

“Should A Christian Be Actively Involved In Changing Culture?”



Any Christian who strives by God’s grace to be an influence where God has providentially put them will hear this warning sounded from our society, culture, “focus groups,” “advocacy groups,” and other special interest groups with chips on their shoulders -- and even people sitting in the pews: **“DON’T GET INVOLVED!!”** After all, it’s just not “spiritual” to get involved in the issues that come up in our society! And besides that, whatever Christians do would basically be the same thing as

“ . . . re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic . . . ” In other words, keep your religion “privatized” and stay secluded and sheltered in the “holy huddle” of the church! So what SHOULD be do as far as involvement and interaction with secular society / culture is concerned? There’s no guessing about what we are to do, because Jesus spells it out for us in **Matthew 5:13-16**.

We've all heard the warning. It's a warning from our society -- culture -- some people who sit in the pews of the church. The warning is this: DON'T GET INVOLVED! [A man once told me, "It's just not 'spiritual' for Xns to get involved in issues we face in our society." "Why?" "Because doing that would be like rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic."] low, this world = a sinking ship, & any attempt we make to get involved is as futile as rearranging the chairs on the deck of a sinking ship.

From the secular society of the '90's, we are told in no uncertain terms to keep our religion as private & as personal as possible. =-=-=-privitization... low, as long as we stay secluded & sheltered here in the sterile & safe environment of this sanctuary, that's OK. But by all means, we need to leave the church @ the church & by all means DON'T GET INVOLVED in the issues we face as a society!

The problem w/this "hands off" policy of non-involvement that many Xns have is that when we refuse to get involved -- to be an influence, we are swimming against the swift & strong current of these words of Jesus here in Matthew 5. In fact, as we consider this part of the SOM, it's obvious from these Vv that WE HAVE A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE GOD TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY -- OUR CULTURE.

This part of Jesus' most famous sermon is both instructive & practical because Jesus tells us

here HOW we can influence our home -- neighborhood -- be an influence @ school, @ work, in politics, in the media, in the arts. Wherever the LORD puts us, we can exercise a Xn influence.

1st, Jesus offers us an infallible ANALYSIS of the condition of culture.

Notice the contrasts Jesus implies here between our identity as His followers and culture / society.

➤ **We are SALT; our CULTURE is in a state of DECAY.**

Why is this not simply paranoid-speak? Cf *Philippians 2:14-16; Ephesians 2:1*

Where do we see evidence of this? In the moral state of our culture? In the hopelessness that shrouds our culture?

➤ **We are LIGHT; our CULTURE is smothered in DARKNESS.**

How

do the words of Jesus and the Scriptures verify this? Cf *1 John 5:19; John 3:19*

There's a lot of Biblical associations made with the word that describes our culture. What are they?

Issac Watts poses a good question for us to answer. What is it, and what is the answer?

low, if we are going to influence our culture, we need to analyze the condition of our culture. Jesus gives us an infallible analysis of our culture as He sets up a couple of implied contrasts between what Xns are & what culture is.

A. We are salt -- our culture is in a process of decay. If I were to tell you that generation was filled w/crooks & perverts, would you accuse me of being paranoid? Talking in hyperbole? Speaking like some writer for 1 of those crazy tabloids you see on the rack @ the check-out stand of Jitney or Kroeger? cf Phil 2:14-16...

In our society, corruption abounds from politics to police departments diaout our nation. Everywhere we turn, we encounter corrupt politicians -- business leaders -- even corrupt clergy. [A recent poll showed that a particular brand of preachers -- television evangelists -

- were rated among the top 3 "sleaziest" professions (other 2 were Mafia bosses & prostitutes...)] Gang wars, drug & alcohol abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, & marital infidelity add up. & the sum total of the equation is that our culture is rotting from the inside out.

In addition to this moral & spiritual decay, there's another problem: For many people, life has become flat, tasteless, & boring. In an effort to spice up a boring, bland life, people get into drugs, sex, \$\$\$, & power. Problem is, every worldly prescription people take leaves a bland & bitter aftertaste in our mouths. Also, in the final analysis, if you combined all the drugs, sex, \$\$\$, & power in the world, you would discover that all those things have no more substance to them than does a soap bubble.

We live in a time in which people are living lives that have been drained of all hope. Joy is scarce, while despair rules the day. [Os Guinness, "The dust of death has settled on our culture."]

B. *We are light -- our culture is smothered in Darkness.* 1 Jn 5:19 = "...evil one, aka Prince of darkness = the 1 who has blinded the eyes of those who live apart from the LORD, Jn 3:19, "...men love darkness rather than light..." low, people prefer to stumble along in the darkness of confused, twisted moral thinking. Are people in our Nation confused about morals? Just sit in front of your TV w/your remote control & do some channel surfing & the answer to that question will be obvious. We are a confused nation -- confused over what's right & what's wrong.

In the Bible, "darkness" is used to describe distress -- anxiety -- confusion -- moral depravity -- spiritual blindness -- final destiny of those who reject the LORD. That's why "darkness" is such an accurate way to describe our society. We are a nation of stressed-out, confused, depraved people heading headlong into the abyss of eternal darkness.

Beloved, it's time to take off our rose-colored glasses -- wake up & smell the coffee when it comes to the condition of our culture. There's a line in a hymn by Issac Watts that poses a question: ("Am I A Soldier Of The Cross?") Is this vile world a friend of grace to help me on to God? Is it?

We know the answer to that question, don't we? The music of our contemporary culture - - films -- magazines -- best selling book -- television -- fashions & fads of our current culture... Can you honestly say that this world is a friend of grace to lead you on to God? We know better. We know that it works the other way. This vile world = an enemy of grace to lead us away from God. In fact, when a movie critic like Michael Medved points out the depravity that prevades so many of today's films, Hollywood responds w/anger & calls Medved a "prophet of doom."

