

The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

Chapter 11: The Light of the World

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Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an 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. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an 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 (Mt. 5:14-16).

After telling the disciples that they are salt, our Lord parallels this metaphor with light: “You are the light of the world.” Given the fact that Jesus was speaking to a group of uneducated peasants, this statement is remarkable. From the standpoint of the world, this little group was completely insignificant. These men were not statesmen or great philosophers or brilliant military leaders; they were unpolished, ragged fishermen. Yet, the only hope of setting the world’s corruption and wickedness back on its heels lay with this group and all believers who follow in their footsteps. The only hope of enlightening the world with truth and salvation and turning back the tide of darkness, ignorance and false beliefs is in the hands of believers. Christ’s statement should cause us to come to a sober realization of the great responsibility of following Jesus. What an amazing and earth-shattering thing it is to be a Christian!

As we examine this passage we want to answer a number of questions. First, what is meant by the term light and why are believers called the light? Second, what are some of the implications of this statement? Third, what is the function of the light? A solid understanding of this passage will impact the way we view ourselves and the world around us. May God enable us to profit from His holy Word.

What is Meant by Light?

The use of the term light in Scripture is exceedingly rich. The term light is used to describe God Himself and emphasize Jehovah’s infinite holiness and righteousness. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5). The LORD is “the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:7) who is covered with light (Ps. 104:2) and “dwells in inapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16). Light is also linked with Jehovah’s salvation (see Ps. 27:1). God’s saving activity illuminates the darkness of calamity and trouble and gives life, peace and joy.

In John’s gospel Jesus is described as the “life” and “light of men;” “the light who shines in the darkness” (1:4, 5); and “the true light which gives light to every man” (1:9). He is called “the light of the world” (8:12; 9:5). As the Israelites followed the Light when it led them from the land of slavery to the promised land, the Savior’s disciples will follow Him out of the darkness of sin, ignorance, depravity and death into redemption in the fullest sense of that term. Thus our Lord preached, “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me

should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:46). Christ presents Himself to all mankind as the only source of salvation from sin and as spiritual illumination regarding all spiritual truth.

All the light that men have, or can have, comes from Jesus. As light was the first thing in the original creation, the light of Christ is the foundation of the salvific recreation. Therefore, when we discuss Christians as light we must always see Jesus as original, underived light. He is the God-man; the source of truth, salvation, holiness, revelation and righteousness. “In a secondary sense Christians are the light of the world; Christ immediately, they mediately; he the original, they the derived; he the sun, they the moon reflecting light.”¹

The prophet Isaiah describes Christ and His ministry as a great shining light upon the inhabitants of Galilee: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined” (Isa. 9:2). Because of Jesus and His gospel, a great light appeared to people who were walking in darkness. “In place of the darkness of calamity the people saw the light of peace and blessedness; in place of the darkness of death, the light of life; in place of the darkness of ignorance, the light of knowledge; in place of the darkness of sin, the light of salvation. Salvation in its widest sense had shined upon these people; a complete reversal of their condition had occurred.”²

The term light is also used to describe God’s special written revelation, for it is through the holy Scriptures that we learn what we must believe in order to be saved from sin and lead lives that please God. As David says, “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (Ps. 36:9). “For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life...” (Pr. 6:23). “Oh, send out Your light and Your truth! Let them lead me” (Pr. 43:3). “The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (Ps. 119:130). God, of course, needs to enlighten us by His Spirit for His Word to be efficacious. “You will light my lamp; the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness” (Ps. 18:28).

Paul uses the term light to describe the gospel of Jesus Christ and represent God’s shining upon man’s heart to cause regeneration and conversion. “But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.... For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). God gives us the light of the gospel and the light of spiritual understanding when He removes the veil that lies over our heart and shows us the glory of Christ. For the elect, saving truth is always accompanied by a spiritual understanding of it.

In the passage before us, the disciples are called light because Christians, by their words and deeds, are called upon to be transmitters of the light of Christ and the gospel. Jesus was the light itself in the sense that, in His being and work of redemption, He is the foundation and source of truth, salvation and enlightenment. The light of Jesus: (1) released us from the darkness of spiritual death (“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Christ by His suffering and death merited regeneration, faith and repentance for His people. What they were unable to do in their ethical darkness and depravity the Savior procured for them.); (2) saved us from the darkness or blindness imposed upon fallen man by Satan (see 2 Cor. 4:4); (3) redeemed us from the darkness of eternal death and hell by His gift of justification (Eph. 2:8-9; Phil. 3:8-9); (4) freed us from slavery to sin or walking in darkness by His gift of

¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 201.

