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Is Christianity Really the Light of the World?

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



The world is systematically becoming a dark place. It is not that people are purposely looking to dwell in darkness, it is that many people have come to believe in things that had their origin in darkness and treachery. Wherever you look you can see the subtle creeping in of thinking, philosophies and actions that do not reflect the wholesome goodness of godly righteousness; rather, they engulf all in their path in a pervasive and deepening gloom that is labeled as a "new understanding" of what is good and acceptable. Jesus emphatically told his followers to be the "light of the world," to be that "city set on a hill for the whole world to see." So, how are we doing with that? Is Christianity truly the light of the world or have we misrepresented and failed the light of the gospel? Is the world supposed to see our light and come to it or are we simply off track in our understanding?

Let's begin by trying to figure out what Jesus is teaching us regarding our light shining. He mentions this on two separate occasions.

His first mention immediately follows the Beatitudes: Matthew 5:13-16: How could we say Christianity is the light of the world based on what we see around us?

In Mark 4:21-23 and Luke 8:16-18, "light" immediately follows the Parable of the Sower and its explanation. Luke 8:16-18

Observations so far about our responsibility of being light:

- The *ingredients* of these lessons are salt and light (more on this soon!)
- The *examples* of these lessons are salt's usefulness, a lighted city and a lamp in a house (more on this soon!)
- The *context* of these lessons: In the Beatitudes, Jesus gave us character lessons using *blessed are you if...* These teach us how to be a follower by being humble, gentle, merciful, willing to be persecuted and so on.

Letting your light shine can be bothersome to some people in the world. Light can reveal things about them they may not like, and they may take it out on you.

We always think of the Beatitudes as those first thirteen verses in Matthew 5, but all of that chapter and the surrounding context are part of the whole lesson. We understand this section to be one of the most important discipleship teachings that Jesus ever gave. He teaches us the importance of being a follower of Christ.

Light bulb moment: We become powerful examples of God's light when we live as Jesus did.

Observations so far about our responsibility of being light: (continued)

- The *context* of these lessons: In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus teaches us about spreading the gospel - what we should be doing as his followers.

First he taught us *how* to be followers in general. Then he told us specifically *what to do*. Both of these have everything to do with being the light of the world.

Light bulb moment: We become powerful forces of God's light when we do what Jesus did.

Salt and light are two very common analogies in the New Testament referring to the life of a Christian. There is a deep connection between them in the teachings of Jesus and understanding this deep connection will really help us see how Christianity is in fact, the light of the world!

Salt played an interesting role in the religious life of the Jews: Leviticus 2:13: Scripturally, salt had to be a part of all their offerings. Why? Salt is a very common mineral yet very valuable. Offerings were called "covenants of salt," meaning they were a firm promise. The salt made the covenant more firm. Soldiers would buy salt with their wages as it kept meat and fish from spoiling. Culturally, salt was very important.



What about the New Testament? Mark 9:49-50: For us to *be salted with fire* seems to directly refer to the gold refining process. For gold refining in ancient times, salt was one of the primary chemical agents of separation. If you did not put salt into the crucible with the gold, it would not separate the gold from the dross. You needed a significant amount of salt in that process in order to render gold.

What does the salt factor teach us? *Salt is an agent of separation in the refining process, and we believe it to directly refer to the strength and focus of our character* - to our submitting ourselves to being in line with the pattern of Christ so that the Holy Spirit can accomplish its work in us. Like in the refining process, if you submit yourself to the "salt," then the "gold" can come forward. God cannot work good results for us through a bad character.

Colossians 4:6: *Seasoned with salt* - seasoned with good character. Salt is not the measure of our faithfulness, it is an ingredient in the purifying of our faithfulness. When we first come to Christ, we should not be the same person as when we have been a Christian for a long time. Salt helps make us different than when we started - something higher, more spiritual. Thus, the salt - the character is not an end but a means to an end. Focused character brings a purity of purpose, good "flavor" to our lives and to those around us, and the preservative quality that imperfect humanity so desperately needs. Good character can save relationships.

Light bulb moment: A "salted character" is a clear and unmistakable template to display godly righteousness in a world that has lost its way.

