

**1 PETER 1:13-25**  
**AGAINST THE TIDE**  
**(PUSHING BACK AGAINST THE MORAL CLIMATE)**

“Preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God; for

‘All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the Word of the Lord remains forever.’

And this Word is the Good News that was preached to you.”<sup>1</sup>

As he was leaving office, the well-known Governor of a western state was exposed as having sired a child with a housekeeper ten years previously. The exposure would ultimately lead to divorce from his wife of many years and a court battle over custody of their minor children. A Senator from another western state was exposed for having an affair with a staffer; then he was accused of using campaign funds in a futile attempt to keep the matter from coming to light. A man who ran as a Vice Presidential candidate and then vied for the nomination of his party to run for President of the United States was accused of using campaign funds to cover up an affair with a videographer. He conducted the affair even while his wife was battling terminal cancer. Ultimately, his actions would lead to an indictment by a grand jury and a sensational trial. A powerful Congressman was exposed for sending lewd photos to multiple young women who admired his aggressive opposition to more conservative politicians and their policies. Yet another Congressman was forced to resign because he sexually assaulted the teenage daughter of a campaign worker. All these events were being sensationally reported within a relatively short period. By no means do these particular stories exhaust the news accounts of moral or ethical failure by politicians. Nor should Canadians feel smug about moral turpitude within the political class of the United States; we have our own sordid stories.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Among the churches of North America, the incidence of moral and ethical failure appears to be as bad—if not worse—than the incidence of such ruinous actions among the powerful and the elite of the nation. Throughout the past several decades, there have been so many accounts of pastoral fraud and moral declension in the pulpit that we are no longer shocked at the announcement of a new scandal by pastors or priests.

While there have always been accounts of individuals who lived as though they need not give an accounting for their actions, one must wonder if this generation is any longer capable of making wise moral or ethical choices. Paragons of morality cluck their tongues at the failure of their opponents and do nothing to clean-up their own lives. What has happened?

I suggest two major contributors to this insidious problem. First, Society as a whole has embraced relativism, abandoning truth and moral certitude. Modern culture has bought into the myth that life is all about us—about fulfilling our desires. Encouraged by educators and the political elite, we have placed “self” at the centre of our existence, dulling conscience and dethroning God. We have abandoned the understanding of right and wrong that once served as the foundation of Western ethics. This situation didn’t just happen; it was the inevitable consequences of a failure of the pulpit in these contemporary times. Let me explain.

Whereas there was a time when preachers would point to the Word of God, holding to the accuracy and the authority of what is written therein, it seems as if many have exchanged the truth of God for the futile imaginations of mortal minds. Contemporary preachers appear more concerned about having a job than they are about pleasing God. I remember an old preacher declaring that the preacher whose little message was “Repent,” had better pledge his head toward heaven. Whereas brashness is abundantly evident in the modern pulpit, boldness is a rare commodity. Adherence to the Word of God as truth is witnessed infrequently today; when it is discovered, we know that the brave preacher stands almost alone against the temper of the times.

**WE CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO PREPARE MENTALLY FOR ACTION.** We are responsible to prepare for war. It is certain that we will be engaged in combat! This is not war as the world wages war; it is spiritual warfare fought with spiritual weapons as outlined by the Apostle. “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6].

We recall also the words the Apostle has written in the encyclical we know as the Letter to the Ephesians. “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel” [EPHESIANS 6:10-19].

The Christian is engaged in protracted, vicious war. Initiated by a surprise attack on our first mother, the war began soon after the creation and has continued unabated to this day. The enemy is cunning and powerful; many fine citizens of Heaven have fallen on the fields of battle. The moment you become a Christian, you are thrust into the conflict. There is an ongoing assault against the child of God as the enemy endeavours to best the follower of Christ, taking him captive and rendering him ineffective. The great tragedy is that many of those individuals who assault the position of the faithful are not conscious of their own motivation. In fact, many would argue that they are doing what they believe is best for humanity. Though they witness the grief that arises out of opposition to righteousness, and though they are genuinely concerned at the instability marking unregenerate society, they are unwilling to insist on a return to godliness.

