

Let Not Your Good Become Evil

Recently I was visiting a couple of outstanding Christians in the hospital. Both of them were experiencing high levels of pain. They were each given morphine. If I had visited these people outside of the hospital and they were bragging about using morphine (in good health), not only would this be wrong, it would be illegal. I remember once visiting with a Christian who, before he was saved, was a dope addict. He was in a terminal condition and he told me the saddest information. He explained that during his years of drug abuse he adjusted to high doses of drugs. Now that he needed the comfort these drugs could supply, there were not strong enough doses to assuage the pain. In contrast, the other two Christians, who had no previous experience in the field of drug abuse, could be quite comforted by even the smallest dosage. So, sometimes drug usage is good and sometimes it is bad. Paul was encouraging the church to be sensitive in the matter of eating meats that may offend in certain circumstances and he said, *"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of"* (Romans 14:15, 16).

In our brief study today I want you to think with me about when some of our actions are good and when in a different set of circumstances they could become evil. It must be clarified from the outset that there are some things that are always good, some things are always bad. *"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"* (Isaiah 5:20). Adultery, intimacy between people who are not married, is always bad. *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* (Exodus 20:14). You can never justify a time when it can ever be good. God is always good. The Bible says in Psalm 119:68, *"Thou art good, and doest good...."* When can the same characteristic sometimes be good or sometimes be evil? Consider:

1. Stubbornness

The Bible says, *"My son if sinners entice thee consent thou not"* (Proverbs 1:10). If the wrong crowd is pressuring you to sin against your Lord, don't do it. Be tenaciously stubborn! In this case stubbornness to do right should not only be adhered to, but also developed. This is a trait that parents should try to teach their kids. Even children, who have strong wills, when nurtured in the right direction, can serve them well in resisting wrong. *"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand"* (Ephesians 6:13). We see that the Apostle Paul was encouraging the stubborn strong-will to be focused in the right direction.

I learned a valuable lesson a few years ago. In most of the years of our church's existence we had deacon elections as early as January and as late as April. It was determined (I am now ashamed to say) when I, as pastor deemed it convenient. One year in deacon's meeting we had a deacon request that we hold the deacon elections the same time every year so they would know when they would come on and roll off and generally know how to plan around the monthly deacon meetings set up for the following year. When the subject was brought up, I said, "Let it go; it has worked fine for these many years; don't rock the boat." Our deacon made another plea, and then another deacon agreed with his suggestion. I felt challenged and decided to stand my ground in this matter. In the middle of our exchange, the Lord began to speak to me. Basically, this is what I sensed the Lord was saying to me, "Hey, Johnny! Is this a hill on which you want to die?" In my inward exchange in silent prayer, I said, "Pardon me?" And our Lord seemed to say, "There are other issues you might need to be stubborn about. Does it really matter when the deacon elections are held? Don't die on this hill; it is not a sin to want the same time for deacon elections. I'll give you a hill that you must take your cross and die on – this is not the one." I felt a strong rebuke in my spirit from the Lord. So, I shifted and said, "Okay, let's determine the date." I remember our Chairman of the Board looked at me as if to say, "Are you alright?" I smiled and went on with the meeting. Now these years later I am happy we have the same time. In the long run it has made it easier on me as well as our deacons. So there are times when stubbornness can be good, sometimes it can be bad.

2. Compromise

When I was younger I admired a truly great man of God who said he was so against compromise that he cut the word out of his dictionary. In the matter of evil, we ought never to compromise. Picture a youth surrounded by his peer group. His parents have given explicit instructions on a certain matter. The gang mentality tells him to disobey his parents. He should not compromise! *"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother"* (Proverbs 6:20).

Now should you keep that same philosophy after you are married, I can tell you right now, you are in store for problems. Of the many detrimental attitudes that are harmful to marriage bliss, perhaps none would be more harmful than an absolute unwillingness to compromise. Don't contend over preferences. Let us take for instance a car-shopping trip. The wife graciously consents to the vehicle that he wants. Then it comes time to pick out the color and she pleads with him for one color and he is holding out for another. A reasonable compromise would be, if the guy can pick out the vehicle, why not let the lady pick out the color? If it always has to be your way, let me break it to you easy – you are spoiled.

Thomas a Kempis from his *Imitation of Christ* said, "In things essential, unity; in doubtful, liberty; in all things, charity." This is not the spirit of incorrect compromise; it is the Christ-like spirit of charity.

3. Rebuke

"Open rebuke is better than secret love" (Proverbs 27:5). When we can see that someone we love is going in the opposite direction of all that is good, we would be remiss not to say anything. True love must speak up at times: *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend..."* (Proverbs 27:6).

When in the course of Christian experience, when we simply don't like the way something is done by another brother or sister, we might remember if our complaint would qualify as preference, in many matters "silence is golden". Oftentimes those who complain and rebuke don't have a constructive alternative. In these cases it may indeed be wise to hold your peace. *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men"* (Romans 12:18).

We would do well to understand in the cases of young or immature Christians that they need more encouragement than the average Christian. It has been rightly estimated that it takes ten good compliments to compensate for one insult. So sometimes rebuke is good, sometimes it can become evil. At times rebuke is needed, but we must take heed to our timing. Perhaps they can receive your constructive criticism later. *"Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee"* (Proverbs 9:8). A good rule to follow is: *Let not then your good be evil spoken of"* (Romans 14:15, 16).

- Pastor Pope -

Back to Pastor's Word