

Salt & Light in Your City and State

Matthew 5:13-16

Good Stewardship of Your God-given Citizenship

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour [influence], wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. 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.”

Imagine a world without refrigeration or electricity. How would you preserve your food? How would you light your home? When you put yourself in the sandals of those who heard the Sermon on the Mount, you understand what Jesus illustrated with salt and light. Salt preserves; light shuns darkness.

One commentator wrote, “In the first metaphor Jesus likens his disciples to salt. Implicitly he is saying that apart from his disciples the world turns ever more rotten: Christians have the effect of delaying moral and spiritual putrefaction. If their lives conform to the norms of verses 3–12, they cannot help but be an influence for good in society.”ⁱ So this raises a couple of questions: How can we become a salty, bright influence in our society? In essence, how can we become what we want our family members, fellow church members and fellow citizens to be? The special focus of today’s message is how to become salt and light in your city and state.

Becoming Salt and Light

Jesus introduced His Sermon on the Mount in an unusual way. These statements of blessing (or “beatitudes”) teach us how to be what we want others to become. This is important: if we will not be what we want others to become, then we will become what they are. That compromise is how Christians lose their salty, bright influence in a society. *So, how does the Lord transform sinful people into being like salt and light in our city and state?* Let

this question sink down into thoughts for a moment. In the words of Ecclesiastes chapter 7, “lay this to your heart.”

Somewhere down deep in your heart, wouldn't you like to help your fellow man? Wouldn't you like to bless others and encourage them to help them succeed in living an exemplary life? You can! Here's how: [follow the Beatitudes](#); this is the way the Jesus Christ began His Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 5:1-12](#).

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit (5:3):** Who has recognized his own poverty of spirit? Who among us has come to the terrifying realization that he or she is a sinner in the presence of the Holy God? Jesus said that those who do so are happy and blessed! But how can that be? Read on to see how these Beatitudes fit together.

- **Blessed are they that mourn (5:4):** Those who really grapple with their spiritual poverty – their sinfulness and depravity – grieve or mourn that fact. They know that “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). They know that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). To produce people who will be salt and light in their society, the Lord opens their eyes to their sinfulness and the awful penalty for their sin.

- **Blessed are the meek (5:5):** Those who know the Gospel, realize that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Knowing their lost condition and their eternal destiny without Christ, they embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The idea of meekness is that someone is willing to be governed.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said, “The man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.... Finally, I would put it like this. We are to leave everything—ourselves, our rights, our cause, our whole future—in the hands of God, and especially so if we feel we are suffering unjustly.”ⁱⁱ

Meek people know that their meek and lowly Lord went to the cross of Calvary to pay for their sins. They know that He died, was buried and physically rose again from the grave to demonstrate His power over death (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Meek people are the ones who humble themselves before the Lord Jesus and embrace Him by faith.

Sinners, Saints, Soul winners

Matthew 5:3-5 indicates how God changes sinners into saints by the Gospel. His grace turns lost sinners into salt and light in godless society (see, for instance, Isaiah 6:1-8). By His grace, these transformed people have peace with God!

This is an amazing transformation. Repentant rebels become righteous in God's sight. These transformed people begin to "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6), they become merciful (5:7) and pursue purity of heart (5:8). According to the Scriptures, sinners who have been transformed by God's grace are called "saints." How do these saints exercise a salty, bright influence in a dark, corrupt society?

If we will not be what we want others to become, then we will become what they are.

According to Matthew 5:9-12, they become soul winners. They share the Gospel – they are peacemakers (5:9); they continue to share the message of God's grace even when they are persecuted for doing so (5:10-12). Through the good, Gospel-driven works of these transformed people, a society learns what it means to glorify God the Father in Heaven. (For further explanations of how these beatitudes work together, listen to ["How to Glorify Your Heavenly Father"](#)ⁱⁱⁱ an audio message from this passage.)

Jesus taught His saints to have a salty influence. In the ears of His original hearers, this described the influence of salt as a preservative against corruption. Those repentant sinners who have been transformed into saints and soul winners "have salt in themselves" (Mark 9:50), and because of that,

they “have peace one with another.” Indwelt by the living Spirit of God, they become salt and light in a godless society.

Jesus, who is the light of the world, gives the light of life (Luke 8:12). According to Matthew 5:13, believers who reflect Christ’s light are also the light of the world. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun on a world in darkness, so believers are sons of God who shine as the lights of the world in a crooked and perverse nation (Philippians 2:15).

Problems with Salt & Light

If we are to be honest, we have to admit that Jesus told us that sometimes our salt and light are silly and shadowy; that’s a problem! The absence of salt allows corruption; the absence of light lets the darkness dominate. Jesus preached to His followers that He was making them into the salt of the earth, but He emphasized the problem: What if the salt loses its preservative influence? The idea here is that when saints are not salty, they look silly^{iv}; they don’t fulfill God’s purpose. Being good for nothing, they are largely dismissed by society and are cast underfoot.

