

The Enemy's Containment Strategy

During recent travels with an Open Doors colleague from Central Asia, he described an interesting dynamic in one of the countries he serves that is very opposed to the message of Christ. (For security reasons, I won't name the colleague or specific country.)

There's a group of believers there known by local authorities. In many of the areas where we work, the local authorities seek to extinguish any presence of Christians or their faith. However, in this region, the local officials took a different tact.

These authorities communicated to the believers that if they keep their Christianity quiet and agree not to let it be shared with those around them, the local officials will leave them alone. The officials recognize they may not be able to get these believers to renounce their faith in Christ, so they've settled for the next best thing—containment of their faith. In other words, they recognized trying to contain the faith of the believers was a more effective strategy than seeking to extinguish it.

As my colleague shared these stories from Central Asia, I couldn't help but wonder if this is a similar tactic to what our enemy, the devil, has adopted in our churches here in the West. Scripture warns us that "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8b, NIV). We don't need to look far beyond our communities, families and even our own experiences to know how true this is.

Nor do we need to look far beyond those same experiences to see how very true this tactic of containment may be.

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In many cases, the devil may not be seeking to get us to walk away from our faith; he may only be seeking to keep us from sharing it. However, Scripture makes it clear that our faith and fruit are linked.

In the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-22), we see this link as well as the tactics the devil uses to destroy it. In the parable, Jesus talks about seed falling on four types of ground.

The fourth type is the one we long to see in our hearts and minds—the good soil that allows the seed to take root and bear fruit. But it is the three other types of ground that give us insight into the devil’s playbook.

In the first type of soil, the seed is never able to take root. The enemy swoops in like the birds of the parable and snatches it away.

The second type of ground is the rocky path. The roots are shallow so when “trouble or persecution” (Matt. 13:21b) comes because of our faith, our faith dies.

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With the third type of ground, we are warned that the “worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes *unfruitful*” (Matt. 13:22b, BSB, emphasis added).

There are times when the enemy will seek to confuse hearers of the word to the message and will simply snatch it away. Other times he encourages people to abandon their faith through persecution. However, there are also times where the enemy

will consider it “mission accomplished” if he can utilize the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth to render us unfruitful.

It seems he uses that tactic of containment over and over for believers in the West. Whether it be pursuing wealth or simply the busyness of day-to-day living, it’s easy for us to live our lives preoccupied. If our attentions can be divided, the enemy has a great chance of containing our faith to ever-shrinking parts of our lives.

My colleague reports that the community he spoke about recognizes the message of Christ can’t be contained. The people feel if they are not seeking to grow as a Christian community, they will be seeking to die.

I pray that mindset would be present in my life and invite my fellow believers to do the same.

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