

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

SLOUCHING TOWARD BETHLEHEM

“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. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”¹

In the turmoil that plagued Europe following the First World War, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats penned a dark poem expressing pessimism about mankind. The poem contains these lines:

**Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?**²

The final lines of the modernistic poem have been controversial ever since they were published in 1919. The apocalyptic poem suggests an evil presence (*Spiritus Mundi*) arising out of spiritual darkness to manifest itself against the righteous. Some have suggested that the poet's lines presage the rebirth of opposition—even persecution—of those who follow the Son of God. Assuming this to be the case, our present situation reflects the darkness of which Yeats spoke.

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

² William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” 1919, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-second-coming/>

It has never been easy to be a Christian. Despite the seemingly ubiquitous view advanced by modern pulpитеers that becoming a Christian will resolve every problem one might ever face, the Word of God cautions that following the Lamb will more likely entail significant personal costs. Stated bluntly, because one is a Christian, trouble will come, opposition will appear. What is worse, as the age nears its terminus, the social condition will degenerate and problems will multiply. Opposition will increase and hatred toward the righteous will not only be tolerated, it will become de rigueur.

Though the Master's words apply specifically to the Tribulation period, we should not ignore their application in this present age. Jesus warned, "Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" [MATTHEW 24:5-13].

No follower of the Master should grow complacent about opposition and persecution. Despite repeated attempts by denizens of this darkened world to co-opt the Faith to serve their own nefarious purposes, the people of God have never been loved by those of this present world. No Christian should ever become comfortable with accolades or with the presumed praise of politicians and the powerful of this dying world.

The Master warned, "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" [LUKE 6:26]. The Master also cautioned those who would follow Him, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause'" [JOHN 15:18-25].

It is certain that we are entering an era in western society that is marked by declining morals and degeneration of thought. Like those whom Isaiah charged with divine lèse majesté, our society calls evil good and good evil. With ever greater frequency, people put darkness for light and light for darkness, just as they put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter [see ISAIAH 5:20]. Contemporary society increasingly jettisons the solid moral and ethical foundation on which the western world was founded, adopting instead a form of social anarchism aptly described by the writer of Judges, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" [JUDGES 17:6].

Therefore, courts accept the "right" to end life on an ephemeral pretext and with gossamer justification identified as "quality of life." "Quality of life" is used to justify slaughter of the unborn *in utero*. The concept is easily stretched to justify almost every strange perversion, even when that perversion results in death and ruin for those claiming this strange, new right.

Claiming to be moved by compassion, some now advocate euthanasia of children³—a new low in the effort to foist euthanasia on society. This is not non-voluntary infanticide for gravely ill children or for those who suffer from significant birth defects such as has already become accepted practise in the Netherlands.⁴ Neither is this the *de facto* euthanasia tacitly accepted in the United Kingdom⁵ nor child euthanasia requested by parents that is seriously discussed in multiple States within the United States of America.⁶ What we are witnessing is a retrograde movement to embrace the child euthanasia that was once practised in Nazi Germany.⁷

To emphasise the moral schizophrenia of modern jurisprudence, and hence expose the ethical confusion plaguing contemporary society, consider the finding of a judge in New Mexico this past week that competent, terminally ill patients have a fundamental right to a physician's help in securing prescriptions to end their life.⁸ Rather than a Hippocratic Oath to do no harm, the physician is encouraged to become a participant in extinguishing life. Thus, there exists in the mindset of moderns a fundamental right to take your own life, or to take the life of a child if "experts" believe the quality of life justifies the decision, but convicted murderers cannot be executed in most cases as an innocent person could possibly be killed.

Our world slithers toward oblivion—slouches toward Bethlehem, if you will. Further evidence is witnessed in contrasting the proposed policies of the newly elected Mayor of New York City. Bill de Blasio insists that he will ban horse drawn carriages, a New York City tourist attraction popular since 1858, claiming they are inhumane and dangerous for the horses. Yet, he intends to ban crisis pregnancy centres. According to the newly inaugurated mayor, these competitors of the human abattoirs that are known as abortion clinics horribly maim women by offering financial and logistical assistance to induce women to bring their infants to term.⁹

³ Mike Adams, "Euthanasia for children nears approval by Belgian Parliament; doctors to mass-euthanize children and Alzheimer's patients," June 12, 2013 http://www.naturalnews.com/040744_euthanasia_children_mercy_killings.html#, accessed 12 January 2014; "Euthanasia ... of children???", January 15, 2013, <http://www.savorhisgoodness.com/2013/01/euthanasiaof-children.html>, accessed 12 January 2014; Russell Goldman, "Deaf Twins Going Blind Euthanized," January 14, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/deaf-twins-going-blind-euthanized-165500992--abc-news-topstories.html>, accessed 12 January 2014

