

DESTINY BULLETIN

A commentary sent to the supporters of the ministry of Christian Destiny.

Dear “Special Friend” of Christian Destiny,

April 2007

THE IMPERATIVE OF VIRTUE

“Add to your faith virtue” (2 Peter 1:5). In Peter’s list of imperatives, the first to be added to faith is perhaps the rarest. It is virtue.

In some ways virtue could also be called the most necessary. Virtue is the quality that places its stamp upon all other qualities in life. To fail at virtue is to fail at everything. A man may be talented, knowledgeable, capable, and characterized by remarkable ability in many ways. However, if he is not believed to be virtuous, he will hardly be trusted, even in the performance of his highest abilities. He will fail.

We know from our deepest instincts (the work of God within us) that the basis of life is moral. The world, in the last analysis, is not made of bricks and stones or even atoms and molecules. It is made of a substance that, in its essence, is moral. This must be so, because the Maker of the universe is God Himself. This God, whom we know and worship, has declared Himself to be, first of all, a *holy* God. The people and things that will ultimately prosper in such a universe are those that are morally compatible with the nature of God. The people and things that will ultimately fail and be destroyed are those that set themselves at variance to the nature of God. It may be said of those attempting to beat the system that, when the system is designed by God Himself, it simply cannot be done.

The call to virtue, then, is the earnest and immediate invitation to those who have put their faith in Christ. What is virtue? How can we add it to our lives? Why is it imperative?

Virtue is not a simple thing. The word in Scripture means “intrinsic eminence, moral goodness.” But virtue is not simply morality. Morality is the successful measuring up to a standard given to us and is a component of virtue. But virtue is more than that. It means “doing good things” as well as “not doing bad things.” Virtue refers to the *being* of a person; it is his ever-increasing moral ability. It is more than just doing a good thing now and then. It is more than doing good things fairly regularly. It is the achieved state whereby the soul operates on a level of goodness itself. It is characterized by abstinence, yes; good works, yes. Virtue is a moral reliability that becomes synonymous with our lifestyle. The virtuous person would not be *believed* to have done an evil thing, despite reports to the contrary. “Sally Jones would *never* do a thing like that” is a profound statement. It is a most awesome compliment. The speaker may not know by external or legal evidence whether Sally did or did not do the thing. He simply “knows” that she would *never* entertain such a thought. Virtue, therefore, comes close to what the world calls character. It is the regular practice of goodness that brings a certain condition to the soul. It is not an isolated breakthrough into goodness but a perennial state.

Let us consider the difference between an isolated breakthrough and a perennial state. Suppose you were to attend a big-league ballpark and find, to your astonishment, that I was playing on one of the teams. Let us say that I came to bat and promptly hit the ball into the left field stands. You might say, “My, that Dave Breese can certainly play baseball!” But you would be wrong. You would

be wrong in that what you had seen was an isolated breakthrough, not a perennial state. If you know my batting average, you would correctly assume that I was an interloper wearing someone else's uniform on the baseball field. You might assume that you had observed a publicity stunt rather than the real thing. And you would be correct. By contrast, let us say that I went to the ballpark back long ago and saw Babe Ruth play without knowing who he was. Let us say that I saw the Babe strike out. I might assume that he was a poor athlete and wonder why he was on the team. "He's no good," I might say. But I would be wrong. What I saw would have been a temporary defection from a high level of baseball ability.

That's the way it is with virtue. Virtue is a high state of moral ability perfected over the years by walking with God. Virtue is a condition whereby any day, any night, any weekend, we can be sure that the virtuous person is living a righteous life, no matter what pressures may be placed upon him. How necessary are such lives today. How important it is for millions of Christians to add virtue to their faith. We may mouth great and resounding words about Christianity and the Bible. We may claim gifts and point to vast experience. All of our claims are like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal if we have not added virtue to our faith.

The call to virtue is particularly vital when we think of it in the midst of our present society. In other eras of Christian history, the believer could rely on support systems to help him toward the life of virtue. Families stayed intact. The church took a community form. The neighborhood itself enjoyed a higher measure of common grace and ethical living. Believers stayed in closer contact with others of the faith. Our society, with its drastic degeneration, has moved to the place where it has no use for virtue. The support systems that were an aid to virtue have disintegrated, giving way to a society that is essentially subversive to moral goodness. The world has devised a thousand means to produce moral destruction in the lives of its individuals. This generation is being pressed upon with more opportunities to sin at a younger age and in increasingly clever ways.

