

Dynamic Christian Living

by

Harold L. Lundquist

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Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan

CHAPTER TEN -

The Power of the Church in a Disordered World

"Ye are the salt of the earth . . . Ye are the light of the World" (Matthew 5:13, 14)

SOCIAL and political leaders have - if they only would realize it - in the Church the strongest influence for good in all the world. One marvels that those who profess to seek the best for humanity and probably do all they can for it within the limits of their ability, who try every kind of social experiment and possibly in all good faith, who labor with every expedient of man, persistently fail to see and use in full measure the almost untried power of Christianity. Perhaps the explanation may be that some of these leaders are themselves unsaved men who therefore do not understand spiritual things, and are not willing to give GOD the glory. Perhaps in the case of others it may be ignorance or lack of touch with the Church.

The work of the Church is not only the most important business in all the world, but the best accredited business with the strongest backing and the greatest possible source of power.

And it has and does produce grand results in all the world. Listen to this testimony of one of our young men who was in the service, Mr. Stanley W. Tefft, an aerial gunner from Toledo, Ohio. He was shot down in combat with six other men near a small island in the Pacific. The natives who rescued and received them were Christians for they had been won to CHRIST by American missionaries. For 87 days, after two and a half days on a raft, the servicemen were hidden on this Japanese occupied Island, guarded and watched over by the natives whose first act had been to give the boys a Bible. Mr. Tefft tells that every night the natives would gather around them and they would take turns reading the Bible, and then they would sing songs. The result was that Mr. Tefft and his companions were won to CHRIST. He marveled at it himself, and said, "Think of it! It took the native converts of an unknown missionary to bring seven fellows from a so-called Christian land back to CHRIST." The Church has served and continues to serve both GOD and country.

But perhaps we ought to face another fact, namely, that the Church as a whole has failed to properly exercise its influence in the world and thus has given an occasion for misunderstanding of its mission. The Church best serves the nation and the social order when it carries out GOD's intended purpose for itself. To fail to do so is to miscarry its mission. A well-known preacher recently made a very pointed analysis of the situation when he said that the chief criticism he had of the modern church was that it was more interested in getting the prodigal son a better job

down in the far country than in bringing him back to the father's house.

It is most important that men have proper employment and opportunity for advancement in the world, good food, and proper shelter, but these are primarily the business of social agencies with which the Christian co-operates. But let us recall that they are not the first business of the church.

The church is to win men to CHRIST and lead them out in Christian faith so that they may then become good citizens and worthy members of society. This is the church's great contribution to the social welfare of the nation.

Whatever the reason for the failure to recognize the importance of the church the situation should be remedied. America could solve her problems, both social and political, by a nation-wide revival of true Christianity, the renewal of spiritual life of believers with the accompanying salvation of the unconverted - and all the blessed results in both personal and national life.

If we cannot have such a widespread movement let us not fail to have a revival in our own hearts, our own churches, our neighborhoods or communities. Some of us think that if we cannot have a great revival which sweeps the country, we cannot have a revival at all. GOD can and does stir individual hearts - and set men on fire for Him. Then He uses them to kindle a flame in others.

Gypsy Smith, the well-known evangelist, suggested this helpful thought to me, that the thing for us as Christians to do was to set as many small fires as we can whenever and wherever we can. If all of us who have a desire for a revival will ask GOD to make us such firebrands that wherever we speak, teach, or live, we may set fires, we will have revivals in many places.

Let GOD light a new fire in your own heart. Ask GOD to do it now. Let it burn in your home, your church, or in the social group to which you belong. Let the fire fall, and let it burn.

We, find that the Church is:

I. A Powerful Influence for Moral Good (Matthew 5:13-16)

Salt in the midst of corruption, light in a world of unbelievable darkness - what striking and meaningful figures Scripture uses to describe the Christian.

Believers are the "**salt of the earth**" and they draw their pungent savour from GOD Himself. The Christian Church, by GOD's own statement, is His powerful antiseptic which keeps the social order from falling into that complete moral decay which at times seems so imminent.

When our Lord speaks of Christians as the salt of the earth, He by implication levels a serious charge against the state of society, for He thereby declares it to be corrupt and constantly tending to become more corrupt. Dr. Alexander Maclaren puts it well, "You do not salt a living thing. You salt a dead one that it may not be a rotting one. And CHRIST says by implication here what He says plainly more than once in other places, namely that human society without His influence is a carcass that is rotting away and disintegrating.

He says in effect, 'You faithful handful who have partially apprehended the meaning of My mission and have caught something of the spirit of My life, you are to be rubbed into that rotting mass to sweeten it, to arrest decomposition, to stay corruption, to give flavor to its insipidity, and to save it from falling to pieces of its own wickedness. Ye are the salt of the earth.'

The salty action of the Christian in the world is positive, fighting against corruption. It also has the nature of retarding or repressing decay. Sometimes this influence is operative simply by the presence of the Christian in a particular place.

