

## Shine as Lights in the World

By Daryl Wingerd

At one point in Paul's letter to the Christians in Philippi, he reminds them that they are to show themselves to be "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life" (Phil. 2:15-16).



We certainly live in a "crooked and twisted generation" ourselves. Anyone who stays in touch with current events is bombarded almost daily with new and shocking evidence of the depravity of the human heart and mind, and of the increasing hostility toward those who follow Christ faithfully. With Paul's 2000-year-old words as proof, we should not imagine that ours is the first generation to experience such twistedness and perversion, but if ever there were a generation in which wickedness were exalted and righteousness condemned (cf. Prov. 17:15), it is ours.

So, how should we show ourselves to the world in such a context as ours? In very simple terms, working backward through the passage quoted above, I believe Paul means that by holding fast to the promises of God embodied in the gospel of Christ (i.e., the "word of life") thus proving ourselves to be true and faithful and obedient children of God, we will shine as lights in the midst of the moral darkness surrounding us.

Simply put, we should live out all aspects of our lives as Christians obediently, faithfully, joyfully, hopefully, and in unity with each other, despite the moral decay all around us and despite the opposition we face.

Paul uses the phrase "shine as lights" to illustrate the kind of influence believers have on a dark world, which should cause us to consider the positive nature of our influence. We should be those who, even when faced with a steady chorus of bad news and growing animosity, do not become purveyors of gloom and doom, or bitterness, or pessimism, or spiteful rhetoric. If we are to be lights shining in the darkness, we should not only believe and speak the truth about Jesus, the Light of the world, but also demonstrate the joy and gladness and hope that the truth we believe produces. We should face each day, each duty, and each interaction with each other and with our "crooked and twisted generation" with joyful countenances—not meaning smiles pasted on artificially out of begrudging obligation, but rather outward demonstrations of true happiness flowing from hearts nourished by gospel truth.

The gospel we believe is the good news—the *best* news—for any generation. So then, believers should be people who go around acting like people who have just learned good, great, awesome news! This should be our default setting every day.

In case you're wondering if I'm saying Christians should never express sadness or righteous indignation, I'm not. Jesus said himself that "those who mourn" are blessed (Matt. 5:4), and it seems certain that he was referring to mourning over sin. None of us should smile when we see people standing up and cheering at the passing of a state law removing all restrictions on abortion up to the point of birth. None of us should feel happy when we hear of a same-sex couple starting the process of gender transition for their five-year-old. These are shocking examples of moral corruption and societal insanity. They should make us all weep, and they should make us feel a sense of anger and revulsion.

None of us should attempt to avoid sadness or deep concern when we learn of a believer falling into sin or walking foolishly and carelessly toward it. None of us should feel constrained to avoid weeping when we or someone we love experiences true loss. We care deeply, thus creating the potential for deep hurt. We love deeply, so we bear each other's burdens and weep with each other sincerely.

But when we are publicly and systematically slandered, falsely labeled as hateful or "phobic" toward one group or another, we should not respond with bitter or hostile self-defense. We should rejoice in our hearts, take opportunities to share the truth with others, and carry on faithfully, whether we are understood or misunderstood. Jesus said "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).

When this "crooked and twisted generation" turns against us to the extent of taking legal action, perhaps affecting our employment opportunities, or seizing houses and possessions, we should respond like the Hebrew believers did, who "had compassion on those in prison," and "joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property," knowing that they themselves "had a better possession and an abiding one" (Hebrews 10:34). They stayed unified and maintained joy, all because they remained focused on gospel truth. And in doing so they shined brightly!