² E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1:325.

definitive sanctification. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 Jn. 1:6; cf. Rom. 6). “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:8-11). Therefore, when we speak of Christians being light, it is always as a mirror that reflects the light of Christ already revealed and received.

We are the light because we believe and possess the truth and will communicate this truth about Christ to a darkened world. As the salt of the earth the disciples were crucial in purifying and preserving the world; as the light of the world they must illuminate it with the light of Christ. Salt is used to stop rot while light is used to illuminate and push back the darkness. The metaphors are very similar except that salt is primarily negative and light primarily positive. It enlightens, illuminates, and enables people to see. “The thought necessarily suggested to the mass of hearers would be that of communicating knowledge, rectifying error, and dispelling the gloom which is inseparable from a state of spiritual ignorance.”³

The statement, “You are the light of the world,” like the statement about salt is emphatic. “You (i.e. Christians) and you alone are the light of the world.” The world’s only hope for salvation, spiritual enlightenment and deliverance from darkness lies with the followers of Christ as individuals and as a body (e.g., the seven churches in Asia are described by John, under divine inspiration, as seven golden lamp stands [Rev. 1:12-13, 20]). Also, like the salt metaphor, the term light especially applies to the apostles and all preachers of the gospel, who witness for Jesus in a unique, commissioned manner. As Jesus said to Paul, “I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Ac. 26:17-18).

Some Implications

As the salt metaphor implied the deep corruption of this world of fallen men, the light metaphor implies a great spiritual blindness. Paul says that men suppress the truth in unrighteousness because they do not want to glorify God. Their rejection of God leads to darkened hearts (see Rom. 1:18-21). Thus, “professing to be wise they become fools” (Rom. 1:22). They are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile” (1 Cor. 3:20). The reason for this darkness is simple: “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Consequently, there are a number of things that our text teaches regarding the world and truth.

First, the world is in complete, total darkness when it comes to the truth that matters the most. Thus, the world can never achieve true enlightenment, salvation or ultimate meaning apart from divine revelation and Jesus Christ. The world of unsaved men can learn many things and make progress in science, technology and medicine. But it cannot attain ultimate meaning or salvation because these things are beyond the scope of human reason and empiricism. Man, apart

³ Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 122.

from God, can have a surface, functional knowledge of reality, but he cannot give any answers as to our origin. Why are we here? How can we be saved? How should we live? And, where are we going?

During the so-called “Enlightenment” or “Age of Reason” in the eighteenth century, many intellectuals taught that mankind must cut itself loose from religion (which they labeled as foolish superstition) and must embrace reason as the foundation of all belief and conduct. But reason or logic at its very best is only a tool for analysis. It cannot be a source or ultimate standard of knowledge (except for simple mathematics and surface observations) because it cannot give us the axioms, first principles or starting point of reality or knowledge. If one’s starting point is flawed or wrong, then one can use reason flawlessly and yet arrive at a completely wrong conclusion. This has always been the case with unregenerate man because he continually suppresses the true knowledge of God and creates false axioms, presuppositions and worldviews to replace the truth. Unbelieving philosophers have always rejected revealed truth because their network of ultimate assumptions about reality excludes God, Christ and the Bible. Thus, they reason from darkness and arrive in darkness. Their only hope is that the Holy Spirit will apply gospel truth to their hearts. They need a true enlightenment.