It is said that Woodrow Wilson, who later became President of the United States, was one day in a barber shop being shaved. Suddenly the door opened and someone entered. The conversation, which had been none too uplifting, took a turn for the better. A customer asked the barber who was serving him, who had come into the shop. The answer was, "Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist." One wonders how many Christians have that kind of influence in their own community. Are we truly that kind of salt in the earth?

But for this purpose Christianity must be genuine. "The salt which has lost its savour is Christianity which is only worldliness under another name." (Dummelow) It is "good for nothing." Our Lord said so! What a word of condemnation for flat, savourless, wishy-washy Christianity, for dead Fundamentalism as well as dead Modernism.

Now please observe this: If you do not salt the world it will try to rot you. Some Christians seem to think it is quite enough just to be formal church members, nice, neutral and polite, not ever expressing any too definite a feeling about sin and corruption. Salt always makes its presence felt. If you don't believe that, drop a little in a cut next time you happen to injure or bruise your finger. The Christian is to be a pungent influence for good and if he is not he is like the salt which has lost its savor. It is good for nothing except to be cast out and trampled underfoot.

We note, too, that Christians are the "**light of the world.**"

It is the essential nature of light to shine. The darker its surroundings the more marked its brightness, and the more needed its illumination. The good works of Christians reflects the goodness of GOD, and so they glorify His worthy name. Brother, sister in the Lord, is your light burning brightly in this wicked world? If not you are not truly representing your Saviour.

Notice that CHRIST likens the Christian to a lamp which has been lighted. The lamp is not itself the light. So the Christian is not the light, but is one who has been lighted by CHRIST, He who is the light of the world. But once having been lighted, a lamp must shine. A candle must give illumination. A Christian must give forth a testimony. There is no such thing as a secret believer - just as there is no such thing as a dark lamp once it has been lighted.

Please observe that our business is not to run around and see whether someone is looking at our light, but simply to keep the light burning brightly. The keeper of the lighthouse is not responsible for the seeing of that lighthouse by those on a passing ship. His only business is to keep the lamps well trimmed, clean, and lighted, and above all to keep them burning so that others may see if they wish or will. He may never know of the thousands who have been guided

aright by his faithful light.

Too often we are concerned about the effect of our Christian testimony or influence when we ought to be concerned only about its quality and its usefulness to GOD. Above all, keep the light burning - and hold it high!

II. A Stabilizing Element in Society (Mark 12:13-17)

The world is in social ferment, no doubt about that. Our own country has its share of "isms" and social theories which are calling men to follow, asking their loyalty, making them Utopian promises which are quite without foundation. The close of the war served to increase the clamor rather than to bring quiet and peace.

Alert and intelligent Americans are concerned about these clamorous voices, many of which are quite properly suspect of having purposes far from beneficial to our American way of life, or to democracy itself. Yet they often dare not oppose them lest there be the cry of denial of freedom of speech, etc.

What then can we do to meet them? Here is the real answer: Preach CHRIST. Bring men to a saving knowledge of Him and to a godly way of living. That will do it. For the Christian is one who has learned from CHRIST Himself to **"render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's"** and they do it, too, because they have first rendered **"to God the things that are God's."**

The importance of a strong Christian testimony through the church as a stabilizing influence to meet the isms and cults which are now here and will make themselves even more strongly felt at the close of the war, can hardly be emphasized too strongly.

Recently a sermon was preached on the subject, "Who Will Win the Next War?" The war referred to was that of the forces of anti-Christ which will make their greatest bid for supremacy after World War II. The speaker said,

"The next war will not be between flesh and Blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies, as these forces seek to overthrow the forces of Christianity and righteousness that are released by the Christian church.

Christians must be concerned now as to this spiritual conflict which will surely follow the cessation of the present physical warfare." He made a very practical application of his message as his church was asked to do something about it. One of the suggestions was that its 2,000 active members give an average of \$1.00 a week to missions which would thus produce a total of \$104,000 in a year for this important work. The response in that church was prompt and very good.

Why not do it in other churches? And why not make the spiritual impact of your church and mine strongly felt right now in the building up of our young people and our men and women into strong, spiritually-minded Christians who can meet the spiritual onslaught which is to come. We need to do this now, not wait until next week or next month or next year. Will you do it?

A spiritual revival of Christianity is (yes, we say it again!) the real answer to our country's problems. Our leaders ought to offer the Church every possible encouragement and honor and support it in its great work for God and country. Men women - get into the church now and stand by!

The Church presents:

III. A Loyal Example of Good Citizenship (1 Peter 2:13-17)

The highest measure of loyalty to country is the Christian standard here stated. In Romans 13:1-10 we learn that all authority comes from GOD and that the power of rulers is to be recognized as His gift. That means that true rulers will submit to Him in every detail of their government, seeking to know and to do His will, and that Christians will submit to authority - from the policeman on the corner to the Chief Executive in the White House. GOD first always - then our country.

