

Light In A World of Darkness

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." – Matthew 5:14-16

"**Ye are the light of the world.**" Our last study dealt with the Christian as salt in society; a reference to our preserving, antiseptic influence in a corrupt, decaying world. Now Jesus refers to Christians as the light of the world. First the Christian's character, then the Christian's influence; the fundamental point being this: it is absolutely of vital importance to realize that our influence depends on our character. The metaphors of salt and light continue to reinforce a theme which is so basic to the entire Sermon on the Mount; that Christians are different (attitude, character) and are called to be different (influence and good works). It cannot be overemphasized that it is always what the Christian is before what the Christian **does**. Furthermore, all that the Christian is, demands expression. Helmut Thielicke states, "*Salt and light have one thing in common: they give and expend themselves - and thus are the opposite of any and every kind of self-centered religiosity.*" Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones refers to these verses as "*one of the most astounding and extraordinary statements about the Christian that was ever made.*"

As salt precludes corruption and decay, so light precludes darkness. The implication is that the world is in a state of darkness. "**And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil**" [Jn. 3:19]. The world is in darkness with regard to spiritual knowledge. The world has much knowledge in some aspects; mechanics, science and life (in a limited sense), but is largely void of spiritual knowledge. It is interesting to note that we now have the technology to store the entire Library of Congress on a computer chip the size of a sugar cube! Yet, with all this learning, the world has failed to "**come to the knowledge of the truth**" [2 Tim. 3:7]. Man's learning and wisdom through its philosophers and "great thinkers" fails miserably for "**the world by wisdom knew not God**" [1 Cor. 1:21].

It was Jesus who said, "I am the light of the world." [Jn 8:12, 9:5] Alexander MacLaren states, "*He was the Incarnate Ideal of humanity, the Perfect Pattern of conduct, who alone sheds beams of certainty on the darkness of life.*" Jesus as the light and Christians as the light must be understood together. Very simply, Jesus is the source of light and true understanding. He has "kindled" us that we may shine, and placed us where we might give light. As His followers we receive the light, and transmit or reflect the light within the surrounding darkness of this world: "**I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life**" [Jn. 8:12]. Note also the words of the Apostle Paul, "**For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light**" [Eph. 5:8].

Light exposes darkness and the things associated with darkness. Light's nature is to radiate. It reveals what was hidden, "**But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.**" [Eph. 5:13]. It is "**light**" which exposes "**the hidden things of darkness**" [1 Cor. 4:5]. It is important to remember that Satan, "**the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them**" [2 Cor. 4:4]. He also has the ability to "**transform himself into an angel of light**" [2 Cor. 11:14]. Vance Havner gives his insight regarding the prevailing darkness in our midst: "*There is a sneaking infiltration of false doctrine and the gradual inflow of worldliness into the Church. Satan does far more evil as an angel of light than he wrought as a roaring lion. And matters are made worse because it is considered unloving, unchristian, to attack these wolves in sheep's clothing. We are honored for killing lions but condemned for battling angels! It isn't nice to tackle these mock angels who preach heresy in the language of orthodoxy.*" It is the particular influence of the Christian to expose the things of darkness and to reveal to the world that "**This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all**" [1 Jn. 1:5]. The problem with the world is not technical knowledge, education or political legislation, but sin, and that man needs to be born anew, with new desires and outlooks in order that he can love the light and hate the darkness.

"**A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.**" The Apostle Paul exhorts believers to "**prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life**" [Philip. 2:15,16]. The words "**A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid**" provide the basic meaning. It cannot be hid because it's obvious. It's conspicuous! Its whole purpose is to give light. The man influencing the world for Christ will stand out! Scripture has no place for "secret

disciples!" He is meant to be seen. William Barclay comments, "*There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy. A man's Christianity should be visible to all men. . . . A Christianity whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone.*" Dietrich Bonhoeffer similarly says, "*Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him.*" Light has obvious features: it is seen, it guides and it warns. Let us not be guilty of hiding our light under a bushel; the bushel of unkindness, temper, uncharitable words, complaining or unforgiveness and the like, hindering our testimony - our light in the world.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." As has been said before, the light we emanate is His light, and subsequently the works we do are His works done in us and through us. The purpose of our deeds is to make the way clear for others, and as we make the way clear for others, they in turn give God glory. We exclaim, "**Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory**" [Ps. 115:1]. There is no attention to self, the enemy of poverty of spirit and meekness. It is all to be done for God's sake, for His glory, and subtle self must die daily. All our works are to point to the supreme calling of our life: God's glory - "**Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit**" [Jn. 15:8].

It was said of the French pietest 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." The point is that what we do must cause people to be attracted to God, not ourselves, to His divine character and not our humanness. Remember fellow Christian, the world gathers its conception of Christianity from you - not from Christ or the Bible, but from your words, your deeds, your conduct. "**But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light**" [1 Peter 2:9].

– Suggested prayer:

Light me, O Light of Life, and let my nature henceforth have no other purpose than to shine on earth as Thou shinest in the Eternal Glory, emitting a radiance of the same nature and yielding the same prism as Thine own.

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