



Transcriptions

What Does the Moral Development Research Suggest?

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Annotation: *Christian Education Conference, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, April 16, 1980.* The capacity to make moral choices is part of common grace; but, in this address, Ted Ward asserts that moral action requires attention to the spiritual dimension. He challenges Christians to recognize the structural dimensions of development and to respect the community of faith as a matrix in which the quest for justice can be the great stimulus for moral development among the people of God.



I want to talk with you in the time that is available to us this morning on the theme, what does the moral development research Suggest? There's quite a bit of interest today in the field of moral development as you've probably been aware. Within the fields of psychology, particularly social psychology and also within the field of education, there's quite a bit going on. I suspect there are a number of roots for this particular concern not the least of which is a kind of a national malaise that we may have some trouble in the moral sector. That has occurred to a number of people—Christian and otherwise—and there is, as a matter of fact, even in the secular community very substantial interest in coming closer to an understanding of how moral values develop and what it is that we can do within institutions of society in order to facilitate the development of moral values that have some promise of building responsible personhood and ultimately responsible nationhood.

As a matter of fact, as a Christian scholar within this field I take these researches as a good sign. I'm delighted always to see people concerned about moral issues because I think this is one of the aspects of personhood that is extremely important and that, as Christians, we need to be in the forefront of concern in the moral domain. And that not only in terms of preaching sound sermons about how God would have us to look at things, but also active in terms of the sorts of things that can be done within society's institutions to set up, that is, to facilitate a condition for more fulfilled humanity through a more moral life.

I'm going to be talking about aspects of human personhood in the presentations today, tomorrow, and the next, and I thought it might be well for us to start off with the cataloging of a number of the aspects of human personhood and see if we can't see where the moral fits into all this. Now down the left margin here you'll find physical, two mental, social and moral. Just a word about each. The physical aspect of personhood is, of course, the one that is omnipresent. It is the one that each of us sees most clearly in one another. It's the aspect that we see most clearly in a mirror. We don't get much insight from a mirror on even our mental development, to say nothing of our social and moral development. Generally, we divide the mental development realm (or mental aspect) into two sub-divisions: the cognitive and the emotional—sometimes called the affective—having to do with the realm of the feelings and the way one handles himself/herself in emotional response to circumstances.

The social which has to do with that part of personhood that fulfills an observation that our Creator made when he had first created Adam; took a good look at the situation and said, "It's not good for man to be alone." As a matter of fact, I think that if you understand that only to refer to the issue of sex fulfillment, you don't understand the whole of it. It's far more than that. It has to do with the human being having been created as a social being, God's intending that humanity would do all sorts of things in various sorts of collectives: in pairs, in sets, in groups, in institutions, and in worldwide community. As a matter of fact, then, the social development of personhood is one of the particularly human aspects and is an extremely important one. Sometimes we violate it, especially in fields such as education where we enculturate our people and ourselves to believe that learning is something best done independently, autonomously, and privately, preferably secretly, lest someone else find out how much we've learned and, for heaven's sakes, giving someone else an answer to a test.

The moral realm is a realm in which we also develop. It is an aspect of humanity not shared in the same terms with other elements of the animal creation. The fifth-day creatures do not have the moral capability that humankind has. It is part of the aspect of humanity that God immediately, in the Genesis account, demonstrates in terms of the capacity of man to be free to use that moral judgment in both the matters of God's will and God's instruction as we find in the third chapter and in reference to interpersonal relationships, the moral judgments, as we find in the fourth chapter of Genesis.

Now I have indicated with some orange plus signs something of the relative strength of what we call the programs or the developmental programs in each of these sectors. [Visuals not available.] Most human beings grow up in more or less the same sorts of way in physical terms. We reach puberty at about the same time. We have rather narrow range of heights and weights. We tend always to go forward in our development, except for sickness. There's a pattern, there's a program there. It's genetically part of being human. That physical program is a very strong program. Illness

can thwart it. Various kinds of physical deformations, genetic deformations, can thwart it. But, as a matter of fact, it's a very strong program, so I've given it five pluses.

