

FAITH TAKES A BACK SEAT

by Carl McMurray

The above was the title to an Indianapolis Star article giving some of the results of a survey taken by Peter Hart Research Association in Washington. It was a public opinion poll for the Shell Oil Company. The point of the article struck me pointedly. Consider the reported results and see if you notice what I did.

This national survey/article begins by pointing to its conclusion that a third of U.S. teenagers say religious faith is not very important. Six other values ranked higher with this group and in their order were...

1. Having lots of friends
2. Being honest
3. Being a great athlete
4. Working hard
5. Being a good student
6. Giving time to help others

I noted that the #1 value among this group is not surprising. A desire for popularity, being part of the "crowd," feeling strong peer pressure, etc. are things that most of us feel at some time or another and this age group is especially conscious of this as they go through a place in their life where they struggle to put their own identity together. Most young people will "try on" different identities to help them form their own. So again, we say we're not surprised here. God cautions us to be wise in choosing our companions because of this very trait of mankind. We tend to become like those we associate with to some degree, large or small. The apostle says to beware of evil companions while the "wise man" encourages us to associate with wise men if we desire to become that way ourselves.

#2 also is not surprising, again, because of the age group. Although being honest is going out of fashion it seems, in our country it is still looked up to as a noble trait and we are speaking of idealistic young people who perhaps have not yet traded in their integrity for shortcuts and "making deals."

#3 is not surprising in view of the idol worship we see encouraged on every side for athletes. Morals, character, attitude, sportsmanship, violence, and even criminal behavior are often ignored while the athlete is admired because of his skill and rewarded with money, homes, women, cars and other material treasures. I hope that as Christians we are struggling to put things in a different perspective of our young people.

Likewise, #4 and #5 are not unusual if they are tied in the minds of many of our youth to later rewards in good jobs, high incomes, and material pleasures. This is an area, like sports competition above, where good and valid principles of ambition and providing a living can become twisted by covetousness and greed.

#6 is the one item that seemed to change the tenor of the list. I'm pleased to see it there and I suppose my only response would be to say to this group, "Watch out. You're getting close. Faith and real spirituality are next on the list." Although it's great that they thought of this, I'm only saddened by the fact that having a servant's heart was overshadowed by personal popularity, fame and fortune, personal achievement and reward. In other words – the summation of this list is that I think it's important to help others, but not until I've taken good care of self.

But, none of the above was the real surprise to me. How about you? The real surprise to me was that such an emphasis (i.e. "Faith Takes a Back Seat") was addressed at all! If you look at the other side of the coin, *two-thirds* of teenagers PUT FAITH IN THE FRONT SEAT! Before personal gain, before personal reward, before popularity, two-thirds of teens surveyed said their most important value was their faith in God.

Two-thirds is usually considered a pretty fair amount in most surveys. In almost any survey divided into 66% and 33%, the emphasis would be on the larger group of people. Why is the focus here on just the bottom one-third? This article says less about teens and more about the "press" than I suspect they realize. I don't hold out much hope for the liberal, ungodly, humanistic thinkers that run our society. But, with every generation of idealistic, noble-minded young people my faith is renewed that God still does His work in spite of the "press" and we need to be careful about who and what we let influence our thinking.

Elijah also thought he was a minority, the only one left that was serving God, and God reminded him that there were still 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Faith takes a back seat? I don't think so.