Moreover, the Christian gives loyal obedience to the "**powers that be**" even though they may fail to recognize the source of their own power. This is subject only to the one limitation that they may not demand that we do those things that dishonor GOD's name. Since their only real power to rule comes from Him, they have no authority to tell anyone to do that which is against His holy will. When that happens, the Higher Authority takes over and our loyalty must be to Him, the King of kings.

It is this fact of the limitations of earthly power and its divine origin which assures protection against the misuse of Christianity to support despots and tyrants. We recall that Communism, following the teaching of Karl Marx, called religion "the opiate of the people." Their claim has been that the Church has put the people to sleep by urging them to be subservient to their rulers, thus making it possible for autocratic government to control.

This may be true of a purely formal Christian worship but real Christianity does just the opposite. Do we not recall that the force which neither church nor state could control at the time of the reformation was the indomitable Christian faith of Martin Luther and those who associated themselves with him? And in our latest and greatest war the only effective opposition to totalitarian Nazism was by the religious forces of Germany represented by Martin Niemöller, and in Norway by the preachers of the state church under Bishop Berggrav. Elsewhere throughout Europe the story was the same. The Church came out of that conflict with a new and shining name for the glory of GOD!

The Christian then will be the best citizen, eager to do what king or country may ask, in order to bear a good testimony and to close the mouth of foolish critics of the church.

The history of our country and of other lands reveals the names of many illustrious Christian patriots, and the roll of honor of those who loved and served their country well in the humble and difficult places, would bear its hundreds of thousands of names which are found also on the roll of the Church.

Have we not seen the picture of George Washington kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge to pray for his soldiers? Do we not recall that Abraham Lincoln prayed and called upon GOD for wisdom? Recently I read of a visitor who was in the White House in 1862 and stayed there over night just after the Battle of Bull Run. He was restless and could not sleep and walked down the hall. The door of the room where the President slept was partly open and he heard low tones of speech coming from it. Thinking that the President was up, he slipped into the room and saw Mr. Lincoln kneeling before an open Bible. He was praying somewhat as follows: "Oh, thou GOD that heard Solomon in the night when he prayed and cried for wisdom, hear me. I cannot lead this people. I cannot guide the affairs of the nation without Thy help. I am poor, weak, and sinful. Oh, God, thou didst hear Solomon when he cried for wisdom. Hear me, and save this nation."

Christians, let us be earnest and intelligent followers of CHRIST, those whose lives count for moral uprightness, who steady the land in times of social confusion, and who in all earnestness salute the flag in dedication of life and service to the country we love.

"For GOD and Country" is the excellent motto of the American Legion, but it should be more than that; it should be the purpose of every Christian citizen.

A CLOSING WORD TO THE READER

So we bring to a close our study of dynamic Christian living. We have seen what it means - and how it expresses itself in the personal life, in the home, and in the church.

As we have written these chapters we have prayed again and again that the Lord would use them to stir up the heart of some reader. Has He spoken to you about your life, your witness in the home, your service in the church? Have you had a holy impulse to make right that which is wrong, to take a step forward in your spiritual experience or (if you are not a Christian) to take CHRIST as your Saviour and make an open confession of Him as your Lord?

Have you done anything about this evident leading of the Lord? His convicting word to your heart? Or are you going to let Satan have the victory, again, as you allow these sacred impulses to die? You must answer that question!

All around our spiritual lives - and around our churches - we see the evidences of failure to be obedient to the promptings of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD. Dr. C. E. Macartney has suggested this solemn thought.

"As one goes through the country one sees cemeteries around churches, especially the older churches; the churchyard which is the final resting place of the people of GOD who worshipped in that house and who want their bodies to remain near it until the day of resurrection.

But there is also another cemetery, every church has one, - an invisible cemetery, at least, invisible to the outward eye - but I fear that it is a very large and crowded burying ground."

"What kind of a cemetery is this? Oh, this is the cemetery where holy purposes and desires, convictions and impressions of divine things which were awakened in the souls of men within

the walls of the church are now buried because they were never acted upon. Chief among these buried impulses would undoubtedly be the urge to repent of sin and to follow the Saviour. Many a man's heart has been touched and his mind has been convinced, but he has never given himself to Christ. The great impulse to turn to CHRIST is often buried in the unseen cemetery of the Church.

What else is buried there? Oh, you remember so well that time when the Spirit of GOD spoke to you about turning away from that "pet" sin of yours. You said that you would do it - and you didn't. Then, too, you recall the time when the Lord spoke to you about serving Him with your life. You said that you would go where He wanted you to go and be what He wanted you to be. You didn't do it! That impulse, too, is buried there. What a graveyard of good intentions and holy purposes!

When we come to church next Sunday perhaps we had better look around that is, with the eyes of the Spirit - and see how many of our holy purposes and desires and impulses have been buried in the cemetery - the invisible cemetery which surrounds our church - yes, and possibly our own individual spiritual life."

By GOD's grace let us not now add yet another gravestone to that awful collection, but let us rather gladly submit to the HOLY SPIRIT so that He may bring forth in each of our lives that thrilling, delightful experience which we have rightly called -

Dynamic Christian Living!

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