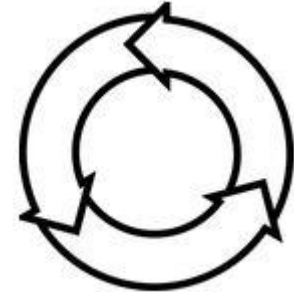


Life Cycle of Great Civilizations

Korean War Colonel William W. Quinn made this observation about the great civilizations in world history. They go through a life cycle of changing values over a period of about 200 years before imploding. History tells us civilizations follow a similar pattern:

From bondage to spiritual faith
From spiritual faith to great courage
From great courage to liberty
From liberty to abundance
From abundance to selfishness
From selfishness to complacency
From complacency to apathy
From apathy to dependency
From dependency back again into bondage



Quinn sent this to a Washington Post journalist friend and asked the question, "As the United States has passed its 200th birthday, and in view of the recent epidemic of immorality, I wonder how your readers would assess America's current position in this cycle".

The Rev. Billy Graham often preached that America is moving away from the teachings of the Bible. He said, "The moral foundation of our country is in danger of crumbling as families break up and parents neglect their responsibilities." Graham said that people don't seem to care or even acknowledge that shift as our culture moves from one part of the cycle to the next. Graham quoted from the ancient prophet Jeremiah, "*Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.*" (Jeremiah 6:15).

Our American culture, like other extinct civilizations before us, is unmistakably passing through these same stages. So, how do we break the cycle? We do it by anchoring our core values to the unchanging Word of God. In contrast, our culture's values are changing over time. Every generation seeks a more liberal lifestyle than the previous generation. Allowed to continue, the eventual end result will be a culture with little or no morality and a return to bondage in its lifecycle.



Look at the stages of the life cycle described by Quinn. The early stages seem positive: spiritual faith, great courage, liberty and then abundance. In its purest sense you could argue that God would be pleased with the first four phases. But you have to examine the heart of a person to evaluate the values of that position in the cycle. Take a closer look and you begin to realize that every stage moves further away from God because our human nature yearns to be in control of our own destiny. Only God determines the destiny of a person. We seek to be the ruler of our lives and the position in the cycle shows the results of that action. The second half of the lifecycle is a sharp, downward spiral: selfishness, complacency, apathy, dependence and then back into bondage.

There is a better way to live – in a strong relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible shows a set of values directly opposite of a culture seeking its own way. Biblical values put us in a position for the destiny God desires for us. Instead of words such as selfishness, complacency, apathy and dependency, God's words are love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (from Galatians 5:22-23). They are the Fruits of the Spirit, and come as a result of living by the 10 Commandments – God's Law for mankind (Exodus 31:18). Moses carried them down from Mt. Sanai on two stone tablets, etched by the finger of God. God wrote them for all time, not just a 200 year life cycle of any civilization. The truth revealed in God's Word doesn't change as a civilization goes through its stages. As a society goes into its next phase it rejects God's truth that it once embraced earlier in the cycle. It is critical that we must respect the anchor of God's truth. To not do so – to go along with the crowd -- is condoning the changing values accepted in our world. To break the cycle we must be firmly attached to the anchor of God's truth.

To be clear, we cannot be perfect, but God provides a way to amend our life and to remain in a right relationship with Him. Billy Graham described it going through 3 stages:

- Receiving God's pattern for right living.
- Heeding God's warning when we fail.
- Accepting God's forgiveness. "Go and sin no more."

Cultures move onto the next stage when they reject the teachings of Jesus, ignore "Go and sin no more" and seek the pleasures of a sinful life.

There is a better way. Living by God's truth, we can seek a life cycle that will be eternal, living in God's presence.

Question: How do you resist the temptations of contemporary society and remain anchored by God's Word?

Prayer: Dear Lord. It is easy to get swept up by the temptations of an easier life, living in a contemporary world and ignoring your Law and Gospel. We pray that we can be an example for others of how to live a life anchored in the faith by your Word. It is our goal to be an ambassador for you in the way we live our life. Amen.