

You Are the Light of the World

Peter Ditzel

Many non-Christians, especially young people, perceive today's Christians as judgmental and insensitive hypocrites who muster political clout to bash homosexuals and support wars.¹ Absurd statements, false prophecies, and ungodly prejudices spoken by some prominent Christians lead unbelievers to dismiss Christians as unable to contribute to any serious exchange of ideas. The continual drive for more donations by highly visible Christians, while they live extravagant lifestyles, incites the world to see Christian leaders as manipulative scam artists. The media frequently exposes preachers, churches, and ministries involved in questionable and illegal activities and as living scandalous lives.

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus told his followers, "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men." Scholars sometimes question whether Jesus had in mind salt's ability to preserve things or whether he wanted us to think of its taste-enhancing quality. The verse itself, however, answers this. Jesus says, "but if the salt has lost its *flavor*...." He's saying that, as His followers, we have the innate property to enhance the lives of those around us; we can make their lives more palatable. Yet He implies that we may somehow lose this ability and become as saltless as the world around us.

In verses 14-16, Jesus continues this thought: "You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus' intent is that we stand out as something different from the world. The world lies in spiritual darkness, but we are to shine out as

¹ "A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity" (<https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity#.VEktAFERNmZ>) and *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

Copyright © 2014 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact. Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are from the *World English Bible* (WEB).

light.pdf

its spiritual light, that light being Jesus Christ (John 12:46). In looking at that light, what is the world supposed to see? Our "good works." What is the result? "All who are in the house" will be illuminated and glorify our heavenly Father. The light of Jesus Christ is to shine through us into the world. It is the world's only hope, and all who are in God's house—that is, His elect who are predestined to be His children—will be illuminated by the light and glorify the Father. We must not passively expect the charlatans to be shining the true light. Jesus Christ shines through us, and we are not to hide Him; we are to let Him shine through our deeds as well as our words.

Are we fulfilling our role as salt or are we blending in with everyone around us? Are we radiating light into the world with our good works? Jesus told us to "see whether the light that is in you isn't darkness" (Luke 11:35). When we look at how the world perceives Christianity and Christians, we seem to be far from successful.

An Historical Example

I am not saying that we should seek the world's praise. Nor am I saying that the world in general will love us. In fact, it will hate us just as it hated Jesus (John 15:18-19; 1 John 3:13). But we should suffer for the right reasons: "For it is commendable if someone endures pain, suffering unjustly, because of conscience toward God. For what glory is it if, when you sin, you patiently endure beating? But if, when you do well, you patiently endure suffering, this is commendable with God" (1 Peter 2:19-20). If we're reviled by the world, not because we are behaving as Christians ought, but because we are not, we have a serious problem. But seeing ourselves as others perceive us can motivate us to make changes.

Let's look at an example from the Bible. In Romans 2:24, Paul says, "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Who were these people? Specifically, they were Jewish Christians who claimed to be guides "of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of babies" (verses 19-20). If true, these would certainly be good works. As we have just seen, "a light to those who are in darkness" is something Jesus specifically told us to be. But what were they really like?

Those who taught others hadn't yet taught themselves, and those who told others not to steal were themselves stealing (verse 21). Those who taught against adultery were committing adultery; those who

abhorred idols were robbing temples, thus making an idol of their illegal gain (verse 22; see Acts 19:37 for the implication that the Jews had a reputation among the Gentiles for robbing temples). Those who boasted in the law were breaking the law (verse 23). So, how did the world see these Christian "guides," "lights," "correctors," and "teachers"? They saw them for what they really were—hypocrites. And because these hypocrites named the name of Christ, they caused the world to turn from Him, blaspheming the name of God. Truly, their false works dishonored God among those they had contact with. Similarly, Peter speaks of false teachers driven by covetousness to exploit others with deceptive words and whose immoral acts cause the way of truth to be maligned (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Is this sort of thing happening today?