Let me address this matter more pointedly so that no one can suggest that my speech is somehow obscure. Teens and young adults face a daunting situation. This is not to say that older adults do not face similar challenges, but it is to acknowledge that the challenges commence early in life. Listen to the experts! Ninety percent of children—underscore this number in your mind—ninety percent of children will have viewed online pornography by age sixteen! Now get this! The typical teenage boy spends nearly two hours each week intentionally looking for pornography! I won't embarrass anyone by asking if such pornographic materials have been cached on your hard drive. I can assure you that without seeking it out, we will encounter such evil on a regular basis.

However, don't imagine that the Internet is the only danger zone for those endeavouring to be godly. A sex scene appears on television every nine minutes! Stop to think of the network and cable shows that you have watched in the past week, asking how frequently suggestive scenes have been presented for your entertainment. Does it surprise you if I tell you that one in three teenage boys admits to having nude pictures sent to them on their phones!<sup>2</sup>

The consequences are about what any sane person might predict. The majority of high school students have sexual intercourse by graduation, and almost eighty percent of male high school students say they feel pressured by society to find a girl who is willing to have sex. Thus, one in four young people will have contracted a sexually-transmitted infection before turning twenty, and one-third of girls will become pregnant in that same time frame. Forty-one percent of all births are outside of marriage; and in some communities, the percentage of pregnancies out of wedlock exceeds seventy percent! Christian youth are not immune to this assault on purity; they are ill-equipped to engage the enemy in this battle for purity and righteousness.

I haven't even addressed such issues as the saturation of our culture with violence. Though the high priests of contemporary culture—psychologists, sociologists and community organizers—assure us that viewing violent acts have no impact on us as individuals, we are witnessing several generations that treat violence as though it were a video game. Children seem unable to understand that stomping on the head can result in death, and apologists for the cult of youth hesitate to hold anyone under the age of eighteen accountable for his or her actions. Nevertheless, we are assured that when these youth turn eighteen, they will magically mature and realise the gravity of their actions. How many violent acts do we witness on a daily basis just entertaining ourselves? Whether we are watching a television drama, attending a movie or playing an online game, violence seems mandatory. By the time a child is six or seven, she will have witnessed multiple murders, countless assaults and numerous sexual assaults just through what is called entertainment! And this is supposed to have no effect on their maturation!

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<sup>2</sup> Cited by John Stonestreet, "Pliable's Slough," Breakpoint, <http://www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/19918>, accessed 26 July 2012

Early believers were distinguished for their opposition to the violence of the games! It is well documented that “Christians were tortured during the violence of the *Ludi Circenses* (circus games) by gladiators or wild animals. Tacitus wrote that ‘the Christians ... were dressed in the skins of wild beasts, and exposed to be torn to pieces by dogs in the public games ... they were crucified, or condemned to be burnt; and at nightfall served in place of lamps to lighten the darkness, Nero’s own gardens being used for the spectacle.’ Augustine wrote against its lure, speaking of how he lost his friend Alypius, who was drawn to the blood lust of the games of the gladiators. Christians had seen their friends martyred for the pleasure of the public shows while other people were lost to its lusts. Paul wrote in **1 CORINTHIANS 4:9** that ‘God has exhibited us Apostles at the very end of the procession [Goodspeed] ... like doomed gladiators in the arena! [Moffatt] ... to be gazed at in a theater by the whole world, both men and angels’ [Conybeare].”<sup>3</sup>

Language is degenerating at a breath-taking clip. Our culture admires the cutting retort, the quick put-down; even if we don’t resort to cursing and swearing, we delight in ridiculing one another as though such retorts demonstrate prowess or virility. Modern comedy is dependent upon either the use of bodily functions normally performed out of sight of others or through mindless debasement of an individual through ridicule and slander. Consequently, our inability to express ourselves adequately is witnessed even within the congregation of the righteous.

