

THE END TIMES

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“...giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:5-8

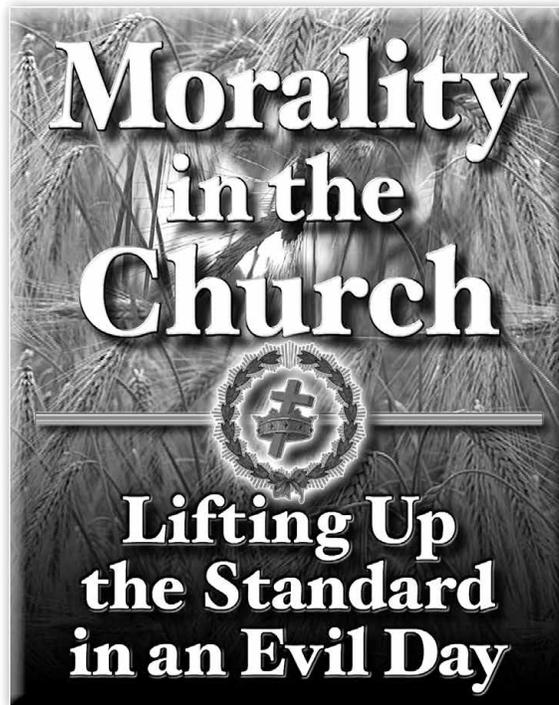
End time prophecy indicates that at the time of the Lord’s second advent, activities among men would be much like that of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Genesis 18:20-19:28) The Apostle Paul stated of our time: *“in the last days... men will be lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God...”* (See 2 Timothy 3:1-7) Knowing that the times in which we live would bring great pressure upon Christians to be influenced by worldly thinking, the Apostle Peter admonished Christians, *“Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved [this present evil world] what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”* 2 Peter 3:11

As we see that this present social structure is being dissolved, it is timely for Christians to *reset* their moral clocks, so to speak, in order to evaluate whether they have allowed the moral standards of the world to be their guide, or whether they have continued in the only safe path of righteousness—that which is laid out in the Word of God. *“...seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.”* Zephaniah 2:3

MORAL RELATIVISM

We live in an era when moral standards are not absolute but are subject to change, depending on the popular culture of the time. This *moral relativism* presents a great challenge for Christians to sort out what is truly virtuous. Unfortunately, in an effort to be *progressive*, some church views on morality have been negatively influenced by the world’s distorted notions of righteous behavior. The media has brought to this generation the thought of being *politically correct*, and in an effort to reach out to everyone, it is not uncommon for some of today’s churches to adopt this philosophy and condone all manner of worldly practices such as drunkenness, gambling, unwed couples living together, abortions, adultery and even homosexuality.

It is claimed by these Christians that *God is love*, and so, He must love everyone, whatever the life-style of choice, as long as it is socially acceptable. Yes, *God is love*, but because He loves, He also sets down righteous laws to live by, so that



His creation might live in health and harmony with one another. To think otherwise is to ignore the Scriptures which teach that the Christian is to *“abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”* In fact, the Christian should not only obey the moral standards of God’s Word, but in addition, he should not even give the *appearance of evil*. 1 Peter 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:22

Yes, God has set before us *moral absolutes* which are rooted in His desire that all of His creation would some day conform to His sacred likeness. God created Adam in His likeness and image, and when Adam chose to live contrary to this, death and depravity was the penalty exacted upon him and his posterity. Although all have inherited imperfection, they have

also inherited the ability to worship and reason. Reason teaches that to live in health and harmony, there must be certain moral codes to live by—for the Christian, these moral principles are spelled out in the Scriptures.

WHO BEARS RESPONSIBILITY?

Although the shepherds of the flock are greatly responsible for exhibiting high moral standards in the church, it is ultimately the responsibility of each individual Christian to see to it that he lives in harmony with the standards set forth in the Bible to the best of his ability. Those who have trusted in other standards of morality, such as that professed by church groups or religious teachers, have often been sorely disappointed by the hypocrisy they have witnessed—the failure to *practice what is preached*.

A case in point is evident in the many scandals that have rocked the world’s churches in the past few decades, and the degree of depravity is truly appalling. Until being revealed in 2002, the Roman Catholic Church had *kept hidden* the devastating problem of sexual predators among its priesthood to avert a scandal and preserve its own interests. According to a study by researchers from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, approximately 4,400 priests and deacons abused more than 11,000 minors from 1950 to 2002—

and this is only recent history where credible allegations can be documented by actual victims. Those who put their trust in the Catholic system have surely had their faith shaken by such hypocrisy. Although this case is extreme, it points out the importance of not trusting in earthly organizations, but looking only to the pure example of Christ.

