

Ye Are the Light of the World
Matthew 5:14-16

In **Matthew 5:14-16** our Lord Jesus Christ declared unto His disciples, “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.”

In the opening portion of **Matthew 5:14**, our Lord Jesus Christ revealed another manner in which we believers have been called to minister unto this spiritually needy world. Therein He declared, “Ye are the light of the world.” As in Matthew 5:13, herein our Lord communicated a spiritual certainty. We believers *are* “the light of the world.” This is not a spiritual instruction, but is a spiritual fact that is not at all in question. Then upon the foundation of this spiritual fact, our Lord indicated that we must not hide our spiritual light, but must shine our shine our light. In the closing portion of Matthew 5:14, our Lord gave the warning, “A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” Again in verse 15 He gave the warning, “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.” Finally, in **Matthew 5:16** our Lord gave the command, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

I. The Source of the Light

Yet a candle or an oil lamp does not come already lit, but must be lit from an outside source. So then, by what source are we “the light of the world”? Before our salvation through faith in Christ, we were not characterized by spiritual light at all, but by spiritual darkness. At that time we were the children of spiritual darkness, and we walked in the ways of spiritual darkness. Yet through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, we who were spiritual darkness as lost sinners are now spiritual light in the Lord. Even so, **Ephesians 5:8** declares, “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” God the Father, through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son, has delivered us from our spiritual darkness and has called us into the marvelous light of Christ’s kingdom. Even so, **Colossians 1:12-14** declares, “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” Even so also, **1 Peter 2:9** declares, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” Indeed, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, we no longer abide and walk in eternal spiritual darkness; but now we possess within ourselves the light of new spiritual life. Even so, in **John 8:12** our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Again in **John 12:46** our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” This is the source of our light as “the light of the world.” God the Father, by the power of God the Holy Spirit through the sacrifice of God the Son, has birthed us spiritually anew as His own dear children of light. Thus we believers are “the light of the world.”

II. The Standard of the Light

However, there is One who is THE LIGHT of the world. There is One who did not have to be made light, for He was never darkness. There is One whose eternal nature ever has been spiritual light. There is One who ever was, who presently is, and who ever shall be “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (See **John 1:9**) This One is God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, He is the very Source of all spiritual life and light for us sinners. Even so, **John 1:1-4** declares concerning Him, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” Thus in **John 8:12** our Lord Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Again in **John 12:46** He proclaimed, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” Indeed, it is the spiritual light of our Lord Jesus Christ that God the Father hath shined into our hearts so as to make us the children of light and the light of the world. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (See **2 Corinthians 4:6**) Furthermore, it is our heavenly Father’s purpose that we should reflect forth the eternal and glorious light of His Son Jesus Christ into the spiritual darkness of this world. We are not “the light of the world” in and of ourselves. Yet our Lord Jesus Christ is THE LIGHT of the world in and of Himself. Indeed, He is the Standard of spiritual light. Thus it is our responsibility as “the light of the world” to reflect forth “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” which is found “in the face of Jesus Christ.” Only as we reflect His glorious light unto this spiritually dark world will we be effective as “the light of the world.”

III. The Shining of the Light

Now, a candle or a lamp is not lit in order to be hidden away from view, but in order to provide light for all who are present. Even so, in **Matthew 5:14-15** our Lord Jesus Christ declared, “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.” In like manner, He declared in **Luke 11:33**, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.” A city that is built in a valley may be hidden from the view of travelers by the hills around it. However, a city that is built on a hill is built in that position specifically in order that it may be seen from a far distance away. In like manner, a candle or a lamp is not lit in order to be put “in a secret place” or “under a bushel” so that its light is hidden away or covered up. Rather, a candle or a lamp is lit and then placed in a location where it may give “light unto all that are in the house,” so that “they which come in may see the light.” Even so, our Lord has not sent us into the world as “the light of the world” in order that we should hide our spiritual light away from the world. Rather, He has sent us into the world as “the light of the world” in order that we should shine our light into the darkness of this world and in order that our light should be seen of all who come into contact with us. Thus in the opening line of **Matthew 5:16**, our Lord delivered the specific instruction, “Let your light so shine before men.”

