

# SALT AND LIGHT

## The Disciple's Influence

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14)

Jesus concluded the Beatitudes by revealing the world's rejection and persecution of His disciples (Matt. 5:10-12). We will be reviled and persecuted. Then Jesus spoke of the positive impact these same disciples would upon the world. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (vv. 13-16).

Influence is the power we have to affect others. Everyone has an influence upon others (Rom. 14:7). All of us may not have the same kind of influence (good or bad) or the same amount of influence upon the same number of people, but we all have influence.

Disciples follow a Master who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). He was often criticized because He associated with sinners (Mark 2:16-17), but these sinners saw His love and concern, heard His invitation to come and find rest (Matt. 11:28), and many responded.

Jesus used two common objects to illustrate the need for disciples to exert a positive influence upon the world. Every house in Palestine had salt and a lamp.

### Salt

Salt literally has hundreds of uses. Let's consider some of the qualities that apply to being a disciple of Christ.

**1. Preservative.** Most scholars believe this is the primary lesson Jesus intended with this illustration. In the absence of refrigeration, salt is rubbed into meat to preserve it. This process is still used today. Disciples exert a similar preserving influence upon the world. When we follow Christ in doing what is good, and actively opposing evil, we are helping to prevent the moral decay of our society.

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The presence of righteous people also preserves the wicked from God's wrath. Sodom would have been spared for the sake of ten righteous people (Gen. 18:22-33). Judah was spared during the days of good king Josiah (2 Kings 22:16-20). Jerusalem would have been pardoned if one man could have been found who executed justice and sought for truth (Jer. 5:1). No man stood in the gap to prevent God's wrath (Ezek. 22:30-31).

**2. Salt Gives Flavor.** Salt is used to enhance the taste of food (Job. 6:6). Its presence in food cannot be ignored. Likewise, there is to be something about disciples that makes them stand out to unbelievers. Our presence in the world is to be distinctive.

Followers of Christ are to provide a pleasing "flavor" to the harshness of life. Our speech is to be seasoned with salt (Col. 4:5-6). We are to lighten burdens (Gal. 6:2) and provide comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-6) by weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15).

**3. Salt Creates Thirst.** Salty snacks make us thirsty. Some people create a spiritual thirst in others simply by the way they live. The world is watching us. When some people see the way we are able to weather the storms of life with peace, hope and joy, they see something they want for themselves. Our faithfulness, which is criticized by some, is desired by others. It creates a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Disciples are called out of the world, yet the Lord intends for us to practice our discipleship in the midst of the world. Salt must come into contact with a substance in order for it to influence that substance. We are set aside, but not shut off. We are sanctified, but not secluded.

## Light

Light is a very important symbol that is used in the Bible. God is light (1 John 1:5). Jesus' entrance into this world is spoken of as bringing light unto mankind (John 1:4-9; 8:12; Matt. 4:15-16). Light is associated with truth and understanding (Ps. 119:130; 2 Pet. 1:19), while darkness is associated with sin, ignorance, and the power of Satan (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13).

Jesus said that His followers are the light of the world. However, this light does not originate within us. We are light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun upon the side of the earth that is turned away from the sun, so also disciples reflect the light of the Son of God in a world that has turned its back away from God.

What are some properties of light?

**1. Light Reveals and Illuminates.** A light reveals what is concealed in the darkness. God's word will reveal the truth to a world lost in darkness (Eph. 5:13).

**2. Light Drives Away Darkness.** The sunrise causes the darkness of night to disappear. Light and darkness cannot coexist. Likewise, sin and righteousness cannot coexist. The light of truth exposes the works of darkness and drives them away (Eph. 5:11; John 3:19-20). The appearance of a disciple will sometimes clean up dirty language, silence the dirty joke, or cause the TV channel to be changed.

**3. Light Gives Guidance.** Light is needed to see in the darkness. There were no street lights in ancient times. Every man took a lamp as he walked at night. Lighthouses mark the

shoreline for sailors. God led the children of Israel at night by a pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21).

God's word gives us light and guidance as we travel through this dark world of sin and error (Ps. 119:105). We are to walk in the light (1 John 1:7; Eph. 5:8). The lives of faithful disciples are lighted paths for others to see and follow (Prov. 4:18).

