
MR. WORLDLY WISEMAN

“RELIGION is fine, as long as you keep it in its place. Going to church is good as long as you maintain balance with the rest of life and only if you avoid going to extremes.” How often have we heard something like this when we try to present a biblical reason or rationale for life, morality and conduct?

Mr. Worldly Wiseman has much counsel to offer the pilgrim, but unfortunately his guidance destroys many more than does the Slough of Despond. He views religion as a once-a-week happening—a social statement. He is the respected, influential citizen of the community whom we find opposed to any kind of religious activity which might interfere with his pursuit of worldly pleasures or monetary gain. His motto is “sensible religion for the sensible man.” Rather than viewing sin with the hopeless despair of the pilgrim and the anguish of soul produced by a sensitive conscience, he bears no burden on his back, and he carries no weight of guilt. He has neither sense of moral accountability nor fear of pending eternal judgment. Further, his treachery is found in the counsel he gives that one can serve both God and Satan at the same time.

Yet Mr. Worldly Wiseman is not without some degree of religious discernment, for he recognizes that Christian has a burden and advises him “with all speed get thyself rid of thy burden.” How? By going to the village named Morality and seeking the instruction of a man named Legality, another reputable person of good standing. Like Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Legality gives spiritual assistance to all who earnestly seek relief from the weight of their sins but are blind to the danger of finding a false comfort, with tragic results.

Notice the main point of Mr. Worldly Wiseman’s questionings: “How did you come by this burden you are carrying?” Answer: “By reading this book in my hand.” The response from Mr. Worldly Wiseman has not changed over the centuries from Bunyan’s time to ours:

“Only the weak-minded read the Bible.”

“The Bible contains too many things hard to be understood.”

“It is filled with distractions and it unmans men.” (Translation: It denies men and women their true human rights, making them less than what they ought to be, suppressing them.)

“It sends them away from their homes and families after delusive dreams.”

Isn’t this the way of modern psychology, the mental therapist and the educated elitist? Surely there are more current methods of taking care of hang-ups than searching the pages of an ancient book long proven to be obsolete. Surely we have come of age and recognized that if there is to be any social change for the good of mankind we must lay hold of the problem and deal with it ourselves. Consequently, many have run to the village of Morality and have applied every legal means of shedding the burden from off their backs. Scores are involved in good works, meritorious activities and self-sacrifice—all in the name of pleasing God and earning His favor. But the burden is still there, the weight is still heavy and the law with crushing conviction still thunders, “Thou art guilty!”

The Scripture is quite clear. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18, NKJV).
