

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

# THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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## “In the Midst of a Crooked and Perverse Generation”

The Holy Spirit through Paul noted that the Philippian brethren were living “*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*” (Phil. 2:15). He didn't excuse sin because of this or promise that life on earth would soon be a utopia. Instead, He stressed the need to be “*blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish*” in the midst of such evil, being “*seen as lights in the world.*”

This verse exemplifies the principle that living in the midst of unrighteousness is nothing new. While we can be tempted to think that being faithful to God is more difficult in our society than it's ever been, the Bible is filled with examples of people who pleased God while living in societies that were just as immoral as what we face.

Consider, for instance, the environment that Noah lived in. **Genesis 6:5** says, “*GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*” Instead of joining this evil, Noah chose faithfulness to the LORD, and thus found favor in His eyes (**verse 8**).

Years later, Abraham's nephew Lot lived in an environment that was likewise exceedingly evil. There were not even ten righteous souls in the city where Lot dwelt (**Gen. 18:32; 19:28-29**), and Lot was “*sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked*” (**2 Pet. 2:7**). Like Noah, Lot could

not stop the environment he lived in from being filled with wickedness, but he *could* (and did) choose to live rightly in the midst of it (**2 Pet. 2:6-8**).

The point is that the world around God's people has long been, and continues to be, filled with immorality, but this does not excuse God's people from obeying Him. The key question for the child of God is not, “Is the world pleasing God?” Rather, the key question is, “Am I pleasing God?” While we can (and should) influence those in darkness for good, we cannot obey God on behalf of anyone else. Each of us *can*, though, control our *own* actions.

Consider the apostle Paul's statement in **2 Corinthians 5:10**: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Notice the words, “*each one.*” On the Day of Judgment, the Lord is not going to judge us according to the path someone else (or society as a whole) has chosen. Societal norms do not negate the responsibility *each one* has to work out his or her own salvation (**Phil. 2:12**).

To work out one's own salvation, the Christian must be deliberate about pursuing what is right (cf. **Matt. 5:6**), instead of merely following the path of the majority.

Throughout history, God's people have often sought, instead, to “fit in” with those in darkness, allowing the world's standards to be the guide.

Take, for instance, the Israelites in Samuel's day. When God built Israel into a nation, *He* intended to be their King. Yet, the Israelites demanded an *earthly* king, and when Samuel tried to talk them out of it, "*the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; and they said, 'No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations'*" (1 Sam. 8:19-20).

Under the Mosaic dispensation, physical Israel was God's holy nation, and *He did not want them to be "like all the nations."*

The same principle applies to God's "*holy nation*" today, the church (1 Pet. 2:9). Christians are commanded to *not* be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2a).

Instead, God wants us to allow *Him* to transform us (Rom. 12:2b). This will lead us to see right and wrong as *He* defines it, instead of fitting our thinking to societal norms. Such "transformative thinking" allows the Christian to *identify* what is crooked and what is straight, distinguishing between the darkness and the light.

Upon doing this, the Christian must *unashamedly pursue* the path of light. The differences that result from choosing light over darkness need not make a Christian feel guilty. Instead, such differences can be used for God's glory (Matt. 5:14-16).

While the path of light should be pursued, the path of darkness should be *abhorred*. Instead of becoming *de-sensitized* to the crookedness that is around us, the Christian should have *disgust* for evil. As the saying goes, we must hate sin, but love the sinner (Rom. 12:9).

Though the path of light has fewer on it than the path of sin, those who choose the former can lean on the *Almighty* for help.

God *knows* the challenges each of us faces, *He cares*, and *He can be trusted* to provide all that we need to serve Him faithfully.

In **Revelation 2:10**, the Lord told the saints in Smyrna, "*Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.*"

Notice that the Lord did not promise these saints that their temporal circumstances would soon improve. In fact, He inferred the *opposite*, noting that they would soon *suffer* additional trials for their stand for the truth.

The Christians at Smyrna were not told to "throw in the towel" because the environment they were living in was so evil that all was hopeless.

Instead, these Christians were told to be faithful even to the point of dying a martyr's death if it came to that, remembering that temporal sufferings are *brief* (figuratively, "*ten days*") relative to eternity. The Lord assured them that He *knew* what they were suffering (**verse 9**). It is evident that He also *cared* about them, and He inferred His *faithfulness* to provide the "*crown of life*" to them if *they* were faithful to *Him*.

The Lord's knowledge, care, and faithfulness should likewise encourage *us* to choose to do what is right. No matter the wickedness of the nation or society one lives in, life on earth always includes the *option* of taking the path of righteousness. It is the path we must *each* choose in order to be lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

- Michael Hickox

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