in a community organization) that determined your worth. Instead, it became who you are as a person.



It is now well-known, in the advertising and marketing circles, that as individuals, we make our consumer choices and our ethical and religious choices largely from within the values and lifestyle cluster in which we were born. When I was working in television and advertising, I was greatly impressed that advertisers know almost everything about us.

When I was writing ads and marketing presentations for the television station and computer firms, I had access to the lifestyles, personal and religious beliefs and social value judgments about any target audience we were trying to reach. This is why advertising is so powerful and it is exactly why you and I buy what we buy. Here is a brief summary of what they know about us and how they manipulate words and images to convince us to buy products.



The **Traditionalists** seek the status quo and they hate nontraditional lifestyles. They strongly identify with the business community and have usually achieved the American Dream. They are traditional with regard to sex roles, seeing the husband as the primary provider for the family and the wife. Even though most woman are employed outside the home, they are expected to maintain the home.

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International, Inc. Values Analysis Profile, 1981, Division of Carlson Marketing Group.

Traditionalists have a strong feeling of belonging to the community and they like order and predictability. They prefer situations that are totally within their control and dislike taking risks. They are cautious about change and feel that things have changed too quickly in society. They’re politically conservative.

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The images and words that *attract* traditionalists are:

- Conventional affluent lifestyles, clubhouses and golf
- Business interests
- Order, planning and control
- Conservative political thought
- Family scenes with men and women in traditional sex roles
- Images of strength and power
- Competitive sports
- Patriotic themes

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Images and words that *alienate* Traditionalists include:

- Liberals
- Nontraditional households
- Women’s rights activists
- Avant-garde fashions
- Hard rock music



In great contrast are the **Boomers and the Challenger Group**. They are achievement oriented and their jobs serve as one of the primary elements of their lives. They’re confident and believe in themselves. They are not afraid to take calculated risks and even their play or off time is spent in enhancing their career abilities – learning new things to excel in their careers.

They like to examine complex issues because they believe they are not simply black and white. They believe there is not one right way to get things done. They like creativity and new ways to do things. They have positive attitudes about innovations.

They are often liberal and sympathetic to the underprivileged. They believe social programs are necessary to support the needy who fall between the cracks of bureaucracy. They’re open and accepting of nontraditional sex roles and personal values. They believe that men and women should relate to each other on equal terms. They’re sophisticated and high-tech in their consumer purchases and they want the best and the latest.

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Images and words that attract people in this second group include:

- Images of speed
- Images of technology and innovations
- Competition, achievement
- Strategic planning
- Outdoor sports
- Casual sophistication
- People who are articulate and witty
- Couples and families living a lifestyle similar to theirs

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Images and words that alienate people from this second group include:

- Simplistic explanations of the world
- People who are very traditional
- People who are very conservative
- People who are inarticulate
- Bargain basement, low quality

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There is a third group of consumers in this Buffalo market<sup>4</sup> who are more simply referred to as the **Average Middle**. Researchers for advertisers have found them revolving their lives around their home and family. This is especially true for the women in the group who define themselves through their roles as mothers and wives.

They value homemaking and view it as an art. Even if the wife works outside the home, her primary duties are still felt to be those of wife and mother. The husband is viewed as the primary bread winner for the family.

Folks in this group three are traditional in terms of sex roles, marriage and the family and they tend to view people who are more liberal as lacking in morality. They tend to be conventional in that they prefer to do what most others around them are doing. They dislike change and things that are not within their control.

In contrast to the more high-tech group 2's, people in the this third group fear change. They avoid risks and are cautious. They prefer to stay with things that are familiar to them. They do not want to have the best of everything and are satisfied with the things they can afford. They are decidedly thrifty and are careful shoppers. They patiently and meticulously save coupons and they are disciplined about finding the best price. This stands in great contrast to the

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<sup>4</sup> And in all other markets across the nation

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second group who feel their time isn't worth fiddling with little nickel-and-dime coupons and don't mind paying more for a higher quality product.

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Images and words that *attract* group three include:

- Traditional family scenes
- Women in traditional rolls taking care of families and husbands
- Men in traditional roles, being strong leaders, fixing things and taking care of the house
- Stretching the family budget, getting a good value for the money
- Men involved in traditionally masculine sports
- Images of strength, power and patriotism
- Explaining complex things simply

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Images and words that *alienate* folks in the third group are:

- People leading nontraditional lifestyles
- Liberals
- Things they think are too faddish or unconventional
- Instructions that are too technical
- Things that are perceived as too expensive or extravagant

There are a few other groups of people in the Buffalo Market but they are discussed in the advertising and marketing circles as target groups for products and services that are smaller in demand. But we could sell waterbeds to college students or retirees, we just had to change the words and images to fit who we were trying to convince.

By now, from hearing all these personality types, all these different values clusters or groups, what does all this have to do with how the church goes about figuring out what is right and wrong for our time and culture from the Bible?

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How many personalities and values groups, from all that have been quickly summarized, are going to feel motivated to do serious Biblical scholarship on certain complex social and ethical issues? Right away, even if all I ever did was advertising and marketing and I never heard about biblical studies, I'd conclude that 90% of everyone I mentioned would want to have nothing at all to do with taking the time to study the languages, the cultures, the social norms, the internal struggles of the religious leaders and the influence of the surrounding non-religious cultures on the first century faith communities. It's far too much work and we want it easy.



Ninety percent of people in any Christian church, in my opinion, want easy answers handed to them without any work on their part. They want the authorities to hand them the answers but they better be what we already believe. And with all of our differences in personalities and all of our different and conflicting values clusters (that have pretty much dictated how we view the world, what you and I buy and with whom we associate), I think there is little chance for unity in the Christian Church. Sometimes I think that one of these days, we're all going to be off in separate little groups of people who think and feel exactly as us. So many people don't have much hope for unity in the Christian church.

The only chance we will ever have is if the Spirit of God finds ways to bridge our alienations, our clashes in values, our preferences and judgments. But when you see unity, compassion, tolerance, openness, disciplined study and learning and grace – stop the arguing and look very closely. These are signs that God is present and enabling the church to exist and perhaps be a healing agent in this lonely world. 🙏

