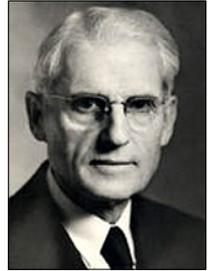


# Is the Standard Too High?

By Meade Macguire, 1956

Meade Macguire was one of the few who really caught the 1888 gospel message, and taught it in his books and writings. He acted as a bridge between the days of Waggoner and Jones, and our time, preserving the truths of the new birth, and perfection of character. On page 4 of this article, he speaks about crucifixion, and how the new birth is attained. He doesn't make a distinction between the once-for-all death which changes the spiritual nature, and transforms us into children of God, and the daily death to selfish desires of the flesh. For a clear presentation of these differences, please read the book *Revival and Reformation* by F.T. Wright.

**A**mong the subjects frequently discussed by our people is the question of standards, relating to the true ideals of Christian character, conduct, dress, recreation, eating and drinking, et cetera.



In these discussions we have observed quite a diversity of opinion regarding proper and necessary standards in all these matters. Sometimes we hear the remark that a certain worker's standards are too high, and that they cause people to be discouraged. Again, we hear of another worker whose standards are too low, bringing reproach upon the cause. We cannot deny that this is a vital matter, and worthy of careful consideration.

The question of first importance is this:

*Do we have any definite criterion  
by which we may determine  
just what are the right standards  
for true Christians?*

To this we may give the positive answer that God has set His own standards of Christian character and deportment, and He expects His children to decide these matters on the authority of His Word.

Some may suppose that locality and circumstances enter

into the picture, and that a standard that would be acceptable to God in Africa, or China, might not be acceptable in America. While this might be true of some particular style of dress, or form of recreation, we should realize that Christian standards are determined by Christian principles, which do not vary, but are the same in all the world.

It is important to have clear convictions of what is right, and to refuse to be influenced by the personal opinions of others, for our safety lies in seeking earnestly and humbly to learn the principles God has given us, and in adhering to them at any cost.

### **Christ's Standard for Us**

In His wonderful Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave the command:

#### **Matthew 5**

<sup>48</sup> Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Has anyone standing as a representative of Christ the right to set before men a lower standard than He did? His messenger to His people in these last days has stated:

#### **The Desire of Ages, p. 311**

God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach.

From the Saviour's own words we cannot conclude that His standard for us is anything less than perfection of character. Yet when someone presents the plain teaching of the Bible regarding a life of victory over sin, some will come with the plea,

Your standard is too high; it discourages the people. We all sin every day. We overcome some sins, but others keep coming up and probably always will as long as we are in this poor, weak humanity.

When we quote the precious assurance,

Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins,

they say,

Oh, yes, He always forgives our sins when we repent and confess them.

But if that is our understanding of being saved from our sins, we have no assurance that we shall ever stop sinning. If we keep on sinning, and the Lord continues to forgive, and finally takes us to heaven without any change in our character, we are really saved in our sins, not from our sins.

Would it not seem that one who claims to believe the Word of God, and to be a sincere Christian, yet who keeps right on sinning every day, is really witnessing against Christ? Jesus says,

Give yourself to Me, and I will save you from your sins.

This man says,

I have given myself fully to Him, but I keep right on sinning.

Others say,

I have gained the victory over some of my worst sins, but of course I still have some little sins. I am trying to overcome them, and believe that with His help I shall get the victory—sometime.

Strange it would be if the God of heaven could give us victory over the big sins, but could not save us from the little ones!

I believe that many who are having this sad experience would have a wonderful transformation of life if the teaching of God's Word regarding deliverance from the dominion of sin were made plain to them. Let us read a statement the Lord has sent us, and pray for the Holy Spirit to make clear to us God's plan for complete victory over sin.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 311**

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God. The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness. As the Son of man was perfect in His life, so His followers are to be perfect in their life.

### **God’s Plan for Us**

According to this statement, the words of Jesus, “Be ye therefore perfect,” are a command. Does any worker for God have a right to set before His people a standard that is not in harmony with the command of Christ? Let us thank the Lord that the command is a promise. Would it not be utterly inconsistent to read the command of Jesus, and then say to Him,

Lord, that is impossible; surely You know that I cannot be perfect?

How important it is for each one of us to study His Word and to learn just how the promise enables us to obey the command.

We are familiar with the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, and we think that we understand them.

### **John 3**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Many are baptized and unite with the church, and seem quite satisfied, though they lack the evidence that they are born again. Herein lies a serious danger.

Many years after Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus, John, the beloved disciple, was inspired to write,

**1 John 5**

<sup>18</sup> We know that whosoever is born of God sins not.

