

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 73

Salt In Society?

The Kingdom Series Part 12

by Alex Robertson

Our lifestyle depends on our doctrines, or, to put it another way, what we believe will always result in how we live, what lifestyle we have. In the light of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God, how should we live? What should be our concerns and our priorities? Clearly, 'kingdom lifestyle' is going to be something glorious when Jesus returns. He talks of ruling and reigning, of blessing, honour, glory and prosperity. But now the kingdom lifestyle is all about the narrow way of denying self and taking up the cross. Before the revolution, it's tough. Afterwards, it's wonderful.

But our hearts can lead us astray. Wrong motives hidden in our hearts, hidden even from us, can lead us to 'talk ourselves round' to accepting an easier way of life, a less costly Christianity, a different kingdom theology. And wrong motives with regard to our personal lifestyle will lead us into the wrong kingdom, the deceptive false kingdom which antichrist, in the guise of Christ, will set up. This 'counterfeit kingdom' will fulfill what many Christians have been led to expect of the kingdom of Christ. But those who squarely face up to Jesus' radical words about the cost of kingdom lifestyle now will not be deceived. Letting God deal with self in our lives is costly, but it bears all the right fruit, and leads us in the right path so that we don't fall into self-deceit.

In the last issue we considered a 'kingdom teaching' (prosperity) which has no support in the New Testament. In this issue it's a different story: a doctrine that seems to be firmly rooted in the New Testament. It's called "Salt in Society" or "Salt and Light". The teaching goes like this:

Jesus says we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Like salt, we must permeate and influence every area of our dark and corrupt society: business, politics, the arts, science, law, education - all need redeeming for God. God is the rightful owner of this world, and the devil has robbed us: we need to stand up and start proclaiming and living God's values, values of integrity and righteousness, in our world. For too long the church has been "so heavenly minded that it is of no earthly use". We have been "afraid to get our hands dirty". We need men like Joseph and Daniel, godly men of integrity holding influential and strategic positions in worldly governments and affairs. We need Christian politicians, Christian policy-makers, Christian business leaders, Christian sportsmen, Christian showbusiness people. The salt stops the rot and brings the kingdom of God to bear on our ungodly society.

What's wrong with that, you may say. It all sounds good and scriptural. Jesus did say we are salt and light, didn't he? Well, let's take a look at what he does say. "Ye are the salt of the earth ... ye are the light of the world". Are those 2 ways of saying the same thing? No, on 2 counts. Firstly, the earth and the world are not the same. In the bible, "the earth" always refers to God's physical creation, which belongs to God. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 24:1). But "the world" in

the bible refers to something bad - not a physical thing at all but a spiritual system of values and ideas, ruled by "the prince of this world", "the god of this world", Satan. The world is something we are to abhor. "Love not the world." "Be not conformed to this world." "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." "Society" is another name for "the world". Society is the system, the way things are run; it's all about values and ideologies.

Secondly, salt and light work in completely different ways. Salt works together with food to bring out the taste; it co-exists, influences, subtly permeates and works alongside. But light does not do this with darkness. Light is the opposite of darkness; it confronts it and opposes it. Light and darkness cannot co-exist; switch a light on and the darkness goes.

The point is this: Jesus says we are the salt (the influencing, permeating, co-existing factor) of the earth (God's creation), and he says we are light (the confrontational opposite) to the world (the devil's system). Jesus doesn't say we are the salt of the world (society), or the light of the earth (creation). That's mixing the metaphors, and it leads us down completely the wrong path: Jesus doesn't tell us to be "salt in society", he tells us to be light in society. In other words, he doesn't tell us to permeate society and subtly co-exist with it in order to influence it. He tells us to confront its values and be the radical opposite!

Changing the system

The aim of those who promote the "salt in society" doctrine is to change society - to influence the system so much that we change it. But the idea that we can "Christianize the system" is not a scriptural one. Scripture tells us that the devil is the unseen spiritual guide and policy-maker behind the system, and that God has allowed it to be so. It is his system, it is all heading towards the system of antichrist, not because men make it so but because behind men's actions and thoughts is the devil, masterminding it all. Only one thing will change the system - a revolution, a spiritual sea-change, a complete overthrow and destruction of the present system and a new "prince" in charge. And that is exactly what will happen when Jesus returns: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ" (Revelation 11:15). Then, and only then, the system changes.

Until then, anyone who tries to change the system inevitably comes up against the corrupt spiritual power behind the system. Many Christians have tried to do it. Sincere Christian politicians embark on their careers determined to have integrity. But as they work their way up the ladder to the place of power (you cannot have any influence unless you have power), they come up against the corruption in the system, and they then have a choice: become a 'whistle-blower' and expose the system, or turn a blind eye to the corruption and keep quiet, because "the end justifies the means" - it's worth turning a blind eye to something that's not quite right in order to get to a place of power where you can change the things that are not right. Becoming a whistle-blower has only one result: the system throws you out because you have opposed it and betrayed it. Turning a blind eye keeps you on the ladder, but to stay on, you have become a little corrupt yourself. You may be "co-existing with the world" but in the process you have compromised your integrity. Your light has started to become darkness. It doesn't work.

