

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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What Can Christians Do?

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 Peter 2:5) in a day when "the wickedness of man was great on the earth" (Genesis 6:5). Gideon and Eli were honorable judges during a time when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). Josiah, the eight-year-old king, "walked in the ways of his father David" while his father Amon "multiplied guilt" (2 Chronicles 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 (Matthew 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 (Matthew 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" (Matthew 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 starving 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 lamp-stand, not hidden under a bushel. You can't be "the light of the world" (Matthew 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" (Matthew 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 Peter 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.

- Bubba Garner

Don't Romanticize Evil

Did the world start revolving in the opposite direction while I slept? Has the earth fallen under the influence of some mind-altering astral body? I ask these questions because of the mind-boggling things which I have recently heard coming out of the mouths of supposedly intelligent beings. Surely, the only possible explanation for such silliness is some change in the way the earth turns!

I refer to recent comments about Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. In an editorial piece, the New York Post observed that author Gore Vidal wants to write a movie about McVeigh because he "has a sense of justice, and that's what attracted me" (5/13/2001). AP News (5/10/2001) reported that David Woodard, music composer, has created a 12-minute "pre-requiem" for McVeigh. Woodard wants the "pre-death trumpet fanfare" to be broadcast on an Indiana radio station just prior to McVeigh's execution

in the hope that the performance of the music will escort McVeigh's soul to heaven. Woodard is "awed by who (McVeigh) is and his circumstances," although he claims that he does not "support" McVeigh's attitude toward the government. I have even heard McVeigh compared to Jesus the Messiah inasmuch as Jesus was hated by many at His death and public opinion is also strong against McVeigh!

Have you ever heard such foolishness? I fully support the right of individuals to say publicly what they think, but that right also implies that expressed views can be challenged. I recognize (hope?) that the almost romantic tolerance for evil expressed by Vidal and Woodard is not typical of Americans in general, but our culture has been moving for some time in the direction of "non-judgmental-ism." It seems that we are becoming afraid to boldly and plainly identify any behavior as sinful, even such heinous crimes as that of McVeigh. He disagreed with the U.S. government's actions at Waco, so he blew up a federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people who were not responsible for what happened at Waco. Yet we are to believe that this action illustrated "a sense of justice"?

I am not the least bit "awed" by Timothy McVeigh; he is a convicted mass murderer and should be punished as such. To compare McVeigh with Jesus as though he (McVeigh) were some sort of messianic figure is ridiculous and denigrates the redemptive work of our Lord. McVeigh struck out at innocent people in an effort to attract attention to his political views. Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified to save guilty people from eternal condemnation. Can someone explain to me the similarity in character between these two?

The eternal fate of individuals should be left up to God (Acts 17:30-31; Romans 14:10-13). The Scriptures, however, teach that we can and should be willing to distinguish between good and evil (Matthew 7:15-20; Hebrews 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). To be willing to publicly identify sinful behavior is not necessarily hateful and is important for the support of a clear moral standard.

- Allen Dvorak

“I DON'T HAVE TIME!”

The employees of a post office of a certain Texas town saved the short pieces of twine which came wrapped around the bundles of letters, winding them into a ball. At the end of four years it was twenty-nine inches in diameter, weighed seventy-five pounds, and contained an estimated length of thirty miles.

The short pieces of spare time which come wrapped around the doings of every day in the average person's life would, if systematically saved by applying them to the reading and study of the Scriptures, result in the accumulation of a vast amount of spiritual knowledge.

- A. Hugh Clark

“You will have no test of faith that will not fit you to be a blessing if you are obedient to the Lord. I never had a trial but when I got out of the deep river I found some poor pilgrim on the bank that I was able to help by that very experience.” - A.B. Simpson

- > “God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts!”
 - > “The best way to move mountains is to begin with molehills and work your way up!”
 - > “It may be true that every man has his price, but too many people seem to be holding bargain sales!”
 - > “Friends don't let friends die without Jesus!”
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“I Will Build My Church!”* (Text: Matt. 16:18-19); Sunday evening: *“The Bad Bargain of Esau!”* (Gen. 25:29-34).