⁴ H. E. Msgr Elio Sgreccia, "Legalizing euthanasia for children in the Netherlands," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdlife/documents/rc_pont-acd_life_doc_20040903_euthanasia-netherlands_en.html, accessed 12 January 2014; "Slippery Slope of Euthanasia for Children, September 06, 2004, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/slippery-slope-of-euthanasia-for-children>, accessed 12 January 2014; Rita L. Marker, "Assisted Suicide: Not for Adults Only?", <http://www.patientsrightscouncil.org/site/not-for-adults-only/>, accessed 12 January 2014;

⁵ Michael Zennie, "Desperate mother and godmother 'killed severely autistic boy, 14, by stabbing him multiple times in the chest' when they became overwhelmed caring for him 24/7 after demanding he be removed from the hospital and in put in their care," (sic), 13 Jun3 2013, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2340710/Alex-Spourdalakis-Autistic-boy-14-killed-mother-godmother-removed-hospital.html>, accessed 12 January 2014

⁶ Rita L. Marker, *ibid.*

⁷ "Child euthanasia in Nazi Germany," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_child_euthanasia_programme, accessed 12 January 2014

⁸ Susan Montoya Bryan, "Judge: NM Doctors Can Give Meds to Help People Die," 13 Jan 2014, <http://news.ca.msn.com/money/judge-nm-doctors-can-give-meds-to-help-people-die-1>, accessed 14 January 2014

⁹ Susan Berry, "NYC MAYOR-ELECT DE BLASIO PROMISES TO WIPE OUT CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS," 7 Nov 2013, <http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Government/2013/11/06/NYC-Mayor-Elect-De-Blasio-Promises-To-Open-More-Abortion-Clinics-Wipe-Out-Pro-Life-Crisis-Pregnancy-Centers>, accessed 14 January 2014; Kirsten Andersen, "NYC Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio pledges to open more abortion clinics, close 'sham' pregnancy centers," Nov 6, 2013, <http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/nyc-mayor-elect-bill-de-blasio-pledges-to-open-more-abortion-clinics-close>, accessed 14 January 2014; Kaitlyn Schallhorn, "Bill de Blasio's mission to relax

The backdrop to this move is that ten percent of all abortions in the United States are now performed in New York City; and seven of ten abortions in the State of New York are performed in Mr. de Blasio's city. Even that exaggerated slaughter of infants is not enough to satisfy the bloodthirsty mayor—he has to eliminate all competition to the slaughter of the unborn.

I acknowledge that I'm presenting shocking information, news reports that express the rush to ruin of modern life. Let me present one other piece of evidence of the ethical confusion and moral schizophrenia exhibited by modern society. Andy Inkster is a transgender man. He, or she, had always wanted biological children, so when he embarked on the transition from female to male at age eighteen—changing his name, taking testosterone and undergoing surgery to remove his breasts—he retained his female reproductive organs. In his mid-20s, he decided he wanted to get pregnant. In 2008 he attended a fertility clinic in Toronto, searching for help in conceiving a child. Several rounds of fertility treatment were unsuccessful.

During this time, he moved from Toronto to Springfield, Massachusetts. In Massachusetts, he went to the Baystate Health Center to continue fertility treatments. Baystate Reproductive Medicine turned Andy away, explaining that it didn't have enough experience with transgender people to provide the hormones and donor sperm required. Eventually, Andy found a clinic willing to help him (her?) get pregnant. In October 2010, he gave birth to a daughter. I could never have dreamed that I would utter the words, "He gave birth to a daughter." A month after giving birth, he sued Baystate for sexual discrimination. The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination agreed with Andy.¹⁰

Consider the incongruity of this situation. Medical professionals confess they don't have enough experience to do what he—she? (now I'm confused!) whatever sex this individual appropriates—requests, and lawyers win a case for discrimination because the physicians exercise a measure of sanity. The account serves as an illustration of the exaltation of rights over reason in modern society. Moderns appropriate to themselves rights, the inclination to protest and the strategy of unmasking.¹¹ Thus, our contemporaries assert their rights against others, but they can offer no rational justification for their claims. When we feel violated, the façade of rational argument falls away, leaving nothing but protest and indignation. This accounts for the fact that protest is a distinctive feature of the modern age. Even Christians are caught up in this reactionary response to perceived insult. Evidence that has made headlines in recent days that this is true for modern society is witnessed in the recent Duck Dynasty kerfuffle.