How, then, can we build into our lives that moral strength called virtue? The first course of action is clear—we must call on the Father for help.

Before coming to Christ, each of us was a confirmed sinner. The Bible says that there is not a just man upon the earth or one who does not sin (Romans 3:23). Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, and they continue to do evil. The Apostle Paul refers to himself as well as others when he refers to the days before he came to the Savior: "*we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others*" (Eph. 2:3). To this day, every person who does not know the Lord is subject to the continued, daily debilitations of sin. Finally, he cannot help himself and becomes an addict to iniquity.

This has happened in our time, not only to individuals, but to our culture as well. In this generation we have seen a frighteningly vast number turn to iniquity. Indeed, we have seen come to pass in our society the fulfillment of Alexander Pope's dictum:

Vice is a monster of such hideous mein
As to be hated needs but to be seen
But seen too oft, familiar with her face
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

Vice has become endemic in our time. Indeed, by every standard for measuring iniquity our

generation wins first prize. Whether it be robbery, murder, rape, pillage, arson, revolution, violence, drug addiction, white collar corruption—our generation wins in the stakes of high iniquity.

This generation, for want of virtue, is not only sinful but also shameless. To sin is one thing, but to sin shamelessly is another. The person who knows that sin is sin may be led to repentance. For the sinner who calls sin “righteousness” and adultery “sexual preference” there is little hope. Sinfulness is a great evil, but shamelessness is evil personified. It is, in fact, reprobation.

This generation is well described in *2 Peter 2:13* as “*they that count it pleasure to riot [revel] in the day time.*” The things people were once ashamed to do in the darkness of midnight, they now do proudly at noon. The things over which society once cringed in shame are now renamed “realism” and put on national television. So it is that adultery, fornication, wickedness, and all the evils (by reason of which the judgment of God comes upon society) are practiced and promoted openly in our time. Modern television, often in the form of soap operas, is little more than the account of adulterous men and silly women laden with sin.

For spiritual success then, virtue is imperative. We must ask for God’s help if we are to be delivered from the power of sin to the power of righteousness.

What is the power of righteousness? Great is the promise made to the Christian in this regard. The Apostle Paul said, “*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*” (*Romans 8:2-4*). The promise? It is that a new law of righteousness works mightily within us called “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.*” God has, therefore, promised His mighty working within the very being of all who trust in Him. The Christian is, indeed, “married to another,” not the old law but a new partner, that he might bring forth the fruit of righteousness unto God.

In addition to his earnest prayer for divine help, the concerned Christian should daily read the Word of God for the righteous strength it builds within the soul. Along with studying the Word, he should nobly purpose that he will obey the Word, saying yes to God and no to the devil every day that he lives. In this regard, he is wonderfully promised that sin no longer has dominion over him in that he is not under law but under grace. Sin has been defeated for us by the Captain of our salvation. However, many say, “But I have sinned.” Even as Christians our most pressing question may be, “How is virtue restored?” What if we fail in the practice of virtue? It is possible for a Christian to commit sins contrary to the righteous law within his own heart. Obviously it is. Many have. How then is virtue restored? How is moral capability returned to the life of one who, even though a Christian, has transgressed the moral will of God? Is there forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration for the erring child of the King?

We have a welcome promise concerning this pressing question in the Word of God. To every convicted believer the Bible says, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (*1 John 1:9*). What a grand provision! Fellowship with God and spiritual capability can be restored in the life of the believer on the basis of his confession and divine forgiveness. Indeed, we may well need to often ask for forgiveness and cleansing in our walk with God. A righteous God stands ready to forgive again on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

David knew this. He was called a man after God’s own heart. We know, however, that he

committed the sins of adultery and then murder. He had other shortcomings, but still the Lord declared him righteous by imputed righteousness and a man after His own heart. Why? It was not because David's actions were perfect; it was because he knew where forgiveness came from. It came from God and was given to a humble heart that would confess its sin, its need, and petition for forgiveness.