The lesson of history

History has shown us that trying to Christianize the world never works. The best attempts have failed. Rome tried to do it in the first few centuries after Christ, and they thought they had achieved it: but in fact it was a corrupt counterfeit of the real thing. Instead of the church invading and transforming the world, the spirit of the world invaded and transformed the church. It happened again with the Pilgrim Fathers, who determined to start from scratch with a new system founded entirely on Christian principles ... and look what happened. New York is worse than old York. It's always a compromise, no matter how 'pure' it may seem to be at the outset. And compromise is unacceptable to God. He wants total revolution, and he's going to get it when Jesus returns.

Should we not be involved in any social action, then? It depends what you mean by social action. Lobbying governments for change? No, because that's trying to change the system. But getting involved with helping individuals, that's another matter. We are certainly called to do that: to visit the orphan and the widow, to help the poor – personally, not just by writing a cheque – just as we are called to share the gospel with individuals, not “win nations for Christ”. Jesus' concern is always for the individual. The compassion of Christ can only be shown by one individual to another, and that we are called to.

Joseph and Daniel

Joseph and Daniel are always brought up as the biblical examples of godly people who attained high positions in society, and Christians have been encouraged to follow their example. But we can not, for several reasons.

1. Neither Joseph nor Daniel sought their position, in fact circumstances forced them every step of the way. Joseph was sold into slavery, then imprisoned. Daniel was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar.
2. God raised both Joseph and Daniel to their positions of influence, they didn't 'work their way up the system', and they attained their positions because they could interpret dreams – a supernatural gift.
3. Neither Joseph nor Daniel had any effect upon the societies in which they lived. Neither Egypt nor Babylon experienced revival, or anything like it. Neither Pharaoh nor Nebuchadnezzar were converted, and both nations remained as ungodly as before.
4. Joseph and Daniel weren't 'salt in society', but they were certainly light in the world, light in society, because they radically opposed the system when it clashed with their values. Joseph suffered imprisonment, and Daniel the lions' den, rather than compromise – by which they both proved that they weren't in the least interested in 'working their way to a place of influence'.

Both Joseph and Daniel are Old Testament examples, for a simple reason: no-one in the New Testament comes near to being anything like an example of what the “salt in society” people are trying to prove. Jesus had no programmes of social reform, only the promise of a far-away revolution. He had no issue with the Roman government, and refused to take on the traditional role

of 'judge' and arbitrate in legal disputes. Paul, far from advocating change in society, urged the Christians to "be subject to the higher powers", and told them that "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). Never mind that the Romans were ungodly, idolatrous, never mind that they demanded idolatry of the Christians and persecuted them: they were still "ordained of God". Paul never set himself against the system or tried to reform it.

"Salt in society" is a subtly deceptive teaching of the counterfeit kingdom, because although it purports to be building towards a Christian society, in reality it can only bring in a compromised, counterfeit "world disguised as the church". Taking power in this world in the cause of Christ will always lead to the counterfeit kingdom, never to the true kingdom.

EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

by Joanna Barratt

Thine Be The Glory

From my earliest recollections I can remember my mother pointing out to me that if I wanted to be on the television and get on in the world of show business I would either have to expose my body or sleep with the directors. This sounds like a terribly 'sweeping statement', but the more I consider it, the more I realise she was absolutely right. For a girl, at least! As I was very plump as a young girl, and had a fear of being taken advantage of, I decided it would be better to explore other ways of earning a living. But, if you have any degree of talent or a bit of exhibitionism, the stage holds a tremendous attraction. I was used to performing vocal and instrumental solos before audiences in school concerts, and the applause even to my young ears, was something to be sought. I felt good at something, of value, accepted, and this gave me a glowing sense of self-worth.

Not being content to just sing in the bath, it was a natural progression for me to move from school circles to church circles. I had a West Indian friend who also had a good voice and we rehearsed hymns together, singing in 2-part harmony. When I was a kid churches were not as sophisticated as they are today, and pastors did all they could to encourage their young members to find a niche. My pastor regularly asked my friend and I to sing during our services, and after hearing us, pastors from other churches would also invite us to sing for their congregations. Sometimes we would even be booked to sing at Conventions, and now we really felt we had hit the 'big time' because we were given a ministry gift for our trouble.

Our style was very primitive. We would ask the pianist, whether they could play or not, to accompany us whilst we sang. After just one brief 'run through' before the meeting, we would perform without microphones to an accommodating audience with beaming smiles.

They all wanted to encourage us. And they did.

