

The insidiousness of sin

My spiritual director suggested that, given my recent focus on love and not sin-and-a-holy-God, I might benefit from reading Matthew 5–7 again, especially the beatitudes. He was right, very right! I'm reading the whole thing so differently now, and it's coming up in glorious Technicolor.

Be careful, Paul, when you're running around smiling at everyone all the time! Sin is insidious, so take care lest you fall. How right! And I've fallen, big time! (Confession time.)

So let's wind back and see where I went wrong. I had been soaking up the 'be-attitudes', and thinking how it was all about our attitudes and the positive ways we can relate to other people, and how we can bring good and positiveness into their lives. Great stuff!

After a few days, I moved on to verses 13–16, salt and light, and found that I was reading that passage differently too. We all know that in Jesus' day salt was used as a preservative, and that salt is also used to make things taste nice. So I revelled in the idea that someone in love with Jesus can make other people's lives taste nicer (especially those people whose lives are crap). We can spread that love and joy to anyone and everyone we meet day by day, and we can offer encouragement and hope – even just a smile can make someone's day more enjoyable, or just a few positive comments to a person ringing you from a call centre. Why not?! Be nice to them: **you wish them**, 'Have a great day!' I've already said how God can coordinate each of our inputs to any given person's life to help draw them closer and closer into God's love.

And be light – that can be the same. Shed light wherever you go throughout the day, notice something positive and comment on it. I don't need to go on about this; you can see how much of a difference your salt and light could make to other people on a day-to-day basis. People desperately **need** encouragement, and if we can't give it, who can?!

Once again, I was reading scripture from a totally different, positive viewpoint, and it was good, very good. But where did I go wrong? Where is the **insidiousness of sin**?

I then decided to look and see what other Christian commentators made of 'salt and light'. On the first website that Google offered, I found someone being very positive and talking about the massive contribution of a Spirit-filled life. It contained a beautiful passage about the positive effect of a 'salty' Christian bringing peace to troubled situations, binding up wounds and exemplifying the love of God in Christ, by returning good for evil. Great stuff!

But I read on (my underlining)...

Believers in Christ are preservatives to the world, preserving it from the evil inherent in the society of ungodly men whose unredeemed natures are corrupted by sin.

...

The passage clearly states that the difference between the Christian and the world must be preserved; therefore, any choice on our part that blurs the distinction between us and the rest of the world is a step in the wrong direction. This can happen either through a choice to accept the ways of the world for the sake of comfort or convenience or to contravene the law of obedience to Christ.

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It is when we depart from the Spirit-led lifestyle of genuine discipleship that the distinctions between ourselves and the rest of the world become blurred and our testimony is hindered.

Do you see now what I mean by the insidiousness of sin? ...the insidiousness of our constant **concentration on** sin? The overriding sense was that, as Christians, we have to be very careful how we live, making sure that we 'take up our cross' and don't 'contravene the law of ... Christ'. Only then will our testimony will be successful.

It sounds good and worthy, but it's probably the attitude that our unsaved friends and family have reacted against: Christians see other people are 'evil', 'unredeemed' and 'corrupted by sin'. We can say as often as we like that 'we too are sinners', but they won't hear it. To them, a sinner is a wife beater, a thief, a whatever – and they're just ordinary people, not perfect, but generally doing good to others; they may even have more time to go about doing good than we do because they're not spending so many hours a week running a church.

Yes, sin as self-focus is a dangerous, insidious killer and, yes, Jesus died to rescue us, but if we major in our 'evangelism' on sin-and-a-holy-God, those we love are going to be pushed further and further away from the wonderful, beautiful, loving, forgiving, welcoming, healing God-who-is-like-Jesus!

A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so also you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34,35)

Lord, let it be so!

Paul Bev. 11.4.19

Do please read 'A more Christ-like God, A more beautiful gospel' by Bradley Jersak. It's a bit theological, but I found it transformational.