

Moral Standards and the Present Day

Society today

There is no doubt about it; we live in a permissive society.

Today, many people believe they have the right to “do their own thing”. They believe they are free to abuse their own bodies, and those of others, violently, sexually, homosexually, with alcohol and drugs. They feel free to fiddle their expenses, deceive the Income Tax Inspector, and indulge in all sorts of petty crimes. In fact, they feel free to do almost anything. And to whet their appetites, the publishers print pornography by the ton, the peddlers push the drugs, the high-street sex shops exploit those foolish enough to step inside. Freely-available “video-nasties” excite them to new heights of violence and sexual perversity.

This so-called “right to do their own thing” is considered harmless - by those who exercise the right. But harmless it is not! Because the damage caused by the permissiveness is not confined to the members of the permissive society. Innocent bystanders are raped, mugged, tortured, even murdered in the pursuit of depraved excitement. Young children are abused terribly. Many are frightened by what might happen to them when they round the next street corner. In short, law and order is breaking down.

One of the latest horrors of modern society is the appearance of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) — a terrible disease, which is caused by a virus called HTLV-111 that severely damages the immune system. The virus can be passed on either in sexual intercourse between homosexuals or in intercourse between a man and a woman. Drug misusers are particularly at risk by using infected needles. Women who have the virus can pass it on to their baby during pregnancy or at birth, so the children are unwilling and unfortunate victims of the permissive society.

Lesser crimes are also on the increase: vandalism, theft, cheating and dishonesty of various sorts. It used to be safe to leave a bicycle outside a shop for an hour or so, or a brief case unattended for a few minutes. If we do these things today, we can certainly say goodbye to our possessions. Nothing is safe from vandalism, theft, or criminal damage. Graffiti everywhere. No longer is there respect for property. Lower down the crime scale, we notice the breakdown of authority and discipline within the family unit, parents fail to maintain control of their unruly children, no longer do children respect their parents.

The decline in moral standards

At all levels, moral standards are declining. This is fact, not theory. A generation ago

the average citizen was law-abiding, the average child well-mannered and well-behaved. Two generations ago- in the Victorian era-things were even stricter, of course even then there was permissiveness behind the scenes. The disturbing fact is that immorality of all types is no longer secret, and is on the increase.

What has happened? Why have things changed? What do the changes mean?

To find out, we must ask: “What governs moral standards?”. The answer is simple: “Your conscience.” You are guided to do, or not do something by your conscience, but your conscience is an extremely complicated reasoning machine, a computer, programmed by what you have been taught, and what you have experienced in life. You learned what is right and wrong from: parents, grandparents, schoolteachers, tutors, employer, neighbours and friends. In later life you learned the law of the land. Therefore it is obvious that everybody’s conscience is different, and the consciences of a generation can follow a trend. Fashions change, consciences change, moral standards change.

It was not always so. There was a long period during which moral standards were relatively stable. Our parents or perhaps our grandparents can confirm this, because moral stability ended, and the decline of moral standards gained momentum in their living memory.

What triggered this change from stability to decline? Again the answer is simple. The consciences of men and women began to be programmed differently. A very important factor was omitted: the knowledge of God’s law. You do not have to look deeply into modern social history to find that the decline in moral standards coincided with a movement away from regular church-going and Bible-reading in the home. During the period of stability when moral standards were maintained, the average family - whether Roman Catholic, Church of England, Methodist, or any other faith-was God-fearing. They respected God’s law. Because the family read the Bible, the children were brought up knowing what was right or wrong in God’s eyes, not their own.

When Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution in the book “Origin of Species”, some people felt relieved that perhaps God did not exist. They did not think very deeply about the credibility of Darwin’s theory of evolution, but they latched on to it readily - as an excuse for not believing in God. They reasoned that if man had evolved without God, why should he be governed by God’s strict moral code? The scent of moral freedom was in the air! If God did not exist, there was no reason to feel guilty about ignoring him. Without God there is freedom to do almost anything without a guilty conscience.