There was far more heat than light in the United States as both GLAAD and advocates of First Amendment Rights squared off in the United States. Even Canadians have been caught up in the melodrama. Each side threatened boycotts and protests, until A&E calculated the financial loss their cable channel faced if they continued siding with the gay mullocracy. Neither side truly presented their arguments based on facts; each reacted precisely as predicted by Highfield, each attempting to unmask the other side. Whether people wanted to be caught up in the turmoil or not, the battle lines were drawn and people were compelled to choose sides. If they refused to choose sides, they were assigned sides.

abortion regulations in New York City," November 14, 2013, <http://redalertpolitics.com/2013/11/14/bill-de-blasios-mission-to-relax-abortion-regulations-in-new-york/>, accessed 14 January 2014; "'Horses count; babies don't' in de Blasio's New York City," 01/03/2014, <http://dailycaller.com/2014/01/03/horses-count-babies-dont-in-de-blasios-new-york-city/>, accessed 14 January 2014

¹⁰ Mondays With Mac, "Telling Andy's Story: Andy Inkster Versus Baystate Reproductive Medicine, 1 October 2013, <http://www.mondayswithmac.com/2013/10/AndyInksterVsBaystate.html>, accessed 14 January 2014

¹¹ The concept is derived from Ron Highfield, **God, Freedom and Human Dignity: Embracing a God-Centered Identity in a Me-Centered Culture** (IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL 2013)

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in his novel “The Brothers Karamazov,” has astutely observed, “If there is no God, everything is permissible.” None of us could speak of “right” or “true” without God. History provides ample proof that the support of the majority cannot be a reliable anchor for moral decisions. All one need do is recall the Nazi policies that launched the holocaust in Germany—a regime chosen by the majority of the German people. One need not go that far back in history to witness the changing moral judgement concerning the slaughter of the unborn in our own nation—a position that has gained such acceptance that no political leader dare touch this “right” to murder *in utero*. With no higher moral authority, any individual could argue, “What gives anyone the right to determine what is ‘right or wrong’ for me?”

We live in dark times; it would be easy to become pessimistic. It is impossible to hold distinctly Christian views and yet be loved by the denizens of this darkened world. Candidly, we are called to choose between being loved by the world and loving God. James stands athwart our strenuous efforts to be acceptable to the world, challenging, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4].

This choice has confronted every follower of the Son of God since Peter’s concession to cultural pressure while standing in the shadow of Golgotha. Christians in the West have long lived in a protective bubble that has allowed us to be both Christian and mainstream. Now, we must either take up our cross and follow Jesus, or bow to the demands of the world and fashion a Jesus that is foreign to the New Testament. One writer has cautioned that we will need to evaluate our expectations. There can be no false nostalgia for a mythical golden era that never existed. We were created for these times, to stand joyfully for Jesus in a world that doesn’t like Him. Like Paul, we must find joy and urge others to rejoice even while suffering for our faith.¹²

The author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians has confronted believers, “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” [HEBREWS 12:4]. At this point in the history of our nation, little genuine persecution has actually occurred; but opposition transitioning to persecution could be on the horizon. Small cultural slights like the censure of a favored reality star, the banning of orthodox believers from inaugural prayers and the compelling of businesses to act against conscience should prepare us to suffer willingly for the arrival of graver perils—for such shall surely come. The question remains for the conscientious Christian, “How shall we live in this changing world? As the world slouches toward ruin, what is our role as followers of the Christ?” Silent indifference ensures our complicity in the lurch toward ruin.

THE CHRISTIAN’S MESSAGE TO A WORLD SLOUCHING TOWARD RUIN — “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.” The Master said of His followers, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” [MATTHEW 5:14-16].

The first question in Spurgeon’s catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” Assuredly, this answer should be evident to any individual even somewhat conversant with the Word of God.

¹² Daniel Darling, “Christians can’t duck controversy,” Jan 15, 2014, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?id=41833>, accessed 15 January 2014

The Apostle has written, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:31]. This admonition was a watchword for the Apostle. Writing the Colossian Christians, he iterated this admonition. “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” [COLOSSIANS 3:17]. As for enjoying God, surely the words of the Psalmist apply in this instance.

“Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

[PSALM 73:25, 26]

Again, David has written for all who worship the True and Living God:

“I say to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you.’”

[PSALM 16:2]

“My heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.”