**4. Light Warms and Comforts.** "Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun" (Eccl. 11:7). A little sunlight is good for those who are sick. Dark clouds and rainy days bring the "blues," but a little sunshine drives away these feelings. Disciples are to live in such a way that others can find comfort, kindness, and warmth.

**5. Light Draws Those Who Want to Come out of the Darkness.** Jesus said that while those who practice evil are repelled by the light, those who do the truth are drawn to the light (John 3:19-21). Sin-sick souls will be attracted to faithful disciples because they find in us something that they desperately want for themselves.

### Maintaining Our Influence

Jesus spoke of the salt losing its flavor (Matt. 5:13). It is possible for salt to lose its distinctive properties due to contamination, and it is possible for a disciple to lose his good influence.

A disciple must maintain his distinctiveness as a follower of Christ at all costs. Disciples represent Christ, His word, His work, His church, His religion, and His Father to the world. The things we do as disciples reflect upon the world's view of Christ. We are not to live in such a way as to validate the world's unbelief and continued rebellion against Christ.

One way a disciple loses his influence is by failing to practice what he preaches (Rom. 2:17-24; 2 Cor. 8:21). The hypocrite has no positive influence upon anyone. Such behavior causes the name of God to be blasphemed among unbelievers. Good influence is also lost through compromise with sin and error (Gal. 2:4-5; 2 Cor. 6:14). The one who compromises his faith has blended in with the world and cannot be taken seriously. Good influence is also lost when one shows his love for the world over his loyalty to Christ (2 Tim. 2:19; James 4:4). When the world sees us involved in their activities (drinking, dancing, immodest dress, ungodly entertainment, etc.), they know that we are really one of them.

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influence. Once this influence is lost (salt has lost its flavor) it cannot be restored. Jesus says that it is "good for nothing but to be thrown out." Even when it has lost its flavor, salt is still dangerous to vegetation. No farmer would allow salt to be discarded on his property. The worthless substance was thrown into the street where it could not harm anything.

Some disciples lose their good influence in such a way that they are actually harmful to the cause of Christ. Their presence is counterproductive to evangelistic efforts and disruptive to the local church. In refusing to repent, some embolden others to sin while driving sincere truth-seekers away from God's people.

Jesus also said that we must let our light shine before men (Matt. 5:14-16). A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. The light of our influence must be visible and unmistakable to those around us. It is foolish for one to go through the trouble of lighting a lamp only to hide it under a basket. A lamp must be positioned so that it benefits all who are in the house. The disciple must illuminate those around him with God's truth.

Our light is to shine before men. They are to see our good works and glorify God. Notice that the world is to see the works, not the worker. A captain driving his ship at night sees the light, not the lighthouse. God gets the credit for our good influence, not us.

We cannot hide our light, but we can tarnish our influence to the point we are no longer capable of reflecting the radiance and purity of Christ and His word in the world. Our influence is maintained by abstaining from those things that tarnish our light and ruin the distinctiveness of our good character. We are to be "blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

## Conclusion

Jesus intends for His disciples to have an important, though often unappreciated, relationship with the world. The world may hate followers of Christ (John 15:18-20). They may try to blame all the tragedies and injustices of human history on those claiming to follow Christ. They may even persecute followers of Christ. However, the reality is the people who the world hates the most are actually the ones to whom it owes the most. This sinful world continues to exist because of the faithful disciples of Christ scattered across the rotting landscape who continue to shine forth as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

## Questions

1. What is influence? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. How does Peter describe Jesus to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:38)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Describe how disciples are to act as preservatives in this sinful world. \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Describe the kind of "flavor" that disciples are to provide to the world (Rom. 12:15; 2 Cor. 1:3-6; Gal. 6:2; 2 Tim. 1:16; Heb 13:16). \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. What does Proverbs 22:1 say about the value of our influence? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. Describe some ways that a disciple can lose his good influence. Use Scriptures to support your answers. \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What does Jesus say about the salt that loses its flavor (Matt. 5:13)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. How do faithful disciples create a spiritual thirst in others and draw them out of spiritual darkness? \_\_\_\_\_  
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9. Explain how the life of a faithful disciple is like the "shining sun" (Prov. 4:18). \_\_\_\_\_  
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10. What do men do when they see our good works (Matt. 5:16)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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11. What do men do when they see us commit sin (Rom. 2:21-24)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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