Salt is often used for household chores, like a stain remover cleaning coffee pots. Salt water is good for our skin. We can gargle with it for sore throats. Our words should help remove the stains of life, promote spiritual health and heal the wounded.

This prophecy describes our backwards world that contrasts with our salted character:

Isaiah 5:18-21,23: This is a facetious way to look at God - treating God as if He is to take direction from us, commanding Him to appear as we want Him to.

This prophecy helps us see what our world has come to in terms of morality and what we can rely on. Christianity has standards set beyond humanity, so we have to look *up* for those standards. This is saying there comes a time when that would be set aside because of man's own desires.

Christianity is being "dumbed down" in an alarming way. For example, the "Prosperity Gospel" takes the principles of Christian sacrifice and turns them into Christian accumulation.

A "salted character" must precede our being light, because a dramatic contrast with worldly thinking is necessary so we can maintain the light of God's direction throughout life! Without a strong Christian character, you will never be the light of the world. Salt has to come first.

In Matthew 5 Jesus tells us *blessed are you if you...* His very next statement is that his followers are *the salt of the earth*, which means they are to have godly characters that could literally preserve and enhance the human condition. Then he says they are to be *the light of the world*.

Let's consider how we become this light: Matthew 5:16: We want to bring honor to God and not ourselves. People might see our good works, but it is not about us. We do not naturally possess the light of God - to let *our* light shine we first must find the light of God. There are many kinds of light in the world. The light we are looking for is the light of Christianity. That is a powerful light when you understand what it is and how to use it.

A salted character will help us to stay focused on the contrast between godly light and darkness: Proverbs 4:18-19: Where are we getting our light from? Is it a different source than the light that the world seeks?

Our light originates from God through Jesus: John 8:12 **The light of God through Jesus is a tool that shows us the way. Carry it and believe in it:** Psalms 119:105, Psalms 27:1: The light comes from the *outside in*.

The light is a tool that feeds us and kindles a positive outlook. Absorb it: Psalms 97:10-12: *Light is sown like seed for the righteous* - a seed absorbs the nutrients of the soil and water so it can grow. We have to absorb the light of God so we can grow. These are the beginning steps of how Christianity is the light of the world, even though it does not look that way.



Our fellow Christians are not perfect - we all make mistakes. We need to let our light shine by being forgiving and helpful. If not, it contributes to the light becoming dimmer within us and within other Christians. That is why it is important to realize the light does not come from within us. We are all imperfect. We have to be understanding and make adjustments in our expecting perfection from others.

This is overtly offensive and misrepresents true Christianity. Forgiveness means changing what you do. The whole concept of forgiveness is changing what you do - changing direction. Being forgiven does not mean you can keep doing anything you want. A lot of the world looks at us like we have a double standard. The character (salt) of Christians and the light we are given is transformative. Every one of those people who ridicule us benefit by the goodness of what true Christian salted character and light is.

The light itself is a tool of defense - it is armor: Wear it! Romans 13:12-14: *Put on the armor of light* - we are not like a turtle, who naturally grows a shell of armor. We do not have that natural shell of armor. We are to put on the light of God through Jesus, which will be able to protect you in your experiences. Jesus said he was the light of the world. Put on Jesus, who is the armor, who can protect us from the bad things of the world. This does not mean bad things will not happen. It means that when they do, they will not undermine that salted character and light of sacrifice. They will make it better for a godly purpose.

To wear the righteousness of Jesus is to be clothed in an unmistakable, powerful godly light. Note, *Christian systems* are not the light of the world. We are talking about true Christianity.

Light bulb moment: God's light in our lives acts as an unbreakable lifeline for us to hold and follow as we seek to draw ourselves ever closer to Jesus.

Becoming light is a big step. Think about it, a tradesman begins as an apprentice and works with and for a master of his trade until he internalizes his craft and is tested thoroughly enough to prove himself. We also must internalize our craft, which is living the gospel.

Back to a portion of our original text: Matthew 5:14-16: *You are the light of the world* - We have discussed how the light source is external - from the *outside in*...somehow it is now from the *inside out*. How did that happen? Here is where we start to understand how true Christianity (not Christian systems or denominations) is the light of the world.

