

SOBERLY, RIGHTEOUSLY, AND GODLY

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After Jesus ascended into heaven, His apostles and prophets labored to lay the foundation of the New Testament Church with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:20) Saint Paul wrote epistles to Saint Timothy and to Saint Titus, instructing them on how to organize particular churches. He told Titus to ordain elders in every city, and to correct false teachers. He told Titus to teach people “the things which become sound doctrine,” which is to say, how they ought to live their lives, and especially how they ought to treat each other. (Titus 2:10-9) He explained to Titus why they ought to live this way. He wrote:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11-14)

People ought to live this way because, like the sun appearing after night, the long-awaited Savior has come into the world to enlighten men, teaching them how God commands them to live. Jesus, when He began His earthly ministry proclaimed, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17) He taught people that they ought to suppress their ungodly desires and to live in a godly way. That is to say, they ought to stop living unlike God, and to live like Him. The Son of God became incarnate, not only so that He might teach people by precept, but also by example. He said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) He has shown the world what God is like, and what a godly man is like. He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

People ought to live like Christ because it is right to do so. God is morally perfect, and the very standard of righteousness, and people ought to obey Him, and be like Him. There is yet another reason that people ought to live godly lives: the Son of God appeared the first time to teach men how to live, but He will appear a second time to judge their works. Jesus is no mere man; He is the Son of God incarnate, and God sent His Son into the world the first time, not to condemn the world, but to save it. (John 3:17) Jesus said, “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.” (John 12:47) When He comes a second time, however, He will judge the world, for the Father has given all judgement to His Son. Jesus said:

For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:25-29)

When Saint Paul preached the Gospel, he called sinners to repent on the ground that Christ would one day be their judge. He told the philosopher of Athens:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

Jesus sacrificed Himself to atone for the sins of His people, but He sacrificed Himself also to free them from the bondage of sin. That is to say, He died to save them from both the guilt of sin, and its power. God does not desire a people who only sin and need forgiveness. He desires a people that are holy like He is. He told His ancient people Israel, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2) Jesus taught His followers that He would die, but also that He would rise again from the dead. They that are joined to Him in baptism have died to sin, and have been raised to new life with Him. (Romans 6:4) Christians ought to think of themselves this way. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:11)

Christ will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead. The Christian has nothing to fear, however, because he is accepted in the beloved, and, because he is accepted in the beloved, not only are his sins forgiven, but His service to God is holy and acceptable to Him. (Romans 12:1; Philippians 4:18; Ephesians 1:6)

Let us thank God that He sent His Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. Let us also thank Him that He has appointed His Son to return in glory to judge the world, and to put all things right. Let us be glad that we are in Christ accepted by God, and that Christ has delivered us, not only from the penalty of sin, but also from its power.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb,
for ever and ever. Amen.