

WHERE MILLIONS MISS THE WAY

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The belief that the Bible sets the basis but not the bounds of modern religion causes millions to miss the way. James spoke of “pure religion” which is “undefiled before God and the Father.” He said it is “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27). Although often repeated in churches of Christ, many never hear emphasized the truth that the Bible is the all sufficient guide in matters religious today. Peter wrote, “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (II Pet. 1:3).

The comprehensive nature of scripture is stressed in the classic text on inspiration which reads, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16-17). Observe in this authoritative affirmation that the scripture, the Bible, profits in assuring the right teaching--doctrine, the reproof essential in making a discovery of wrong doing in the life, the right way to make amends--correction, and the right instruction to make believers righteous before God.

An example of how many believe the Bible establishes the basis but not the boundary for Christian living emerges from a little book titled *Major United Methodists Beliefs* by Mack B. Stokes from Atlanta, Georgia. First printed in 1955 this book has undergone fifteen printings up to 1990. Stokes wrote in the preface, “We believe in revealed religion, experienced religion, and social religion.” He explains, “Revealed religion is based on the Bible as God’s living Word for our response.” Notice that this religion is “based” on the Bible without the provision that the Bible also sets the boundaries of acceptable belief and practice. “Experienced religion is personal religion. It is far more than forms, ceremonies, and second-hand religion. . . . It means the inner assurance that we are God’s children now and are on our way to heaven.” Note that the “experience” is believed to provide assurance beyond what is actually written in the Bible. Lastly, he says, “Social religion binds us together with our fellow-Christians in public worship, Bible study, and praying for each other. It means reaching out to others by telling what Christ has done for us and by deeds of love and mercy.”

On the United Methodist television program which aired April 6, 2003, a Mississippi bishop for the UMC named Kenneth Carder argued for fifteen minutes

that Christianity needs no argument to support its claims. He told of a Roman Catholic nun in Mississippi who was doing good deeds and a mayor of a little town in Mississippi who was giving of himself and obtaining government grants for various purposes for people, and “in him,” the bishop asserted, “we saw the risen Christ.” He was expressing what his comrade, Stokes, styled “social religion.” Right here is where millions miss the way.

Cornelius, a devout and generous man already, needed to hear “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). Bishop Carder has Cornelius in a saved state due to his “social religion.” A report like Luke gave of Cornelius that he was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always” would cause the Bishop to exclaim that in Cornelius he “saw the risen Christ.” Yet, Cornelius was not even in Christ and longed to “hear all things commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33).

The Methodists place emphasis on “social religion” instead of “revealed religion” because “revealed religion” calls for baptism by immersion (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and Methodists insist on substituting sprinkling. “Revealed religion” demands teaching before baptizing (Matt. 28:19-20), and Methodists induct infants into their membership. “Revealed religion” organizes the local churches as self-governing with elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, and members under Christ alone (I Tim. 3; Eph. 4:11), but Methodists organize according to the *Discipline written by men*. “Revealed religion” calls for men to do the public preaching (I Tim. 2:11-15), but the Methodists disregard what God revealed and have women preachers to the delight of modern “social religion” which plays on a woman’s pride that no man can do a better job than she can. Example after example could be given to show the danger of following such an inconsistent triad of religious views which mitigate against the teaching of the Bible.

Millions are missing the right way today. Long ago the apostle Peter wrote of those who were straying from that which had been revealed. He said, “Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (II Pet. 2:15-19).