This is one of those triumphant certainties that the loyal apostle of Jesus declares so enthusiastically again and again.

**1 John 3**

<sup>6</sup> Whosoever abides in him sins not.

**1 John 3**

<sup>9</sup> Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin.

We all know that no one stops sinning who is not born of God. But why do so many who claim to be born of God keep right on sinning, yet do not seem to be much concerned about it?

It seems to us that the answer is simply that they do not understand what is involved in being born again. Nicodemus did not understand Christ's statement, and he asked for an explanation. He questioned the possibility of a man's returning to his parents and being born again. Certainly a second birth of the same parents would not change the situation at all. Jesus said,

**John 3**

<sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Every human being born in this world since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, has been born of the flesh, inheriting the fallen, sinful, impure, degenerate nature of his parents. Our nature controls our lives; it is the source of all our thoughts and actions, and determines our character. From this inherited nature springs every sin we commit. As the psalmist says,

**Psalms 51**

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Since our nature controls our life, no human being can stop sinning while controlled by a fallen, sinful nature; and no one can change his nature by an effort on his part.

We hear people say that they do not drink, or smoke, or steal, and that they endeavor to treat others as they would like to be treated, and so they feel confident that they will get to heaven. Doubtless such reasoning is very pleasing to Satan. Such people do not realize they have a nature that God could never admit into heaven.

## **Look at Your Nature**

### **Jeremiah 17**

<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

### **Mark 7**

<sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

<sup>22</sup> Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness;

<sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Every child born of human parents has this kind of heart, and therefore cannot of himself live a sinless life. This is why we must be born again. We cannot be children of God until we are born of God.

### **John 1**

<sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

When born physically of human parents, we inherit the fallen, sinful, unholy human nature of Adam after he sinned. When born again, we are born of God spiritually, and we inherit the pure, holy, divine nature of God.

### **2 Peter 1 [Weymouth]**

<sup>4</sup> It is by means of these that He has granted us His precious and wondrous promises, in order that through them you

may, one and all, become sharers in the very nature of God, having completely escaped the corruption which exists in the world through earthly cravings.

It is not difficult to understand that when one is released from the control of the fallen, sinful, corrupt human nature, and surrenders to the control of the pure, holy, upright, divine nature, a great change will take place in the life. Here it is graphically described:

## **2 Corinthians 5**

<sup>17</sup> Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

How unfortunate it is, how really tragic, for one to believe the doctrines of God's Word, be baptized, and be taken into membership of the church without being born again. Because of this sad experience many church members are not witnessing by their lives that Jesus saves "his people from their sins," and their example and influence are a stumbling block to others. It is quite evident that "old things" are not "passed away," and "all things" have not "become new." Someone may say,

The experience you speak of is just what I long for, but I fear my case is hopeless.

Do not forget that the command to be perfect is a promise. Let us cooperate with our Saviour.

The messenger of the Lord has told us that

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 173**

...the blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God.

### **The Desire of Ages, p. 176**

The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will

of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 324**

When the soul surrenders itself to Christ, a new power takes possession of the new heart. A change is wrought which man can never accomplish for himself. It is a supernatural work, bringing a supernatural element into human nature. The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world.

Thus it is made plain that the experience of deliverance from the dominion of sin, the experience of complete victory in our lives, depends upon this miracle of a change from the sinful human nature to the holy divine nature. It may help to make this clear if we look again at this promise:

**1 John 5**

<sup>18</sup> We know that whosoever is born of God sins not.

We notice that this word “whosoever” is changed to “whatsoever” in verse 4:

**1 John 5**

<sup>4</sup> For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

The miracle of transformation is not a physical but a spiritual change, brought into our lives by the exercise of faith in God’s Word. We have not been born again physically, and the natural desires of our mortal bodies are not changed, but the Holy Spirit has created in us “a new being in the image of God.” We are now partakers of the divine nature, which brings a “supernatural element into human nature.”

We know that two natures cannot control us at the same time. When the old carnal nature controls, we cannot be pure and righteous and victorious. When the new divine nature controls, we cannot do wrong. That makes it plain that “whatsoever is born of God”—the divine nature sins not.

Now the important question is, What am I to do to make sure that the divine nature controls, and that the old nature is powerless? The Bible says we are to

**Ephesians 4**

<sup>22</sup> ...put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

And then we are to

**Ephesians 4**

<sup>24</sup> ...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

It is evident that this is a matter of our own choice, and involves the action of the will.

**Steps to Christ, p. 47, 48**

What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends upon the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him...Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers.

