

Influence: Light in the Darkness

Jeff Rogers / Lamplighter Bible Study

Matthew 5:13

The world needs salt because it is corrupt, and it needs light because it is dark. The biblical worldview is that the world is corrupted and decayed, that it is dark and darkening. “*Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived,*” Paul warns (2 Tim. 3:13). The world cannot do anything but get worse, because it has no inherent goodness to build on, no inherent spiritual and moral life in which it can grow. Year after year, the system of evil accumulates a deeper darkness.¹

While man’s knowledge has increased (scientific, medical, historical, etc.), his basic nature remains unchanged. Man’s morals have not improved. Instead, men invent even more ways to corrupt and destroy themselves. What is the answer?

I. The Christian’s Defining Metaphor (Matthew 5:14a, see also vs. 13a)

- A. The “**You**” is emphatic.
 - 1. The meaning is “*You and you alone...*” It is a privilege, responsibility, and defining.
 - 2. Preservation (salt) and illumination (light) in the corrupt and dark world come only from the members of the body of Christ. There is no other source.
- B. “**Are**” – Present tense. Right now. No line and no waiting around.
 - 1. He does not say, “You will be...”, “You can be...”, “You ought to be...”, “You are becoming...”
- C. The emphasis is on “being” rather than “doing.” (Be salt – Be light)
 - 1. This is a consistent theme in the Sermon on the Mount.
 - 2. The Beatitudes encapsulate the “being” that salt and light pictures.
 - 3. **1 Thessalonians 5:5**, *For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.*
 - 4. **Proverbs 4:18**, *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.*

II. The Christian’s Undeniable Function (Matthew 5:14b-15)

- A. A Christian is strategically placed by the Lord (14b)
 - 1. **1 Peter 2:9**, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*
- B. A Christian is warned about deliberate concealment (15) (Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16, 11:33)
 - 1. **Ephesians 5:8–14**, *For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as **children of light** 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light.*
 - a) The Christian takes no part in darkness instead, he illuminates (11)
 - b) The Christian avoids shameful conversation instead, he speaks truth (12)
 - 2. **1 John 1:5–7**, *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light**, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*
 - a) The ultimate Source (5)
 - b) The ultimate deception (6)
 - c) The ultimate walk (7)
 - 3. **Philippians 2:14–16**, *Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,*

¹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985.

among whom you shine as lights in the world. 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

4. **Proverbs 31:18**, ...*Her lamp does not go out at night.*

III. Let Your Light So Shine

- A. The purpose and function of light Set on a hill, cannot be hidden
 - 1. We are meant, by God, to be salt and light in the world.
 - a) How quickly do we forget our form and function as light and salt?
 - b) Does it not rebuke us and our hiding light? (Jesus put no qualification on who is salt and light; it includes every believer)
 - 2. The warning against deliberate concealment
 - 3. The warning against loss of essential purpose
 - a) Salt if loses its saltiness, is good for nothing (5:13)
 - b) Light, if it goes dark (hidden or concealed), is good for nothing
- B. Christian, without light, is useless (Lukewarmness in Laodicea)
 - 1. **2 Timothy 3:5**, *Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*
 - a) Appearance – *morphōsis* – the act of fabricating something in a particular shape; metaphorical in the sense of moral and spiritual character formation.
 - b) It is cast out, put under a bushel and good for nothing.
 - 2. A true Christian will stand out:
 - a) He is like salt
 - b) He is like a city on a hill.
 - c) He is like a candle on a candlestick (household).

IV. The Failure

- A. Salt cannot inherently lose its saltiness. It loses saltiness through contamination.
 - 1. As Christians, we can lose our influence through contamination.
 - 2. This can be fear of offending others, indifference, and even sin.
- B. Light can lose its effectiveness by being hidden.
 - 1. As Christians, we can lose our influence by covering our light.
 - 2. We can deny as Peter, we can forsake as Demas, or through embarrassment, fear, etc. all result in our light being covered and becoming ineffective.
- C. What does this look like in the Scripture?
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 6:14**, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

V. The Glory (Matthew 5:16)

- A. Our Good Works – This is not what we create or make up. Instead, is what the Lord does through us
- B. Our Intentions – Not for others to see us, but for them to see the Father.
 - 1. This is the supreme calling of life: glorifying God. Everything we do is to cause others to give praise to the God who is the source of all that is good.
- C. Examples
 - 1. It is said of Robert Murray McCheyne, a godly Scottish minister of the last century, that his face carried such a hallowed expression that people were known to fall on their knees and accept Jesus Christ as Savior when they looked at him. Others were so attracted by the self-giving beauty and holiness of his life that they found his Master irresistible.
 - 2. It was also said of the French pietist Francois Fenelon that his communion with God was such that his face shined with divine radiance. A religious skeptic who was compelled to spend the night in an inn with Fenelon, hurried away the next morning, saying, “If I spend another night with that man I’ll be a Christian in spite of myself.”
 - 3. *(John 3:19–21 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.)*

VI. Being Light

- A. Compared to Salt
 - 1. Salt works secretly; light is obvious.
 - 2. Salt works from within, light from without.
 - 3. Salt is more indirect influence of the gospel, Light is more its direct communication.
 - 4. Salt works through our living, light works through our words
 - 5. Salt can retard corruption, light reveals corruption
- B. Scripture
 - 1. **Psalm 36:9 (ESV) — 9** For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.
 - 2. **1 John 1:5–7 (ESV) — 5** This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
 - 3. God's light is the Bible, the living Word of Jesus Christ. **Psalm 119:105 (ESV) — 105** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
- C. Christians are to proclaim God's light in a dark world
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV) — 6** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Our light must be visible and not hidden (Matthew 5:14-15) (**Romans 2:19–22 (ESV) — 19** and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, **20** an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— **21** you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? **22** You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?)