Others in the Enlightenment sought truth and meaning in empiricism—the idea that studying things with the senses will answer life’s deepest questions. This view also leads man from darkness to darkness for a number of reasons. (1) A study or observation of various things may tell us certain facts, but it cannot tell us how these things come into being or why they are here or where they are going. It gives a rudimentary surface or functional knowledge while everything else is pure conjecture. A nature program may successfully discuss the mating habits of baboons, but all talk of evolutionary origins, etc. is pure unbelieving speculation. (2) No person can observe and analyze things without their own preconceptions or outside of their own worldview. Therefore, any deep or meaningful analysis apart from pure, simple, surface observations is biased, subjective and untrustworthy. Indeed, both rationalism and empiricism have led secular humanism to skepticism, subjectivism and irrationalism. (3) The empiricist must presuppose a biblical worldview of the universe to an extent to conduct science, for without observing the past or the future he cannot assume that continuity of reality will continue. Without divine revelation, his assumption that the future will be like the present is a blind leap of faith. (4) Further, the empiricist must assume a biblical view of man and reality, for without a transcendent, infinite and eternal God who reveals truth the empiricist has no way of knowing how or even if his senses are altering or filtering objective reality. If the empiricist were honest he would ask, “Do I really know the nature of things outside of me or is everything I see and experience conditioned by my mind?”

When we speak of ultimate meaning and absolute ethics, the so-called “Enlightenment” was a complete failure; it gave way to skepticism, mysticism, and the abandonment of absolute truth. Rationalism has given way to evolutionary thought or the idea that the only absolute is that there are no absolutes. Intellectuals now generally follow existentialism and pragmatism. The secular humanists’ dream of salvation through state planning and control has been replaced by a radical pessimism. Thus, the optimistic humanism of the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries has given way to rank hedonism. Like the people of the spent, chaotic and deteriorating Roman Empire, the predominant America philosophy of life is, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” Surface or functional knowledge still increases and we are surrounded by amazing technology, but modern unbelieving man is no closer to truth or salvation than the pagan savage living in the rainforest with a bone through his nose.

This point is evident when a secular humanist is asked about the meaning of life or why we are here. A consistent secularist, like the evolutionist Gould, would say that life does not really have any meaning or purpose. Most atheists, however, will speak about love, community and working for a better humanity or an improved planet. Such thinking apart from the Christian worldview is nothing more than pure opinion. If we are merely machines of flesh that are the product of chance evolution and there is no transcendent God or law outside of the universe and there is not a judgment to come or perfect justice before God, then love is no more virtuous than hate. All talk of goodness, caring and improvement is merely an electro-chemical response in evolutionary machines that will die like dogs and forever cease to exist. Indeed, as modern scientists assert, all of humanity, including the earth itself, will be consumed by a super-nova. Without souls that live on and a transcendent God who is personal, righteous and just, it will be as if the whole human race never even existed. Therefore, modern unbelieving thought does not enlighten, but rather leads to nihilism and total meaninglessness. The secular humanist has nothing to offer but integration into the void. Therefore, it is rather amusing when speaking with the humanist to keep asking him *why* every time he makes a statement regarding ethics, meaning or ultimate truth. They can only answer from a position of complete darkness. Thus, their answers are either completely arbitrary (e.g., because humanity, or the intellectual elites or the United Nations say so) or contradict their presuppositions about reality (e.g., macro-evolution from pond slime and concepts of absolute ethics are totally incompatible). Once again, it is obvious to anyone who has eyes to see that we need an infinite personal God who is ontological and outside of creation and we need this God (Jehovah—the God of the Bible) to reveal Himself to us.

Second, (closely related to our previous point) our text teaches the absolute necessity of Christ and special revelation for the world to have true saving knowledge. The world is dark and needs light. Darkness cannot produce its own light. But God in His infinite mercy has given this light to mankind in the Bible. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1:1) says,

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable [Rom. 2:14-15; 1:19, 20; Ps. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:32; 2:1]; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation [1 Cor. 1:21; 2:13, 14]; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church [Heb. 1:1]; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing [Prov. 22:19-21; Lk. 1:3, 4; Rom. 15:4; Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Isa. 8:19, 20]; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary [2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:19]; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased [Heb. 1:1, 2].

From the study of nature we may see that evil exists but we do not know how it entered the world. The Bible tells us what sin is and how it came into the world. It tells us that salvation from sin can only be found in Jesus Christ and that no one can have knowledge or faith in the Savior without first being exposed to divine revelation (Ac. 4:12; Mk. 16:16; Rom. 10:14-17). Without God's Word everyone will perish in their sins (cf. Prov. 29:18); they have no hope and are without God in this world (Eph. 2:12).