You and I must ask ourselves these questions: *When we see the depravity and corruption in our society, are we actually fulfilling our salty purpose to restrain this corruption? Are we being an example of what we want them to become? Do the greatest problems in society actually begin with silly saints who tolerate the shadows?* Remember that when Jonah disobeyed God, he found himself in the midst of a devastating storm. Did those storms come because of the paganism of the mariners? No! They came because of the disobedience of the prophet.

We were designed to be light-bearers, light a shining city on a hill on a dark night. Such saints and such cities cannot be hidden. Christians are like lamps and candles in a dark house. Those who wish to light up a room put the light on a stand, not under a basket. Whom do you know who is in darkness that could testify that you are a light-bearer for them? Who can glorify God saying

that you were a bright, shining light that showed them the way to eternal life?

Settings for Salt and Light

Where should we be like salt and light? Can you name three God-ordained institutions?

The Family: God ordained the family. When God created Eve from the side of Adam, Adam proclaimed, **“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh”** (Genesis 2:24). God ordained the family. The marriage is a permanent, God-ordained covenant between one man and one woman, terminated by the death of either spouse (Malachi 2:14). God ordained that children should obey their parents, honoring their father and mother (Ephesians 6:1-4); parents are instructed to raise children in the loving discipline of the Lord. Would it be right to be apathetic toward your responsibilities to your family, like Eli toward his sons? Should we ignore our family responsibilities? Shall we disdain what God ordained? Let’s be practical:

Family Survey

- [] If you are a husband, do you show your wife that you love her?
- [] If you are a wife, do you show your husband that you respect him?
- [] If you are a parent, do you discipline your children in love?
- [] If you have parents, do you honor them?

The Church: God ordained the church. Ephesians 3:20-21 reminds us, **“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”**

Hebrews 10:25 reminds us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together but to meet and encourage each other fervently. Would it be right to be apathetic toward your responsibilities to your church? Shall we disdain what God ordained?

Church Survey

- Do you exalt the Lord by serving in your congregation?
- Do you enjoy getting together with other members of your congregation to encourage them?
- Do you use your time, talent and treasures to support your local congregation?
- Do you uphold the high importance of the local church in this age?

The Government: God ordained the government. In Romans 13:1, Paul commanded, **“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”** He even says that those in authority are ministers of God for good!” (Romans 13:4). We have the privilege of living in a constitutional republic. Would it be right to be apathetic toward your responsibilities to the government? Shall we disdain what God ordained? If you are like most of us, you would say that you try to exalt the Lord in your family and your church, but you fall short when it comes to being a good citizen.

In 1644, the Scottish preacher, Samuel Rutherford wrote a book entitled, “Lex Rex” (meaning “the law is king”). Up to this point in history, the main emphasis was that the king was the law. But Rutherford and others, drawing on Biblical principles insisted that the law is over the king or chief executive of a nation. As David Shumate commented, “Lex Rex is a concept that finds its roots in the Old Testament, where everyone, including the king, was subject to the Law of God.”^v

In English law, and beginning with the Magna Carta (in 1215), this was understood to involve a shared authority among leaders – not a pure monarchy. In America, godly pastors who preached the Word and laid the foundation for a lawful society. The constitution of Connecticut was formed after a godly pastor preached a sermon describing a civil society in Biblical terms. That colony’s constitution was the template for the U.S. Constitution. (That’s why Connecticut calls itself, “The Constitution State”).

Did those storms come because of the paganism of the mariners? No! They came because of the disobedience of the prophet, Jonah.

Through the influence of these spiritual leaders, we do not live under a dictator nor under a gang or oligarchy. No one person gets to make up law by executive orders. Ours is a government “of the people, by the people and for the people” (in the closing words of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, delivered on November 19, 1863.) This vision of the government was advocated by those who were steeped in the Scriptures, such as Daniel Webster.^{vi} Our checks and balances system helps us maintain order between our legislative, executive and judicial branches. We live in a republic.

According to an entry in the diary of James McHenry, an important conversation occurred during the founding of our country. As the constitutional convention was adjourning, Mrs. Eliza Powell approached Benjamin Franklin with a question. She asked, “Well doctor have we got a republic or a monarchy?” Franklin replied, “A republic, if you can keep it.”^{vii} What did he mean?

Today, many people despise what they call “politics.” Yet the root of the word refers to the people. The word translated “citizen” in Luke 15:15; 9:14 and Acts 21:9 is a translation of the Greek word [*polites*]. The “ics” in the word “politics” refers to the science (as in aerobics, economics, etc.), so politics is the science of the government of the people. Yes, many people hate politics because it seems like a useless waste of time. But it involves the God-ordained government of our country. Let’s ask again: Shall we disdain what God ordained? Shall we abuse what God may use?