Yet how do we so shine our light before the spiritually dark and lost world around us? Throughout the New Testament we find a three-fold answer. First, we shine our spiritual light by good works. In **Matthew 5:16** our Lord Jesus Christ continued his instruction, saying, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Herein our Lord reveals His desire that lost individuals around us should see our good works. Yet what are these "good works?" How are they to be defined? Good works are to be defined as pursuing and performing that which the Lord our God has ordained for us in each step of our daily living, even as **Ephesians 2:10** states, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." They are to be defined as pursuing and performing that which is pleasing in our Lord's sight, even as **Colossians 1:10** states, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." Indeed, shining our spiritual light by good works means taking up every opportunity before us to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (See **Galatians 6:10**) It means being ready, careful, and zealous to do that which is good, helpful and edifying unto others. (See **Titus 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14**) It means being "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" of our material goods unto others in need. (See **1 Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 13:16**) It means "to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men." (See **Titus 3:2**) It means being "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." (See **James 3:17**) It means to "eschew evil, and do good," to seek peace, and pursue it. (See **1 Peter 3:11**) It means not to "render evil for evil unto any man," but rather to return good and blessing for evil, and thereby to "overcome evil with good." (See **1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9; Romans 12:21**) It means purging ourselves from every selfish motivation, that we may be spiritual vessels "unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." (See **2 Timothy 2:21**)

Second, we shine our spiritual light by godly behavior. In **Philippians 2:14-15** the instruction is given, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." Certainly, the character of this world is that of spiritual darkness. Certainly, we must dwell in the midst of a spiritually crooked and perverse society. Yet we are to shine within this spiritually crooked and perverse society as spiritual lights in the midst of the darkness. Therefore, we must be characterized by godly behavior. Indeed, we must be characterized by spiritually blameless and harmless behavior. We must be characterized in behavior as the children of God, as the children of spiritual light, being holy in all manner of behavior, even as God our heavenly Father is holy. (See **1 Peter 1:14-16**) Even so, we must engage in all activities without any murmuring or complaining. Rather, we must maintain an honest and honorable behavior among the lost world, with all godly integrity. (See **1 Peter 2:12**) Thereby we may behave in a manner that is without any legitimate rebuke before their eyes. Indeed, thereby we may even put to silence and bring to shame those who might falsely accuse our good behavior in Christ. (See **1 Peter 2:15; 3:16**) On the other hand, if we do not continually behave with godly integrity and do engage in murmuring and complaining, we cloud the light of Christ that our Lord would have us to shine before the lost world, and that the lost world needs us to shine before them.

Third, we shine our spiritual light by gospel witness. The closing line of **Philippians 2:15** states, “Among whom ye shine as lights in the world,” to which the opening line of **verse 16** adds, “Holding forth the word of life.” Indeed, one of the ways in which we “shine as lights in the world” is by our gospel witness in “holding forth the word of life.” In like manner, the apostle Paul stated in **2 Corinthians 4:3-4**, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” Even so, through our gospel witness we are shining forth “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ” unto a world that is lost in spiritual darkness. Seeing then that we have such a ministry of gospel light for this world of spiritual darkness, we must depend upon our Lord’s upholding mercy and must not faint in our gospel witness. (See **2 Corinthians 4:1**) Furthermore, in our gospel witness we must renounce “the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.” (See **2 Corinthians 4:2**) We must present the message of the gospel, “not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” (See **1 Corinthians 2:4**) In our gospel witness we must not depend upon “excellency of speech or of wisdom” to convince the lost, but must depend upon the power of God the Holy Spirit to convict the lost. (See **1 Corinthians 2:1**) Indeed, we should do this in order that their faith “should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (See **1 Corinthians 2:5**) Finally, in our gospel witness we must preach “not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord.” (See **2 Corinthians 4:5**) He is THE LIGHT of the world, and it is His eternal light of life that we to reflect unto this spiritually dark world. Indeed, we must ever remember that we hold this treasure of spiritual light and gospel light “in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” (See **2 Corinthians 4:7**)

