

APRIL 2004—*What Are You Helping Your Neighbor Become?*

Last month we saw how our decisions and actions play a profound role in shaping our souls, for better or worse. However, this is not the end of the matter. We must also consider the potential effect of our decisions and actions on our neighbor's soul and the awesome responsibility this places upon us.

C.S. Lewis offers a particularly valuable insight on this matter:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never met a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.¹

We are taught by Christ to love and serve our neighbors—that is, to seek their highest good at all times. As we do so, our actions and attitudes have an effect upon their souls for good, for in our deeds of love and service they see the unseen Christ.

Tragically, the reverse is also true. When we neglect our neighbors or do them harm we can cause them to spiritually stumble or fall, bringing injury to their souls. Yes, they are ultimately accountable for their responses to our actions, but we are also accountable for being the cause of their stumbling when it occurs. Thus, we see the awesome responsibility we bear in our relationships with one another.

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 13:9-10 NIV

¹ C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*, HarperSanFrancisco, ©1949 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., Copyright renewed © 1976, revised 1980 C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd., pp. 45-46.