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MORAL STANDARDS

by  
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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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A friend of mine who has just returned from a world trip in connection with his work remarked to me how different social life in Christian countries is, especially protestant countries, compared to some other countries of the world, where, as he remarked, if you post your letter you cannot be sure that there is enough honesty to see that it is delivered. On the other hand, my friend remarked on the recent declension in morals in some of these protestant countries overseas from the standards of the past and we here are in Australia experiencing a similar phenomenon.

I think there is no doubt that the reason for these observable differences is related to the place that the Bible holds in society and in the thoughts and lives of its members. For Christians, this relationship is not surprising. After all, we believe that the Bible is God's Word. Jesus Himself said to the Sadducees

"Have you never read what was spoken to you by God", and so teaching that all the Old Testament is the words of God to the present day reader. Now if this is so, it is not surprising that the Word of God the Creator should be effective in the minds and over the consciences, and so in the hearts, of those who read it. As the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharp, piercing right down to the inmost being". His Word sets the standards for moral living. Protestant societies of the past have fully accepted this and so have been firmly based on the Word of God in the Bible. What a wonderful effect for good the Reformation brought with its rediscovery of the Bible, and the Puritan Movement which took the Bible seriously and was followed by the great Evangelical Movement of Wesley and Whitfield in the 18th century. In all these movements of the Spirit the Word of God contained in Holy Scripture was a basic element and this word purified

society. It is, of course, wellknown that in the past Roman Catholic societies have not placed in the same prominence the Word of God contained in Scripture. Naturally enough then, the purifying effect of this Word has been muffled, and the effect of this is discernable, I believe, in, for example, the societies of Southern Italy or South America. It is a matter for very great thankfulness to God that Roman Catholics are now taking a foremost place in biblical scholarship. The Second Vatican Council emphasised the place of Bible reading and Bible study in the individual life of the Christian as well as in the life of the church, so reminding all of us of the importance of reading the Bible and not just merely doing lipservice to it.

In the civilisations of Mohammedanism and Hinduism the Word of God has no place and in my mind this is the reason why these civilisations have the moral character that they have. If this analysis is true, it is

a matter of very serious concern to all evangelical Christians that in our own society and in our own churches the authority of the Word of God is being denied. For if God's Word is neglected moral standards will begin to slide till they finally finish up indistinguishable from those in the non-Christian civilisations. You see, it is impossible to arrive at a high moral standard simply by following our own thoughts, because there are always reasons for doing what we want to do and what we want to do is dictated not by our reason but by our self centred desires. That which is God's Word must, of course, be true, and its moral standards must be the best standards for human life, because they are the standards which the Creator designates for His creation. The moral standards of the Bible are very clear. For example, all greed and covetousness is strictly condemned, and yet greed and covetousness is rife among us and is the basis of gambling which has grown to

such proportions and treated with such complacency.

The Bible is equally clear in condemning sexual relations outside of marriage and in condemning homosexuality. There is no room for disagreement on what the Bible teaches on these matters. However, once we begin to doubt the authority of God's Word we will not be able to distinguish one way of life as better than another, and so we will simply do what we want to do, which is, of course, how non Christian civilisations have arrived at their level of morals.

I had interesting confirmation the other day of this. I was listening to a former Professor of Moral Theology of Sydney University who told his audience that moral philosophy (that is to say, human reasoning and thinking about morality and how we ought to live) was unable to distinguish which was the better way of life amongst various theories of living. All the professor could advise

was to choose one theory and to stick to it. But of course this is useless advice. Why stick to a way of life even though we have adopted it when another way of life appears for the moment to be preferable for one reason or another. It is only the unchanging standard of God's Word reflecting the mind of the Creator which is able to raise and maintain moral standards in a world of selfishness and sin. This is why it is so sad to see our churches abandoning the authority of Scripture because if this is abandoned in due course morality will slide down to the levels of non Christian countries; and we are already seeing this process at work happening frighteningly quickly.

When the authority of Scripture is abandoned faith begins to falter. It was a disappointment to me to find that in the recent drought (which is still very severe in parts of our State) the leaders of several Protestant denominations were not willing to join in a call for repentance, and

prayer for rain. The Bible is clear that God sends the rain. Jesus Himself taught it in Matthew 5:45. If we follow the authority of Scripture then we know that God is in complete control over every event, great and small, within His creation, and it is entirely appropriate that we should pray to Him in our need for He knows how to help us and will certainly help if we are repentant and believing.

The failure to believe in the authority of Scripture leads to other failures of faith such as the failure to believe that God is able to raise the dead in the resurrection or indeed that Christ rose in the flesh. A failure to believe the teachings of the Bible about God and His power leads to a doubt of the teaching of the Bible about God's will for human life. We prefer to follow our own ideas, which are so quickly leading to the moral declension in which we are involved here and in England.

Our Heavenly Father remains, however, sovereign over His world and His ears are open to the prayers of Christians so that we should pray constantly that His Spirit may revive us as in the time of the Reformation and as in the time of the Puritan Movement and as in the time of the Evangelical Movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. For when His Spirit begins to work then faith in His Word will become strong once more, and the conscience will accept Scripture as the standard for the Christian's life. Prayer is the great weapon which God has given to us to remove the mountains as they loom up before us. At the same time we need to deepen our own subjection to the Word of God in Holy Scripture, reading it for ourselves, and to our families, and explaining its meaning to them, as well as preaching it truly from the pulpit if we are called to that ministry.

Christians are ultimately optimists. God is a Saviour

God. He has not left us to our selfishness and blindness but has sent His Son to be the Light of the world and the Saviour of the world. So let us turn our eyes to Jesus who died for our sins and rose again. He will save us now and for eternity, if we turn to Him, and through us He will save others.

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Now may I close on a personal note:

This is the last broadcast I will be making in this series for another twelve months as I am leaving shortly with my family for England where I will be attending a world conference of Theological Principals. I will also be examining theological educational structure and colleges in Europe and America. I expect also to undertake some theological research and writing and I also hope for a sphere of ministry while away. I would be grateful for your prayers to accompany me on this journey.

While I am away these broadcasts will be shared in by the Rev. Bruce Smith and other speakers, and I am sure you will find their broadcasts interesting and valuable.

19 November 1967