

Evil is Everywhere

Evil is everywhere. It is all around us. It's in the workplace and in the school houses. It's in the neighborhoods and in the media. It's even in the church buildings and in the home. It is, indeed, a very clear and present danger.

But ours is not the first generation to be shrouded in darkness. Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5) in a day when "the wickedness of man was great on the earth" (Gen. 6:5). Gideon and Eli were honorable judges during a time when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6). Josiah, the eight-year-old king, "walked in the ways of his father David" while his father Amon "multiplied guilt" (2 Chron. 33:23). These and other heroes of faith did not use their unfavorable surroundings as an excuse for bad behavior. Rather, the very presence of evil became an opportunity for them to show what was good.

Jesus addressed this very principle in the Sermon on the Mount. With the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12), He described what the kingdom citizen must look like on the inside: "poor in spirit" and "pure in heart." In the next section (Matt. 5:13-16), He pictured what we must look like to everyone else: "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." How fitting that Jesus used two common items, two things that everyone has in their house. And they describe something that everyone has in their life—influence.

What can Christians do concerning the evil that is all around us? Shelter in place? Keep to ourselves? Remain shut in and shut out? Not hardly. In fact, Jesus' admonitions suggest that we spread out.

Be distinct. Salt has a peculiar taste. It is immediately recognizable. Food at the restaurant (notice I didn't say at my house) is usually judged as having too much or not enough salt. When Jesus said that we are the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), one of the things that metaphor recommends is that we have a distinguishing flavor all of our own.

Now, this is not about being different just for the sake of being different. This has nothing to do with weird hairdos and eccentric clothing that draw more attention to the person than the cause they represent. This is about being different for the sake of being right. That is, after all, how we make a difference. When evil abounds, good is easily detected.

But what good is salt that is not salty? When you can't tell the difference between the flavor and what needs flavoring, we have lost our effectiveness. "Low salt" is fine if you're on a diet, but when it comes to a world that is hungering and thirsting for righteousness, get out of the shaker and into the soup. Leave a taste in someone's mouth that causes them to say, "we could use a little more of that." Christians, of all people, ought to be worth their salt.

Be seen. Lights are meant for shining. They are to be beaming from a lampstand, not hidden under a bushel. You can't be "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14) when you stay in your house all the time. You have to shine like a city set on a hill.

Darkness is not a power that opposes light. It is merely the absence of it. And it doesn't take much light to cancel it out. One candle can brighten a whole room. One flashlight can illuminate an entire tent. What do you think one Christian can do? When you shine in your dark corner of

the world, you enable others to see. You give them enough light to finally find the way out, the way to Him who gives life and light. But if you are not where you can be seen, the rest of the world remains turned off, too.

You have a little light. Let it shine. All around the neighborhood. All the time. Let it shine. If you hide it under a bushel or let the devil blow it out, you extinguish your purpose and responsibility as well. You shut your own eyes to the "blessed gospel light."

Be good. "You" are the salt of the earth. "You" are the light of the world. These are individual responsibilities. You can't depend on others to do them for you. Just as salt has a distinct taste, you have a peculiar circle of influence. Just as light spreads and extends, you have a unique area where only you can shine. Don't wait for other people to overcome evil with good. Be good yourself.

That's what the world should taste. That's what they should see. "Your good works" (Matt. 5:16). They've already seen plenty of bad ones. All they have to do is look around to observe those. Let them see in you someone whose behavior is not influenced by what's around him but by what's inside him. Peter encouraged the "aliens and strangers" of the First Century, those who didn't fit in with their surroundings, to "keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles" (1 Pet. 2:11-12). If your attitude is where it ought to be, your conduct can't help but follow suit. Good works will "glorify your Father who is in heaven." Through us, they get a taste of Him. Our light reflects back to Him who is Light. We're not in this for our glory. We just want to help people find their way *to* glory.

What can Christians do? Just be what you are meant to be. It's what will make a difference.

-Brian Anderson