What the World Sees

What the world sees when it looks at the Christianity that holds center stage is a veritable three-ring circus of darkness, shameful behavior, and false teachings. They see the Catholic Church trying to cover up thousands of cases of child sexual abuse that have scarred the lives of the victims. They see television networks with one televangelist after another telling viewers to speak what they want into existence or incubate it into reality. Of course, they must also send a generous gift to the evangelist.

They get to hear Mars Hill megachurch cofounder Mark Driscoll say such "gracious" things as, "There is a pile of dead bodies behind the Mars Hill bus, and by God's grace, it'll be a mountain by the time we're done. You either get on the bus or you get run over by the bus" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfTmgPhmlto>). And they can hear him screaming like a demented maniac (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eU6E-05w9XI>). Over a year after being charged with being domineering, verbally violent, arrogant, and quick-tempered, and dragging the church through one shameful headline after another, Driscoll resigned from Mars Hill but was quick to point out that he hadn't been disqualified from future ministry ("Mark Driscoll Resigns: Mars Hill Church Pastor Steps Down Following Controversy") (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/15/mark-driscoll-resigns_n_5991998.html).

The world that should associate Christianity with the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ gets to read the headlines about Juan McFarland, pastor of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church of Montgomery, Alabama, who admitted to having sexual intercourse with church

members on church property while he was HIV positive. Not only that, but he was also mishandling church funds and using illegal drugs (http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2014/10/pastor_juan_mcfarland_asked_to.html).

They can also read of the pastor of the City Harvest Church in Singapore who has been accused of misusing over \$40 million dollars in church funds to support his wife's hip hop career (<http://beginningandend.com/city-harvest-church-accused-of-embezzling-over-40-million-to-fund-pastors-wifes-hip-hop-career/>).

I could go on and on with one example after another of people who are causing non-Christians to blaspheme the name of God. If we are in any way associated with a church or ministry involved in such Christ-dishonoring behavior, we should walk out and hope that the ministry will fold due to lack of funds. But there is little else we can do to stop these scandals. The media will always latch onto them because they are sensational and, at least in some cases, it seems they are very happy to do what they can to destroy Christianity. As Christians, however, we can make a stand and refuse to be associated with such blatant hypocrisy.

What We Can Do

We can't stop the wrong-doers. But we can counter the impression they're giving others by showing the world what true Christianity is all about. We can regain our saltiness, stand out from the world, and shine our lights brilliantly. What would the world think if we believers, who know what the Bible says, really acted upon what it tells us?

Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Jesus wasn't talking about shaking hands with one another once a week in church. He means that we should make sure that none of our brethren suffer financial hardship—see "What the Bible Says About Tithing and Christian Giving" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/giving.html>) and "Were Early Christians Communists?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/christiancommunistqa.htm>), care for the sick, drive those without transportation, do housework and yardwork for those who physically and financially can't do it, comfort those in distress, and so forth. "For this is the will of God, that by well-doing you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15).

But that's not all. Jesus also said,

Don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away him who desires to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you.

Matthew 5:39-44

What would the world's reaction be if we refrained from violence and worked for peace? What if the world knew us for blessing our enemies, praying for them, and actually doing good works for them? Would they speak evil of this? Some would, because it would run contrary to their political agenda. But at least the criticisms would come our way for doing good, and would throw into sharp relief the contrast between our pure conduct and our critics' wicked desires. It would also stimulate others, God's elect in the world, to want to know more about our beliefs, illuminating those in the house and glorifying God (Matthew 5:14-16). The light will attract the elect and repel the reprobate (John 3:20-21).

It's time we stood out, not just from those who make no confession of belief but also from those who profess Christianity while sully the name of our Savior with their foolish words and public sins. Let's salt the earth with the savor of true Christianity, let's shine the light of Christ before the world that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good. In love of the brothers be tenderly affectionate one to another; in honor preferring one another; not lagging in diligence; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; enduring in troubles; continuing steadfastly in prayer; contributing to the needs of the saints; given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless, and don't curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Don't set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Don't be wise in your own conceits. Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honorable in the sight of all men. If it is possible,

as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men. Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head." Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:9-21