

#218 “Provoked to Action”
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Isaiah 5:20 says, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” A while back, I happened upon an advertisement for a new cable television show in which the whole pitch of the ad was that it was a next generation news show with a sexy, comedic edge. This very worldly show promoted itself by showing a clip of a person making fun of fanatical, religious, right-wing fundamentalists, or something to that effect. The punch line was something like, “What will they get worked up about, the witchcraft or the gay headmaster?” That this followed a commercial in which a lesbian relationship was promoted as the ultimate guy fantasy has made me question whether or not I should even be watching commercials during the occasional sports event that I have the opportunity to watch. Our western society is increasingly getting more blatantly evil, criticizing those who even believe in evil as being evil while they parade around as being the good ones inasmuch as they define good as being happy-go-lucky and self-indulgent. Alcoholism and sexual promiscuity are their gospel, and those who believe in calling evil “evil” and good “good” are mocked and ridiculed for taking a stand against what God calls evil. The confusion over good and evil and the outright hatred for those who preach Christ is remarkable. That is not to say that it hasn’t happened before, for it has happened throughout human history, from the fall, to the Tower of Babel, to the apostasy of Israel, to the unbelief of our day. However, the Biblical reality is that things will go from bad to worse morally (2 Timothy 3:13). Yet, even so, I find myself marveling at how fast it is happening. The question for us as the true church in an age of rampant disbelief, growing universalism, and increasing immorality is what it does to our spirits within us, if anything? Does it make us sick, or does it not really bother us much at all? Does it make us want to stand for truth and do something about it, or do we cower in fear of the certain persecution?

Paul found himself in such a situation in Athens. Acts 17:16-17 says, “Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, *his spirit was being provoked within him* as he was observing the city full of idols. So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present” (emphasis added.) As Paul observed the rampant arrogance, evil, and idolatry, his spirit was pricked within him, moving him to take a step of action, namely, to start reasoning with the people of the society about Jesus Christ. He was willing to talk with any who would listen, whether practicing Jew, God-fearing Gentile, or outright pagan in the marketplace. He wanted to encourage believers in their faith, and he wanted to try to convince unbelievers of the God Whom they didn’t know. The Holy Spirit within him made him so unsettled with the present reality around him that he couldn’t help but do something and say something. As believers, as society pressures us and as Satan tempts us, are we stimulated to love and good deeds, or are we more interested in conforming to society’s immoral norms? The fact of the matter is that good and evil most certainly exist, and we are called to abhor evil and cling to what is good (Romans 12:9). There is a very drastic choice of action that we are called to, despising one lifestyle and

holding on to the other for dear life. It is the Holy Spirit's job to provoke a response within us and to move us to stand for truth, to speak up, and to do something to remind believers of what is true and to show unbelievers the error of their ways. This is not an easy way to go through this world, for opponents and attackers lie in wait, Satan included. However, it is the only way to go through life spiritually alert and awake.

Ephesians 5:11-12 speaks of taking action, saying, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret." Our society is so far gone that it no longer holds its most evil things in secret but instead exposes its wickedness to everybody in utter shamelessness. As Christians, by preaching the gospel and sharing about God's righteousness according to His revealed moral standards and laws, we can help expose the deeds of darkness around us as being the outright evil that it is. We dare not be the ones who hold the gospel in secret, for the world needs to see their unrighteousness and come to appreciate God's holiness.

There is no time for spiritually dozing off. The church at Sardis was spiritually sleeping at one point, and God called them to "wake up" (Revelation 3:1-3). Ephesians 5:14-16 says, "For this reason it says, 'Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.' Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." The days are indeed evil and getting more so every day. As such, we must be careful how we walk, making wise choices and using this time on earth judiciously. We are stewards of the gospel, and we must not shy away from the name of Christ and from all that He has taught us in His Word.

As the world gets more evil, the spotlight will shine with greater intensity upon true Christians, giving us a better and better chance to proclaim the gospel and defend its merit. We need to be ready, and we do this by listening to and heeding the Spirit's prodding in our hearts. He will deal with any sin issues in our hearts first of all. As we deal with these and move to a place of obedience, He will give us chances to serve Him. May the Spirit awaken us where we are sleeping and provoke us to faithful steps of action. What is the Spirit drawing attention to in your heart?