The mental program is also quite strong. I've given it three pluses because it is by no means as genetically determined as is the physical. It—and, by the way, as most of us are well aware, even the physical is quite subject to appropriate use of one's physical capabilities, one's body, exercise, nutrition, and so forth—none of these programs are absolutely determined in the sense of deterministically fixed beyond our control. But clearly the mental development program is somewhat less fixed, less firm. It is more subject to the kinds of things you choose to do with yourself. The kinds of educational experiences, for example. The kinds of ways you approach interpersonal relationships whether you approach them as experiences from which to learn or as experiences in which you're going to do in someone else.

The emotional aspect is even a little less stubborn or persistent as a program. Development of an emotional sort does occur. It is, to some extent, genetically determined, but it is much more prone to the kinds of interference that occur in our lives. And most of us are aware that it is not at all unusual for a person to have various periods of life with various sorts of emotional instabilities and emotional setbacks; not at all unusual. It's a relatively less persistent program and, similarly, the social program is about of the same sort. I've also given it two pluses.

The moral program is there for Christian and non-Christian. It's part of being human. There is a capacity to make moral judgments. There's a capacity to make moral choices that is part of general common grace. Every human being has the capacity to make moral choices. Now the capacity to act on those moral choices is something else. We'll get to that after a bit.

Moral has to do, particularly here, with that set of processes that make it possible for a person to discern on some kind of a schedule between right and wrong and then be able to make moral judgment. That program of development, as a matter of fact, has only fairly recently been understood. And the research has focused on the development of that program.

So I want, first of all, to identify what we're working on in moral development as being one of the programs that are genetically, structurally, functionally within the human being and the one out of all of these five that is the weakest, the most apt to be derailed, the most apt to be frustrated, the most apt to be thwarted. Now, at this point, all of God's children said what did you do with the spiritual? Did you forget? That's what the dotted lines are all about: to indicate that I didn't forget it. But for a couple of theological reasons, I persist in putting it below a dotted line because I don't believe that it is fair to refer to the spiritual nature of man as an aspect of personhood. If I read my Bible in theological light, I have to understand that it is in the essence of man to be spiritual. I can reduce, diminish, eliminate virtually any of the other of the characteristics, aspects, functions of man and still have a person.

For example, we talk about absent from the body, right? Absent from the physical; present with the Lord. What is present with the Lord? The essence. What is the essence? The essence is in the spiritual. Now I don't care whether you're going to use language of soul, spirit, whatever. Most of the research tends to use this nomenclature and the secular researchers occasionally use this word spiritual but they generally use the word spiritual to mean that which is metaphysical and not really empirically discernible. That's not necessarily a bad way for a Christian to start. I think that those of us who are concerned about the spiritual need to understand, though, that the spiritual is very real.

And biblically we understand that it's not really an aspect but that, in fact, spiritual refers to the essence of person. Remember, persons without Christ are described biblically as being spiritually dead. The essence is dead in Adam's sin to be made alive in Christ. It is an aspect only in a different sense than all the rest of these aspects and I persist in not wanting to call it an aspect; I persist in wanting to call it the essence.

And, by the way, it's a fairly Western notion to think that we live in our heads. You ask yourself the question, now where is the real me? And it's basically out of the Greek tradition that you tend to think through your eyes. You're very empirical. You think you process the things that you feel, touch, smell with your head so therefore where's the real you? It's in your head. Cut off your head which side do you go, you know? Well, I submit that that is not inherently Hebrew or Christian to assume that you roll off with your head. Given a first-class beheading, you ain't there because the essence of you is in the spiritual which is in the presence of God.

Well, this is not going to turn into a sermon, but I think it might be well for us to consider sometimes the carelessness with which we throw around things like body, soul, and spirit as if somehow this tripartite notion of humanity is somehow going to do us some good. Even the Bible itself tends not to be pushy about that notion. In fact, there are times in the Bible where the human person is described as a dualism, other times as a tripartite function, and other times in four aspects.