Our spiritual forebears were distinguished by their speech, which was holy and pure in contradistinction to the culture about them. The influence of Christians on speech persisted for centuries among English speaking nations, ensuring decency in speech long after Christendom was influential in morals and ethics. There was a time when we who name the Name of Christ took seriously the admonition of the Apostle given in **EPHESIANS 5:4-21**. “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Webber, **vol. 4, Music and the Arts in Christian Worship**, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Star Song Publishing Group, Nashville, TN 1994) 778

Christian speech should be marked by expressions of gratitude, joyful singing and respect for each other; Christian speech should not be characterised by the dark associations of this fallen world. I admit that earlier generations may have been extreme in some of their language prohibitions; nevertheless, I must believe that their caution was more praiseworthy than is the excesses that mark contemporary language. When people working as professionals, supposedly trained to communicate, are incapable of doing so without resorting to language that would have been eschewed by even drill instructors at Quantico, there is a serious problem.

I'm about to quit preaching and go to meddling. Much of modern Christianity is influenced negatively by Hollywood. We assume a worldview that is dictated by Hollywood. It isn't just the violence and the ubiquitous sexuality, but the underlying dissolution of speech that is foisted upon an incautious society. Regardless of real life, Hollywood is determined to introduce degraded language into the mix. Lifeway Stores recently removed DVDs of the movie, "The Blindside" from its shelves. The reason was the incorporation of "street language" (profanity) and degrading racial references.<sup>4</sup>

However, as one Hollywood producer has noted, "I watched 'The Blindside' when it first hit theaters and though generally unimpressed with the film, was nonetheless pleased that such a nice story was getting so much attention. I certainly don't remember any bad words, but then again, maybe I'm getting used to it. I work in Hollywood after all."<sup>5</sup> Mark Joseph continues by noting that writers commonly spice up the language, even if such language was not used in the original communication. For instance, he writes, "As I point out in my book, 'The Lion, The Professor & the Movies: Narnia's Journey To The Big Screen,' early drafts of the screenplay for the first Narnia film included numerous profanities uttered by the children, inserted by writers who somehow thought that adding words that rhymed with "luck" and "bit" would somehow enhance this children's classic."<sup>6</sup>

Eric Metaxas provides another disturbing example of such "creativity." He writes of Hollywood's portrayal of Bob Muzikowski, a personal friend. "Bob runs a Christian high school in inner-city Chicago, and Hollywood based the movie 'Hardball' on his life. Bob is a strong believer, and he started an inner-city baseball league in New York (and Chicago). In the movie, all the little African-American kids are cursing like sailors. But Bob told me that those kids never *ever* cursed in real life."<sup>7</sup>

Swearing, cursing and generally degrading language have become so commonplace in our entertainment that we are unaware when we are listening! How often have I heard some individual say, "This is a great movie; and there are only a few bad words in it." What would the Master say about such comments? What would the early saints say about such rationalisation? How should we respond when someone comes into our living room and swears at us?

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Marrapodi, "'The Blind Side' pulled from LifeWay Bookstores," July 20, 2012, ChristianCinema.com, [http://www.christiancinema.com/catalog/newsdesk\\_info.php?newsdesk\\_id=2094](http://www.christiancinema.com/catalog/newsdesk_info.php?newsdesk_id=2094), accessed 1 August 1, 2012; Elena Garcia, "Christians Upset Over LifeWay's Removal of 'The Blind Side,'" July 7, 2012, CP Entertainment, <http://global.christianpost.com/news/christians-upset-over-lifeways-removal-of-the-blind-side-77806/>, accessed 1 August 2012; "'The Blind Side' too hot for Christian bookstore," July 19, 2012, <http://www.wapt.com/news/national/-The-Blind-Side-too-hot-for-Christian-bookstore/-/9157010/15604512/-/item/2/-/14nj2yy/-/index.html>, accessed 1 August 2012

