

# GOD AND THE CHANGING TIMES

By

Curtis Dickinson

God is moral. Man was created a moral creature, to reflect the very image of God. Only as he thought God's thoughts and acted in response to God's desires could he reflect God's image and remain moral as God is. When he rejected the moral One and acted independently and contrary to him, he became immoral; his instincts became depraved and his destiny became death (Gen 3:19).

When God made a covenant with the tribes of Jacob (Israel) the terms of the covenant were based on God's own morals, spelled out in explicit commands forbidding man to violate them. "Thou shall not..." The penalty for breaking the commandments and thus rejecting God's morals was death, not only execution by the hand of man, but the ultimate and final death by the hand of God in the day of judgment.

God's attitude was, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:19). Life and death! The issue was vital to survival. The major task of the prophets was to warn God's people that He would not overlook their sins and would not forgive them unless they repented.

Has the attitude of God changed? From the general tenor of the evangelistic message today you might think that God Himself is the One who repented and is now operating under a different set of morals, or worse, that morals do not even matter. The zeal to make the gospel attractive to the "me" generation and enlarge the church as rapidly as possible has prompted evangelists to keep silent regarding man's immoral condition. We see a lot of suffering, sadness and tragedy in the world, and it seems cruel to add to this by the further diagnosis that a person is also under judgment for sin! So the compassionate thing to do is to offer God's love and salvation on the easiest terms possible. Salvation is offered on the basis of God's love and one's own desire for God. He is told to "invite Jesus in" to his life, utter a prayer and, Presto! He is born again. This is to offer salvation on man's terms, not God's. Such presentations of salvation ignore the basis for man's alienation from God; the fact of his moral failure.

God judges man on the basis of His own moral nature. It is the express purpose of God to have man in His own image, and this is the promise to every Christian, that "we shall be like Him" (I John 3:2). This is yet in the future, after all the people God has cleansed from sin are also redeemed bodily and made immortal. The central point of Christ's mission and message was that man is under judgment for sin because he falls short of the glorious moral character of God. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Tim. 1:15). He viewed man as being in an immoral state, worthy of death. In spite of all his accomplishments and honor among his fellows, he stands before God as one having failed in measuring up to the moral image of God. That moral image does not change, because God does not change. God is Eternal, Immutable and Unchanging. "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). This fact is confirmed in James 1:17 and Hebrews 1:12. Therefore, the moral requirements have not changed.

But his is not the way modern man sees it. He has rejected God's standard of morals and God's judgment. In public institutions moral judgments are not allowed and

teachers are generally forbidden to teach God's commandments as a basis for morality. The religion of humanism has influenced the world to the extent that morals are determined by public opinion, and not God. In a democracy the voice of the people, not the voice of God, becomes the moral standard.

There was a time in our nation when people were greatly influenced by God's moral code, so that there was some credibility to public opinion. But through the steady teaching of evolution, respect for God's laws have deteriorated until majority opinion often endorses the evils which God condemns. Furthermore, public opinion is being molded through a controlled media and a diabolical set of television producers and writers who are militantly anti-Christ.

Man seeks to establish morals on the desires and practices of men, rather than the desires and example of God. "Times have changed," is the excuse given for immoral conduct. The humanists go further, claiming their exemption from moral law on the basis of individual rights and that such rights must be protected, which is to say that no one is allowed to tell them they are morally wrong nor can anyone force them to cease their immoral practice. This is the position of homosexuals. Humanists, through their claims of "children's rights," are trying to carry this out to the point of keeping parents from training their own children to hold to God's morals.

A person nurtured in this climate feels no estrangement from God, no deep sense of guilt and no fear of God's judgment. The modern church, so eager to gain the "convert" carefully avoids any mention of sin and judgment, for such a gospel is "foolishness" to the modern world. So they present the gospel as the good news that "God loves you." This is good news, alright, but it is not the gospel.

The gospel consists of the judgment upon sin, as well as its forgiveness. Christ came to save sinners because all are sinners and stand outside the fellowship of God and under the sentence of death. According to God's unchanging moral law, the wages of sin is death. Christ became the sin-bearer, and God's judgment fell on Him. The gospel, then, pronounces every man a sinner under the wrath of God until he is saved from that wrath through the Death of Christ.

Therefore, to believe the gospel one must first of all believe his condition before God, that morally he stands condemned before the perfect moral One in whose image he was made.

The other half of the gospel is the fact that God's moral requirement is met by the sentence of death falling on Jesus, the sinless One, instead of upon me. The gospel is, indeed, a mighty demonstration of God's love, but His love and the gospel are not the same thing.

Men may believe in Christ without ever having believed the gospel. They believe Jesus lived, that He was the Son of God, that He died and rose again. Such a one may pray and go to church. He may say his is a Christian and believe that he is. But if he has never considered himself a sinner, a moral rebel, under the just and fair condemnation of God, then he has not truly believed the gospel. Obviously he will not be zealous to tell anyone else of his deliverance from the wrath of God, since he has no awareness of such deliverance for himself.

Offering a person God's love without offering him the moral demands of God may not be a compassionate gesture at all, but a dirty and deadly trick. God's grace is never applied apart from man's repentance.

John the Baptist, who had the mission of preparing the way for Christ, was “like a refiner’s fire” in making his hearers conscious of the need for moral purity. “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” he said. “Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance.” Jesus gave His stamp of approval to those who approached Him in deep repentance, like the woman who bathed His feet with her tears, or the centurion who admitted, “I am not worthy that you should come under my roof,” and the publican who cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” He told of the prodigal son who at least “came to himself” and realized his morals were so far below those of his father’s that he was “no longer worthy to be called (his) son.” It was this conviction of his depraved condition that drove him to “arise and go” back to his father, repentant, ready to become obedient as a humble servant. Jesus said, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.”

Ad Jesus sent forth the apostles He said, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46–47). Repentance is to be preached, that remission of sins may follow.

The apostles followed this order, beginning on the Day of Pentecost, when Peter drove home to the crowd the fact of their sin in consenting to Christ’s death. They were “pricked in their hearts” and asked, “Brethren, what shall we do?” We wonder what kind of answer they would get in the modern religious crusade. Say a prayer? Sign a card? Ask Jesus into their hearts? Seek an experience? Or would they be told to just believe that God loves them? Peter was the one commissioned by Jesus to give the answer. He said, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

The twentieth century ahs encompassed more change in the world scene than all other history since the death of Christ. We have passed from crisis to crisis until crisis-living has become normal. But the major crisis of life is always the same, and the same for each person. It is a moral crisis. The moral standard is the same, because God is the same. How shall we stand when He appears? To face Him in an immoral condition is to face death. The only solution is in Christ, in our being identified with Him in His death for our sin. “Repent and be baptized” is the God-given answer that needs to be lifted above all the multitude of voices that roar about us today.

“I have set before thee life and death...therefore, choose life.”

.....  
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.  
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute  
Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article  
for permission to be valid. Vol. XX, Number 3.  
.....