Now let's get a little bit further down the line in terms of some of the particular problems we get into and understanding the research itself. First of all, as in Christian perspective we know that to know something, especially in the Greek sense, does not necessarily imply doing it. In the Hebrew sense, knowing it is interwoven with the doing, but in Western traditions and in most of modern man there is a sense in which we say we know things but we know we don't do them. And, therefore, there's a kind of discontinuity or a break between the knowing and the doing. And it's at this point where the moral development research begins to be important because as we identify what are the pieces that tie these two together we can see three facets of human function. We can see a knowing function—or, technically, a cognition function—in which the concern is to know as if to know to do the right and we call that stuff moral judgment.

There is a volitional aspect in which we must also be willing to do the right, and there's an operational aspect in which we must have the strength to do the right. Now if you're a Trinitarian at this point, as I suspect some of you may be at this seminary, you may notice that there's a very interesting analogy—I'm not going to preach it again as any kind of marvelous insight—but there is a kind of analogy between the knowing function in that God has revealed; God is the great revealer. And one of the senses in which we are in his image is that we reflect as an image. We inquire because God has revealed. It is in humanity to inquire. Scholarly inquiry to me is very beautiful because it's a reflection of God's revealing. God reveals, I inquire. I am in the image of God in the sense of a mirror reflecting back. My dynamic is toward the inquiry. I approach his Word theologically. I inquire through the rubrics of theological inquiry. I approach the universe. I approach his handiwork, his revelation of himself in his doings. I approach through the rudiments of scientific inquiry. Therefore, I keep these two things in a kind of continual, mutual evaluation in which I am concerned to be as whole as possible in my grasping of what it is that God has revealed of himself. God Jehovah the Creator has made it possible for us to know the right. He has made it possible. He has put it into us. He has put it into the genetic structure of humans to be in the business of making moral judgments. Jesus Christ, in his resurrection, makes it possible as the second Adam for the function of man's will, bent against God in Adam, to be restored to a bent

toward God. Therefore, we find Jesus Christ identifying himself in a volitional way opting for God's will, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done," speaking to this issue of the frailness of human will. And we find that God the Holy Spirit offers himself to us as the indwelling presence in strength that we might stand. I find that a very fascinating analogy.

I don't have the foggiest idea whether it means anything or not, but it's fun to contemplate, especially when I realize that the research is focused almost exclusively right here. [Visual not available.] There's almost no research here and virtually none at all here. This area here is not even labeled in the research. These two areas are carefully labeled in the research, but as a Christian I have to put this one in too because I reflect on the fact that to know to do the right and to do it not is sin, therefore, knowing is not enough. But also Paul points out that when you know and when you will, that's not always enough, "Those things that I would do, I do them not. Those things that I would not do, those things I do." Right? So it's possible to have the will in place and the knowledge in place and still fall short. There is a third component. To know and to do is divided in a product of the fall and it must have three aspects to bring it back into place.

Now the secular folk are preoccupied right now with the moral judgment. I think you can get all the moral judgment straight. You can get all the understanding you want, and you can still not build that bridge back together again because you have also to deal with the will; you have to deal with the strength, and that's where it falls down again over and over again. But, as a researcher, I pay a close attention to my secular colleagues who are working very hard in this field trying to help us better understand the moral judgment research and it's *that* research that I refer to today when I say, what does the moral development research suggest? I'm going to be delimiting our presentation today to the judgment research.

Now there is a terminology that we need in order to get on with it. First of all, to make a distinction between moral judgment and moral action because a lot of us get all hung up, especially those of us with Armenian tendencies—of which I suspect I have relatively few here this morning—distinguishing between moral judgment and moral action. Now moral judgment can be in place and still moral action not be there. We've already illustrated that before. Please bear in mind that the research on moral judgment may say such things that are very startling as there is no empirical evidence for a person's regression in moral judgment. That does not disallow backsliding. That does not allow lapses into simple behavior. It simply says that the judgment processes once in place are always available to you. Now *that* the research shows: the judgment development once in place at a certain level of sophistication, if you please, or advancement never regresses. There's no evidence in the empirical literature of regression, but oodles of evidence all around us of people who know better than what they do. And, by the way, I think I have four or five such people here today. I'm not going to ask those three, four, five people to put their hands up but I'll put mine up. I know a lot better than many of the things I do.