It is the responsibility of each Christian to *work out his own salvation*. (Philippians 2:12) One should seek to learn what God's perspective is on morality through His holy Word, leave the company of those who practice moral depravity, and then seek the company of those who exhibit a higher Christian standard.

"IF YE DO THESE THINGS, YE SHALL NEVER FALL"
2 Peter 1:10

The world may choose any life-style desired, but, if one has given his life to the Lord in full consecration, he has stated that he desires to live a godly life. Our theme text gives the formula for living a godly life, however, the Christian must also use spiritual common sense. For example, there is no passage in the Bible which states definitively that a Christian should not smoke. But, if the Christian has given over his will to an addiction, then he has not given his will completely to God. *"All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."* (1 Corinthians 6:12) Thus, where there is no direct command, the child of God will *make earnest strides* to live in conformity to the *principles* of righteousness set forth in the Bible that he might glorify God: *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body..."* See 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 and Romans 6:4-18

In our theme text, the Apostle Peter sets forth guidelines from which to make spiritually healthy choices and mature decisions as Christians.

"...giving all diligence..."

The first admonition of Peter is to be diligent about this endeavor to develop in Christian character. The Apostle Paul stated it even more forcefully, *"I buffet my body and make it my slave..."* (1 Corinthians 9:27 NAS) He also stated that *"the flesh sets its desire against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh."* (See Galatians 5:16-21) Character development does not come easy, and it is a process of diligent study, experience and prayer—applying the knowledge we learn from the Scriptures to the experiences the Lord permits in our lives to refine and crystallize our New Creatures in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17

"...add to your faith virtue..."

Having declared that it takes diligence, one is to add to his faith—not just a blind faith nor one that has been built upon error—but, as it indicates in the Greek, faith is being fully persuaded in a *system of Gospel truth*. (See Strongs Concordance #G4102) Hence, it is of paramount importance that one *study to know the doctrine*, otherwise, one might be building a character upon an unstable foundation that is lame and weak. See 1 Corinthians 3:11-19



Then, we are to add to that solid faith virtue, or as translated in the New American Standard, *"moral excellence."* There is only one pattern from which to get a clear understanding of virtue, and that is from the only man who lived a life *"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"*—the man Christ Jesus. (Hebrews 7:26) Like our Master, we should strive to live to a higher moral standard than the world in our conduct, our dress, our speech and even our thoughts. And, where we fail, we must remember that we have an advocate who covers our unintentional weaknesses and thus, go quickly in prayer for forgiveness.

"...add to virtue knowledge..."

The Apostle Paul warned of a zeal for God that is not based upon the proper knowledge of God and His plans. Speaking from his personal experience before conversion, Paul truly thought he was doing God's service when he zealously persecuted Christians. (Acts 26:9-15) From wisdom gained through experience, Paul

made the following observation of misguided zeal: *"...I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* (Romans 10:2, 3) Therefore, it is important to study God's plans so that we do not, in our immaturity or ignorance, work against God's will, or worse, like Judas, become rebellious.

Jesus prayed to his Father on behalf of his Church: *"Sanctify them by thy truth: Thy Word is truth."* (John 17:17) Being sanctified is to be set apart from the world for God's service. God has provided ample knowledge of His

character, plans and purposes in His Word, but it takes effort on our part to come to an *accurate knowledge of the truth*. 2 Timothy 2:15

"...add to knowledge self-control..."

The Bible sets before the Christian limits or boundaries to hold in check the natural fallen tendencies of his flesh. God set boundaries upon the first man and woman to keep them pure and to sustain their lives in a perfect environment. He told them to eat of any of the good trees of the Garden, but of one particular tree, He warned them not to eat or they would die. This test of obedience seems simple to us now, for we have over 6,000 years of experience with the knowledge of good and evil. But to Adam and Eve, the test was a matter of inexperience with the bitter consequences of sin. They believed God, but they had not learned to trust Him and His codes of conduct to keep them safe.

Self-control will mean making *"straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame [easily tempted] be turned out of the way."* (Hebrews 12:13) As we mature in our Christian walk, we should be keenly aware of our weak spots, and we should ask for God's help in avoiding those influences which we know to be evil. Then, it is our responsibility as Christians to *watch* and continue to *"pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* See Matthew 6:13; 26:41

"...add to self-control perseverance..."

Perseverance is the ability to patiently endure under trial, temptation and pressures from without and within. The Apostle

Paul says that the experiences which test our patience are for our good: *“Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”* (Hebrews 12:11) James confirms this thought: *“...the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”* (James 1:2-4) If we resist God’s workmanship in us, we shall never be complete and mature as *New Creatures in Christ*. Refer to Ephesians 4:11-14

“...add to perseverance godliness...”

