

*[From The Witness, May 1948. Message delivered over WLW, Cincinnati, on the "Church by the Side of the Road" program, November 2, 1947.]*

Hath God Said

Gordon H. Clark

*Of man's first disobedience and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the world, and all our woe,  
Sing heavenly Muse ..."*

With these sonorous phrases, the immortal poet Milton began his great work, *Paradise Lost*. It was from the opening chapters of the Bible that Milton took his theme.

God had created Adam and Eve perfectly righteous and had given them the well-watered garden of Eden for their enjoyment. The delicious fruits of all the trees were theirs to eat, with but one exception. God commanded them not to eat of that one tree.

Then Satan in the form of a serpent came to tempt Eve. He began by asking her this question: "Hath God said?"

Of course if God had not said, if God had given no commandment to Adam and Eve, then there would have been no reason to abstain from eating of that tree. What Adam and Eve were to do and what they were not to do, depended on what God had said.

Later on in the Bible we read how God spoke to the children of Israel from the thundering crags of Mount Sinai. There God said: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain . . . Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Thou shalt not steal . . ."

Considering the disobedience of the Israelites on many occasions, we may imagine that Satan came to them also and asked, "Hath God said?" Of course, if God had not said, Remember the Sabbath day; if God had not commanded, Thou shalt not steal; there would have been no reason to obey. What the Israelites were to do and what they were not to do, depended on what God said.

Today there are multitudes of people who care nothing for these commandments. During the war the allied forces were incredibly profane. In this era of so-called peace, few people remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Juvenile delinquency shows that one, or more likely two, generations have not honored their fathers and mothers. The world has seen not only murders but massacres.

Unfortunately, adultery and divorce are so common as to have eaten away the moral fiber of our nation. And stealing goes on, if not in one form, then in another.

But, after all, why should one keep the Sabbath? Why shouldn't one enjoy adultery and profanity on occasion? Why not get what you can while the getting is good? Hath God said?

Our conduct, so many people affirm, is not to be hampered by ancient traditions. The Ten Commandments may have been good enough for a bygone age; but today we have evolved a new code of ethics and we must conform to the morals of our age and our society.

Maybe there is a God, and maybe there isn't. It is hard to say. But even if there is a God, he is not the tribal deity of the ancient Jews. The Old Testament is folk lore and superstition. We live today and we must follow the ways of the society in which we live.

This is the teaching that has permeated the educated classes of our country. The sociology departments in our colleges, the psychologists, the philosophers, and the schools of education insist that it is the society in which one lives that sets the standards of conduct.

The aborigines of Australia have their code of ethics. The tribes of central Africa have another code. American society requires its type of conduct and Chinese society sets different norms. No society can impose its mores on another. When in Rome, do as the Romans do. The particular society is the supreme judge.

Now, it happens that society changes. In fact, American society has changed considerably in the last century.

When our grandparents were alive, an accusation of immorality was a serious charge. Later on it became smart to be immoral. Today, however, immorality is too common even to be smart. People no longer use the idea of immorality to indicate blame or the idea of morality to indicate praise. Morality is old fashioned. Instead of these ideas, if a serious accusation is to be made against someone, he is called antisocial. The worst thing to say of a man today is to say that he is antisocial. We no longer listen for the voice of God; we pay attention to the demands of society. Society, the society in which we live, is the supreme judge of our conduct.

But if this modern humanistic theory is true, several interesting conclusions follow. When in Rome do as the Romans do, they say. Conform to the society in which you live. If this be good advice, then was it not right and good for Germans under Hitler to massacre the Jews? If society establishes the rules of conduct, an anti-semitic society justifies anti-semitic conduct. It was not Hitler's lieutenants, it was not Goering and Goebels who were antisocial; it was Pastor Niemoeller who was anti-social. That was why he was put into a concentration camp. He did not conform to the code of society. Similarly, just before the Protestant Reformation the city of Florence was licentious and gay. Savonarola appeared

and rebuked them for their sins. Savonarola was anti-social, and they burned him at the stake. Society was the judge.

And why should not society be the judge, if God has not spoken? Why isn't anti-semitism right and good, if God has not said, 'Thou shalt not kill? If God has not spoken, why should not society murder those who disagree with it?

Niemoller was anti-social because he believed God had commanded. The Apostle Paul was killed because he believed that God was superior to society. And Jesus Christ was perhaps the most anti-social person who ever lived.

Hath God said? If God has not said, then profanity, murder, adultery, theft are all right wherever these actions are customary.

But as for me, I do not believe this godless humanism; I do not approve the conduct it produces. I believe that God has spoken. Only on the basis of what God has said can morality be justified. Only on this basis can individual murderers and political massacres be condemned. Only if God has spoken can the old fashioned American principles of freedom challenge the modern forces of a tyrannical society. Only if God has spoken can we have hope in this life and eternal joy in the life to come.

Has God spoken? Yes, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," The Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever, World without end. Amen.