Now let this sink in. God has given you the great privilege of living in a country whose government is “of the people, by the people and for the people.” Do people need to be governed? Of course they do. Romans 13 insists upon it. Our country governs people. But our government is very different from most of the countries of the world because ours is also a government by the people. The people elect representatives in our

government. The government is by the people. Stop for a moment to think about this question: “Are you a ‘people’?” (Are you a person and a citizen of this country?) If our government is “by the people” then what have you done lately to help govern the people? In our constitutional republic, you don’t need to passively curse the darkness. You don’t have to complain about the government; you can do something about it! Will you be passive? Will you disdain what God ordained? And bear in mind that the government is also for the people. That is, it is designed to serve the people. That is a Biblical concept. So don’t abuse what God may use. Exercise good stewardship of your God-given citizenship.

Will you disdain what God ordained?

In our present culture, it seems that pompous leaders want to dominate the people rather than serve the people. But our government was designed to be “of the people, by the people and for the people.” We need servant-leaders who are dedicated to serving others. Among the last words of King David, he made a very important point about those who rule over men. David wrote, **“The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, He that rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.”** (2 Samuel 23:3-4).

Now let’s get practical. Take some time to think through these survey questions and evaluate your role in our government.

Being Salt & Light in Your City and State

Government survey: Use these questions to ask yourself this question: Am I exercising a salty, bright influence in this constitutional republic?

I am frustrated with the direction that my country is going and I’ve stopped voting

I watch, listen or read very little news right now because I am disturbed by what I read

I question whether my vote at election really counts for much of anything

- I did not watch the recent political debates.
- I know someone that I could ask for advice about how to vote using my Biblical values
- I am very concerned about the way that the constitution and laws of our land are being flaunted
- I know at least four Bible verses that give me guidance about how to vote
- I would be willing to write down some Biblical wisdom about how to vote and share that with other believers
- I study how to use my Biblical values when I vote by using sources that I trust to give me accurate information about candidates
- I could explain the function of God-ordained government using Romans 13

- I am registered to vote and I plan to vote in the upcoming primaries
- I vote because I want to be a good steward of the national citizenship that God gave me.
- I plan to vote in the upcoming general elections
- I know the names of the people on my county or city council, and I pray for them
- I know the names of the people on my county or city council, and I have made contact with them by phone or in person
- I know the names of my local school board members, and I pray for them
- I can name my state representative and my state senator
- I read about legislation that is being proposed in my state's legislature
- I have made personal contact with my state representative or senator
- I can name my state's Governor, Lt. Governor and Secretary of State
- I can name the members of my state Supreme Court and I am aware of their decisions.
- I can name my US representative, my state's US senators, my country's president and vice president, and I pray for them.
- I can name the members of the US Supreme Court and I pray for them
- I know how my fellow citizens choose specific candidates to put them on the ballot at election time
- I know how the political party central committee in my county works and I know the names of some those on the committee
- I could explain the checks and balances system in our government

- [] I am content to live my life in peace even though I fear that the next generation is in for some very hard times
- [] I would like to learn how to be salt and light in my city and state
- [] I would be very pleased to meet some political leaders in person just to chat with them and pray for them
- [] I would be willing to work at the polls at election time
- [] I would be willing to be a poll watcher at election time to help verify the no fraud is taking place
- [] I would be willing to serve on my local school board
- [] I would be willing to be part of a “rapid response prayer team” to pray about important developments in the local, state and federal government

If you discover that you really don't have a salt and light influence in your city and state, stop to ask a few questions.

1. Do you really know the Lord? Have you ever been gripped with the realization that you are an impoverished sinner, mourning under the penalty for sin? Have you meekly trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?
2. If you know the Lord, are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness and longing for purity of heart? Are you merciful to those around you?

Let's ask the Lord to help us be salt and light in our families, our churches, our cities and our states.

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ⁱ D. A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 31.

ⁱⁱ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959–60), 1:69–70. See also [Google book](#), p. 58

ⁱⁱⁱ How to Glorify Your Heavenly Father, accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=5119125153709>

^{iv} The Greek word [moraine] is the basis for our English word “moronic” see <https://www.etymonline.com/word/moronic#:~:text=Entries%20linking%20to%20moronic,a%20loan%2Dword%20from%20OGreek>. They become like those in Romans 1:22 who profess themselves to be wise but are actually fools.

^v David Shumate, “Rendering unto Caesar, part 2” *Frontline magazine* (FBFI), July/August 2021, p. 18

^{vi} See Wolfgang Mieder, “Government of the People, by the People, for the People” *The Making and Meaning of an American Proverb about Democracy* Proverbs Are The Best Policy, University Press of Colorado; Utah State University Press, accessed at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctt4cgr04.6.pdf>

^{vii} The Diary of James McHenry, Library of Congress, accessed at [File:James McHenry. Diary, September 18, 1787. Manuscript. James McHenry Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress \(63.02.00\) \(Digital ID us0063 02p1\).jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)