Now let's go on with vocabulary. Moral judgment is concerned with choices and decisions. Those decisions or choices have two components: a component called the moral content component and a component called the moral structure component. And for some of you in theological training, I think you'll find that to be a very useful construct. There is a *what* one believes to be right or wrong, and there is a *why* one believes that certain content to be right or wrong. And the emphasis is in the content on the *what* and on the structure on the *why*.

Now let me ask you: quiz item number 1. Have you been paying attention? Christian teaching, in general, is strongest in its preoccupation on the *what* or the *why*? The *what*. We are past masters at helping people to see what it is they ought to believe is right or wrong. But we tend not to be very well backgrounded in understanding how that structure develops and how one becomes increasingly complex in that *what*. If I brought a very small child in here today and said to him, “Pete,” 4-years-old, “is it wrong to lie?” Well, I’ll tell a story; whatever it is that Pete understands, and he says, “Oh, yes.” Yes, he knows that. “How do you know it’s wrong?” “Well, you get in trouble when you do it.” Follow me? Now if I brought Pete back ten years later, he’s 14 now, and I say, “Pete, you’ve lived a little more life now. Tell these folks out here: Is it wrong to lie?” Do you suppose Pete’s changed much? No. The odds are that whatever he’s got in there as content at age 4 is still going to be hanging in as content at age 14. By the way, that’s one of the more powerful arguments for affective involvement of parents with their kids before they ever hit school because there’s an awful lot of the moral content that’s already laid down by then. Now if I said, “Hey, Pete, you told us ten years ago when you were only four years old; you told us that it was wrong to lie. Haven’t you developed at all? Haven’t you changed at all? You’re still saying the same thing.” He will look bewildered and, of course, we’ll look like idiots.

We don’t necessarily expect to see that his moral content has changed a lot as evidence of development. What would we expect to see having changed? His structure. In fact, at age 14 if he still answers, “The reason I know it’s wrong to lie is because I get in trouble when I do it,” we’d say he hasn’t developed much. His structure is still stuck at a very early childhood level. Instead, we would expect a 14-year-old to have a much more sophisticated, much more complex kind of structure in which he says, “Yeah, I know occasionally you get in trouble when you do it, but that isn’t what makes it wrong. What makes it wrong is the kind of guy I’m trying to be, you know? The kind of person my Mom wants me to be; the kind of person that really pleases my Dad; the kinds of things I see in the people that are important to me make it wrong to lie.”

He’s got himself out of this notion of rewards and punishments and by this point his development has come to the point where he’s willing to reference himself outside. And maybe he’s a kid that’s had some biblical teaching and he says, “God says it’s wrong. That’s why it’s wrong.” Fine and dandy. But notice the point of reference at this point has changed from an internal, it feels bad or it feels good to me; to an external, it has it has truth out there. We’re going to get to that in a moment, too, in more detail. But please understand that the research has looked particularly at judgment, not action. And, by the way, moral action is what one does whether or not it’s consistent with one’s moral judgment. The research has focused here and the research has particularly underlined this contrast between moral content and moral structure. And one of the most important implications for the field of education, and ministry in general, is that we can pay much more attention and to good advantage to the people we’re ministering to.