IV. The Singleness of the Light

In order for us to shine the light of Christ most brightly unto this spiritually dark world, we must maintain a “single eye.” Only by maintaining a “single eye” can we be full of spiritual light in the character and conduct of our lives. Even so, in **Matthew 6:22** our Lord Jesus Christ declared, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” Now, herein our Lord was not indicating that we must ever keep one eye shut. Rather, He was indicating that we must maintain a single focus of attention for the direction of our lives. Herein a “single eye” represents a single focus of attention and commitment, and that single focus of attention and commitment is rooted in a single priority of heart. Thus in **Matthew 6:19-21** our Lord Jesus Christ spoke concerning two opposing directions for our lives and two opposing priorities for our hearts, saying, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Again in **Matthew 6:24** our Lord spoke concerning two opposing masters for our hearts and lives, saying, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [the things of this world].”

From these passages we learn that the brightness of our spiritual light will be determined by the focus of our heart’s priority. If the priority of our heart is set with single focus upon our Lord, and His kingdom, and His service, and His gospel ministry, then the character and

conduct of our lives will be full of spiritual light. If the affection of our heart is set “on things above, not on things on the earth” (see **Colossians 1:2**), and if the pursuit of our life is to lay up treasures in heaven, rather than upon earth, then we shall shine the light of Christ most brightly unto this spiritually dark and needy world. However, if we do not maintain a single focus of priority upon our Lord and upon the things of our Lord, but if we allow ourselves to have an “evil eye,” then our character and conduct will be full of spiritual darkness, rather than spiritual light. Even so, in **Matthew 6:23** our Lord Jesus Christ delivered the warning, “But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” In this context our Lord presents the “evil eye” as the opposite of the “single eye.” Whereas a “single eye” represents a single priority of heart upon the Lord as our Master, an “evil eye” represents a priority of heart that is set upon the various things of this world. It is when our affection is set on things of this world, rather than the things of the Lord. It is when we are serving “mammon” (the things of this world), rather than the Lord. It is when we are laying up for ourselves treasures on earth, rather than in heaven. It is when we are living unto ourselves, after our own will, rather than unto our Lord, after His will. So then, if our eye (our priority and focus) be evil (after the will of self and the things of this world), our whole body (our character and conduct) “shall be full of darkness.” In fact, this is the manner by which we hide our spiritual light and put it spiritually “under a bushel;” and this is just what our Lord does not want us to do. Thus in **Luke 11:35-36** He proclaimed, “Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.”

V. The Separation of the Light

Now then, there are some pursuits that we as the light of the world must separate ourselves. In **2 Corinthians 6:14-18** God’s Word declares, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” Just as righteousness and unrighteousness are spiritual opposites that cannot join in unity and fellowship, and just Christ and Satan are spiritual opposites that cannot join in unity and fellowship, even so spiritual light and spiritual darkness are opposites that cannot join in unity and fellowship. For this reason we believers, as the spiritual light of the world, should never join together in a close, “yoking” relationship with unbelievers, who are spiritual darkness. Indeed, if we desire for the Lord our God to walk in fellowship with us, then we must “come out from among them” and be separate from them in anything that requires intimacy of fellowship and spirituality of communion. This does not mean that we are to behave with unfriendliness toward the lost around us; for as we have already learned, we are required to shine our spiritual light by good works, doing good unto all as much as we have opportunity. Nor does this mean that we are to avoid any and all contact or acquaintance with the lost around us; for then, as **1 Corinthians 5:9-10** reveals, we would be required to leave this world altogether, which would defeat our purpose as the salt and

light of the world and as witnesses and preachers of the gospel unto the world. However, this does mean that we must not “yoke” ourselves together in fellowship with the lost around us in such matters as Biblical ministry, marriage relationship, close friendship, or business partnership.

