

A Christian's Influence

Matthew 5¹³⁻¹⁶

The Beatitudes spelled out the character of people who experience the life-changing power of Christ. The whole sermon in fact presupposes an acceptance of the gospel, an experience of new birth, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.^{Sott,37} These qualities are to characterize all his followers and they carry with them God given promises that have both a present and a future fulfillment.

As the Spirit produces Christ-like character in us, Christ's influence begins to expand beyond ourselves to others. In today's verses we will hear Jesus' teaching on the kinds of influence his followers will have in and on the world around them.

1. Can you think of several ways in which Christians have had a positive influence on society?
2. **Read Matthew 5:13-16.** Jesus compares his followers to salt (v.13). What does this metaphor suggest about the Church's role in society? About the Christian's role in society?
3. Has anything appeared in the news in recent days to indicate that society is rotting and decaying?
4. Bernanos in his famous novel, The Diary of a Country Priest, said that it is significant that Jesus did not say, "You are the honey of the world, but rather the salt of the earth." Do you agree? Is it our function to be the honeypot of the world, adding sweetness and sugar to the bitterness of life (OR) is it our function to be the salt of the earth, adding some bit and sting at the points where men and women have sore spots?
5. Recall the message that God gave to the Hebrew exiles in Babylon through the prophet Jeremiah: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:4-7). Give some practical illustrations of how we function as salt where we live, work and play.
6. What happens "if the salt loses its saltiness" (v.13)?

It has been shown scientifically that pure salt in itself never loses its saltiness or seasoning capacity. In Biblical days, however, there were no refineries, so salt often got mixed in with impurities which rendered it useless. What causes Christians to "lose" their saltiness (v.13; cf. how Israel lost their saltiness at times in the Old Testament)?

7. Rebecca Manley Pippert wrote a book with the title Out of the Salt Shaker and Into the World. What does the title of her book suggest about the Christian's ability to be salt?
8. Jesus also compares the Christian to light (vv.14-16) and mentions two sources of light. What is the function of light in his two illustrations?
9. How does the church's role as light complement its role as salt?

10. In what ways can we promote the spread of truth in the world?

11. Why might we be tempted to hide our light (vv.14-15)?

According to Jesus in John 3:19-21, how does the world tend to react to light?

12. What does Jesus say is the result of people seeing our good deeds (v.16)?

Salt is lost in the flavouring of food; we do not praise the salt but the taste of the food. Light is overlooked when it reveals the contents of a room; we do not praise the light but the items on display. What does all of this imply for the Christian? For the local church?

13. Is there any significance to the order in which Jesus describes the Christian's relationship to the world – first salt, and then light?

14. Do you see any relationship between the beatitudes and our role as salt and light in society?

15. Os Guinness recently wrote, "We are not living in a great age of faith, such as the Reformation or the first Great Awakening. (Two points make our cultural situation very different) On the one hand, our society is at a turning point, principally because of the decreasing influence of faith on society. On the other hand, the church is at a turning point, principally because of the increasing influence of society on faith." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

16. In what ways are you already functioning as salt and light?

Is there a bowl or a basket you need to remove so that your light can shine more effectively?

Is there one thing you can do to have a stronger influence as salt and light?

PRAYER: "Lord, being salt and light is a problem to me. I am so inclined to seek people's attention for myself. I want to have my flavour brought out and my qualities illuminated. Help me to discover the richness of life when it is dedicated to helping others to see you instead of me, so that they may praise your name instead of mine. Through Jesus, who always reminded us that what he did was through your presence and not his own power. AMEN."

Optional Reading Assignment – Next week's lesson will include the question of "what Jesus meant when he said, "I have not come to abolish [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill them"? Since this is a very big one to tackle in a short time, I encourage you to read the following articles:

- Dr. Timothy Keller on "'Old Testament Law and the Charge of Inconsistency"¹
- Dr. David Wenham's on "Jesus and the law: an exegesis on Matthew 5:17-20"²

¹ <https://timothykeller.com/blog/2012/6/12/old-testament-law-and-the-charge-of-inconsistency>

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/jesus-and-the-law-an-exegesis-on-matthew-517-20/>