

Can the Church Survive?

By Ken Davies

Scripture: Matt. 5:13-15

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes woke up and nudged his faithful friend. Holmes said, “Watson, look up and tell me what you see”.

Watson said, “I see a fantastic panorama of countless stars.”

Holmes said, “And what does that tell you, Watson?”

Watson pondered for a moment. “Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I can see that God is all powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.”

“Why? What does it tell you, Holmes?”

Holmes was silent for a moment then said, “Someone has stolen our tent.”

Maybe you’ve noticed the dwindling numbers of people who attend a church these days. I think that one of the reasons this is happening, is that the typical American, and this includes many who call themselves “Christians,” don’t believe that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

Many have compromised with the world in their thinking and beliefs regarding the Bible, and bought into the liberal notions that have infected many, perhaps most of our churches and seminaries today. Starting around the 1800s, some theologians began teaching that the Bible is neither divinely inspired, nor inerrant, and thus not really the Word of God, as was previously thought. They denied all things supernatural, and concluded that any Bible text that spoke of a miracle was therefore false.

This attack on Scripture began in Germany, and by the 1920s, it had been completely adopted by the Protestant churches there. What happens when the Church can no longer present a clear, Biblical message? The society becomes just like Israel in the time of the Judges. “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (**Judges 21:25**). This is called “relativism.” It leaves a person without an

authoritative or consistent standard by which to compare one's own actions. This also leads to self-justification and self-deception.

As **G. K. Chesterton** said, "When a man stops believing in God he doesn't then believe in nothing, he believes anything." It's apparent that the silenced voice of the Church in Germany allowed for the rise of Hitler. God and His Word had been discredited by the Church, so the German people sought another god. They found one in the person of Adolf Hitler, and put their faith in him (to their own destruction).

More recently, in our country, the so-called, "mainline denominations" (Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, Catholic, etc.) have all succumbed to same theological liberalism as the Protestant churches in Germany did. As a result, these churches have no way to discipline any of their leaders for misconduct. Take the example of Bishop James Pike.

Although he was raised as a Roman Catholic, he became an agnostic while in college. Nevertheless, he still found himself drawn to the Episcopal Church. After World War II ended, he decided to go to seminary. He later told Francis Schaeffer, "When I turned from being agnostic, I went to Union Theological Seminary, eager for, and expecting bread; but when I graduated, all that it left me was a handful of pebbles."

Because of his radically anti-Christian teachings, Bishop Pike was brought before a church council and charged with heresy. The charges were eventually dropped, though, because the Episcopal Church no longer had any firm standard by which to judge him. Sadly, while traveling in Israel, Pike died in the wilderness because his car got stuck on a road he thought was going to Jericho, but actually led to the Dead Sea. (There's another whole message here, isn't there?)

Chesterton also said, "Do not be so open-minded that your brains fall out."

As Christians, we must take a firm and unalterable stand on the historic teaching of the Church that the Bible is the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of the one true God. If we don't believe this, what can we offer a lost and dying world? If our view of Scripture is that it was only inspired by enthusiastic men, but contains numerous errors, the Bible ceases to have value for us or the world.

Some people are afraid to stand up for biblical doctrine because they think it causes conflict or strife. There is always going to be conflict when truth confronts and opposes error. However, we can take a firm stance and still show love in our confrontation. As Christians, we are called upon to shine as lights in the darkness of this world. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (**Matt. 5:14-16**).

This indicates that we must not only believe that the Bible is the Word of God, we must also live godly lives! "...that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." We're not free to live our lives any way we want to. Some will view this as intolerably restrictive. That's because they have the notion that "freedom" means being able to do whatever they want, whenever they want to.

According to Scripture, however, that is a recipe for disaster and destruction (both physical and spiritual). The Bible calls us to a life of purity because that is what will produce God's best for us! It's not that God wants to be a cosmic killjoy. He knows what will give us the most happiness and contentment in this life, and tells us what to avoid for our own good.

People today seem to think that "being happy" is all that matters! But they have no idea what being truly happy is all about. A former friend of mine, who also claims to be a Christian, had the gall to tell his kids, "I'm a better man without your mom," and then proceeded to abandon them in order to shack up with a woman that was not his wife!

What in the world is going on? How is it that people who claim to be followers of Christ can behave in such a vile and ungodly manner? If we're thinking, believing, and behaving just like the world, what is there that will draw people to Christ? The world already discounts the Bible as a book of fables made up by men. If we believe the same thing, what do we have to offer the world? We will be like the salt that is no longer salty. Something that has lost its purpose for existence is no longer of any worth. Would you use non-salty salt?

Scripture says if we sow the wind, we will reap the whirlwind (**Hos. 8:7**). If we set aside the Bible as unreliable, we destroy the foundation of our Christian faith, and our very reason for existence. Why bother to call ourselves Christians any longer if we refuse to believe God's Word?

So, what's the solution to this? Believe the Word of God! **Hebrews 11:6** says, "...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Faith in God necessarily involves belief in His Word, the Bible. After all, it claims for itself not only inspiration (**2 Tim. 3:16**), but that it is the very Word of God. What do you think "thus says the Lord" means? If you cannot bring yourself to believe these things, please do everyone a favor: Stop calling yourself a "Christian." People may be fooled by the pretense, but God certainly isn't, and people will point to you as an example of what Christians are like.

What the world needs is a Christian community that will **believe** and **live** the Word of God as it is found in the Bible. The bitter accusation of the pagan world that "the Church is full of hypocrites" shows that they are desperately seeking the **real** thing!

As Christians, we must oppose (lovingly) those who say that the Bible is not the inspired, inerrant Word of God, whether that person is seminary trained or not, or even a seminary teacher or pastor! Those who teach such things are taking the "children's bread" and replacing it with pebbles.

What, then, can we do? Scripture says, "Be diligent [KJV says "Study"] to present yourself before God as one tried and true, an unashamed worker, correctly handling the Word of God" (**2 Tim. 2:15**). There are many, many resources available to the Christian today to help strengthen and enable them to defend their faith. It's only a matter of desire on your part! If you lack that desire, **pray** about it! Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the desire to be diligent in your faith. Study the Bible, and **believe** what you read!

May God bless you as you endeavor to do these things!