We can pay much more attention than we’ve been paying to that emergence of structure. And there are some things that people engaged with God’s people in ministry should really understand about that structure. Let me go on to a couple of them that are particularly important. I promised you that I’d elaborate this notion that the source of right and wrong tends to shift over time. As a matter of fact, empirical studies show us that there are three grand levels. There are subdivisions of each of these, but you can strike it down to about here. And the empirical works shows us that virtually every human being begins life at a stage of pre-moral judgment, but once beginning to make moral judgments, makes them on this kind of a ground. What’s the key word? Me. We call that, technically, the egocentric level. These levels are the development of the structure of moral

judgment. They are really answers to this question, what source do I use to decide right and wrong? At each of these three levels of development, what do I use as the source? And we all start out in life, whether you're in a Christian home or not; whether you are, you know, saved at an early age or not, the fact is that when you first have a moral conscience, it is quite sharply related to the notion of what is going to affect me? And that egocentric it's right if it if it feels good to me; it's wrong if it gets me in trouble, is where we all start. Now some of you here are humble enough to remember that you used to be there. In fact, some of you may remember that that wasn't very long ago because you may not have left that stage until very recently—if you've left it at all—because the research shows that in the United States somewhat just less than 50% of adults make it beyond that program level. Did you hear that? In our society that is really where adults stay almost as often as not. In other words, there's an awful lot of stuff that can be rationalized by the likes of Hugh Hefner. If it feels good, do it!

Now a person who is not stultified in his or her moral development is, somewhere in the age of about 5 through 10, 14, going to come into a very important transition into what we call a socio-centric moral structure. And the decisions now about right and wrong are wrenched out of me and they suddenly become external to me. Do you follow that? And, boy, that's a very heavy trauma. Have any of you ever worked in churches and worked with juniors? Juniors are in trauma. That's what, you know, the church schools call them juniors, generally. I don't know why they call them juniors. They really ought to call them troublemakers and be done with it. But those are kids who are having a lot of trouble because they've suddenly discovered that there's really an inadequacy in making all their moral judgments on *I feel, I think so* level and they begin to say, "Hey, there's somebody else out there that's important and I've got to give myself some reference to it."

In my own experience in judgments, though we have no empirical work on this, I think that most Christians are inclined to get hung in that second stage because that is the stage where legalism is the most popular. Because the highest form of outside of me is, what? God said so, or that's what Jesus would do. See it? It's an external to me.

Now what does God tell us about his Law and how he would rather have that Law somewhere else rather than hanging on the stones on the wall? What does he say he'd rather have? And if you think that means Scripture memorization, you've missed the point. That has to do with the internalization of that which God has said. Now when Christ came along to fulfill the Law, what did he put his emphasis on? He put his emphasis not on a reiteration of the Decalogue. What did he do with the Decalogue? As a matter of fact, when he was pushed by the Pharisees really hard one day—which is the great commandment—he gave them a kind of well, if it wasn't first, why did God put it first kind of a statement and said, "Well, the great commandment is the first." Right? That's pretty rare for Jesus to tick off a commandment and put a specific focus on it but he did it in response. Then he kind of put them down because he had an answer that was rhetorically excellent; made a good debater's answer. But Jesus was more than a person who was willing to answer with shrewd answers so that people would go away and say isn't he bright. He made himself vulnerable. In the next phrase he says, "But, the first commandment is 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.'" And then he made himself absolutely vulnerable because what he said next was not even a Decalogue commandment. He says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And they turned to him and said, "Well, now here you go inventing again! We asked you, 'Which was the great commandment?' You gave a kind of a shrewd answer and then you messed it all up. Now we got you!" And he says, "No, I got you."

In these two, all the Law and the Prophets—to throw that in, too—hold together, right? Do you remember that? In these two, what? It's a funny thing. You look in your biblical text and it's hard to find out these two. These two, you know what does *two* modify? You're left to deal with that. These two, what? These two are the grand principles that are capable of being brought into yourself. You can't bring a body of Law in. That's what the Pharisees were trying to do. You can't bring a body of Law in and have it be truly internalized, but you can bring principles in. See the elegance of that?

