

GOD'S HOLY STANDARDS vs. MORAL RELATIVISM CHOOSING THE RIGHT MORAL COMPASS

"...in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves... unholy... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness... led away with divers lusts..." — 2 Timothy 3:1-6

We live in an era when "...every man is doing what is right in his own eyes..." (Proverbs 12:15) This basically defines *moral relativism* — moral standards which are not *absolute*, but are subject to change, depending on the popular culture of the time. This shifting world view of morality presents a great challenge for Christians to sort out what is *truly virtuous*.

The Apostle Peter counseled: "*Seeing that all these things [this present evil world] shall be dissolved what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?*" (2 Peter 3:11) As we see that this *present evil world* is being dissolved, it is timely for Christians to evaluate whether they have allowed the standards of the world to guide their path, or whether they have continued in the safe path of righteousness guided by the only true moral compass — 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

BIBLE STANDARDS vs. POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Today's culture emphasizes *political correctness*. It is no longer socially acceptable to criticize unrighteous behavior. Instead, the popular message of our day is: "*Be true to yourself.*" This provides a *green light* to live up to whatever standard *feels right*. Sadly, this *feeling* is often thoroughly ill-advised by misguided advisors. A standard of righteousness with no *true* moral compass is likened in the Scriptures to "*filthy rags.*" Isaiah 64:6

In the effort to be progressive, many church denominations have conformed to the world's distorted notions of righteous behavior. These churches not only condone, but even invite and applaud behavior which is strictly forbidden under the moral code of conduct set forth in the Bible. Thus, in an effort to reach out to everyone, they adopt this unscriptural reasoning and turn a blind eye to all manner of worldly practices such as drunkenness, political bullying, gambling, unwed couples living together, abortions, adultery as well as homosexuality and transgenderism.

A recent example of *moral relativism* permeating the media is the gender reassignment of an internationally famous individual. God forbade such behavior under the Law: "*A woman shall not*



wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing... these things [are] an abomination to the LORD..." Deuteronomy 22:5 NAS

Gender reassignment is even recognized as unhealthy by several in the field of psychiatry. Dr. Paul McHugh, the well respected former chair of the Department of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, cites a recent study revealing that the suicide rate among individuals who had gender reassignment surgery is 20 times higher than the suicide rate among non-transgenders. The Wall Street Journal, "Transgender Surgery Isn't the Solution," June 12, 2014.

GOD'S LOVE REVEALED IN HIS MORAL CODE

Recent advertising by one church denomination invites individuals to "*Come as you are — we will not judge.*" The claim is that, because *God is love*, He must love everyone, whatever their life-choice, as long as it is socially acceptable and *not hurting anyone*. 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. Therefore, even though we *come* as we are to Jehovah, He does not want us to *stay* as we are. James counsels: "*Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands... purify your hearts...*" (James 4:8) And the Apostle Paul confirms this saying, "... *be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*" Romans 12:1, 2

God's Word sets before us moral absolutes. We are admonished 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 be careful that he does not even give *the appearance of evil*. (1 Peter 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:22) Therefore, if we are to be advocates of God's Word, our love for others will include teaching what is right and wrong in the eyes of our Creator. "*Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are vain...*" (Jeremiah 10:2, 3) "...*walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind... being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...*" Ephesians 4:17-19

WHO BEARS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MORAL EROSION?

Although the news and entertainment industries bear much responsibility for normalizing what God calls reprehensible acts, we must remember that the world is not claiming to be led by biblical standards. But Christians are to be *lights in the world*, holding up the standard of biblical principles. (Philippians 2:15) Those who have trusted in other standards of morality, such as that professed by misguided church groups or religious teachers, have often been sorely disappointed by the hypocrisy they have witnessed — a failure to *practice what is preached*. (Matthew 5:14) When careless living is not challenged by the truth of God's righteous laws of conduct, hypocrisy becomes the standard.

A case in point is evident in the many scandals that have rocked the world's churches in the past few decades. Until brought to light in 2002, the Roman Catholic Church, in an effort to avert a scandal, *kept hidden* the appalling problem of sexual predators among its priesthood. 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 brave enough to come forth. Such immoral actions on the part of *professed* shepherds of the flock have shaken the faith of their congregations to the core. Although this case is extreme, it points out the importance of not trusting any organization's viewpoints or practices without *proving all things and holding fast to that which is good*. — 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Although the shepherds of the flock are greatly responsible for teaching and exhibiting high moral standards in the church, ultimately, however, it is the responsibility of each individual Christian to live in harmony with the standards set forth in the Bible to the best of their ability. It is the duty of each Christian to seek to learn what Jehovah's perspective is on morality through His Word, leave the company of those who practice moral depravity, and seek the company of those who exhibit a higher Christian standard. "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*" Philippians 2:12

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

The world may choose any life-choice desired, but if one has given his life to God in full consecration, this Christian has stated a desire to live a godly life. For example, there is no passage in the Bible which states definitively that a Christian should not smoke. But, if a Christian has given over his will to any harmful habit or addiction, then, through prayer and persistency, every effort should be made to overcome. "*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, and thereby 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

With this goal in mind, the Apostle Peter set forth guidelines from which to make spiritually healthy life choices and mature decisions as Christians: "...*giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance patience [perseverance]; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity [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

"...giving all diligence..."

Peter's first admonition is to be *diligent* about this endeavor to develop in moral character as a New Creature in Christ. The Apostle Paul stated it even more forcefully, "*I discipline 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 easily, and it is a process of *diligent* study along with prayer — applying the knowledge we learn from the Scriptures along with the experiences the Lord permits in our lives to refine our character and become more Christlike. Romans 12:2; 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, a stable faith, being fully persuaded in a *system of Gospel truth*. (See *Strong's Concordance*: G4102)

Hence, it is of paramount importance that one *study to know the doctrines*, otherwise, one might be building a character upon an unstable foundation that will make one lame and weak. See 1 Timothy 1:10; 4:16; 1 Corinthians 3:11-19

We are then 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 that of the world in our conduct, our dress, our speech and even our thoughts.