<sup>5</sup> Mark Joseph, "Hollywood's Blind Side," Huff Post Entertainment, 07/27/2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-joseph/lifeway-the-blind-side\\_b\\_1708695.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-joseph/lifeway-the-blind-side_b_1708695.html), accessed 1 August 2012

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Metaxas, "Another Side to the Story," Breakpoint, <http://www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/19970>, accessed 1 August 2012

I am quite aware that I have focused on three particular issues at some length—speech, violence and perverted sexuality; and perhaps you are wearied by that focus. However, the point is vital if there is any hope that Christians can effectively push back against the moral climate. We are appointed to be distinct from this fallen world. Though we Christians are in the world, we are not to be of the world. We are ambassadors of Heaven, appointed to represent the True and Living God in the midst of this dying age. We are to reveal His grace.

**WE CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO FOCUS ON THAT WHICH IS COMING SOON.** “Being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Believers must be totally attuned to God’s view of history. Let me rephrase that! Believers must train themselves to see God at work in history, aligning themselves with His work as He directs world events to the divine culmination. We are not to permit ourselves to become so attuned to this dying world that we forget that for which we are destined.

One of the grave dangers confronting the believer who is engaged in spiritual warfare is the ease with which one can forget who the enemy is. In the midst of battle, self-protection induces us to strike out at everyone coming into our comfort zone. Friends and even family members are often injured because we react in fear. I am certain there no remedy exists for this dreadful situation other than focusing on the grace that will be revealed.

Each generation has faced serious battles within the Faith. The early Twentieth Century saw the Fighting Fundamentalists—and I am grateful to them; they fought necessary battles. William Bell Riley, R. A. Torrey, C. I. Scofield, Billy Sunday, J. Gresham Machen and Robert Ketchum were giants of that era. Near the end of the Century, new battles were fought over the inerrancy of the Scripture, and men such as W. A. Criswell, Paige Patterson, Harold Lindsell, Albert Mohler and Adrian Rogers led these fights. Unfortunately, in the midst of battle, some men became recognised as better fighters than as fundamentalists. I am indebted to these bold men, but I must not permit myself to become unfocused lest I become a mere street brawler.

Learning to distinguish between friends and foes, between enemy combatants and allies, requires discipline; that discipline is acquired through remaining focused in the midst of demanding events. This is the concept that is conveyed by the word translated “sober-minded.” The word occurs six times in the New Testament, and Peter uses it three times in this one letter. The word means “to be restrained,” “to be self-possessed” or “to be clear-headed.” The word speaks of one who is well-balanced and able to keep his head regardless of events swirling about his him. Thus, Peter has in view the individual who manages to keep his head in the midst of stressful situations. The sober-minded Christian does not permit herself to be rattled when wickedness appears to be in the ascendancy. The sober-minded child of God refuses to be panicked when unjustly assailed by small-minded individuals.

Let me expand on that somewhat more specifically. We live in dangerous times, when wickedness appears to be gaining moral legitimacy. This transition is driven by politicians and social engineers intent on remaking western civilisation into an entity neither known nor imagined since the world began. Christians must be aware of the transitions, and they must be engaged as good citizens who will vote their conscience. However, Christians must not succumb to the temptation to imagine that political action will change the world. Ultimately, transformation of the heart is necessary to maintain social decency. Is this not what was taught in the last words spoken by the Master before His ascension? “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” [MATTHEW 28:19, 20].

Three times in this letter, Peter urges believers to be sober-minded. The first time is in the thirteenth verse of our text. Let's read the verse again. "Being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" [1 PETER 1:13]. Approaching the final points he will present in the letter, Peter writes, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" [1 PETER 4:7]. Then, at the end of the missive, the aged saint writes, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" [1 PETER 5:8]. Readers naturally understand that being sober-minded figures large in Peter's thinking.

