

Buy Low and Sell Lower

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” Matthew 16:26.

Everything on earth – animate or inanimate, material or immaterial, eternal or temporary – has multiple assigned values: The value assigned by God and the values assigned by people. There are more than only two, as different cultures assign different values to the same objects. Some cultures value kindness more than respect while others value respect more than kindness. Some cultures value technological advancements more than traditions while others value traditions more than technological advancements.

Since different objects have different values, we compare values and act accordingly. The way in which we act toward objects and people reveals how our values interrelate with each other. If, say, a coffee mug has an assigned value of 2 and a family pet has an assigned value of 8, then in a fire one would not save the mug before the pet. Thus it's important to get the order right so that in a situation like a fire one does not save the mug before the pet. One of our greatest struggles is getting the order right. This is what Jesus is addressing: The order and disorder of values.

In using hyperbole, Jesus makes the statement that one human soul is more valuable than the entire world. The hyperbole doesn't lie in the value of the human soul. That part is accurate. One human soul is more valuable than all the world's riches and kingdoms. The hyperbole lies in the *gains the whole world* part. Because the truth is that we are foolish enough to give up our souls for much less than the entire world. We're foolish enough to give up our souls for a fraction of a fraction of the world, let alone the world in its entirety. We bought low and sold lower at a time when it was foolish to buy low and sell high.

It's prudent, then, to understand God's value system and to have the same as His. Our systems change and are corrupted by desires. For many of us, there are times in which we rationally understood the value of our souls and yet, because of desires, we valued a fraction of a fraction of the world more than our souls. Our value systems are corrupted and disordered by desires. Thankfully, God's value system doesn't change. He gives us an unchanging system of values. A value system without disorder. And in this system, one human soul is always more valuable than the earth and all it contains.

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