And, when we fail, we must remember that we have an advocate who covers our unintentional weaknesses and, thus, go quickly in prayer for forgiveness and guidance. 1 John 2:1, 2

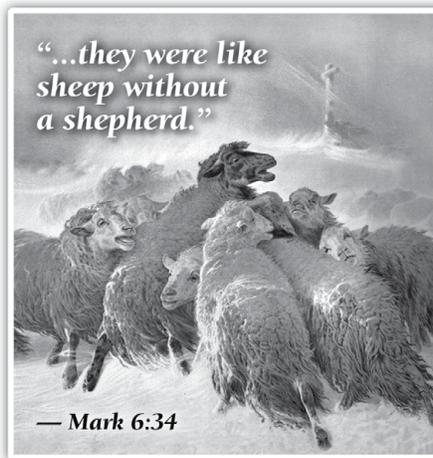
"...add to virtue knowledge..."

The Apostle Paul warned of a zeal for God that is not based upon the proper knowledge of Jehovah and His plans. 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 Word 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. Jehovah 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 temperance [self-control]..."

The Bible sets before the Christian boundaries to hold in check the natural fallen tendencies of the flesh. God set boundaries upon the first man and woman to keep them pure and to sustain their lives in a perfect environment; He warned them not to eat of one particular tree 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 means making *“straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.”* (Hebrews 12:13) As we mature in our Christian walk, we should be keenly aware of our weaknesses, and we should ask for God’s help in avoiding those influences which we know to be evil. *“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise...”* (Ephesians 5:15 NAS) It is our responsibility, as Christians, to *“watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Matthew 6:13; 26:41

Hear the prayer of King David: *“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright...”* David knew from experience not to trust in his own righteousness. Psalm 19:12, 13

“...add to temperance patience [perseverance]...”

Perseverance is the ability to *patiently* endure under trial, temptation and pressures from without and within. The Apostle Paul stated that the experiences that test our patience are for our good: *“Now, no chastening [discipline] 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 confirmed 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 patience godliness...”

As we gain knowledge, we gain strength of faith and it becomes less challenging to be virtuous. We also find it more advantageous to exercise self-control and patience. As we replace our immoral thoughts and behaviors with virtuous thoughts and practices, we find ourselves growing more and more like God’s dear Son — adding one character attribute upon the other.

Jehovah is developing in every Christian a character which reflects 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 like God, 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. (Proverbs 2:1-12) God’s **Love** 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 *loving mercy* has provided a way of escape from eternal death. (1 Timothy 2:3-6) If we have the love that is like God’s love, we will be merciful, long-suffering and kind—exercising the full standard of the *Golden Rule*. God’s **Power** is granted by His holy Spirit working in us to perform His will. Like Jesus, we do not use God’s *power* selfishly nor 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 kind-hearted 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

In the current climate of political wrangling, the media takes delight in promoting *mud slinging* among political candidates. Unfortunately, these *professed* Christian men and women find it necessary to evil speak for the sake of winning votes. But the Scriptures admonish Christians to *“speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.”* (Titus 3:2) In the eyes of God, slander is a serious offense. (Matthew 5:22) Again, our examples should be that of Jesus and the Apostles, not the examples set forth to us in the media.

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

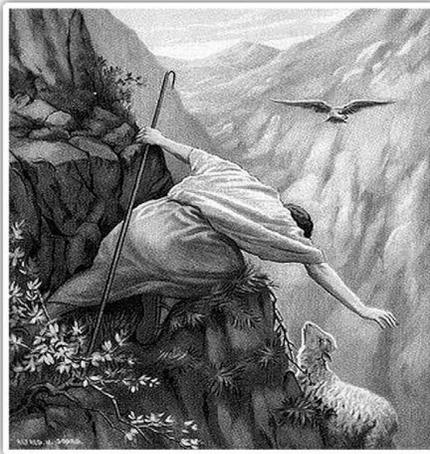
The greatest of all the commandments is *love*. Jesus said that upon this — loving God and your neighbor as yourself — *hangs the whole Law* of God. (Matthew 22:37-40) 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 describes love as long-suffering and kind, is not envious and does not boast, does not behave in a crude manner, 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.

GO AND SIN NO MORE

When a consecrated child of God has learned what it means to live a truly virtuous life, rather than dwelling on how far away from righteousness he has strayed, 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) It is important to recognize sin for what it is, thank the Lord for opening our eyes to it, repent and then turn away from sin. Using the lessons learned from our experiences in the failure of our flesh, we see opportunities to grow in knowledge and grace.

How merciful is our God who accepts the *perfect heart intentions* of the truly consecrated, instead of the absolute perfection of our flesh. It is impossible for the fallen flesh to walk perfectly, and so we must keep in mind the Scripture: *“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,”* asking for strength to go forward *and sin no more*. Hebrews 4:16; Galatians 6:8 and 2 Corinthians 7:1

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 and harmless, 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 into 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 faithful Church*. (Galatians 1:4) Then, inhabitants of the world will walk up *the highway of holiness* to perfection — learning and living righteousness. Isaiah 26:9; 35:8-10; 1 Corinthians 6:2 and Revelation 20:2, 3



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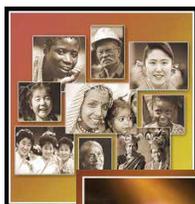
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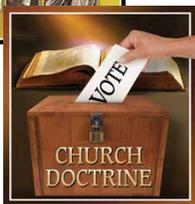
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