[PSALM 16:9]

Paul’s admonition was addressed specifically to Timothy; nevertheless, it is applicable to each preacher of the Word. However, believers are declaring the glories of God as they live out their lives before the eyes of the watching world. When opposition to the Faith is experienced, when persecution does come, the people of God will be harassed and harried just as the first congregation in Jerusalem was persecuted as Saul of Tarsus began his pogrom against followers of the Way. Believers will be compelled to resort to God, as neither wealth nor position will deliver from the hands of persecutors. The illicit luxury of exalting ourselves against fellow saints will be impossible at that time; each of us will find our joy in God alone.

A godly life is all that is required in order for a Christian to “reprove, rebuke and exhort.” The life of the righteous is a rebuke to the godless. This is the reason the Apostle warns believers, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” [2 TIMOTHY 3:12]. His warning is nothing less than a pointed application of the encouraging word the missionary band delivered to nascent believers as they were returning from the First Missionary Journey, “We must enter the Kingdom of God through many persecutions” [ACTS 14:22b NET BIBLE].

Peter instructs believers, “In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” [1 PETER 3:15-17].

To be certain, we who are twice-born are commanded by Christ Himself to live holy lives that glorify our Father in heaven [see MATTHEW 5:16]. As we live righteous lives, though the world is condemned by those lives, some will ask us for the reason we hope in the Risen Lord. When they ask, we will be given opportunity to tell of God’s salvation. Some, hearing our testimony of God’s grace, will believe. Thus, we will each be preachers of righteousness.

Our message is a message of warning, urging those who do not know Christ the Lord, “Flee to Christ! Flee the wrath to come” [cf. MATTHEW 3:7]! Our message is a message of life, for we cry out to all who will listen, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” [JOHN 1:29]! Our message is a message of comfort, offering rest to the weary as we speak the Word of the Master, “Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” [MATTHEW 11:28-30]. We are appointed to live so that our lives reveal complete patience and teaches the truths of God’s grace and glory, for some will receive what we offer; some will come to life.

I do not say that the world wants to receive the message we bring, though the world needs the message. The message proclaimed by word and by deed condemns human effort as worthless in the sight of God. The nature of those identified with this dying world is lupine, fierce, wolfish. Jesus warned His disciples, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved” [MATTHEW 10:16-22].

THE CHRISTIAN’S MINDSET IN A WORLD SLOUCHING TOWARD RUIN — “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.” Long years before the Christ was born, Moses warned the people of Israel, “You shall not fall in with the many to do evil” [EXODUS 23:2]. The NET BIBLE, seeking to be somewhat more contemporary in this instance, translates this verse, “You must not follow a crowd in doing evil” [EXODUS 23:2 NET BIBLE]. The word translated “the many” in the ESV and translated “a crowd” in the NET BIBLE, is the Hebrew word *rabbim*. The word is used infrequently to refer to the “mighty,” people of importance in society [see JOB 35:9].

There is a tendency among Christians—especially evangelical Christians—to look for popular or notable individuals to serve as spokesmen. In no small measure, this accounts for the popularity of such “Christian stars” as Joyce Meyer and Joel Osteen. Their teachings do pander to fallen mankind’s baser instincts—health, wealth and ease of life. Nevertheless, many people listen simply because these people have secured a prominent platform from which to deliver their tenets. News outlets, applying the standards of the world, conclude that because individuals such as these have a large viewership, they are spokesmen for all Christians.

Note what the Apostle says concerning the dark times of which he wrote. First, “people will not endure sound teaching.” He is speaking of the mass of those professing to follow the Risen Son of God. Those who endeavour to present sound, healthy teaching will soon enough learn that what they say will not be endured by the mass of professing Christendom. Teaching that denies one’s ability to make himself or herself acceptable to God, teaching that denies the accumulation of wealth as the mark of God’s favour will not be popular. Teaching that demands adherence to the written Word of God rather than reliance on one’s best thoughts will not be well received. Teaching that exalts righteousness over power and position will be unpopular.

Then, the Apostle states of the mass of professing Christendom in that day, “having itching ears...[they]...will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” The attitude that will be prominent at that time fairly shouts, “I want what I want when I want it!” Adherents of this faux Christianity will twist Scripture to say what they want it to say, justifying the novel understanding by claiming to have new insight into the mind of God.

Consequently, the hallmark of professing Christendom in that day will be people “turn[ing] away from the truth and wander[ing] off into myths.” Those attending church will be predominantly elderly, unconcerned about knowing the will of God and seeing the Faith as having no significant validity for directing choices in life. The great concern for church goes in that day will be to hear something that will make them feel good about themselves. They will make religious choices and seek to be affirmed in the choices they have made. Being spiritual will be of greater concern than is being righteous. In fact, the definition of righteousness will be fluid, constantly changing according to the loudest voices clamouring for a hearing at that time.