Then as scientific discoveries increased rapidly, men “used” them for their own ends-to strengthen the myth that God never existed. The result is that today, as the

twentieth century draws to a close, we live in a country which nominally is Christian, but actually is a godless society. Belief in God is “old-hat”, and the fashion has changed. Congregations have dwindled, churches are being demolished. Leisure time has increased but the attractions of the leisure industries leave no time for reading the Bible or going to church.

Our Godless Society

Some almost worship the pursuit of pleasure. Leisure and pleasure are their gods, but their pursuits are innocent and they harm only themselves. Others pursue the sensuous pleasures of the permissive society, and as we said at the outset, they harm themselves, their associates, and many innocent bystanders.

Permissive society is godless, our young people learn nothing of God - unless THEY want to. Religious education in schools has been reduced to a farce. In many schools - for a variety of reasons - the morning assembly is not a daily event but a weekly one. In others it has been abandoned completely. Therefore, it is quite possible that you know nothing about God and what He has written in His book the Bible. It might come as a shock to know that the following quotation is from the Bible.

“But you must realise that in the last days the times will be full of danger. Man will be utterly self-centred, greedy for money, full of big words. They will be proud and abusive, without any regard for what their parents taught them. They will be utterly lacking in gratitude, reverence and normal human affections. They will be remorseless, scandal-mongers, uncontrolled and violent and haters of all that is good. They will be treacherous, reckless and arrogant, loving what gives them pleasure instead of loving God. They will maintain a facade of “religion” but their life denies its truth. Keep clear of people like that” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, J.B. Phillips version)

There can be no doubt. It is a chilling fact. These few words from the Bible - written almost 2000 years ago - describe the state of the world today, as clearly as if they had just been written. The quotation continues.

“... wicked and deceitful men will go from bad to worse, deluding others and deluding themselves. Yet you must go on steadily in those things that you have learned and which you know are true. Remember from whom your knowledge has come, and how from early childhood your mind has been familiar with the Holy Scriptures, which can open the mind to the salvation which comes through believing in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:13-15 J.B. Phillips version)

So God knew that the permissive society would come. He tells of the consequences of being a member of it. Also, He tells us how to avoid the consequences.

God's punishment for immorality in Old Testament times

It is well known that the easiest way to learn is by following an example-There are many examples in the Bible of punishment for immorality Individuals and nations were punished when they broke God's law. To bring home to us the seriousness of the decline in moral standards which we see happening before our eyes, we must read what the Bible tells us happened when thousands of years ago, the whole world slipped into the depths of immorality. The story is set in the time when God used to deal directly with men. He held conversations with them. He sent angels to visit them, He performed miracles which proved He was God. The story centres on Noah - an honest God-fearing man, who found himself living in a godless, permissive society, when sexual morality had reached a low ebb.

“When mankind began to increase and to spread all over the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God (hitherto godly descendants of Seth, one of Adam's sons), saw that the daughters of men (un-godly descendants of Cain, another of Adam's sons) were beautiful; so they took for themselves such women as they chose” (Genesis 6:2 from the New English Bible - the words in parenthesis are the authors).

They were unrestrained, driven on by their unbridled lust for the beautiful women they saw around them.

“When the Lord saw that man had done much evil on earth and that his thoughts and inclinations were always evil, he was sorry that He had made man on earth, and He was grieved at heart” (Genesis 6:5, N.E.B.)

“the whole world was corrupt and full of violence. In God's sight the world had become corrupted, for all men had lived corrupt lives on earth.” (Genesis 6:11-12. N.E.B.)

If we pick out key-words and phrases from these quotations, we find that in Noah's days:

- 1 There was sexual immorality.
- 2 The people were wicked.
- 3 Society was willingly ignorant of God. and actively looked for wicked things to do.
- 4 The people's thoughts were wicked.
- 5 Society was corrupt in every conceivable way.
- 6 The streets were full of violence.

God promises punishment on our society

The parallels with our society are obvious. The Bible is describing the world which existed before the Genesis flood. In our opening paragraphs, we described society today. The two descriptions and the two societies are very much the same.

The days of Noah's godless society were numbered. The flood ended them!

The days of our society are numbered - and only God knows for how long. God has promised that His Son, Jesus Christ will return to end them. While we do not know when Jesus will come, reading the whole of the Bible - which contains God's plan for man, - leads us to believe that he will come in the very near future.

