

"The Good Works Of The Light"

Probably the greatest tragedy of the Christian Church throughout its long and checkered history has been its constant tendency to conform to the prevailing culture instead of developing a Christian counter-culture. We each have the responsibility before God to "let our light shine" in this world — that is our calling. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book "The Cost of Discipleship" put it this way: "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call." We must not fail the world that we have been called to serve." — "Let men see your good works that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16); notice that it is the light that they will praise, not the lamp which bears it; thus it is our Father in heaven whom they will glorify, not the children whom He has begotten. Just what are these good works? They include every outward, visible manifestation of the believer's faith — evangelism, believing, confessing and teaching the truth are all good works that give evidence of our regeneration by the Holy Spirit (John 6:28-29); "Then they said to Him, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He has sent." In addition, there are the visible works of love and compassion as well as the works of faith; they express not only our loyalty to God, but our care for our fellow man as well. (Matthew 5:44) "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." (John 13:34-35) "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Ephesians 5:2) "...and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

"A Warning To The Light Bearers"

Without these works our gospel loses its credibility and our God His honor. Jesus said we are to be like a lighted lamp in a prominent position in the house (rather than in an in obscure position where it does no good), so that we give light to all those around us. (Matthew 5:15) "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house." As disciples of Jesus we are not to conceal the truth we know, or the truth of what we are (Matthew 10:32-33, 38) "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies Me before others, I also will deny before My Father in heaven. And whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me." ... nor are we to pretend to be other than what we are. (Mark 8:38) "Those who are ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the Holy Angels."



Some years ago there was a popular television show, Mission Impossible. Peter Graves played a distinguished-looking character named Mr. Phelps, who would come on early in the show. He would receive a mysterious tape and be given an assignment to go off with his associates and do

some extraordinary thing or other (perhaps to find a spy nest in an obscure place and clean it out). It was always something in which success was against all odds. It was Mission Impossible: the call to do something that was beyond the ability of ordinary people to even conceive of. Once the assignment was given, viewers would discover how Mr. Phelps and his friends would do the impossible as the drama unfolded. I'd like to ask you to assume the role of Mr. Phelps this morning. We'll all receive an assignment that, for ordinary people using only human strength, is impossible. You will discover the tape giving you the assignment in the book of Philippians. Chapter 2, verses 14 and 15 call upon us as followers of Christ to accept a role that we are unable to fulfill on our own, yet which we are required to accept by the power of God. Here is the assignment, Mr. Phelps: "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world...."

Three-Part Assignment

Part One "Know Who You Are"



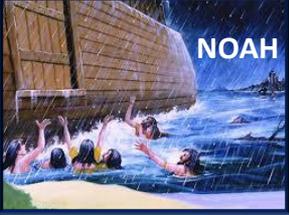
1. There are three parts to this mission that I would like you to focus on. First, by our heart attitudes as they reveal themselves in our actions, we are called to live out our family name, to be children of God. We are sons and daughters of the King, and we are to be distinguishable from

other people. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's Own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2: 9) "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7) It's by His power that shapes our character, attitudes, and actions so that we may live as the light above reproach.

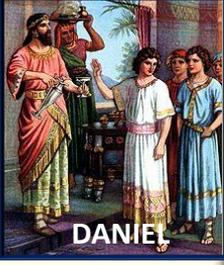
Part Two / "Be The Light The Midst Of A Crooked And Perverse Generation"

2. The word perverse, or depraved as the NIV translates it, is a very strong word in Greek. It describes moral decay that has gone about as far as it can go. In the midst of a crooked and depraved generation we are to be children of God. We can't be children of God off by ourselves or find an enclave where we join only with other children of God to live lives that are above reproach. We are not allowed to disconnect ourselves from the pain-filled world of our contemporaries. We face two possible choices as Christians: (1) try to clean up the society in which we live, so that we and our children can serve God without the pressures and evil influences that presently exist. We would not discourage reasonable effort on the part of individual Christians along these lines, but success in any such efforts will be on a small scale. It matters not how hard we work at it, by and large, the world will still be a corrupt world when we die: evil will still exist on TV and in the movies; corruption will still exist in government leaders around the world. Our purpose as Christians is to call people out of darkness through the gospel and into light. We can do that, but efforts to eradicate darkness will for the most part be futile. Fortunately, we have another choice: (2) make up our minds to serve God faithfully in whatever environment we find ourselves. This is the only viable choice for the Christian.

"God Showed Us That It Can Be Done"



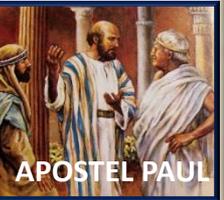
It can be done. Consider Noah's generation when "every imagination of the thoughts of (man's) heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5); or Lot's generation when ten righteous souls could not be found in all of Sodom; or Elijah's generation when wicked Ahab served as king in the



wicked nation of Israel; or Daniel's generation when as a young man he found himself in a foreign land facing pressures to eat the king's meats and drink his wines (Daniel 1:8); "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself."



or the Apostles' generation when Rome ruled the world and the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees dominated the religious scene.



What were these men doing in such crooked and perverse circumstances? They were serving God! That's what they were doing! The point is this: if these could serve God in the midst of the crooked and perverse circumstances in which they found themselves, and if the Philippians could shine "As Lights In The World" in the midst of their crooked and perverse generation, so can we. Our eternal destiny is not determined by the environment in which we live, but by our own determination to be what we ought to be in whatever environment we find ourselves. We must lay aside our excuses, both for ourselves and our children, and make up our minds to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). This we shall do, and with God's help we shall overcome.

Part Three – "We Are To Be Lights In The World"



3. And the third point follows from that, and that is that we are to be lights in the world. Our lives are to be of such quality that against the darkness of the generation we live in we are sources of light that glorify God on the one hand, and on the other offer an invitation to a lost and dying world. We offer "The Good News / The Gospel" for people

who are in the darkness or who are in the darkness of our own neighborhoods, we offer hope in Christ to be able to rise above the condition they were born into, that they might themselves become children of God. "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isaiah 9:2). To walk in the light is to have a daily commitment to living out a righteous life. It refreshes us within so that we gain the power to be a refreshment to those around us.

"What Is Impossible With Man, Is Possible With God"

Understanding these things means we are ready for an impossible mission-beyond human strength, accomplished by God's power for His glory. The mission that we have been called to is to be children of God in a crooked and perverse generation, lights in the world. Instead of being sorrowful at our lot in life we are to be those who offer hope to other people. Only we who know the Lord have a voice that can offer help to a decaying world. There are people around us on every side who are tragically sad and lost because they don't know the Lord, and our responsibility is to be true to Him from the heart so that we can offer them hope and lead them to Christ the True Light.