

GUILT AND INNOCENCE

By

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“Deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13).

All mankind is concerned with the problem of evil, for it is the problem of all men and of God.

The coming of Christ, His death on the cross, His work as Mediator and His second coming all are aimed at the solution to the problem of evil. From the opening pages of the Bible with the temptation and sin of Adam and Eve to the closing chapters, with the final destruction of Satan and all evil men, the message from God centers around the intrinsic evil in mankind and how it may be removed through Jesus Christ. Every person, whether he is born rich or poor, in Phoenix or Bombay, knows that he is assailed by temptations from the first time he is able to make a rational decision. The more he aspires to virtue, the more he is assailed by Satan and tempted to do evil. The more refined the culture, the more subtle and sophisticated the evil.

Christ readily acknowledged the person of Satan and the guilt of men. His own course was a bloody battle against evil, beginning with His perilous flight to Egypt shortly after His birth because of Herod's murder of the male children under two years of age. This is known in history as the “slaughter of the Innocents”. At the outset of Christ's ministry the first event was the severe temptation in the wilderness by Satan. Throughout His life on earth Jesus openly declared the presence of evil, revealed that Satan was His arch enemy and that the world is filled with evil men who follow Satan's will. In the end, He declared, the evil ones will be gathered up and cast into the fire like weeds to be burned (Matt. 13:41-42).

SIN MINIMIZED

But who is guilty? The worst crimes are explained away by the maudlin cry that “the fault is with society or environment”. A horrible murder takes place and the fiend confesses to the deed. Then the sentimental whimper is heard, “He is an innocent victim of insanity; no man can be so evil”. The gruesome murder of the Clutter family in Southwestern Kansas a number of years ago, dramatized in Capote's book, *“In Cold Blood,”* was the topic of conversation for months over the land. Again and again I heard the comment that “those men are surely insane; no one could be that evil”. Attorneys sought to prove them insane, using as an argument that the cold bloodied killing was in itself evidence of insanity. So far has Satan been able to convince the race that evil does not really exist. Yet these men knew they were guilty, as each man knows that his sin is his own, no matter what his environment and opportunities.

Still, we minimize evil and try to rationalize it away. A congressman or senator is involved in a criminal act of fraud, and the populace says, “So what, everyone does it”. A

T.V. entertainer blasphemes Christ and Christian viewers continue to laugh at his acts. Young people take up drugs and become involved in crime, and the parents are blamed. The prevailing sentiment is that a young person cannot be evil; someone else is to blame for his crimes. But I can remember my own youth. I remember influences of other people. But I cannot recall one sinful deed that was not my own. I cannot think of one act that I can blame on my parents or my peers or upon anyone else. The fact is that every person is guilty of his own sin, no matter what his age. Even a three-year-old child has sense enough to know that when he disobeys he is the one guilty, and that's why he runs from his mother or hides away after writing on the wall with her lipstick or hitting little brother and taking his toy. The sentimentalist may plead, "He doesn't know any better" or "He didn't mean to do it," and they plead that at every crime from political fraud to forcible rape, but the guilty one knows it is a lie. He knows that he did it because of sin that he rejected God's law and followed Satan's temptation, and no one is to blame but himself.

THE LUKEWARM CHURCH

One of the worst tragedies is that this attitude prevails in the church. If anywhere there should be a consciousness of evil as opposed to innocence; it should be in the church, among the very ones who have confessed that Jesus died for them to take the terrible punishment that is due them for their sin. In the church, as no where else, there should be an attitude of absolute revulsion to sin, and a holy desire for purity and innocence, where each one is (supposedly) being transformed into the image and glory of Christ. Scriptures abound with admonitions to the church to guard against Satan's wiles, to resist him, and to fight against all sin and evil. Yet the church is largely indifferent to evil. It publicly denounces pornography, drunkenness, drugs and sexual sins, but goes on condoning the participation of its members in anti-Christ organizations, lodges and dishonest business practices.

Of course, the church is composed of people in all stages of growth. Naturally there should be those who are new in the walk with Christ, who are immature Christians and whose habits of life are obviously not in keeping with the desired goal. But these should be the exceptions, and should be pointed firmly by the leaders to the way of righteousness. Instead, they are the rule. We want to be good, but not too good. "After all, nobody's perfect."