The group

But when I reached 16 years of age I was asked to join a group. This was totally different. We all played various instruments, and each song was treated in a completely different way. We practised our material for weeks before performing anything publicly. We would work on introductions, endings, vocal backing, etc., and only when it was as good as we could get it would we bring it to the church. We became very proficient and were regularly booked by other ministers for church meetings and conventions. When we were invited to tour Holland to perform in some of the Dutch churches, we felt it was now time to expose ourselves and begin playing in 'the world'.

This was of course the ultimate. We would be 'Salt in Society', getting work in pubs and clubs singing a few worldly songs and mixing in some Christian songs, this way we could get to witness in a way that would be acceptable. How else were we to affect the world? If people wouldn't come into the churches to hear us, then we would take our music out to them. We talked about our plan over and over together but couldn't feel right about it. We booked ourselves into recording studios and made albums, we began to get bookings for concerts, all the time waiting for the right person to come along to spot our talent and put us in the big league. We did everything we could to be professional in our performance, from the clothes we wore to the way we held our mics, we advertised ourselves, but still God kept us hidden.

I do remember one occasion when we were asked to provide the music at the 21st birthday party for a friend of ours who was a professional model. She wanted to sing and asked if I would do a duet with her. Because of this she asked if she could buy me a dress identical to the one she would be wearing so that we would look really good singing together. But after seeing what she had in mind, and realising I was going to try to be a 'witness' at this worldly 'do', I declined her offer. We sang all the right songs as far as Christianity was concerned, then had a giggle accompanying our friend with her song, 'Big Spender', and it was only after this song that I realised what we were doing ... we were just entertaining. We lapped up the applause, and the men tried to flirt with me. The guys in the group ate the food and drank the alcohol, and except for the fact that we went to church, we were no different from the world.

Embarrassed

On another occasion I was asked to do some session singing with a famous international hairdresser. He was putting on an elaborate fashion show in London and to make it even more unique he wanted to incorporate a love song. In his very sexy Swiss accent he sang the male part whilst I did the female vocal. He did his part very convincingly whilst I tried my professional best to get into the song, but knowing that he was a self-professing homosexual made me feel unbelievably uncomfortable. I blushed. He could see the discomfort I was in and seemed to revel in it, becoming even more teasing with his manner whilst looking right into my eyes. I think that was one of the worst jobs I ever took on, and it made show business and fame seem smutty and false to me.

Some years ago I happened to see a television interview of Sheena Easton. The programme was very educational because it traced how she became famous. She had started out as a pub and then club singer and was noticed by a talent spotter. She was offered a record contract, but in order to be

promoted she had to succumb to quite a number of changes, physically and musically. She had started out as just an ordinary, good looking girl, but they cut and restyled her hair, gave her a complete makeover, and changed her whole image. She looked a completely different person. Then they chose the songs she was to sing. The effect was quite astonishing, she didn't look or sound like the same girl. But it made me realise that fame comes at a cost. You may think you can become famous and carry on singing about God, but show business is all about making money. 'If it don't sell, you can't do it!' U2 is a classic example of what happens to Christians who try to break through into the world of showbusiness with the idea that you can be a witness. They have all ended up in the occult, preaching for Satan instead of the one they once called their Lord Jesus Christ.

At one time I went to concerts to watch famous artistes perform. I have seen some extremely gifted stars and been able to admire their talents. But in all these people I detected that they were displaying themselves, and showing what they could do. In some cases, performers were so technical, and could do so many clever things with either their instruments or their voices, that I was left cold. There was no emotion in what they did. Other times the artiste would manipulate the audience so much that we were all swept away on a wave of emotion which would end up with the crowd on their feet giving rapturous applause.

Stephane Grappelli was one such performer who, after playing his jazz violin, had the crowd on their feet. The applause was long and thunderous. Nobody worried about his life style. It was his talent he was displaying, and people recognised and appreciated it. I felt totally detached as I watched him and his male backing musicians take their bows, as wave after wave of applause went up. I thought to myself, 'He is acting like a god. Only God should receive this kind of praise'.

Christian superstars

We now have Christian superstars. People who want attention. People who love the praise of men and want personal glory for their God-given talents and gifts. I was going in that direction also, but God allowed me to go through the fiery furnace to knock all desire for wealth and fame out of me.

Churches have become the equivalent of moral clubs into which we bring both fashion and entertainment. If you want to know how much 'salt' the church is in society, just look at the churches which are attracting the biggest congregations, and you will see plenty of 'society' in the 'salt'.

We cannot influence the world by becoming part of it. The two just don't mix. We have to leave the world, and the world has to leave us. We have to show a completely different life style. If what we do with our God-given talents and gifts doesn't bring the conviction of God upon those who observe us, then we are at best just entertainers who have lost our way. God is interested in changing people, not systems.