My grave concern is that “that day” is “this day!” I fear that what Paul foresaw as defining the churches has already come to be. If “this” is not “that,” it is so close as to be indistinguishable. I confess that I often wonder, if the rapture should take place today, would anyone notice? Churches that hold to the Faith are increasingly marginalised, whilst those that affirm people in their sin appear to be prospering. The Laodicean Church was perhaps the most prosperous of the Seven Churches of Asia addressed in the first chapters of the Apocalypse. Christ appears to indicate not to rely on what the world relies on when He reflects their position, “You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” [REVELATION 3:17].

The Christian who will follow Christ the Lord will need to adopt the mind of the Lord. However, this is not as difficult as one might imagine. Already, the Christian can assert with the Apostle, “We have the mind of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 2:16b]. The statement implies that we have the understanding of Christ. That should not be difficult to believe since the Spirit of Christ lives within the believer. Therefore, the believer has the capacity to know the will of the Lord, to recognise the worldview of the Saviour and to choose that which pleases the Master.

Knowing the will of the Lord requires courage to do the will of the Lord. Many will attempt to live so as to avoid disturbing the world, even as they imagine they worship the Christ. Of course, such an effort is doomed to failure. Jesus warned, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” [MATTHEW 6:24]. The word Jesus used that is translated “money,” is the Aramaic term “mammon.” The word refers to possessions.

The person who is more concerned with living undisturbed so she can continue to hold her possessions cannot serve Christ. This same concept is addressed by Paul at the end of his First Letter to Timothy. “Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” [1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10].

If we will honour God, our mindset must reflect our adherence to the will of the Master. We must reject surrender to the spirit of this dying age. We must seek out the teaching of the Word and do what is commanded in the Word. We must train ourselves to recognise error and turn from all such error.

THE CHRISTIAN’S MISSION AS THE WORLD SLOUCHES TOWARD RUIN — “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” What we are *not* to do as the world slouches toward ruin is to despair. We are not to “run for the hills,” or cower in terror, or attack “them” before they attack us. We are not to concede the field to those who are doomed to die in their sin. We *are* to live joyfully as those who are alive in Christ the Lord. I am deeply impressed by the assessment of the first Jewish believers. “Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” [HEBREWS 10:32-34].

As I read the New Testament, I note a theme of triumph that is the occasion of joy. Who was writing these admonitions to rejoice? Was it not the same men who were about to lose their lives for Jesus’ sake? Note some of the statements delivered by the servants of the Master. “Have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

‘Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” [1 PETER 3:8-17].

Paul admonished believers to live in joy when he writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” [PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7].

One must be impressed by the repeated call to rejoice in hope sounded by the Apostle. “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer” [ROMANS 12:12], he admonishes. The conscientious Christians must be impressed by Paul’s call for Timothy, and for us, to stand firm. “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” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3, 4].

Christianity will always cost us something; it was always intended to do so. We repeat the old saw, "Anything worth having costs us." Somehow, we act as though that is not true of the Faith. We imagine that if we are a believer, everyone will love us. Of course, that cannot be true if the words of the Master have any validity. There can be no avoidance of conflict with the culture of this dying world. Those who have embraced this degraded culture cannot choose what is right because their eyes are blinded. If the Christians fail to stand firm in the grace of God, if we fail to deliver the message entrusted to us and if we no longer hold the mindset of Christ, there is no hope for this dying world.

Our mission is to be holy, revealing the grace of God that brings salvation. Our mission is to glorify the One we call Master. Our mission is to declare the love of Christ the Lord in the midst of a world that has no concept of love. Our mission is to seek the will of the Lord and boldly do His will.

Can it be that some who listen to the message have religion, but no relationship? Can it be that some now weighing what has been said call themselves by the Name of the Son of God, though they neither know Him nor are known by Him? I dare not conclude the message without reminding you who listen of the grace of God who sent His Son to provide a perfect sacrifice because of your sinful condition. Jesus, God's own Son, offered His own life because of our helpless condition. Now He calls us, not to religious exercise, but to life through faith in Him. He died because of our sin, and was raised from the dead to provide us the means to stand in the presence of God the Father. The Word of God now calls each individual to faith in Him, the Risen, Reigning Son of God.

The Word of God declares, if you agree with God that Jesus Christ is Master over your life, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes, resulting in a right standing with the Father, and with the mouth that one openly confesses that Jesus Christ is Master and is set at liberty. The Apostle, citing the Prophet Joel, declares, "Everyone who calls on the Name of the Master will be set at liberty" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. Believe and be saved. Do it today; do it now. Amen.