

Michael Brown: Now Is the Time to Let Your Light Shine

For many years now, I've said that I'm not as much concerned with the presence of darkness in America as I am with the absence of light. Darkness will always be present, but light can drive it out. That's why our greatest need is to get our light shining brightly again.

Otherwise, darkness will prevail. As Jesus said in a different context, "If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23b).

We all know the saying that you can't put the horse before the cart. But before you can hitch the cart to the horse, the horse needs to be healthy. Without that, no one is going anywhere.

And that's where we stand today in America: The greatest need is a healthy church. Then, with a healthy church, the "cart" of cultural, moral and political change will follow as a natural consequence.

But it's not a matter of either-or, as if we must focus either on spiritual life or on cultural life. Instead, it is a matter of priorities, a matter of putting first things first. When we do that, everything else falls into place.

When we are right with God, we will be right with people, and we will make things right for others.

Put another way, if politics is upstream from culture, then culture is upstream from spiritual life. So, voting is important, but living moral lives on a daily basis is far more important. But the key to living consistent moral lives is a vibrant relationship with the one true God. That's where everything starts.

Jesus said to His followers, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how shall it be made salty? It is from then on good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matt. 5:13).

This is similar to one of Dr. King's famous remarks. He said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool."

As salt, which was used as a preservative in the ancient world and which was also used for flavoring, the church is called to be "the conscience of the state." But we can only do that by maintaining a good conscience ourselves. We cannot show the way if we are not living the way, and we cannot call others into something that we are not living ourselves.

Not only so, but if we lose our saltiness—meaning, our spiritual and moral distinctives—we not only become useless. We become irrelevant. Worse still, we become the object of mockery and scorn, not because of our godly living but because of our empty words and hypocrisy.

As King also said, "If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."

Of course, it is easy for us Christian conservatives to become righteously indignant over the godless agenda of the radical left. It is another thing to point to our lives, to our families, to our communities, and to say, "We can show you a better way!"

In one of His strongest rebukes, Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and greed. You blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may also be clean" (Matt.

23:25-26).

This is the way real change will come, not with our religious posturing and our self-righteous pronouncements but with clean hearts and godly lives. Cleaning up the inside is the key to cleaning up the outside, and if we focus on changing hearts first, changing laws will naturally follow.

And with our own lights shining bright, all things are possible with God.

As Charles Spurgeon said, “A healthy church kills error, and tears in pieces evil. Not so very long ago our nation tolerated slavery in our colonies. Philanthropists endeavored to destroy slavery; but when was it utterly abolished?

“It was when Wilberforce roused the church of God, and when the church of God addressed herself to the conflict, then she tore the evil thing to pieces. I have been amused with what Wilberforce said the day after they passed the Act of Emancipation. He merrily said to a friend when it was all done: ‘Is there not something else we can abolish?’

“That was said playfully, but it shows the spirit of the church of God. She lives in conflict and victory; her mission is to destroy everything that is bad in the land.”

But it all starts with those three simple words: a healthy church. And that starts with you and with me.

Unfortunately, we cannot erase the scandals of recent months or the other, public failings of the church. But we can seek spiritual renewal in our own lives, and we can love our neighbors.

In the end, our present-tense witness of love will speak more loudly than our failings of the past, and as our light shines, people will see our good works and praise our Father in heaven (see Matt. 5:16).

So, let your light shine! {eoa}

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