Let's talk about being the light of the world and the light that is in the house. We will save the city on the hill analogy for later. **Becoming light: First, to become light, we need to be related to the source of all light:** Romans 8:14-17: We have been adopted into God's family. *Abba!* - In the Greek language, means a very personal relationship as in "daddy."

Second, the proof of this sonship is born out in the begetting of the Spirit of God: ¹⁶*The Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.* Sonship means brotherhood, mutually-shared experiences.

Third, as a result, we are transformed into light, because we are now children of light: Ephesians 5:8-10: If you are a child of light, you are born into light. You grow up to be light just like your Father. By being light, you can walk into a room and change the way the whole environment looks. *The fruit of the light* - it produces that transforming character that can have an effect on things around you, such as the fruit of the Spirit. Being light means not just *knowing* what godly righteousness is but by *being* righteous and godly.

Fourth, as children of light we must shine that light at home - among our family in Christ: Galatians 6:6-10: Another good point about our personal responsibility is we are to let our light shine to our pastors and teachers. They need spiritual encouragement and fellowship as well to strengthen them. We have a responsibility to uplift our pastors.

If you *are* light, it never goes out. If you borrow light, you could put it down. We are supposed to *be* light.

There is a liberty in Christ that frees us in a different way. There is a defined relationship between men and women for a godly purpose. There is not oppression. This takes a line here and a line there out of context, which causes damage.



As children of light, have the expectation to follow and imitate the steps of Jesus: 1
Thessalonians 5:4-6,8

Light bulb moment: We are to be God's light on earth tasked first with being a steady inspirational light to others within the household of faith...

If we can truly be that light within the household of faith, then that means your light does not turn off for any reason. Then, actually *being* the light of the world will make more sense. This is a process. First you have to have that salted character. You have to then put on light to have light. Then you have to be "begotten" of the light. The Bible shows us we reach a point when we *are* light.

In a dark and troubled night, light does show the way, and in so doing it provides a beacon of hope and direction. The gospel and those who live it are such a beacon for our misery torn world, so our next focus will be on where this beacon leads to. Think of a beacon of light like a lighthouse. It shines to some place. To be the light of the world is to be a beacon of light that is shining someplace different.

Our light shines towards the Day of Reconciliation: Philippians 2:14-15: Our example should be like stars - "look up" worthy! Our characters should be able to be recognized as different by the people around us. That character stands on different ground than the world.

This verse shows us both being reflective of the light and actually carrying and being the light: Isaiah 60:1-3: Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising - This is a prophecy - but when and where will it happen? More soon! There is so much darkness out there that if we are shining our light, it should be obvious! Part of the challenge is that true Christianity will hurt their eyes and they may shield themselves from you. We see people clamoring to find their identity and they are coming up empty. When society is in that state, terrorism has an easier way of rising. Part of what Christianity does is give us a clear identity.

Finally, let's talk about how our light should shine as from *a city set upon a hill*. This is a dramatic picture! How does it work? **Always keep the most important thing THE MOST important thing - the Gospel of Christ!**

2 Corinthians 4:3-6: The beacon we have points to Christ and in turn to God. The world looks at that and says, "I cannot see that. It is too bright and hurts my eyes. I am not looking." But we are to preach Jesus - even if no one listens. Be bound to that message because it shines from the inside out. In the Day of Reconciliation the world will see what Christianity stood for. The work you do now will have its effect later. You are investing light into the world. That investment takes time to mature. Satan poses as an angel of light because the kind of light he will show you is attractive and not so bright that it will hurt your eyes, but leading to a road that is dark.

We ARE God's light. This means that we should be *naturally* showing the world the meaning of true light in mighty contrast to the kinds of light that they naturally seek:

1 Peter 2:9-12: For those people who made fun of you for your beliefs, they will be able to see the glory of God once they are raised in the resurrection. We are to stand above the ridicule.

This light transforms us so we may in turn be instruments of transformation for others!

Light bulb moment: The power of our shining as God's light to the world is not in the moment, but it is in eternity. Our lives are tools of light in God's hand to give the world inspiration and hope in the future.

The light we shine out is the light of the world because it is shining towards a new day when all will be resurrected. Transformation will follow! Our example in a dark world will be an inspiration.

***So, is Christianity really the light of the world?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***