The only other time this word is translated "sober-minded," Paul is instructing Timothy. "As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" [2 TIMOTHY 4:5]. The context in which it is used is pointing forward to the challenges that the young theologian will face. "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-4].

When we are perfectly self-controlled, truly sober-minded, we will be looking forward to the return of the Master. Sober-minded Christians know that we are living for eternity and not for time. However, when we allow ourselves to become unfocused, we concentrate on personal comfort, on accumulation of that which we imagine will provide temporal security and on acquiring position and/or power. Unfocused, we are intent on securing that which can neither endure beyond this transient existence and that which cannot deliver the satisfaction promised.

This is the essence of Paul's statement to Timothy: "You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything" [2 TIMOTHY 2:1-7].

As citizens of Heaven, residing temporarily in this fallen world, we will be called upon to make hard, ethical choices; we cannot make such choices in a manner that honours the Master if our lives are not fixed on God's grace. If we are intoxicated with the elixir of this world, we cannot remain focused on what is about to be revealed. I say with genuine regret that one serious deficit of the prevalent condition that has insinuated itself into contemporary church life is the failure of the pulpit to encourage Christians to focus on grace. When we do focus on what we commonly refer to as grace, we often distort the true item until it is almost impossible to identify.

**WE CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO ESCHEW OUR FORMER LIFESTYLE.** "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct." The life of a Christian is to be distinct from the life of earth dwellers. We who bear the Name of Christ the Lord are to reflect His righteousness.

Let me state very clearly, holiness is not something that one can strap on each day. Holiness is not displayed through acting weird or being eerie; holiness is the condition of life that results when a Christian is reserved for God's use. Holiness is nothing less than the anticipated result when an individual seeks God's will and boldly does that will to the praise of His glory.

Peter emphasises the need for holiness by appealing to the words Moses wrote in **LEVITICUS 11:44**: “I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.” The words serve as a precursor to a number of laws to mark the Israelites as people dedicated to God. Peter reduces the laws that mark us as holy to the Lord to a few, easily remembered rules. He is quite specific concerning the means to be employed in turning from our former lifestyle whilst embracing a life that is pleasing to the Master.

***Conduct your lives in holy fear!*** “If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds [referring, of course, to God], conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” [**1 PETER 1:17**]. To conduct oneself with fear does not mean to live in cringing terror. I know that there are people who think of God as some sort of cosmic bully who is always looking for opportunity to slap us down. Nothing could be farther from the truth. God is love, and He relates to His people as the Father. However, that does not mean that He is some sort of a benign grandfatherly figure who frets that people may not like Him.

Perhaps the concept that God is some sort of celestial spoilsport results from the attitude of rebellion marking this present generation. It is apparent that we preachers have done a very poor job of teaching parishioners what it means to live in holy fear. Again, it is possible that this attitude results from the failure to instruct the present generation in what were once common courtesy. However, the more likely root of the misperception of how we should relate to God is the exaltation of the self and the resistance to any legitimate authority in our lives.

We want a god who is handy when we want him. He must not demand anything of us and he must accept us as we are without tampering in our lives. He must be available to give us what we want, when we want it, and he must do so without quibbling. We train our children that they are special, never thinking that if everyone is special, no one is special. We are instructed from childhood that we do not need to obey anyone, that we are our highest authority. The United States even has a President who tells his audience “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” Of course, because we’ve been waiting for ourselves, we certainly will not tolerate a God who expects us to obey Him.

However, if we honoured the True and Living God, we would respect Him. And if we respected Him, we would hold His Name in fear. He is God; we are not. As it is, God does not count in the conduct of most lives. Our self-centred existence has no room for a God who is holy. We do not want a God who is awesome, for that would diminish our self-importance! However, God is worthy of our best service and our highest honour. Therefore, we are taught to conduct our lives in light of God who is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

***Remember the price paid for your life!*** “You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” [**1 PETER 1:18-21**].