As we gain knowledge, we gain strength of faith and it becomes easier to be virtuous. We also find it more advantageous to exercise self-control and patience. Replacing immoral thoughts and behaviors with virtuous thoughts and practices, we will find ourselves growing more and more godlike—adding one character attribute upon the other. For those who have given their hearts to Him, God is developing a New Creature to reflect His four Divine attributes of

Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power:

Justice is the foundation of God’s throne, and therefore, if we are to be godlike, we should have a keen sense of justice.

Wisdom is a crown jewel of Christian character. Like a gem, it forms under the pressure and heat of experience combined with knowledge. See Proverbs 2:1-12

Love, God’s love, is beyond human comprehension, but is manifest in the giving of His Son to die upon the cross for us *while we were yet sinners*. (Romans 5:8) God’s love is balanced with justice and mercy. He must be just, and so He does exact the penalty for sin, which is death, but, by His nature He must also be loving, and so, His mercy has provided a way of escape from eternal death. (1 Timothy 2:3-6) If we have the love that is godlike, we will be merciful, long-suffering and kind—exercising the full standard of the *Golden Rule*.

Power is not of ourselves, but if we have given ourselves fully to God, then this power is granted by His holy Spirit working in us to perform His will. Like Jesus, we do not use God’s power selfishly or to show that we are one of His favorites. No, we ask for God’s spirit to use us as instruments to glorify His character and plans. *“So also Christ glorified not himself...”* Hebrews 5:5

“...add to godliness brotherly kindness...”

The Christian should be the most kindhearted and gentle toward all, but in particular toward his brethren in Christ. *“As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10) It is a kindness to our brethren that we strive to be an example of God’s righteousness in our lives. *“Be ye an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”* 1 Timothy 4:12

Jesus encouraged his disciples to take brotherly kindness a step further, stating, *“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:13) The Apostle John stated that Jesus laid down his life for us, and, therefore, *“we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren...”* See 1 John 3:14-18

“...add to brotherly kindness love...”

The greatest of all the commandments is love. Jesus said that upon this—the love of God and the love of thy neighbor as thyself—hangs the whole Law. (Matthew 22:37-40) Love, long suffering and kind, envies not and does not boast, does not behave in a crude manner, nor is it bigoted. Love does not hold a grudge, nor does it rejoice in wrong doing, but rejoices in righteousness and truth. Love covers the sins of others and believes in the good of others. See 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

GO AND SIN NO MORE

When a consecrated child of God has learned what it means to live a virtuous life and finds that he has not lived up to the perfect standard, it is comforting to recall what Jesus said to the man who had been cleansed from sin—go and *“sin no more.”* (John 5:14) Rather than belaboring the fallen state in which we

find ourselves, it is important to recognize a sin for what it is, and then to thank the Lord for opening our eyes to it. Using the lessons learned from our experience in the failure of our flesh, we have an opportunity to grow in knowledge and grace.

It is impossible for the fallen flesh to walk perfectly, and so we must keep in mind the Scripture that states *“a just man falleth seven times and riseth up again.”* (Proverbs 24:16) Those who have accepted Christ as their redeemer and who have given their wills to God are invited to go *“boldly before the throne of grace,”* and by the strength of the Lord, go and *“sin no more.”* Hebrews 4:16

God will forgive our sins through the merit of His Son if we come to him in humility and sincerity of heart. He that seeks to put away the deeds of the flesh to the best of his ability and who trusts in the redeemer’s merit to compensate for unintentional shortcomings is counted as righteous in God’s sight. (See Galatians 6:8 and 2 Corinthians 7:1) How merciful is our God who accepts the *perfect heart intentions* of the truly consecrated, instead of the absolute perfection of the flesh. Yes, so far as our flesh is concerned we cannot walk up to the Spirit’s requirements, but our minds can walk according to the Spirit. What our Heavenly Father seeks in us is perfection of intention—as perfect control of our flesh as possible, by His grace.

God’s children have been given the responsibility and great privilege of being ambassadors of His Kingdom. (2 Corinthians 5:20) We are to be *“blameless, the Sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world...”* (Philippians 2:15) Now is not the time for this world in general to learn righteousness. At this time, God is refining only those who willingly put their lives in His hands. *In due time*—when the Church is glorified, having been proven faithful under the trying circumstances of this present evil world—the remainder of mankind will have their opportunity to learn righteousness under the direction of Christ and *his Church*. With Satan bound, the inhabitants of the world will walk up *the highway of holiness* to perfection. Isaiah 26:9; 35:8-10; 1 Corinthians 6:2 and Revelation 20:2, 3



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