Jesus said:

“But about that actual day and time no one knows - not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, only the Father. For just as life went on in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of man. In those days before the flood people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage until the very day that Noah went into the ark, and knew nothing about the flood until it came and destroyed them all.” (Matthew 24:36-39, J.B. Phillips)

In Noah's day, life went on as normal. God told the earth's population that unless they ended their wicked ways and turned over a new leaf, they would be destroyed by a great flood. Only Noah and his immediate family listened to God's warnings, and despite the fact that for 120 years Noah had been telling anyone who would listen of the choice set before them - turn over a new leaf and escape the flood and certain destruction or be drowned-only a handful of people were saved. Today we accept four minutes warning of a nuclear attack. God gave them 120 years!

Man's willing ignorance of God

Why did all except Noah and his family perish? The truth is they just did not want to know about God or His plan for man. They were willingly ignorant. They were too busy to listen to Noah.

Our permissive society is just the same-just as Jesus said it would be. Amidst the vast amount of rapidly increasing knowledge, and the hustle and bustle of his everyday life, modern man has left no room for God. He is too busy “doing his own thing”. God does not fit into his life-style.

So, just as Noah's generation lived in the time of the end of the then-known world, we live in the time of the end of civilisation as we know it, when man's wickedness will lead certainly to his destruction- unless he heeds God's message and repents before

Jesus returns.

Will there be another God-fearing society?

Will man turn again to God? We said earlier, it is our conscience which rules our moral standards.

The Bible says:

“... in the latter days there will be men who abandon the true faith and allow themselves to be spiritually seduced by teachings of demons, teachings given by men who are lying hypocrites, whose consciences are as dead as seared flesh ...”
(1 Timothy 4:1-2, J.B. Phillips)

Seared flesh is dead flesh. The majority of consciences are dead. It is highly unlikely that all these dead consciences will spring to life and their owners respond to God's message of salvation. Some will respond. Some will be saved - but how?

It depends on what standards they adopt to rule their lives. The only set of moral standards which are acceptable to God is that written in His book the Bible. We find them in Exodus 20 when we read the Ten Commandments, and in Matthew's gospel chapters where Jesus sets down rules for living acceptable in God's eyes.

Who will listen to the word of God? Who will live by His moral standards? Unfortunately the answer is: “Very few.” God's standards limit them. God's standards prevent them from “doing their own thing”. But this should not surprise us. Look what Jesus said:

“Enter by the narrow gate. The gate is wide that leads to perdition, there is plenty of room on the road, and many go that way; but the gate that leads to life is small and the road is narrow, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14, N.E.B.)

Some examples of the moral standards set down by God

God will not tolerate dishonesty. He says:

“You shall not have unequal weights in your bag, one heavy, the other light. You shall not have unequal measures in your house, one large, the other small. You shall have true and correct weights and true and correct measures, so that you may live long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. All who commit these offences, all who deal dishonestly are abominable to the Lord.”
(Deuteronomy 25:13-15. N.E.B.)

What about “free-love”: sex outside marriage?

In the New English Bible we read in Exodus chapter 22 verse 16 “When a man seduces a virgin who is not yet betrothed, he shall pay the bride-price for her to be his wife,” In other words, God forbids fornication (sex before marriage).

Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said to the people in the old days Thou shalt not commit adultery,” but I say unto you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her- in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27-28. J.B. Phillips)

So Jesus condemned even thoughts of sex outside marriage.

What does God say about homosexuality and other sexual perversity?

“You shall not lie with a man as with a woman: That is an abomination. You shall not have sexual intercourse with any beast to make yourself unclean with it, nor shall a woman submit herself to intercourse with a beast: that is a violation of nature.” (Leviticus 18:22-23, N.E.B.)

“If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman, they both commit an abomination. They shall be put to death.” (Leviticus 20:13. N.E.B.)

“God has given them up to shameful passions. Their women have exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and their men in turn, giving up natural relations with women, burn with lust for one another males behave indecently with males, and are paid in their own persons the fitting wage of such perversion” (Romans 1:26-27. N.E.B.)

Blasphemy (using God’s name or Jesus’ name as an oath or swear word) is an increasingly common habit in our permissive society. God expressly forbids it.