The church is designated as the light of the world because God declared His truth to the church and the church, as the pillar and ground of the truth, passes God's Word to other

geographical locations and generations. Preachers are the light in that they apply sacred truth directly to various hearers. Paul says, “It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). Christians are light because the Holy Spirit changed them through regeneration and caused them to believe in Christ. For anyone to become light, it takes a work of the Holy Spirit which is rooted in the Savior’s redemptive work and it takes a belief in the Word of God or God’s written testimony regarding Jesus. Paul writes, “For you were once darkness, but now you are the children of light” (Eph. 5:8). People can only be light when the Holy Spirit enlightens their dead hearts to embrace the true Light—Jesus Christ.

A person who does not have or believe the gospel is dark within and walks in darkness. But when he is exposed to the truth and the Holy Spirit causes him to understand it and believe it, he becomes a light for Christ. The gospel changes the person’s whole worldview and manner of life and, thus, good works are done to glorify God. Thus, the Christian’s beliefs, message and behavior reflect the light of Christ. He becomes a walking beacon of the truth of the gospel. In our profession, character and conduct we must exhibit the truth of the gospel to a dark, unbelieving, ignorant world.

The Function of Light

After telling the disciples that they are the light of the world, Jesus spurs them on to live what they are by two illustrations regarding light followed by an imperative. “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:14b-16).

The point of both of these illustrations is that light is meant to be seen. In the ancient world where there was no electricity or street lights, travel on a moonless night in the wilderness was very difficult. In such circumstances a city at night on a hilltop would stand out sharply in the darkness. It could be seen from every direction, even from a great distance. Similarly, people do not light a lamp and then hide it under a basket. (The Jews used a boat-shaped lamp filled with oil with a wick on one side and a handle on the other.) The lamp is put on a stand to give as much light as possible to everyone in the house. (The majority of people in the days of our Lord lived in small one room houses.) By these illustrations Jesus is telling His followers a number of things.

First, men are saved not to live the Christian life in secret, but rather to set forth the truth of the gospel to others by words and deeds. Light is a positive force against darkness and aggressively pushes the darkness back as it radiates in all directions. Thus, our Lord teaches a Christianity that goes beyond the four walls of the church building and beyond the Christian household. There is an idea common in America that one’s Christianity must not be mixed with business, art, science, education or politics. It should be kept private in our secular-pluralistic society. But Christ says the complete opposite. If our faith stops at the door of the church, then it cannot shine forth to mankind. When a man is cut off in traffic, he must shine as a Christian. When a believer speaks about others, he must radiate the gospel. When he conducts his affairs at work, it should be clear that he is different and that he follows the Master. Do we reflect the Savior in the way we talk and act at school, work or play? Do we use language that enlightens a room or do we shift our behavior to fit into the darkness around us? The light metaphor assumes that we are always confessing Christ in our thoughts, speech and actions. It assumes a very dynamic Christianity that is not satisfied with only Sunday morning radiance. “A Christian

should be just as much a Christian in the factory, the workshop, the ship-yard, the mine, the schoolroom, the surgery, the kitchen, the golf course, or the playing field as he is in church. Jesus did not say, ‘You are the light of the *Church*’; he said, ‘You are the light of the *world*...’⁴ We must think about this verse when we are at work and others tell dirty jokes. We must remember our Lord’s words when we are with complete strangers. The world of unsaved men needs light and we must be the source of that light.

Second, this message was astonishing in that the apostles would go from obscure peasant fishermen to the very center of the world’s stage. For example, the preaching of the gospel in the book of Acts was conducted in a manner that was as public as possible. The apostles put the lamp stand where it would be visible to everyone in the house. On the day of Pentecost they preached in a public place to thousands of Jews (Ac. 2). Not long after this Peter preached on the steps of the Temple (Ac. 3). The apostles taught in Solomon’s porch and did signs and wonders among the people (Ac. 5) even after they were forbidden to do so by the Sanhedrin. After they were beaten by the authorities, they still taught daily in the temple and in every house that Jesus was the Christ (Ac. 5:42). It was Paul’s practice to not only speak to the Jews in the synagogues, but also to preach to the Gentiles in public places. Paul even preached to the Greeks in the Areopagus, the geographical center of pagan philosophy (e.g., Ac. 17:16-33). The apostolic church truly was a bright city on a hill. They aggressively publicized the gospel of Jesus Christ so that sinners living in darkness could find refuge in the Light. The disciples of Christ did not go into hiding or obscurity under the pretense of contemplation, modesty or self-preservation, but they diffused the light of the gospel as widely as possible. “The disciples of Christ were obscure men before he called them, but the character he put upon them dignified them, and as preachers of the gospel they made a figure; and though they were reproached for it by some, they were respected for it by others, advanced to thrones, and made judges (Luke xxii.30); for Christ will honour those that honour him.”⁵