Still, the analysis of our culture that X gives here in these Vv is right on target. The Great Physician's diagnosis is 100% correct: Our world is a decaying, dying world. That Jesus' analysis, & that also should be our analysis. If we would influence our society & culture, we must take this 1st STEP of ANALYSIS.

This 1st STEP is just that = a FIRST step. Notice that if we would influence & impact our culture, we need to take that necessary 2nd STEP:

2nd, Jesus offers us a helpful step of ACTION to take to deal with the problem.

How personal (and corporate) is this step?

What is Jesus saying and not saying?

➤ **We need to SHAKE the SALT.**

What are the 2 purposes of the first item Jesus mentions?

How does this item become ineffective?

How do we DO what Jesus is asking here? (And remember the "Daniel Webster Principle")

➤ **We need to SHINE the LIGHT.**

this item do? Cf **Vv 14-16**

Think of the opportunities we have! Think of what this does!

How does **Vs 16** explain the effect of doing what we do?

What does

The Bible was never intended to be just food w/which to feed our minds. God intends the Bible to be the fuel that drives us to action. True Bible knowledge is ALWAYS applied knowledge. When Paul wrote... 2nd Thess... 3:4, "& we trust the LORD that you are putting into practice the things we taught you."

Jesus begins w/a personal reminder. "You..." is personal -- emphatic, "YOU are...YOU are..." YOU are on the spot. YOU! YOU! YOU! YOU are @ the free throw line. If you are a member of God's forever family, YOU (CORPORATELY) are salt -- light. & notice that Jesus does not say "...you can be salt...should be light..." In fact, you don't even need to pray, "LORD, make me real salty...make me a bright light..." Kata Jesus, you already are salt -- light.

Meaning what? GET W/IT! SHAKE THE SALT! SHINE THE LIGHT! SHAKE & SHINE! SHAKE & SHINE! That's the strategy that Jesus gives us as members of the Xn counterculture. Let's take a closer look @ Jesus' agenda for us.

A. We need to shake the salt. [Before the days of home refrigerators, people used salt to preserve food. Fishermen would pack fish in layers of salt. To preserve meat, people would rub salt into the meat.] low, the function of salt was to arrest corruption.

But remember, in both cases, the salt had to come in contact w/the fish -- meat. If salt stays on the shelf on in the shaker, salt does no good @ all. In the same way, you & I cannot be a preserving influence on our culture -- arrest the decay unless we come in contact w/our culture. We cannot -- should not -- MUST not remain aloof. We must penetrate our culture.

Vs 13... How does salt lose it's taste? By becoming contaminated by dirt & sand & other impurities. Jesus reminds us here that we need to be careful that we do not absorb the ways to the world. When the salt (that's us) gets too many impurities in it (too much of the world), the salt loses it's flavor -- we lose our influence.

What does impure salt look like? We see Impure salt when we see Xns who straddle the fence. We see Impure salt when we see Xns who act 1 way on Sunday & another way on

the other 6 days of the week. We see impure salt when we see Xns who are social camelions changing color kata who they are around. We see impure salt when Christians uncritically accept and absorb the morals and perspectives pounded into their minds through repetition in the ALL media. Impure salt is something else = "...good for nothing..."

So, HOW do we shake the salt? WAYS. (1) PRAY. If society is going to change, people must change. God is in the people-changing business. As we pray for God to change the hearts of people in our culture, we are shaking the salt. (2) TAKE A STAND. Don't go w/the flow. Go against the flow of evil. Don't follow the heard. If the piper is playing a tune that's not in harmony w/God's Word, don't join the parade. (3) PROTEST. When it comes to speaking out, don't let the cat get your tongue. Speak out. Call your congressman & senator. Write your newspaper. Be a prophet & speak up -- speak out against evil. Daniel Webster, "All it takes for evil to succeed is for good people to stay silent & say nothing." Dear friends, we need to shake the salt!

B. *We need to shine the light.* What does light do? Light chases away darkness, Vv 14-15... Have you ever been in total & complete darkness? I have. [Ruby Falls...NOT see my hand in front of my face...blacker than india ink. Then, someone would strike a tiny match & that tiny match burned like a brilliant beacon in the darkness of that cave...]

Our culture is in a spiritual & moral darkness that's just as black & thick as the darkness I experienced that day. The only way to dispell the darkness is to shine the light in the darkness. Jesus says, "Don't stay in the church & have flashlight fellowships where you shine the light on each other. GO into the darkness & SHINE THE LIGHT!" [C.T. Studd, pioneer missionary to India, "Some wish to live w/in the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop w/in a yard of Hell!"]

Is there darkness in your family? What an opportunity! Are you the only Xn in your peer group? Great! Is your work environment a place of moral darkness? Now THAT's an opportunity! You are light. SHINE THE LIGHT! & friends, when it dark, all eyes focus on the light. You need to shine your light!

Here's some "light" you can shine. You can shine the light of faith & confidence into a

world that is distressed & anxious. You can shine the light of a clear moral direction into a world that is confused about absolutes. We have a moral compass that always points North. We have a rulebook for living that doesn't need to be revised every year. You can shine the light of the Gospel into the darkness of our culture as you evangelize others by telling them of Jesus who is The Light Of The World. You shine the light by becoming actively involved in missions.

You shine the light as you live out your faith in front of a world that is watching every move you make. **Vs 16...** People see your good work. The preacher & his family are not the only ones who live in a fishbowl. You also live in a fishbowl. But notice here that IF you shake the salt & shine the light, people will... That, dear friends, is what influence & impact is all about!