

Matthew 5:13-16

7/11/2007

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The lady objected: "Christianity is a private faith. It doesn't have to show itself outwardly. It is what I believe, not what I do."

Another lady said, "Yes! And you do not have to go to church to be a Christian!" "Too right!" added a man, "My belief is not public, it is private. You do not have to show it off!"

The man chatting to them then responded, "OK. If they held a trial to determine if you were a Christian or not, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Are you a Christian? Does your family see that Jesus is your friend? Do people around you notice anything different about you because of how you're responding to what Jesus has done? Can they tell that you're a follower of Christ?

Some Christians do not want that. They like being secret disciples, secretly following Jesus, not wanting anyone to know that they've committed their lives to Jesus, and accepted Him as their saviour and Lord.

It is like buying a Porsche, but trying to cover it with a shell of an old Cortina, so no-one will know it is a Porsche.

It is like eating out at a deluxe Restaurant, but when the photographer comes, you insist on putting a big yellow M with a red background on the wall behind you, before she takes the photo.

It is like marrying a wonderful partner, and leaving them every night to sleep in your old bed at your parents' home.

Jesus gave some other comparisons in Matthew 5:13-16. He said it is like having salt that is not salty at all. And it is like lighting a lamp and covering it so no-one could see it at all.

It makes no sense to have such a private faith that it doesn't affect your life at all. It is as useful as having no faith at all, because that is what it is. It is a dead faith.

And like a dead prawn, it begins to stink and people sure can tell it is dead.

James tackled this problem in his letter in the Bible. He said *Faith without works is dead*. If what you believe is not affecting you, then you do not really believe it at all.

If I said that I believed that every night a man dropped 5 gold coins in every empty can left on my door step, but I never once put a can out there, then you would rightly wonder if I really believed it.

Put your money where your mouth is. If you believe something is true, then do it! Have the courage of your convictions! Live your faith.

If you believe something is wrong, why do it? If you know it is good to do other things, why not do them?

Why claim to be a Christian and not live as a Christian?

The most common answer is in what Jesus said just before he said the comparisons. For he said that we will face persecution if we follow him. and deep down we're scared of being hurt, and of being noticeably different.

After all, many think committed Christians are loonies who stand on streets berating people, do not they?

They are the hypocrites who abuse kids in private, aren't they? They are the ones who do not have a sense of humour, and cannot take a joke aren't they? They are the dorks of society aren't they?

And so our perceptions of Christians push us into privacy. We do not want to be like them.

We do not want to be thought of badly, so we pretend we're not Christians in our actions, but claim we are in thought and faith.

Listen again to what Jesus had to say about this from Matthew 5:

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 by men. You are the light of the world. A city 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 men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven.

If you are a Christian, then let God change your actions because of your faith. Let your good deeds shine out. And as they shine, people will notice and they will respond in 2 ways. The 1st way is the persecution he mentioned earlier in Matthew 5, but the 2nd is that some will be drawn closer to God and will praise him.

Throughout history much has been done because Christians have dared to let their deeds shine. In the past 300 years, we have seen prison reform, medical care, trade unions, abolition of slavery, orphanages, law reform and schooling being spearheaded by

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committed Christians. It has changed the face of life in Western society.

As Christians have taken a more private role in society, our society has changed rapidly over the past 30 years.

Truly godly living is now thought of as a thing for the weirdoes. Ungodly lifestyles are more acceptable as being normal.

You cannot change that with laws. You cannot force people to be godly. But what we need is for God to change us.

If you claim to be a Christian, let God change you. Ask him to help you be more loving, caring and gentle. Find out more of how he wants us to live, which he has had written for us in the Bible, and put it into practice. Meet with Christians and learn from them. And ask God to keep filling you with His Holy Spirit, who will help you change.

As we do this, we will shine brighter, be saltier, and change our world for the better. We can do it by living our faith.