Yet in **2 Corinthians 6:17** God’s Word delivers a second instruction, saying, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” Not only must we be separate from close fellowship with unbelievers, but also we must not touch (have contact with) any unclean behavior. In like manner, **Ephesians 5:11-13** gives the instruction, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov’d are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” As the light of the world, we must have no fellowship, no part, no contact with the spiritually unclean, unfruitful, unrighteous works and ways of sinful darkness. We are to reject, to avoid, and to flee such works and ways. Indeed, we are to “cast off the works of darkness,” and rather to “put on the armour of light.” (See **Romans 13:12**) Furthermore, as the light of the world, walking as the children of light in the armor of light, we are to reprove the unclean, unfruitful, unrighteous works and ways of darkness. We are to have no fellowship whatsoever at all with those works and ways; but rather, through our example of righteous living and our communication of gospel witness, we are to reprove those works and ways. By nature the light has no communion with the darkness, but by nature the light provides a clear revelation of the darkness.

VI. The Success of the Light

So then, what success can we expect as we shine our light unto this spiritually dark and lost world? In **Matthew 5:16** our Lord Jesus Christ revealed the answer, saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Herein our Lord indicated that some individuals from among this world will respond unto our shining of the light by glorifying our heavenly Father. Yet what does it mean that they will glorify our heavenly Father? **1 Peter 2:11-12** also speaks concerning this matter, saying, “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation [behavior] honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” Having our behavior to be honest and honorable among the lost world is equivalent to shining our spiritual light unto the world through godly behavior and good works. Even so, as we shine our spiritual light unto the world, some of those who may at first speak falsely against us as if we are evildoers will be moved by our godly behavior and good works instead to glorify God our heavenly Father “in the day of visitation.” So then, what is this “day of visitation?” It is the time wherein the Lord our God visits them with the drawing work of His Holy Spirit and the gospel word of His glorious gospel. It is the time wherein the Lord our God visits them with His gracious offer of eternal salvation through faith in Christ. Even so, some among the this spiritually dark and lost world will be moved by our shining of the light in godly behavior, good works, and gospel witness to glorify God our heavenly Father by receiving His gracious gift of salvation. Indeed, some will be moved to glorify our heavenly Father by placing their faith in His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as their personal Savior.

VII. The Scorn of the Light

Yet we must not expect that all will respond unto our shining of the light by glorifying God our heavenly Father and receiving His gracious gift of salvation. Some, yea even a many, will scorn the light. Some, yea even a many, will reject and even hate our shining of Christ's light unto them. Even so, in **John 3:19-20** our Lord Jesus Christ declared, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproof." As we have already learned, by nature the shining of spiritual light gives a clear revelation of and a firm reproof against the spiritual darkness of sin. Yet many among this world love the spiritual darkness of their sin and are fiercely opposed to having their sinful deeds reproof. Thus they reject the light and even grow to fiercely hate and oppose the light. Above all, they hate the reproof of the light with burning hatred. Now, specifically **John 3:19-20** is speaking concerning our Lord Jesus Christ as THE LIGHT of the world. Yet if they will fiercely hate the Master for His reproofing light, then certainly they will also fiercely hate His servants for reflecting His reproofing light among them. (See **John 15:18-20**) Thus in **Luke 21:17** our Lord Jesus Christ delivered the warning unto His disciples, "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." So then, how should we respond unto this fierce hatred and opposition? We should respond by continuing yet the more to shine our spiritual light of good works, godly behavior, and gospel witness unto them. In **Matthew 5:44** our Lord gave the instruction, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."