

"Why Christian standards fall"

A sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster at a Young People's Meeting in Mullaglass Free Presbyterian Church

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, 1Timothy 4:1.

This question has been given to me to answer. Before I do so, perhaps we should consider if the question is legitimate. *Are those who claim that standards have fallen correct? We must not mistake change of style for a fall in standards. We are not talking about colours and fashions tonight. When I was a youngster, there were only two matters taken into consideration when you were brought to a shop to buy a suit. "Was it big enough to allow for some growth and was the material hard wearing? Colour or the cut of the cloth did not have a place in the pre-purchase discussion which did not include me anyway!! Times have changed. However, you may purchase items of clothing that are fashionable without infringing any Christian standard.*

On the other hand, we must not seek to disguise a fall in Christian standards as mere changes in style and outlook. If we stay with clothing, many modern fashions are immodest. It is part of the atmosphere of this age to be immodest. Now it is no good excusing immodesty by saying that it is merely a matter of keeping in fashion.

The believer's standard is the word of God. The Shorter Catechism, question 2 asks: *What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify him and enjoy him . Answer: The word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him .*

The word of God sets the standard by which we may enjoy God and glorify Him. If we are talking about falling standards we are talking about a departure from the word of God. Is that departure taking place among God's people? I believe that we must say **Yes** , unpleasant as that may be.

I will substantiate this by stating that the world is growing ever more wicked. I am sure no Christian will argue on that point. If that is so, then those steadfastly opposed to the world will be coming more and more into confrontation with it. We have often read or heard war reports in which advancing armies have met with stiff resistance. If there is no resistance then is it not because the people are not resisting the taking over of their country? They are permitting the old way of life to come to an end and a new regime to take over. Is there an increasing level of resistance against the world today, or is there an accepting of changes dictated by worldliness? I believe that there is an acceptance of the declines and departures that public opinion has demanded.

An example of what I am referring to may be seen in Exodus 32:8. *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt .* The Lord said Israel had turned aside from His law. When Moses comes to the camp there is quite a confrontation. *And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it ,* Exodus 32:19-20. Notice the difference between Aaron and Moses. One would have no part in falling standards and the other was willing to go along with it. Aaron was undoubtedly the most popular with the people but it was Moses and his praying who was the true benefactor to the nation.

Is it the spirit of Aaron or of Moses which prevails today? The answer is clear. Darkness can only advance as light retreats. When Christ speaks of the increase of wickedness in the last days it is in the same breath as He speaks of the decline of the love for righteousness by many of His people. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved ,* Matthew 24:12-13. Falling standards are a challenge for this generation especially since none other has been nearer to

the end-time age!
Let us come now to our subject.

I. WHY DO THE STANDARDS OF BELIEVERS FALL?

There are a number of reasons.

1. Because of the existence of a fallen nature within us. Our old nature desires the slackening of God's standards. When King David acknowledged his fall into backsliding he explains why by pointing to his sinful nature. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me*, Psalm 51:5. The fallen heart pours forth depraved desires. If we give in to them we immediately will fall. It is for this reason that we must battle against the flesh and see it crucified daily.

2. Because of the environment of a corrupt and evil world. This world is corrupt and steadily growing worse, Phil 2:15, II Tim 3:1-5, Psalm 2. Should we yield to its influence, then we will fall. We must ever resist conformity to it. *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*, Romans 12:2. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*, James 1:27. It is the Christian's constant task to keep himself unsullied and free from sin. Where this does not happen then the world's views and standards are adopted and Christian standards fall.

3. Because of a subtle and persuasive enemy. The devil is a deceiver. *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season*, Revelation 20:2-3. Eve was persuaded to abandon God's standards for her own by the devil. He argued that she would be better off rejecting the constrictions of God's law. Freedom, liberty -- all awaited her outside God's law. She believed the devil and the rest is history. He still works this trick on God's people today. He still manages to persuade Christians that there is a better life outside obedience to the law of God. He is believed and Christian standards fall.

A combination of these three factors accounts for the decline in standards whenever there has been such a fall. For this reason you will find that God's servants in every age consistently call God's people to obedience to His law. The medicine is the same because the disease is the same.

II. FURTHERMORE, STANDARDS WILL FALL WHEN THE INSTITUTIONS WHICH GOD ORDAINED TO PRESERVE HIS STANDARDS FAIL IN THEIR DUTY.

There are basically three such institutions.