We do not speak often enough about the price of our salvation. Christ the Lord, very God, became man that He might share our life and then present His life as a sacrifice because of our sin. Sin estranged us from God. There was no way that we could know God, except He should tear down the barriers that separated us from Himself. He did this in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. There was a time when we had “no hope and without God in the world” [**EPHESIANS 2:12**]. We must never forget that we have been ransomed “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” [**1 PETER 1:19**].



***Love one another earnestly!*** “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” [1 PETER 1:22, 23]. Our lifestyle is paramount to being holy. Peter introduces again, perhaps as emphasis, the necessity of obedience. However, this is not a broad command to be obedient in all things; this is a command to embrace the crowning act of obedience that adorns the doctrine of Christ the Master. You will undoubtedly recall His instruction as He prepared His disciples for His departure. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:34, 35].

Apparently, the command to love one another is important, since it is repeated frequently. “Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard” [1 JOHN 2:7]. “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” [1 JOHN 3:16]. “And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it” [2 JOHN 5, 6].

As an aside, germane to the matter at hand, though often neglected, love for the brothers arises from sound doctrine. Listen to the Apostle to the Gentiles. “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” [1 TIMOTHY 1:3-5]. Take special note of the final sentence: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” We who shepherd the flock of God are responsible to rebuke error and to teach sound doctrine so that God’s people may learn how to love.

This leads to Peter’s final instruction designed to lead the followers of Christ to holiness. ***Nourish your soul on the Word that remains forever!***

“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever.’

“And this word is the good news that was preached to you” [1 PETER 1:24, 25].

There exists the imagination among contemporary Christians that it is in shared programs, in shared worship, in shared experiences, that holiness is fostered. Nothing could be farther from the truth. According to the Word of God, holiness is both fostered and strengthened through doctrine. To be certain, we are the Family of God, and we share our lives, speaking of our relationships as a fellowship—a shared life. However, the foundation for fellowship is doctrinal and not experience. What is vital is what is believed, and not what is experienced. This is the reason that what is preached and what is taught is so vital. If error is introduced, the foundation for continued fellowship is destroyed. The only foundation that can long continue is the certainty of the Word of God.

Among contemporary churches, preaching tends to be dismissed as out of step with modern sensibilities. Church members often whine that they want something to make them feel good about themselves, something to entertain, something that will not turn anyone off. Of course, such whinging only emphasises the warning issued by the Apostle. We have already read Paul's warning, "The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths" [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4].

There is another warning that seems pertinent in light of modern tendencies among the churches that profess the Name of Christ the Lord. "We know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted" [1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11].

Churches rush to set apart to sacred office individuals who are identified as those who ignore the Law in this warning. Such attitudes are "contrary to sound doctrine." Such contemporary philosophers, imagining themselves to be preachers of the Good News fall under the apostolic censure. "O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge,' for by professing it some have swerved from the Faith" [1 TIMOTHY 6:20, 21].

So churches exhaust themselves doing what they imagine to be "good," only to earn the contempt of modern pagans. "But, we are doing something for the good of those who are victims," the modern parish protests. So they promote political social action, organise noisy marches to support one cause or another or take up offerings to support some cause du jour. They need to hear the cautionary warning of C. S. Lewis. "Of all tyrannies, a tyranny exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience."

What is needed is what is most likely to be absent—the declaration of a certain voice saying, "Thus saith the Lord." It is as if the words of the Prophet Amos have been fulfilled.

"Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord GOD,  
     'when I will send a famine on the land—  
 not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water,  
     but of hearing the words of the LORD.  
 They shall wander from sea to sea,  
     and from north to east;  
 they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD,  
 but they shall not find it.

[AMOS 8:11, 12]

Let us determine that we will be holy. Let us heed the words of Peter. Let us seek what is pleasing to the Lord our God. Let us do this to the praise of His glory, for surely Christ the Lord is shortly coming for His people. May we be found in that number. Amen.