

Billy Graham: This Is Our Only Hope

The decline in moral values we see in Western culture coincides with the decline in this culture's view of God's Word, the Bible. In this classic message, presented in 1966 at the 150th anniversary of the American Bible Society, Billy Graham calls for a return to the Bible as the authoritative guide for national life.

It has been well over four centuries since William Tyndale was sentenced to death for translating the Bible into English. We find in Tyndale's ashes not only a symbol of the impact that the Bible has made in our world, but also a symbol of the price paid by many heroes of the faith to give us our Bible. Miles Coverdale, who 400 years ago issued the first printed copy of the Scriptures in our language, was banished from England. The decaying bones of pioneer translator John Wycliffe were dug up 31 years after his burial and publicly desecrated.

Thus, when we read the Bible today, we must remember that every page has been preserved through the years by the tears, the blood and the agony of courageous men and women.

One of the greatest tragedies of America today is that the Bible is an open book available to everyone, but to millions of Americans it is a closed book—either because they leave it unread or because they read it without applying its teaching to themselves.

Men somehow think that in an age of scientific achievement, this ancient book is out of date. However, I am convinced that the Bible is just as relevant for today as it was for the first century.

America is facing a moral crisis that will ultimately

determine the future of this nation. The security of America is not being threatened abroad so much as it is being threatened by immorality at home. We are in the midst of a moral struggle that is just as important for the survival of America as the revolution led by George Washington and his co-patriots.

Most Americans hate to admit we are in a crisis, but its bitter fruits are all around us. We are adrift without answers. No single authority rules our conduct. No church lays down the moral law for all. No tribal customs and taboos define the limits of our immoralities. We are free to be prejudiced or promiscuous, to cheat or chisel. We are left floundering in a money-motivated, sex-obsessed society.

Nowhere is the moral confusion more apparent than in the area of sexual morality. The country is paying a fantastic price for this moral-sexual confusion, which began a few years ago in this country and now has reached full tide. It is getting worse with every passing hour. It threatens the foundations of our democracy and the security of our republic.

We are rapidly becoming a secularized society. We are unwittingly accepting the idea that man is simply a physical being—that life on this planet is all there is. This materialism and secularism has captured millions of people in Europe and America. Millions now explain the universe without a reference to God, morality without the Ten Commandments, personality without a soul, the good life without hope of immortality. This is blatant secularism and humanism.

We see this trend in the great social programs that have now been instituted by federal, state and local governments. We are almost totally preoccupied with the things that minister to the life of the animal-man. Nothing else matters. "Eat, drink and be merry" (Luke 12:19) is the prevailing slogan of our generation and all too often the emphasis of many churches.

If we accept the fact that man is only an animal—that God is dead, that only this life counts—then there are only two alternatives. One is total license, where man's animal instincts of selfishness, greed, jealousy, lust, rebellion, indulgence and possessiveness are allowed to run totally free. The other is total control, where these instincts are controlled by the state. We now see government moving into every area of our lives.

There is, however, a third alternative that I would like to submit to you. It is a return to the Bible as the authoritative guide for our national life. It is the acceptance of the moral principles laid down by the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount as the guidelines to every area of our lives. Our secular view of man would have to be abandoned. The emphasis on materialism would have to be replaced by an emphasis on the moral and spiritual nature of man. We would have to embrace wholeheartedly the Christian view of man and life as our forefathers did—and we would have to do it voluntarily!

The primary thrust of the Bible is alien to the secular orientation of our day. The Bible proclaims absolutes at a time when relativism is the prevailing philosophy of the Western World and when ultimate truth is regarded as an impossibility. Relativism tries to assure us that all things are subject to change. They say that true religion of today may be untrue tomorrow; the ethics of today may be completely reversed tomorrow; the immoralities of today may be the norm tomorrow.

However, once you start reading the Bible and believing it to be the Word of the Living God, the picture changes. Absolutes become fixed principles by which men guide their course from one generation to another. They are true yesterday, today and forever. The absolutes of the Holy Bible give man something on which he can depend and by which he can steer the course of society.

I am convinced that only as we abandon secularism and embrace the biblical concept of man can America and the world be saved.

A return to the Bible would change the moral tone of our nation. The Bible says: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34).

A return to the Bible would strengthen our home life. I receive letters every day from people whose homes were on the brink of disaster, but who now thank God that they accepted Jesus Christ. One man wrote: "My home was on the rocks, but now that our family has accepted Jesus Christ, it is on the Rock."

A return to the Bible would do more for race relations than any other single thing we could do. The teaching of the Bible could take the bigotry, hate and prejudice out of the hearts of men today.

A return to the Bible would put sex in right perspective. The abnormal use of sex is a result of our depraved, sinful nature. It takes that which is holy and drags it down into the gutter. It makes a plaything of the most creative, the most sacred gift God has given to man. Nothing can bring sex into its proper place as quickly as a spiritual awakening.

A return to the Bible would give purpose to our young people.

A return to the Bible would also restore a high sense of destiny to our nation. The men who founded our nation had a high view of what our nation should be under God. True, some of them were not what they should have been, but at least they believed that faith in God and reverence for Him gave man a dignity he could not otherwise have. They sought for the guidance of Almighty God in the affairs of the nation. They prayed in times of crisis—and they got answers to their prayers.

But to make it more personal, a return to the Bible would also give the inner peace and security that people are desperately looking for. Woodrow Wilson once said, "Give the Bible back to the people, unadulterated, unaltered, unexplained, uncheaped, and then see it work for the whole nation."

Just as Christianity began with the dedication of a few in an isolated upper room, so it can be revived by a handful who dare to give Christ all they have.

Charles Spurgeon once said: "A lion needs no defense—just turn it loose." Our greatest need at this hour is to turn the Bible loose throughout the world.

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