

Thoughtlessness: Far More Dangerous Than We Realize

Evil wins when otherwise good people fail to think clearly enough to stand up for what is right.

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Jeff Myers is an authority on Christian worldview and apologetics who teaches Christians how to understand what they believe, why they believe it and how to defend it against fatal worldviews. Over the last 20 years, Jeff Myers has become one of America's most respected authorities on Christian worldview, apologetics, and youth leadership development. He's the author of several books and the president of Summit Ministries. Dr. Myers lives in Colorado with his family.

One of my friends calls them “pastorisms”: catchy statements that leave everyone saying, “Ooh, that’s profound.” Soon such pronouncements become memes that are widely shared and treated as self-evidently true.

I contend that fascination with clichés makes us thoughtless, and thoughtlessness is dangerous—as illustrated by a disturbing example from history.

A Thoughtless Monster

Adolf Eichmann was the architect of the Holocaust. His planning skills made easy work of transporting millions of people to concentration camps. After World War II, Eichmann fled to Argentina and remained in hiding for a decade and a half until he was discovered and brought to trial in Jerusalem.

The *New Yorker* sent political theorist Hannah Arendt to cover the proceedings.¹ When she saw Eichmann in person, Arendt found herself eerily disturbed. Eichmann didn't seem like a monster. He was, Arendt realized, "terrifyingly normal."

Speaking in his own defense, Eichmann came across as a boring, trivial person who communicated in clichés and didn't seem to have any thoughts of his own. For example, Eichmann described transporting Jews to the gas chambers as offering them "special treatment" that resulted in a "change of residence."

Eichmann spouted clichés to the very end. At the gallows, he emphasized that he did not believe in life after death, but then announced, "After a short while, gentlemen, we shall all meet again. Such is the fate of all men." Not even the reality of impending death could jolt Eichmann out of mindlessness.

As Arendt described it, Adolph Eichmann became one of history's most evil men not because he was brilliant, but because he found himself incapable of thinking meaningfully about his wicked actions.

Thoughtlessness is dangerous. Evil wins when otherwise good people fail to think clearly enough to stand up for what is right.

Since World War II, the world has wondered how a handful of evil Nazis and Communists could have slaughtered a hundred million people and held billions more in misery. Arendt's explanation offered half a century ago is chillingly prophetic:

In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing was true.

To Arendt, everyday people don't so much endorse evil as they allow themselves to be run over by it because of their own moral confusion.

Thoughtlessness in the Church

Christians are just as vulnerable to thoughtlessness as anyone else. As I wrote my book *Unquestioned Answers*, I realized that our core problem is not unanswered

¹ For more about Arendt's view of Eichmann and the trial, see her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1977).

questions, but unquestioned answers—clichés we believe that keep our faith at a shallow level.

In other words, we use short-cuts so we don't have to think deeply about our faith. Thoughtlessness is the enemy of the Church, the gospel and Christ.

The Bible calls us to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). This doesn't mean we need to be brilliant to love Jesus. But it does call us to embrace four thoughtful disciplines:

Know Scripture.

To know truth and be thoughtful with truth, we must know our Bibles. This requires time and study. Don't merely look for individual Bible verses that touch your heart. Become deeply familiar with the whole flow of Scripture and learn how to interpret it well.

Think about the connection between Scripture and culture.

Don't think about the Bible as an Aesop's Fables for Christians. Focus on how the Scripture reveals the very nature and character of God and orient yourself to see everything in today's world from His perspective.

Don't believe something just because it's phrased in a witty or powerful way.

Stating something cleverly does not make it true. Don't accept punchy slogans at face value. Ask, "How do we know that is really true?" Thinking deeply about truth helps us think more deeply about everything else.

Be people of curiosity as well as conviction.

Be willing to dialogue with people you disagree with. Instead of defaulting to clichés like, "Let's agree to disagree" or "You have your truth and I have mine," mull over what the other person is saying and be an advocate for truth and meaningful reflection.



Evil wins when our thinking is confused. Don't settle for unquestioned answers. Dig for the truth about God, and as a result, about everything else. 