Jesus saves us to illuminate the world with the doctrine of Christ. We have here one of the greatest proof-texts for church planting, witnessing and missionary work in the entire Bible. Although the church no longer has apostles and evangelists who perform signs and wonders and had the gift of inspiration, nevertheless ministers of the word should be trained and sent to the four corners of the globe. The church should do everything it can to enlighten society with the truth of the gospel. Churches should take full advantage of every form of media—book publishing, the internet, radio or television—to tell the world about Christ. As Christians we must understand that we have been saved to shine for Jesus. Although (as we all know) witnessing to our relatives and acquaintances is often awkward, uncomfortable and unwelcome, nevertheless we must do it to be faithful to our calling as lights of Christ. Light should be aggressive in pushing back the darkness of sin, ignorance, unbelief and depravity. We should be as the believers in Thessalonica of whom Paul said, “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thess. 1:6-8). Are you a light for Christ shining in all directions or is your light hidden by an unwillingness to confess the Savior before men; and a failure to lead a consistently sanctified life before the world?

⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:123.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:55.

Third, our Lord's words clearly contradict a number of errors. (1) There is the doctrine of what is called hyper-Calvinism. This is the teaching that the gospel of Jesus Christ must not freely be offered to all, but only to those who first show an interest or work of the Holy Spirit on their heart. Such teaching obviously is disastrous for the work of evangelism and missions and clearly contradicts many portions of Scripture (e.g., Mk. 16:15ff; Mt. 28:19-20; Lk. 24:47; Ac. 1:8; 9:15; etc.). (2) There is the idea common among modernists that moralism and civilization is the way to bring light to those in darkness. Once the majority of men in mainline denominations rejected the inerrancy of Scripture and the doctrine of the atonement which is at the heart of the gospel, mission work shifted to one of modernization instead of gospel preaching. We must never make the mistake of equating the light spoken of by Christ with the spread of Western civilization. The Greeks and Romans built up impressive civilizations, yet were saturated with idolatry and immorality (e.g., the open practice of and encouragement of idol worship, legal cultic prostitution, chattel slavery, homosexuality, pederasty and so forth). The communists in the Soviet Union were well known for their massive slave labor camps, systematic terror and genocide. First, there must be the light of the gospel and then the sanctifying light of Scripture taught and applied if the world is to be truly enlightened.

Modernism is a heresy of the devil because it fails to acknowledge that all light comes from Christ. Isaiah prophesied, "I [Jehovah] will keep You and give as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house" (Isa. 42:6-7). Jesus does not merely bring light or lead into light, but He Himself is the light. He is salvation. To separate light from Christ is to redefine light in a completely unscriptural manner.

Fourth, Christ makes it clear that the light involves not only words, but also concrete works that support the words. Jesus commands us to let our light shine before men in order that people may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. "In Greek there are two words for *good*. There is the word *agathos* which simply defines a thing as good in quality; there is *kalos* which means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also winsome and beautiful and attractive. The word which is used here is *kalos*."⁶ The good deeds of a Christian are to be done in such a kind, selfless, merciful and loving manner that they support the message of the gospel. They are to adorn the gospel of Christ. They are to be examples of the truth of the gospel. The light of Christ causes men to walk in the light. Good works become a distinguishing mark of Jesus' followers. Regarding those good works we need to note the following.

(1) They involve the love that believers ought to show to each other. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:34-35). Knowledge, orthodoxy and teaching must be accompanied by love if people are going to identify the true followers of Jesus. When professing Christians treat each other unkindly and gossip, slander and malign each other, their heterodox lives contradict and orthodox message. "Tertullian tells us that the heathen commented on the Christians: 'See, they say, how they love one another' (Apol. xxxix; ANF, III, p. 46). Chrysostom, however, complains that in his day Christian men show all too little love; 'even now, there is nothing else that causes the heathen to stumble, except that there is no love.... Their own doctrines they have long condemned, and in like manner they admire ours, but they are hindered by our mode of life'

⁶ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:125.

