

SALT AND LIGHT

By

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Millions of devout believers today are deeply concerned, if not intensely alarmed, that the nation is in rapid decline, and that freedom is eroding. They are becoming aware of a powerful movement to destroy Christian faith and doctrine, a movement spearheaded by those in control of the media, the movies, and who hold high positions in government, as well as influential positions in world finances.

Carl F. H. Henry, in his book *Twilight of a Great Civilization*, wrote: "There is a new barbarism. This barbarism has embraced a new pagan mentality...not simply rejecting the legacy of the West, but embracing a new pagan mentality where there is no fixed truth." In fact, it is their aim to destroy truth. The progression of pagan concepts and the increase of sin fairly scream at us every day, no matter where we are. The question is: What can be done? What are we to do?

In the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus gave the blueprint for his kingdom, his disciples are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. In explaining this, he said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:20)

The strength of Christ's followers is to be found in their personal faith and in the way this faith works in their relationships, both to him and to all others. The actions produced by such faith are seen by the world as acts of radicals and rebels. Therefore, Jesus warned that his disciples would suffer reproaches and persecution "for righteousness sake." Plainly, the kinds of people who seek the kingdom of God are unwelcome to an evil world. "Even so", he said, "let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16)

The tyranny of the Roman Empire was not conquered by the power of politicians nor the force of arms, but by the power of the gospel as it was applied in the lives of humble and faithful Christians. This is why those who seek to establish the sovereignty of a world government in defiance of the rule of Christ must render the Christian faith ineffectual.

As if the enemies of Jesus hadn't thought of enough ways to weaken and destroy Christian influence, the church has come up with a few of her own. There is no need to mention the showmen of so-called TV evangelism. Anyone vaguely familiar with the New Testament can see that the antics of the "healers" and their manipulations to relieve the viewers of their money are detrimental to the effort to shed the light of truth and righteousness.

More effective in diminishing the Christian witness is the focusing of Christian activity on an organization and the concentration of resources on the housing and management of

that organization. Today's Christian leaders seek to bring bigger crowds together, to build larger structures to house them, and thus promote the feeling that one is serving God by being a part of this process.

Neither God nor the world are impressed by the size of the church band, the contemporary music, the number on the staff or any of the rest of the program designed to please a generation drugged by entertainment. It should be obvious by now that great cathedrals with stained glass windows and gold crosses are seen by the world as ornamental monuments, and nothing more.

One may be part of the crowd of thousands on Sunday morning, yet completely unnoticed by the lost sinner groping his way through life, in despair and darkness, without a clue to God's marvelous purpose. This is not to deny the value of large Christian assemblies, but the larger the crowd, the more likely is one to miss his calling to be salt and light to those lost individuals.

The sensationalism and emotional manifestations that are presented in the name of worship actually confound the Christian life and serve as a substitute for a life consecrated to God. Zeal is encouraged, but it is zeal for the activities of the group, zeal for him, for the ski trip. Or the overnight lock-in, or the garage sale, or the special day services, but where is the zeal for holding forth the truth and righteousness of God in the market place of greed, and in the squalor of broken homes and misguided lives?

What is being offered through religious channels today, including many churches, is a swift short-cut to peace of mind without the pain of self-denial and the burden of personal responsibility to God. If you had a million, or a billion, people like this, in thousands of churches, the whole multitude would not produce enough salt to preserve the nation or enough light to reveal the narrow path to eternal life.

In the days of the apostle Paul he reminded his brethren that they were in a spiritual warfare, and that God had provided them with all they needed to combat the forces of darkness. (Eph. 6:11- 18) Notice that all the tools of our warfare are personal: a girdle of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel, a shield of faith, helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit, and prayer. It is only when one takes a personal stand in this warfare that he begins to take on the flavor of salt and shed some light of God's truth.

The battle is not fought at the ten-thirty hour on Sunday down at the multi-million dollar state-of-the-art - church facility, but at the work place, in the home, in the school, in the market place. The enemy attacks through the public schools, through the elected officials, through movies and TV programs, all taking place seven days a week. The salt and light is not in the church building, however vast and lavish it may be, and it cannot be shed by listening to the most erudite preaching. The Bible says that not many wise men after the flesh are called by God, but that He uses the foolish and weak things of the world, and the things that are despised, all that no flesh should glory before God.

The power to combat God's enemies is not in the skills of the doctors and experts, or the size of the church staff, but in the testimony of truth by consecrated servants, who have taken a personal stand to bear the cross, whatever the price.

Unfortunately, we have strayed so far from the Biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that many Christians have no confidence in their own witness. The business of declaring the way of truth is left up to the preacher - "that's what we pay him for." Consequently, the light of truth is confined to the thirty-minute sermon once a week, which is never heard by those, lost and blinded by the god of this world.

Back in the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church refused to allow the Bible to be translated into the common language of the people. The priests said that if the people had the Bible in their own tongue, they would abuse it and fail to understand the meaning and application. They claimed that only the priests had the authority to interpret the scriptures. But William Tyndale was determined to translate the scriptures into the English language, and said to the priest-craft that if God allowed him, he would see to it that the common ploughboy of England knew more of the Scriptures than they. He was executed for heresy.

Today, almost everyone, including every ploughboy, has a Bible. But few people know what it contains, and still think that they must have the professionals to interpret it for them. Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount to ordinary people and expected them to understand him. Are modern Christians less literate than those of the first century?

The non-Christian culture sees the church as a divided, competing mass of hypocrites marked by the scandals of the TV evangelists. George Barna, in *The Second Coming of the Church*, said, "The systems, structures, institutions, and relational networks developed for the furtherance of the church are archaic, inefficient, and ineffective - and, perhaps, even unbiblical... Our goal cannot simply be a timid, powerless survival; it must be the role that Christ called the church to play, that of a loving authoritative, healing, and compelling influence upon the world. What we need is true spiritual renewal - a transformation that goes well beyond mere evangelistic outreach."

If Christians are to stand against the full-scale war being waged against us today, we must each one, individually, cast off the popular fashions of the world, leave our "religious ghettos," and take action as Christ's salt and light to people in a sinful world. We must follow the example of Jesus, who didn't sit in the Temple waiting for the lost to seek him out; rather, he took his message to the harlots, the publicans, and to other sinners, for whom he was willing to die. Then he commanded his followers to go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them. It is when we do this that we receive the promise:

"And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 18:18-20).

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