

**Matthew 5:16** *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify you father who is in heaven.*

Jesus has been teaching us that we are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of men.” He teaches that to become tasteless as salt and hidden as light is not acceptable – nor does it even make sense for the believer. Apparently He had more to teach on the subject, for He continues with today’s verse in speaking more about light. So let us investigate to see what we must learn in addition.

### **MY ROLE IN BEING LIGHT**

This week I was conversing with a fellow believer about our being salt and light. And he asked this question: Since being salt and light is who we are as believers, isn’t staying close to Jesus all that is required for my being salt and light in the world? Or do I need to pay special attention to becoming more effective as salt and light? In other words, he was acknowledging that it is God who makes us salt and light, and wondering whether we have any responsibility to pursue the matter further.

What would have been your response had he asked you? It was a good and profound question, and one that has great implication for our correct role as followers of Christ generally. If my faith is “all about God,” do I simply “let go and let God” do His thing in me while I wait for His molding and forming of me? Or am I expected to play an active role in the process? Understand that I am not speaking about salvation – we know that imparting spiritual life is by grace alone and is all the work of God. I simply accept that gift. But how about living the Christian life?

**Galatians 5:25** *If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

This is Paul’s teaching to the Galatians, and some would say this means that our Christian living is all God’s doing as well. What say you?

My response to my friend was that it is both-and, meaning we both are salt and light and need to strive to be salt and light. My answer was based on both Jesus’ phraseology in the passage as well as from the overall teaching in the epistles.

#### **1. Jesus’ Phraseology**

Notice in vs. 13 and 14 Jesus says “you are” salt and light. This emphasizes that it is God’s doing. But in verse 16, our verse for today, he goes on to say “Let your light shine” which indicates a personal responsibility in the matter. And the second half of verses 13 and 14 also imply a personal responsibility, warning us not to become tasteless as salt or hidden as light.

#### **2. Teaching in the Epistles**

Paul’s teaching in his letters was to teach a doctrinal truth in the first portion and then give practical advice as to how to live out that doctrine in the latter portion of the letter.

I’ll give two of the clearest examples of this.

- a. In Romans, Paul writes in chapters 1-11 about the “Righteousness of God” and how that righteousness of God (salvation) can be appropriated by faith alone. It’s all about God.

**Romans 1:17** *For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”*

Yet in Chapter 12 we see a “therefore” that turns the corner and begins a final 5 chapters of how we are practically to live out that righteousness. We have a role to play in our growth.

**Romans 12:1** *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service or worship.*

- b. In Ephesians, Paul writes in Chapters 1-3 about our high calling as Christians.

**Ephesians 1:3** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

He goes on to say that He “chose us” (1:4), “predestined us” (1:5), redeemed us (1:7), revealed His purpose to us (1:9), gave us inheritance (1:11), and so on. Yet in Chapter 4 we see a “therefore” that turns the corner and begins a final 3 chapters of how we are to walk worthy of this high and holy calling. Again, we have a role to play in living out our calling.

***Ephesians 4:1*** *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*

Yes, we “walk in the Spirit” in that our spiritual growth can only come by the power of the Spirit within us. But God expects our cooperation in the matter! And there are steps we are to take to insure that this growth occurs – Bible study, prayer, church fellowship, ministry, and many practical and specific steps that Paul outlines in his many epistles.

So, I must strive to be salt and light as I “walk worthy” of my calling as salt and light. Essentially, the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, Chapters 5-7) is a teaching on how we are to practically live out the Beatitudes (which we are) and live our being salt and light (which we are).

## **PRACTICAL TEACHINGS**

Here are the primary practical teachings that we learn here about being salt and light:

1. that Christian faith, if it exists, cannot be concealed
2. that if a distinction is not manifest in the life, faith does not exist
3. that to conceal our faith is to betray our trust, injure God’s cause, and render our lives useless
4. that good actions will be noticed and lead some people to honor God

## **THE METAPHOR OF THE LAMP**

Whether we use the illuminating metaphor of a lamp, a candle or even a modern day flashlight, the dual principles of God’s enabling and our complying is apt.

