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BLOG

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Living in the Last Days?

*A short version of my essay
“Do We Need a Special Ethics for the Last Days?”*

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Available online at <https://www.thomasschirmmacher.net/blog/living-in-the-last-days/>.

This is a summary of a document developed by Thomas Schirmmacher, Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns, World Evangelical Alliance. A complete version of this document can be found here: <https://www.thomasschirmmacher.net/blog/do-we-need-a-special-ethics-for-the-last-days/>

1. Continue one's Christian witness

There are no new or special ethics for the last days before Christ's return. Rather, we should be observing the very same ethics of the Kingdom of God which commenced with the coming of Christ (Luke 10:9–11; 21:31–32). Regardless of whether we are living in the Last Days, the commandment to love, the Ten Commandments, and other central ethical principles such those defined in Romans 12:1–2 or 2Tim 3:16–17 remain unchanged. God's assistance and direction for our lives apply whether we live in the best of times or the worst and whether judgment or revival is pending.

In his sermons on the last days, Jesus exhorts the disciples to keep watch (Matt 24:32–25:13). He uses the metaphor of the unexpected thief in the night (Matt 24:43), whose arrival time is unknown to the master of the house (Matt 24:44; 24:50; 25:13). The only preventative action is to stay alert and not become lazy.

The apostle Paul gives one of the most dramatic descriptions of the “perilous times” of the last days (2 Tim 3:1–4:8). Men will become selfish, slanderers, seducers, “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (3:7), clinging to a powerless, superficial Christianity (3:5). Persecution will be an everyday affair (3:11–12), and things will continue to get worse (3:13). “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim 4:3–4).

What conclusion does Paul draw from these predictions? The fundamental principles of the Christian lifestyle which have always applied continue to apply. In this situation of perilous times he says, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ... But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (2Tim 4:2, 5).

2. Repent and intercede for our land

The Old Testament gives us many examples of judgments announced by the prophets but postponed because of repentance. Some examples include Hezekiah, and Jonah's warning to Nineveh. The promise given in 2Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land,” remains valid today.

Repentance, a reconciliation of man to God, can postpone or cancel God's judgment. Judgment not confirmed by a divine oath can be canceled, and a judgment whose date has not been set with an oath can be postponed. God frequently applies this distinction when people repent, call on his mercy, are reconciled to him, and begin to do his will.

In addition, supplication can defer the fullness of wickedness in this day and age. “Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is destroyed” (Prov 11:11). This proverb suggests that a righteous group of people can postpone or repeal judgment over their society. We see this principle in Abraham's insistent plea for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–33), which clearly demonstrates the potential value of godly people in protecting a godless society. God would have spared the cities for the sake of only ten righteous inhabitants (Gen 18:32, 35).

3. Hope in God collectively as the Church

The Church continues to hope in Jesus Christ. These uncertain times offer us excellent opportunities to renew our hope through prayer, to proclaim our faith in word and deed, and to develop our faith further.

In the face of this pandemic, the church can pray courageously for the afflicted. We can actively stand in the gap so that God will not conclude, “I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one” (Ezek 22:30), as he did in Israel.

Even Christians can lose hope when they focus primarily on negative things happening around them. Our hope lies not in what we see, but in our faith in God’s sovereignty and his grace.