(LXXII, 5; pp. 266, 269).”⁷ Beloved, does a lack of love and good works in your life cloud the brilliant sunshine of the gospel? If it does, then it is time for some radical changes.

(2) All good deeds that a believer does in the name of Christ should be used to point people to the gospel. If we help someone change a flat tire, we should let them know that we do it in the name of Christ. If we give food to starving children in Africa, it must be attended with a message that thanks Christ and gives Him the glory. If we establish a soup kitchen, then it must be an explicitly Christian soup kitchen. It must be known that we do not receive credit for our good works, but that our works of faith radiate out from the salvation achieved by Christ. By the godly behavior of believers, unbelievers will be forced to acknowledge the reality of a Christian’s teaching. By the holy behavior of Christians in conjunction with the sum of saving knowledge, the true and living God shall be believed, known, loved and glorified by men. An orthodox doctrine accompanied by an orthodox lifestyle is most suitable for teaching the cross of Christ. The old saying that actions speak louder than words is often true. Such light will be used by the Holy Spirit to draw many to Christ.

(3) The good works mentioned must not be limited to charity, but are also inclusive of the preaching of the gospel itself. In verse 16 we are told that the good works that shine before men will cause men to “glorify your Father in heaven.” “The end, therefore, and also to a certain extent the *result*, of seeing such good works, will be that men, influenced by God’s Spirit, will ascribe to God the reverence that is his due for having caused the light to shine forth from human lives (Isa. 24:15; 25:3; Ps. 22:23; cf. 1 Cor. 10:31).”⁸ Now if these men know enough to glorify God, then it is rather obvious that they have been taught the biblical doctrine of God and know enough doctrine to ascribe all glory to Him and none to those who perform the works because they are sinners saved by grace. Thus, Paul commands Christians to shine as lights in a crooked and perverse generation and combines this with the command to “hold fast the word of life” (Phil. 2:15-16).

(4) The good works that are done in Christ’s name must be truly good. How do we know when a work is good in the biblical sense of that term? For a work to be genuinely good in God’s sight, it must be done by a believer or person who is already justified and baptized with the Holy Spirit. It must be done in accordance with God’s holy Word and it alone. Obedience to human philosophies and traditions cannot be good in God’s sight. Therefore, Christians must avoid jumping on some humanistic bandwagon to seek the approval of unbelievers (e.g., free condoms to high school students and sodomites to prevent AIDS). And, it must be done to glorify God, not ourselves. We are to do good works to draw attention to Christ and not ourselves. The believer always acknowledges his own unworthiness—that God by the power of His Holy Spirit has enabled him to obey Scripture.

(5) The works must be good or the light does not shine. The professing Christian who is seriously backslidden and is committing public, scandalous sins has destroyed his witness for Christ. Indeed, it is better for the hypocrite to keep his mouth shut than to attempt to be a witness for Jesus. If the unbeliever does not use his wicked behavior as an excuse to mock and reject the gospel, then he may embrace an antinomian perversion of it. When a man says one thing and then does another, he, by his gross inconsistency, alters the very message he may have attempted to convey. We must diligently attend to our sanctification or we essentially lie to the world about the gospel. The godly Christian stands out and sheds light. The hypocritical professor either

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 633, footnote 74.

⁸ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 286.

stands out in a bad way or deliberately pushes the light under a bushel because he is ashamed of his behavior.

Conclusion

In our time when Western culture is more and more casting off the truths of Scripture and consequently is becoming darker, Christians need to shine before men. This must first involve reformation and revival in the churches themselves, for a church that accommodates itself to the world darkens the light of Scripture. It also must involve us being more consistently Christian and godly in everything we do. As the world becomes more consistently wicked and perverse, we must be more diligent in prayer and all the means of grace. We must live all the beatitudes among men. We must be salt and light to society. This subject is very important because this is something that only believers can do. We have been saved to reflect the light of Christ. Therefore, let our light shine in every direction to lighten the whole world.

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