All three metaphors have a power source. The lamp and the ancient candles used oil, whereas the flashlight uses batteries, or some other electrical power. And there is no light whatsoever without that power source. God alone is the spiritual power source of our life. He alone is the Light, therefore He alone can produce light in us. Only when the power source is engaged is light possible.

All three metaphors also have something that burns and displays the light. The lamp and the candle have wicks, and the flashlight has a bulb. We are that wick or bulb, in the metaphor. Now what is our responsibility? It is not to produce the light – the power source alone can produce. But we must (1) keep the power source and the conductor close in contact, and (2) tend the integrity of the conductor (ourselves).

Do you remember the parable of the 10 virgins that Jesus told in Matthew 25? The prudent virgins brought with them extra oil. The foolish virgins did not. They had a dual responsibility in their lamp-tending. One was to “trim the wicks.” If wicks get too short, the wick gets smothered and goes out. If the wick gets too long it smolders and smokes. The wicks must be kept trimmed. In the parable, all 10 virgins trimmed their wicks properly (25:7). From this we are reminded that the Christian must tend to his integrity, keeping our life “trimmed” to follow carefully the commands of our Lord. We watch our tongue, manage our temper, avoid temptations and all the rest – all the while knowing that these are only possible by the power of the Spirit within us – we “walk by the Spirit.”

But in the parable the 5 prudent virgins brought along extra oil, whereas the 5 foolish virgins did not. This is the second responsibility of lamp-tending, that is to keep the oil and the wick closely together.

And for us, we must ever seek the Lord, hunger and thirst for righteousness, and acknowledge Him in all our ways that our (His) light might shine brightly in and through us.

For a flashlight the principles are the same: (1) keep the batteries fresh and in close contact with the bulb, and “tend” the integrity of the bulb, keeping the contact clean and uninhibited and the bulb undamaged.

Yes – we have a responsibility in our Christian walk. Yes – we have a responsibility in “letting our light shine.” Did you get both of them in our lamp/candle/flashlight metaphors?

1. Keep yourself ever close to God. Don’t drift. Keep close contact in prayer, Bible study and fellowship with fellow believers. **Power is His gig – contact is yours!**
2. Keep yourself “trimmed” of sin and habits that will break your spiritual integrity. **Keeping your nose clean is your gig – enabling is His!**

## THE PURPOSE OF YOUR LIGHT SHINING

The last part of today’s verse tells us “how” and “why” we are to let our light shine. How: *“in such a way that they may see your good works.”* Why: to *“glorify your Father who is in heaven.”*

Let’s begin by saying the obvious – our light shining is not to show ourselves off. Jesus speaks to this specifically later in the Sermon:

**Matthew 6:1** *Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.*

It must not be our motive to be seen for the purpose of personal recognition. But it must be our motive to be visible – not anonymous, but in the name of the Lord, for His glory. This is a continual challenge as we minimize “showmanship” and yet maximize “showing Him off.” As I do good in the world may they see my zeal and fervency, my simplicity and transparency, my sincerity and integrity, my courage and forthrightness, my diligence and conviction. And yet may they see Jesus in me, but not so much of me.

I came across a quote from an ancient Hebrew commentary on the book of Numbers, written by Jewish Rabbis, but it speaks to our consideration in Matthew 5:16. It comes from Bamidbar (meaning Numbers) Rabba, section 15.

*The Israelites said to the holy blessed God, “Thou commandest us to light lamps to thee; and yet thou art the Light of the world, and with thee the light dwelleth.” The holy blessed God answered, “I do not command this because I need light; but that you may reflect light upon me, as I have illuminated you; - that the people may say, ‘Behold, how the Israelites illustrate him, who illuminates them in the sight of the whole earth.’ ”*

Clearly not all will glorify God for your good works. But as we have the opportunity, we must let them know why we do those good works – that is, for the glory of God and in the name of Jesus our Lord. We won’t do this pompously or self-righteously. We will do it humbly and respectfully.

How we appreciate those in the public arena, whether politicians, sport or media celebrities or musicians who let it be known in simple but clear terms that they are in the grip of the Lord of the universe. Our platform may not be as far-reaching, but our little candle can make a difference.

No sincere and humble Christian lives in vain. Even the feeblest light at midnight is of use.

## LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE !