

Our Influence for Good

by Walton Weaver

The reason God decided to destroy the world in the days of Noah was because "the earth was corrupt in the sight of God ...And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Genesis 6:11-12).

After God had purged the earth of wickedness, it was not long until moral corruption had filled the earth again. He had promised he would not destroy the earth again by water, and he chose Israel as the people through whom Christ, the seed of Abraham, was to come to save the world from sin (Genesis 12:1-3; John 1:29; 1 John 2:1-2). The Lord's servant of Isaiah's prophecy was to "restore the preserved ones of Israel" and to be "a light of the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). When Jesus came He said that when he was lifted upon the cross He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32). He also claimed that he was the light of the world (John 8:12). Thus Jesus fulfilled the mission of the Lord's servant predicted by Isaiah.

Ideally speaking fleshly Israel should have been a light to the nations during the Old Testament period. Being in the unique role where God placed her, it was surely God's intention that she should be an influence for good among the nations. Paul found fault with the Jews of his day because though they were confident that they were a guide to the blind and a light to those who were in darkness, they did not even live up to the demands they made of others. Consequently, Paul says, the name of God was blasphemed among them (Romans 2:19-24).

In this age God is looking to Christians, the new Israel of God (Galatians 6:19), to be an influence for good in the world. Jesus told His disciples that they were "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14), and "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). The condition of the world has been about the same in all ages and the need for a good influence from righteous people is just as important in our time as at any other time in the history of the world.

John says that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one" (1 John 5:19), yet, Christians, as a peculiar people (that is, God's own special people), have been called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). They are not to love the world, nor the things of the world (1 John 2:15-17). Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lusts, they "no longer should live the rest of (their) time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (1 Peter 4:2). Good influence is made possible through good behavior.

Live in the World

To be an influence for good Christians have to mingle themselves with society. They cannot be monks or hermits and at the same time be constituted the salt of the earth and the light of the world. To mix with people in the world is not the same as to be "of the world." We must be in the world to be an influence for good, but we are not of the world (John 17:14). To be "not of the world" is to be kept "from the evil one" (John 17:15); positively, it is to "keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27), and, negatively, it is to "love not the world or the things in the

world" (1 John 2:15).

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord" (2 Corinthians 6:17) shows we are to live a separated life, but not an isolated one. No one can be an influence for good while living in isolation. The world is surely the place for the salt of the world.

Human Instrumentality

God uses human beings as human agents to win the world to Jesus Christ. The reason Jesus intended for his disciples to be lights in the world was that those of the world may "see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16), Peter admonishes Christians to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" so that "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles ...by your good works which they observe;" they may "glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12). Being blameless and harmless in the world, shining as lights in the world (Philippians 2:14-16) has purpose beyond the happiness and good it will bring to our own lives. God wants by our good behavior to use us as instruments in His hands to bring others out of the world into His marvelous light.

Preaching and Practice

It takes good example to win those of the world to Jesus Christ, but it also takes specifically teaching them the word of God. When Paul admonishes us to 'become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation;' he adds, "among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2:15-16). It takes both a shining example and the word of life to redeem a soul from sin. Those of the world may learn a good bit about the truth by one's good deeds which he sees, but there are some things he can never learn just by observing one's good behavior. We should be looking for a door of opportunity to be opened to us to teach the specifics from the word of God to that neighbor or friend who has been favorably influenced to be receptive to the word of God because of the good behavior he has observed in our lives.