And interestingly enough the secular researchers are saying there is something else beyond the external orientation and it, strangely enough, is another internal orientation. So here you go. You start off in life [saying] how do I know it's right? I look in here. I see how it feels. A little later in life you say how do I know it's right? I look out there and I find out what all the good people are doing. I find out what all the authorities have said. I find out all the responsible stuff that God has said. And it's out there. It's on those tables of stone out there. But God is saying and the secular research is showing that there's something beyond that. There are principles in that outside of me that can be incorporated so that one does not have to ask is it right or is it wrong in terms of what would Jesus do, but in terms of what is Jesus doing in me. See the difference? So it's like a wrenching back from the external to an internal again. Now this is not mysticism. This is simply a referencing to the principles that God makes it possible for us to embrace willingly. And by the way, that *embrace willingly* is language that the secular researchers use about this and I find it to be very biblical in its notion.

These, then, are the three levels that the literature in the secular research studies show. And this is the same material in a slightly different form acknowledging that there is a pre-moral state: that *self* is the moral determinant here; that *others* are the moral determinant here. And, by the way, God is an *other*, the State is an *other*, codes of law are representations of *others*. Do you follow me? So it's that external. And third: that principles incorporated, incarnated, brought into one's own being as moral determinant here.

And then we notice very interestingly that this wrenching that I refer to as a person moves from this level to this level has a focus on the notion of obedience. And if you know anything about those juniors I was talking about, you know that one of the things they're really having trouble with is willing obedience. Now, little kids can be taught obedience but generally obedience is taught either as a kind of a patterned habit—almost non-rational—or it's taught under the under the rewards and punishment ethic. That's the way you get obedience here. But willing obedience is a very crucial piece that you have to have before you get over into here.

Before you can get from here into here, the crucial piece is a trust phenomenon. I really feel that the little song, Trust and Obey would have been a little bit more to the point if it had been somehow more poetically possible to say obey and trust. However, it just doesn't hold together as a song because the progression of development in moral judgment involves, first of all, coming to grips with obedience and then later coming to grips with deep trust. Now, by the way, people will show you that there is a kind of trust that exists down here. Sure. Interpersonal, relational trust of child to mother, for example. Surely. But we're talking about profound trust in the worthiness of the authority.

Let me give you a little quick illustration of this. If I had three ladders here. People replacing those light bulbs up here would probably have these grotesque ladders that look very scary. I have

three of them here and I have a guy at the top of each one. And I go down to this first ladder and I look up at the top and I say, “Jump!” And he looks down and he laughs and he says, “Not on your life, dummy!” I don’t have a whale of a lot of obedience there, right? And perhaps even a little less trust. In fact, that guy up there is deciding whether or not to respond to my request or demand simply in terms of what’s good for him.

I come to the second ladder and I say, “Jump!” This person says, “Do I have to?” I say, “Yes.” “Okay, if I have to. But notice it’s awful high and you’re not going to be able to catch me. One or the other or both of us is going to get hurt and it’s your responsibility, but here I come.” Does that sound familiar? A lot of people relate to God that way: a whole lot of obedience, but not a nickel’s worth of trust.

I go to the third ladder and I say to this person, I say, “Jump!” He looks down. He smiles and he may even scratch his head. And he says, “I don’t know that it makes an awful lot of sense, but you and I have been through an awful lot together and you’ve never let me down yet, so here I come.” See it? This comes out of not an obligation, not a concern for making sure the responsibility is fixed on me, but on a relationship that has become a trust relationship so that my word is not rule but my word is the matrix of a desire. Think about that: God’s Word as a matrix of desire. Moral behavior of Christians can come out of a third level in which God’s will is a moral matrix incorporating his principles into ourselves and living on them because of the richness of the experiences. But you know what? That’s not what the secular people talk about when they talk about this research. Instead, we find some other things among Christians and non-Christians and that’s probably the bottom-line of what it is we’re going to talk about today and that is what are some of the various educational implications that are being drawn from the current research and the attendant problems of each of these? And I’m going to identify four of them one at a time.