Consider for a moment the results of a life of virtue. Every believer in pursuit of goodness would do well to read Proverbs 31. Here the question is posed: "*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies*" (v.10). With compliment after compliment to such a person, the Lord tells us of the fruits of virtue in this gracious woman. Her husband safely trusts in her, she provides wonderful food and clothing for her family, she dependably carries out the business transactions of the family, she does not fear future calamity, her husband becomes a well-known leader, and she herself is wise and kind. Finally, her children rise up to call her blessed, and her husband lifts his praise of her.

Is the pursuit of virtue a costly, troublesome, vain, profitless endeavor? No, indeed! The opposite is true. The life of "easy virtue" is always a deteriorating one. It is only easy at the beginning and becomes painfully hard at the end. It leads its victims down into shame and rejection. It produces physical debilitation, mental deterioration, and, finally, spiritual disaster. It ultimately brings its chained and spiritless prisoners to the steps that lead down to hell. The simple equation is: virtue pays; vice does not.

Our society has yet to learn this lesson and probably never will before Christ comes again. The men and women of this world, following that familiar path of easy virtue, smile sweetly and approvingly at one another as they dance down the slippery slope to the grave.

Virtue is the answer to that often-repeated question, How can I be happy? In our world, promoters press the foolish answer that happiness comes from possessions, amusement, travel, indulgence, and other supposedly self-fulfilling activities. Our world has invented its own futile merry-go-round in the pursuit of happiness. We will never find genuine happiness until we learn the connection between virtue and happiness. Happiness without virtue is an impossibility.

The person who gains riches at the sacrifice of virtue will find his riches to be impediments. A house filled with possessions gained by dishonesty will become a household of sorrows. To sacrifice virtue for something else is to give real gold in exchange for counterfeit. We see those in pursuit of that foolish course disintegrating before our very eyes. Our society has become plagued by AIDS, venereal disease, suicide, and evils of all kinds in the pursuit of happiness, without virtue.

The call to virtue, to public righteousness, has moved up the scale of importance in our day. Virtue has never been an option, but in today's world it is becoming an essential to survival. The very fate of a nation could depend upon the practice of virtue.

God has said, "*Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Proverbs 14:34). This principle applies to any nation and any people. Sin brings reproach, destroys reputations, erodes a nation's human potential, and can even bring a great culture to an end. Our present society is filled with illustrations of the connection between virtue and survival itself.

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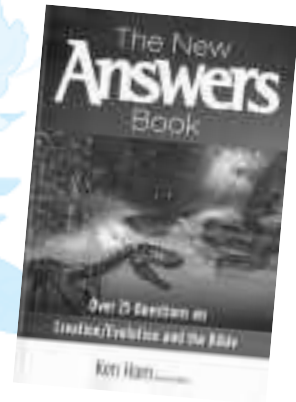
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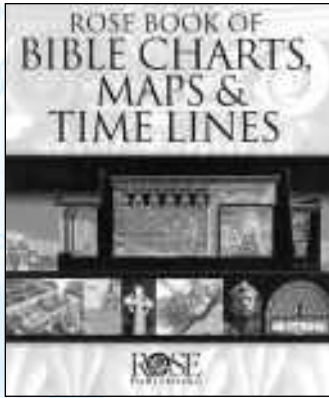


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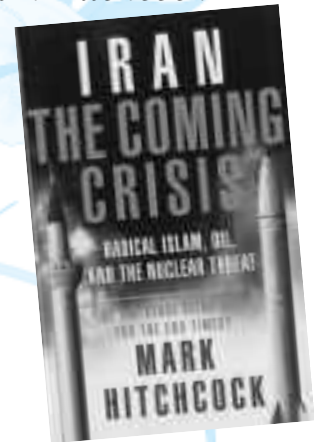
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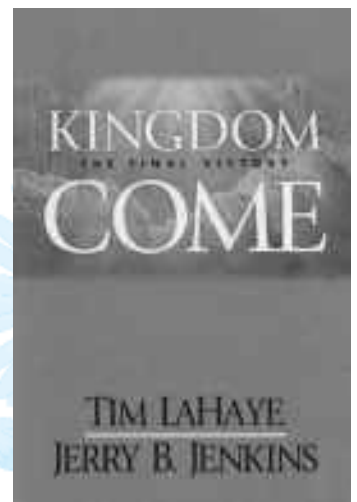
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