1. Parents. Deut 6:3-9, Eph 6:1-4. Mankind is to be instructed in the standards of God from its earliest days. God's ways are to be taught from the cradle. *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*, Proverbs 22:6. There is a tremendous attack upon this institution of God today. Parents' rights to discipline their family according to the Bible are almost gone. A Christian parent who uses a rod to discipline his child will almost certainly be accused of child abuse by the watch dogs of the Social Services. The plethora of views and notions that emanate from the lobby of child 'experts' on television, radio, in magazines and newspaper columns, is completely anti-Bible and anti-God. Society today effectively forbids a parent to obey God in the matter of raising the child. Whatever remnant of biblical instruction is retained in the home comes under attack in the classroom of the state school system. It is even believed that it is essential for educationalists to persuade children to disregard their parents if their parents are instructing them in views that are objected to by the ecumenical educationalists of today. Dr. Ed Cairns, of The New University of Ulster, published a book called, "Caught in the Crossfire." In that book he says, "Paradoxically there is also the question of making Northern Irish children more rebellious not less. Northern Ireland is undoubtedly a conservative, some would say authoritarian society. Of course, in every society an attempt is made to transmit information, including attitudes and values from one generation to the next. In order to do this efficiently it has been suggested, the first step is that each child has to be moulded into an information acceptor. It has to be

ready to believe what it is told.' {Waddington, 1960, 28}. Unfortunately, adults in Northern Ireland, the evidence suggests, may have become all too expert at this process and therefore there is a need for children in Northern Ireland also to learn to question what they are told. Here there may also be an important if difficult role for the schools which ultimately could contribute to a Northern Ireland where two communities could live in peace rather than eternal conflict.

None of this can, of course, happen overnight. It will be a long slow process. But the fact that instant results are not achieved must not allow those who advocate peacemaking activities, particularly those in power, to lose faith with this approach because in the last analysis it could be argued this is Northern Ireland's only real hope." {Page 165.} His views may be considered as too radical and may not have the support of the majority of educationalists but remember, today's majority was yesterday's minority!

2. Pulpit . The pulpit is to stand between the people and departure from God's word. It must exercise a warning ministry and a rebuking ministry. God's man must, *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins* , Isaiah 58:1. Look at the following texts and see that such a ministry is all part of the New Testament minister's duty as well: I Tim 5:20, II Tim 4:2, Matt 8:26, 17:18. What a mighty influence for good is the ministry of a man who preaches in the power of the Holy Ghost! Pray for your minister that he, and indeed all of God's servants, might have such power. Paul said this, *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock* , Acts 20:29. There could be no attack until after Paul departed. The devil and his allies are greatly restricted by the powerful ministry of a man of God.

3. Parliament . The ruler has a God-given duty to perform in this matter. Romans 13:4 sets this out clearly. *For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil* . When parliament fails to uphold the standards of decency established by God's law then national values fall. Liberalising of the laws of this country has led to increased crime and the disintegration of the very fabric of society. The Prime Minister's "Back to Basic" campaign will not and cannot stop such a decline. Only a return to the basics of God's holy law can effect such a change.

When these institutions fail then a fall is inevitable. Do we not see failure in all three institutions today? Then, there you have part of the answer to your question.

III. STANDARDS WILL FALL IF BELIEVERS DO NOT KEEP THEIR HEARTS AND SOULS.

We are commanded to keep our hearts and lives under the rule of God's word.

1. We need to maintain a watch over our hearts . *Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons* , Deuteronomy 4:9. *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life* , Proverbs 4:23.

2. We need to maintain a readiness to bear reproach for Christ . What made Peter fail and fall? He was ashamed of Christ. Whenever we grow ashamed of Christ or any aspect of His Gospel then there follows a falling away, Matt 26:33-34. Heed the call of Hebrews 13:12-13, for it is still relevant today. *Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach* . The standards never change for a people who follow Jesus outside the camp. Standards only become an issue whenever God's separated people begin to drift back within the camp.

3. We need to be ever waiting for the Lord's return . Matt 24:42-25:5, Luke 12:35-40, I John 3:2-3. *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of*

him in peace, without spot, and blameless , II Peter 3:10-14.

A classroom will remain perfectly peaceful in the absence of the teacher as long as the pupils are mindful of that teacher's return. Once that fact slips from the children's minds, then bedlam breaks loose. Let God's people cultivate an awareness of the return of Christ and what that return will initiate, then they will stay loyal and stay diligent awaiting His return and His rewards. Read carefully the words of the parable told by the Saviour in Matthew 24:42-51 and note especially the words of the wicked servant in verse 48. Here is the thinking that will give rise to a departure from God's holy standards. Let us once lose sight of the return of Christ and we encourage carelessness and decline. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins it was the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh", that aroused the sleepers.

Dear Christian young person, stay awake and obedient by ever contemplating the return of the One Who died at Calvary for your sins. Such meditations can only stimulate desires to remain faithful and true to your Redeemer.