Values clarification is a strategy most particularly associated with one person whose name is Sidney Simon who was a student of a man by the name of Louis Rathes a German immigrant who came to the United States and had a number of students in the East who went on to greater things, including Sid Simon who has virtually taken this field over. Sid Simon is a thoroughgoing humanist in the secular sense of that word. And values clarification has taken some steam from the research. However, it tends to live apart from the research. So I put this one first simply because this one predates the contemporary research. This movement has been around about twenty years now. And the research that is really exciting and recall the current research is only about twelve years old, so the values clarification movement comes earlier. However, I find a lot of people in Christian education very mystified about what to do with values clarification. There are oodles of books about it. There’re even books out of Seabury and other religious presses—Abingdon and Cokesbury, and so forth—dealing with values clarification as it can be used in the church. You have to watch it because it tends to be very relativistic.

Secondly, it tends to be inadequately concerned with action. In a sense, it tends to be very Greek, as you would expect it. The notion clarification itself is kind of like the end result of good solid Greek education, so that we have clarified—we have elucidated ideas. But I find that not to be terribly close to the Hebrew model in which one does not really know until one is experiencing, one is doing.

There’s a great contrast in educational philosophy between Greek thought which, by the way, is the great matrix of the Christian liberal arts colleges. I don’t understand that. I’m going to

have to wait 'til eternity, I guess, to figure that one out—and, on the other hand, the Hebrew matrix of knowledge which has to do much more with what the Greeks call, with some degree of cynicism occasionally, praxis; that is the experience reflected upon the action thought about. A doing focus in education, a practical view of education, which is much closer to the Hebrew value of learning. We find values clarification, then, coming off very Greek in most uses. Furthermore, it's very prone to abuse by amateurs. And by their own definition, people who are into values clarification call anybody an amateur in the use of it unless they've been trained in the values clarification techniques themselves and for good reason. Namely, it is a kind of treatment of people that approaches amateur psychotherapy.

There are a number of people in the Christian education field who have taken the Kohlberg research particularly; and, by the way, Lawrence Kohlberg is the most renowned of the researchers in this particular field. These Christian education people have taken communication at level as the big meaning. In other words, if people are at a certain level of development, you better communicate at them right there with language that they will understand. Kohlberg points this out—that people tend not to hear messages that come at a different level. Yet I find that our Lord quite often—even just take an analysis of pieces of the Sermon on the Mount—take the Beatitudes and you'll find that he communicates in one message at several different levels. He does not seem to be preoccupied with communicating at level unless he's dealing on a one-to-one basis. There was one occasion where at night a young man came to him and said, "You know, I really got excited about some things. I have some problems I want to share with you." And Jesus says, "What are you into?" And he says, "I'm into law." Jesus says, "Fine, let's talk law." And so Jesus talks where people are, you know, what their wavelength is. In that sense, he communicates *at level*.

But to build a whole Christian education concept around the notion that the ideas that you're going to use are always carefully tuned to the developmental level of each kid is a little bit farfetched. First of all, it's very obvious that that's a heavy emphasis on content because all you're doing with the research literature is trying to find new ways to couch your messages of content so that they will slip through the gates. Well, some of us are of the opinion that we already have some pretty shrewd content methodologies. What we need are better structural development methodologies so, therefore, we're not terribly happy about that.

Secondly, it demands constant measurement. If you're really going to come through to people at level, you have to keep measuring to find out where they are because they might turn around and develop on you; so you have to keep measuring them. It's like, you know, the guy who's sick and you keep ramming the thermometer into him, make him sicker.

Third: this kind of communicating at level can be conceptually non-edifying. And again I noticed in the habits of our Lord that he tended not to be always talking, if you please, down to people at their level. But he talks sometimes in ways they couldn't even understand. The disciples warned him about that from time to time. They were very good consultants. And he said they'll get it. It will grow in their understanding and their understanding will grow to it, if you please.