We want to be innocent, but not totally, because we will then be accused of being religious fanatics or some kind of nuts. We like to confess that we are sinners, but we don't want to get down to talking about sins. O no! We're not going to start doing anything about it. No changes in our homes, in our businesses, in our associations and in our recreation. There must not be too much difference between the saint and the sinner, between the church and the world. After all, we must "relate" to the world. So the citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom cannot be distinguished from the citizens of the Kingdoms of Satan. In fact, they all have hearts set on the perishing things of this world and seek its glory, its affluence and its rewards, with only a few (fanatics) who take seriously the things of God, the purity of heart and "holiness without which no man shall see God".

For this reason much of the young generation sees the church as organized hypocrisy. I'm not referring to the SDS, students under communist influence, who attack all law and order for the purpose of establishing a new economy. Nor am I referring to the rebels who would destroy all civilization and Christian restraints just so they can practice sin. I refer to the great company of young people who are boycotting the church. They attend religious discussions on campus, read religious works and have a religious viewpoint. But they stay away from the church house. Of course, there are several contributing factors. But one reason many teenagers give for their disenchantment with the church is the failure of the mature members to face up to the real issue of sin.

It is hard for us to admit that we are wrong, that we have left off pursuing Godliness that we have become complacent, respectable "church members" with little time or desire for the purity of a true saint. It is much easier to center our attention on the evils of communism, to devote our warfare to the field of politics, to level our finger at the variety of lawless groups (and Heaven knows they are in abundance) and never get around to seriously measuring ourselves by the image of Christ. It is much easier to blame someone else than to "examine ourselves" and confess our sins. Often enough we may say, "O, I know I'm not perfect; I have my faults and sins like everyone else". But this is not facing up to evil. It is a kind of boast. It is actually bragging, saying that one is like all other men, and that he is proud to be in that category of sinners. But to admit that one is evil! To confess that we cheated, or lied, or yielded to Satan's call, that we have loved the world more than God's Kingdom, that we are willfully resisting God in some habitual sin; to be specific in the confession of a sin and then to renounce it, this is the kind of rare confession that humiliates, but which results in Godliness. We are opposed by no less than the monstrous power of Satan and all his spiritual hosts, now supported by vast organizations and governments. They are evil and will destroy every vestige of Christian truth and innocence if they possibly can. This is the fact we must face. Evil is a reality and every Christian is to pray earnestly "Deliver us from the evil one", then take steps to insure his freedom from involvement with sin in any form.

A HATRED FOR INNOCENCE

The "Slaughter of the Innocents" at the birth of Jesus was significant of the perpetual warfare that is waged against innocence. The infant Jesus was no threat to Herod, and he knew it. He gave no excuse for the murder of hundreds of children. Evil needs no excuse for its savagery. It is sufficient for innocence to exist; Satan must destroy it. "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

The first overt act of hatred in history was Cain's murder of his brother Abel. "And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). *Men who prefer sin over holiness develop a vicious hatred for innocence.* It was Christ's innocence Satan sought to abolish. It was the innocent children that Herod killed. It was the holiness of John the Baptist that got him beheaded. It was the innocence of Joseph that enraged Potiphar's wife. It was David's purity and favor with God that brought the wrath of Saul upon him. The early church met behind closed doors "for fear

of the Jews.” Because they were evil? Because they were dangerous to the community? Because they were criminals? No. Because they were innocent.

Pilate declared the innocence of Jesus – “I find no fault in Him,” and the Pharisees and priests immediately insisted that he die. Have you ever been in the midst of a group whose delight was in perverted speech, dirty stories and filthy language? Then you know how their ire is kindled against you for remaining aloof from their filth. Do you know that you can refuse mustard on your hamburger or sugar in your coffee and no one gives it a thought. But try refusing a drink of liquor in the midst of those who are indulging and see how they take issue and try to persuade you to have “just one, just a little one.”

Innocence is abhorred by evil. How the TV showmen delight in ridiculing chastity, and how the audience gleefully applauds when reference is made to the loss of virginity.

The clamor for leniency, relaxing of moral laws and lowering the standards, all is a product of the savagery of evil and its aversion to purity. Either one has the goal of Christ-likeness and absolute Godliness, or he doesn't have it. And if such innocence is not his desire, then he is opposed to it, embarrassed by it, shamed by it and ready to destroy it. John wrote that “The whole world lies in the evil one” (John 5:19). But Christians have been translated out of the darkness of this present evil world into the Kingdom of Christ (Gal.1:4, Col.1:13). Thus Jesus clearly promised, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). It is time for all who are redeemed to face up to the fact of evil and the power of sin.

It is time for every Christian to take issue with sin in his own life and in the world knowing that “They that are of Christ have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof” (Gal. 5:24), and “whosoever is a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Let us cease making excuses for sin, and make confession.

“And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”.

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