God says:

“You shall not make wrong use of the name of the Lord your God; the Lord will not leave unpunished the man who misuses His name.” (Exodus 20:7. N.E.B.)

Jesus said:

“Again you have heard that the people in the old days were told - Thou shalt not forswear thyself. but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths’, but I say to you, don’t use an oath at all. Don’t swear by Heaven for it is God’s throne, nor by the earth for it is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great King. No. and don’t swear by your own head, for you cannot make a single hair white

or black! Whatever you have to say let your 'yes' be a plain 'yes', and your 'no' be a plain 'no' - anything more than this has a taint of evil." (Matthew chapter 5 verses 34 to 37. J.B. Phillips)

We could go on quoting passages from the Bible which explain to us God's code of moral standards. We could go on drawing parallels between Noah's day and the present day, and quoting passages of Scripture that prove we are living in the last days.

As the Bible is completely consistent the message would be the same.

A permissive, immoral society is an abomination to God.

A permissive, immoral society was destroyed by God in Noah's day.

Our permissive society will not be tolerated by God.

God will send his son Jesus Christ back to this earth to overthrow our society and establish God's own kingdom.

Our permissive society is one of the most important pieces of evidence that we are living in the "last days" when the return of Jesus is imminent.

What does God want us to do?

Having said all this, what does God expect us to do? He expects us to follow His moral code, and be guided by His word the Bible.

We said earlier that one of the best ways of learning is to follow an example. Who followed God's law? Who maintained the highest moral standards? Who is our perfect example? There is only one person - the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible says:

"Then when Jesus had been proved the perfect Son, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who should obey him." (Hebrews chapter 5 verse 9, J.B. Phillips)

The New Testament tells us of the life of Jesus. In it we read in great detail how he behaved, how he spoke, how he prayed, how he loved and cared for his friends. He was unselfish. In fact he was generous to the extent that he gave his life for you and me. So, if we read about Jesus and take to heart the examples set for us in his perfect life, our own characters will gradually become more like his. We shall begin to understand how he would react to all life's situations. In fact our watch-word when

unsure of the correct course of action will be “What would Jesus do?” The answer the Bible gives will guide us on to a higher moral plane. Our lives will be governed by a set of standards which are acceptable to God. But because of our mortal limitations (remember that Jesus derived great strength of character from being the Son of God), we shall never be able to attain perfection in our lives. Often we shall fail to do what Jesus would have done, for only he was able to be perfect. But God knows this. His plan for the salvation of man makes provision for our shortcomings and requires only that we always try our best.

So what have we to look forward to? We have found that the conditions prevailing on the earth will grow steadily worse. The threat of war, famine, earthquake, etc., will steadily increase. Men’s hearts will fail them for fear of what is threatening - until God intervenes.

Therefore what incentive is there to separate ourselves from the permissive society, to set ourselves a higher set of moral standards - if at the end of it all, moral and immoral people will suffer the same fate?

The choice God puts before you is:

participate in the permissive society, experience and enjoy its sensual pleasures until you die - an eternal death,

continued ...

... or

separate yourself from the permissive society, be guided by the word of God, try to the best of your ability to serve Him acceptably-either until you die a temporary death with God’s assurance that you will enjoy eternal life - or until the Lord Jesus returns (if you are alive when he comes).

But, we have to make a conscious decision, and resolve to separate ourselves from the permissive society. We have to be baptised by total immersion in water (an act of faith which symbolises the death of our old self, and the re-birth of a new character which is firmly committed to serving God). We have to raise our moral standards. Are you prepared to follow God’s code of practice? Are you prepared to read God’s word the Bible and learn for yourself God’s plan for man and the earth? Please do not let years of ignorance hold you back: years during which you knew nothing of God and His purpose.

God tells us:

“Never give your hearts to this world or to any of the things in it. A man cannot love the Father and love the world at the same time. For the whole world-system,

based as it is on men's desires, their greedy ambitions and the glamour of all that they think splendid, is not derived from the Father at all, but from the world itself. The world and all its passionate desires will one day disappear. But the man who is following God's will is part of the permanent and cannot die." (1 John 2:15-17 J.B. Phillips)

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