And I'm very much afraid that if we develop all our Christian education in terms of somehow making sure that everything for the kiddies is a kiddies' sermon, and everything for Maude is exactly where Maude is, even if Maude is kind of hung up as a legalist, I'm afraid we're going to kid ourselves and we're going to ultimately do some non-edifying kinds of things. I'm not very

enthusiastic about that school of thought you may have gathered, though it has a lot of strong evangelicals writing in that vein right now.

The third kind of thing that's being done is a lot of emphasis on stage-changing as being the real business of moral development. You say well, what we want to do is get everybody to Level III as fast as possible. Well, those of us in developmental education, developmental psychology, tend to look at that and kind of shrug and say here we go again. It's very American to assume that the finest thing in the world would be for everybody to grow-up yesterday; for everybody to become instantly mature. Jean Piaget, the great Swiss psychologist, has come across the ocean several times—he doesn't like it over here—but he's come across several times and he always watches what American teachers do with kids, and he shakes his head and goes back to Switzerland. He says the only thing American teachers seem to be interested in is making adults out of kids. And if you really if you really come to grips with development, you know that childhood is beautiful. And God has created it to be explored. And the business of making people instantly higher than they otherwise would develop to be is hardly what you'd call a very sophisticated educational objective. It assumes too much importance for rapid structural growth. It puts too much of a premium on jamming people on up into a higher level of development. Look! Development is beautiful. It's part of what God created. Development is genetically in you. Some of the programs are stronger than others, but even moral development is in you. Let it work. God put it there. Clear the rubbish away and it'll grow. If more educators could take that view, we'd have a lot stronger Christian education. It's not a matter of ramming stuff into people. It's a matter of clearing away the underbrush so that people can grow; people can develop as God intended that they develop. Sure they need information. Sure they need correction. Sure they need help, but you don't have to make people out of them. God made them people. You may not know it, but that's the most profound thing I said today.

Another thing, it tends toward artificial change because kids are really shrewd. They soon catch on to the game. What he's trying to get us to do is to give him a different kind of response. So pretty soon kids will psyche out the program and they'll begin giving the higher form response but it won't mean much. You can teach children to give marvelous responses. In fact, kids are so clever that they can figure out what response—especially if you're not a well-trained educator or if you're a minister—they can figure out what you want. And they'll feed it to you, and you'll say, "Look at what's going on," and the kids are saying, "Look what's going on." That's called common ground, by the way.

The fourth of these four is what's called the just moral community. This one is extremely complex. To try to create an educational environment that, in fact, has any resemblance to a just moral community is very demanding. And they tend not to survive unless a strong common ground of values exist to begin with. It sounds an awful lot like the more utopian kinds of things that have been tried down through the years of Christendom. But would you believe that there are secular people trying to reconstruct schools and educational environments today and they're calling them just moral communities? And they put a lot of emphasis on resolving moral justice issues in that environment of learning and making that focus on the resolving of justice issues a learning growth. And you know what? It works. It works. One of the most dynamic things that stimulates human growth on that program we call the moral program is being in an environment where people are working on justice. But I've tried a couple of them in the secular environment and they don't work. They get tremendous effect, but then they fall apart. And they're very threatening to the status quo. They're very threatening to the status quo. And more often than not, they don't get off the ground because people within the community feel that they will be threatened and they will have to change.

And, indeed, they will. To build an educational environment that is a just community is a threat to the status quo of every one of us in that community. We all have to be willing to change.

What are the implications, then, of the moral judgment research? What does it suggest? It suggests things like this but as far as I'm concerned as a Christian, it suggests two major bottom-lines: first of all that we get very serious about development and recognize the structural dimensions of development; and secondly that we respect the community, that is, the people of God, the church, as a matrix in which the quest for justice can be the great stimulus for moral development among God's people.

Can we pray together.

Our Father, we pray that you will work these ideas and thoughts and information to our respective needs in such a way that we might be strengthened, encouraged, teased where necessary, to think more deeply, reflect more carefully, and take our responsibility with that kind of thoroughness that is a proper response of servants to the Lord we love, in whose name we pray.

Amen.