Perhaps we are now prepared to understand what seems to be a very perplexing question arising from the apostle’s state-

ment, “We know that whosoever is born of God sins not.” Many believe that they are sincere, earnest Christians who have been born again, yet they sometimes do wrong. And they incorrectly understand this statement to mean that if a person sins, it proves that he is not born of God. When we notice other statements of John, it is evident that he did not mean that it is impossible for one who is born again to sin. Notice this verse:

### **1 John 2**

<sup>1</sup> My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

In addressing “my little children” he is evidently writing to God’s people.

It is necessary for us to understand what our attitude should be toward these two natures—the human nature, with which we are born physically; and the divine nature, which comes with spiritual birth from God. The instruction is

### **Ephesians 4**

<sup>22</sup> ...that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

<sup>24</sup> And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

How are we to put off this old man, or the flesh?

### **Galatians 5**

<sup>24</sup> They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

The only way to escape the control of our inherited, sinful nature is to crucify it. That is what the apostle Paul meant when he said,

### **Galatians 2**

<sup>20</sup> I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.

When we are born of God by a definite act of faith, we place our old sinful nature on the cross to die with Him, and we enthrone Christ in our hearts to reign.

So Paul was saying, “I crucified self, and enthroned Christ, and now He lives in me.” It was beautifully and simply expressed by Martin Luther, who said, “When the devil knocks at the door of my heart and asks, Does Martin Luther live here? I reply, No, Martin Luther is dead; Jesus Christ lives here.”

This is not an act performed once for all, but a daily experience with the true Christian. Paul said,

**1 Corinthians 15**

<sup>31</sup> I die daily.

A well-known writer has said, “In every human heart there is a cross and a throne; when self is on the cross dying, and Christ is on the throne reigning, we see a true Christian.”

Let us notice how plainly this is set forth in Romans 6:

**Romans 6**

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

<sup>2</sup> God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

We are controlled by our nature; and if our old nature is hanging on the cross dying every day, and the divine nature is on the throne reigning every day, we shall not sin.

**Romans 6**

<sup>6</sup> Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

<sup>7</sup> For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Now the important thing for each one of us is to make this practical, in our teaching and in our own lives. Every day we are assailed by temptation through our different senses and

faculties. Many plans are devised by the enemy to arouse evil thoughts, appetites, lusts of the flesh, desires of the fallen nature. When such a thought enters the mind, instantly there flashes into the mind the realization,

Ah, that is the old nature—but it is dead. I nailed it to the cross today.

And we are thrilled as we realize that the evil thoughts are gone. Faith is the victory, and our mind is reaching out after the higher attainments of Christian perfection.

## **Growing in Grace**

Jesus gave us the command,

### **Matthew 5**

<sup>48</sup> Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

The apostle John declares,

### **1 John 3**

<sup>9</sup> Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin.

The Lord through His messenger has caused further light to shine upon these wonderful truths, making it plain how this experience is to be attained. Should we not study this counsel carefully?

### **Messages to Young People, p. 165**

He came to show man how to obey, how to keep all the commandments. He laid hold of divine power, and this is the sinner's only hope. He gave His life that man might be a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

### **Testimonies, vol. 7, p. 194**

It is only through becoming partakers of His nature that we receive power to obey His commandments.

### **Ministry of Healing, p. 180**

Christ came to make us "partakers of the divine nature," and His life declares that humanity combined with divinity does

not commit sin.

**Christ's Object Lessons, p. 314**

But Christ came in the form of humanity, and by His perfect obedience He proved that humanity and divinity combined can obey every one of God's precepts.

**The Review and Herald, July 1, 1890**

Genuine faith appropriates the righteousness of Christ, and the sinner is made an overcomer with Christ; for he is made a partaker of the divine nature, and thus humanity and divinity are combined.

**The Review and Herald, Jan. 13, 1910**

We want to see the King in his beauty. Then let us daily keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, the perfection of human character, and laying hold of his divine nature, we shall have the strength of divinity to overcome every evil tendency and desire.

**The Desire of Ages, p. 123**

Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. So it may be with us. Christ's humanity was united with divinity; He was fitted for the conflict by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And He came to make us partakers of the divine nature. So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character.

Brethren, can the world see the character of Jesus in us? Do our members see in us the ideal we hold before them? Are our lives an irresistible attraction to the lost? If not, is it because we ourselves have not yet laid hold of the promised power to overcome sin? We are His people, His ministers. And the Saviour came to "save his people from their sins."

Surely God would be pleased if we should kneel humbly before Him and pray:

Father, You are reaching for my hand of faith, to direct it to lay fast hold of the divinity of Christ that I may attain to perfection of character. By Your grace I now place my hand of faith in Yours, and relying wholly upon Your infinite love

and mercy and the merits of Jesus, I now determine to set perfection of character through Christ as my goal. Lead me on till the goal is reached, and Your purpose is fulfilled.  
Amen.