

Dear saints who are salt and light, grace to peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You are the salt of the earth. This is not some command given for you to fulfill. It is a declaration, it is who you are, you the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. Just a week ago you heard the sweetness that yours is the kingdom of God., your reward is great in heaven. And now you are salt and light. So let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Seems simple enough. I must go and do the most good works that I can in order that my light may shine and give glory to the Father in heaven. Easy enough. Now go, do it.....
No, no, no, no, no! This is precisely the dribble and misinterpretation that troubles the Christian, and what may even keep one who is not a Christian from receiving the gifts of the same Jesus who spoke these words. After all, if the simple point is to let your light shine and do good, why would I want to join and believe that? If this is what it is about, what makes the Christian religion any different than any other religion in the world? Wouldn't be easier to do what you want, when you want, and what's this business about the Father getting the glory for my good works? And those are just the questions of the unbeliever or doubter? And truth be told, they would be right in their questioning. Whether it is Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, Islam, or any other religion in the world, the simple teaching remains the same – you must somehow do enough good works and earn your reward in eternity.

And what about you, dear Christian. How does this sit with you? Sure it may serve as some sort of motivational speech about getting up and getting out and doing as much as we can for others. And service to your neighbor certainly is given to us to by our Lord. We fall into the same temptations and thoughts as the one who doubts. We want the glory to ourselves for a job well done, we want the recognition. We want to serve and help who we want and when we want, and maybe that is not all the time.

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Now just to be clear, the scribes and Pharisees worked very diligently in their attempts to keep the law. They were the goody-two-shoes. And they wanted everyone to know it. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of those who sought to fulfill every aspect of the law by their own good works, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Think you are up to the challenge? I mean the Pharisees were good at outward keepings of the law: they never missed the regular gathering for worship, they gave regularly to the temple, they didn’t have any tolerance for sexual immorality in their lives, and all the ceremonies given by God were obeyed.

The fallen mind of man is delusional. It has been seduced by demons. It pretends as though it can keep the Law, as though it is capable of its own righteousness. It has developed convoluted, complicated philosophies and rationale for all its wicked desires. Its wisdom amazes the men who hear in it exactly what they want to hear. Though they be paper thin, no more substantial than smoke or fog, the fallen mind of man has learned to not peer too deeply, to not ask too many questions.

Thus do men full of sin try to justify themselves. They tell vapid and obvious lies. They make vain boasts. They claim they have not killed. But their tongues, their inattention, and their deeds have broken the hearts of their wives and children a thousand times over. They claim they have not stolen. But they have not worked at full throttle for their employers, yet they have taken full wages. They have cheated. They have begrudged those who have more than they. They have acted as though they earned all that they have while others have just been lucky. They claim their lust is natural, even God-given. They are bold in their depravity and perversion. They despise the poor and suffering. They pretend that it will not happen to them. They love the misery of their friends and rejoice in the failure and degradation of others.

The fallen mind of man, abides, O Sinner, in you. You were conceived in it. You have been shaped by it. There is no excuse. You are not merely a victim. You are the person responsible for it. To this original sin you have added abundant actual sins. The Law

stands perfect and holy. It is complete. It is true. It never changes. You cannot escape. It does not only apply to others. Some of your worst behavior has only occurred in your heart. The mercy of God has kept you from acting them out, sparing both you and your family. That is good, but not good enough. Judged by the law, you are guilty of breaking all the commandments: idolatry, blasphemy, laziness, rebellion, murder, adultery, stealing, lying, gossiping, and coveting. You are no better than any other person on this planet. Your righteousness is not enough. It is no better than that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Dear Christians, this is why the Lord has come. Not to abolish the Law, for the Law stands perfect and holy. But our Lord Jesus has come to us in the flesh to take on our sinful flesh, to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. For truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until it is accomplished. You can't do it, I can't do it, your neighbor and person sitting next to you can't do it. The scribes and Pharisees couldn't do it.

Our Lord Jesus takes on human flesh and comes to us to fulfill the Law for you. As the one who keeps it perfectly he sacrifices himself in your place to complete the Law. His blood shed for you, your price for sin paid in full. Your sins forgiven. It is that flesh that he takes up again risen from the grave as he fulfills the Law's demands for you. It is full. There is no one to accuse you. It is finished. Heaven and earth will pass away, for the dots and tittles that nailed Him to the cross have been laid to rest, fulfilled.

You are righteous and holy. Your sins are forgiven. Your righteousness is given to you in the life, death, and resurrection of the one who declares you to be salt and light. This righteousness is given to you, it is yours, and it exceeds greatly that of the scribes and Pharisees, for it is the Lord's righteousness given to you. Rejoice and be glad, yours is the kingdom.

So then, how are you salt and light and what are you to do? You are salt, for you flavor and preserve the best of what is given to you. You flavor the world as you are declared

holy by Christ. The light of the world has given himself to you and declared you to be light. A city, the community gathered together, cannot be hidden. The gifts our Lord gives cannot be put under a basket. But what must you do? Receive what is given to you. The forgiveness and life that is yours in Christ will shine. Our Lord, who has done all the work of creating you, of redeeming your sinful flesh, will do it. The light does nothing to shine on its own, but it cannot help but shine.

Your good works will come, even without you thinking of it. Children as you obey and honor your parents. As you serve them. Parents as you serve your children, bring them to receive the gifts of Christ as well as provide for them. Husbands as you love, honor, and serve your wives, wives as you love and honor your husbands. Teachers as you teach what has been given to you, students as you study and learn. As you give to others and support the work of the church. As you help and support your family, friends, and neighbors in need. But do not get yourself puffed up. This is merely what is given to you to do. Salt that loses its flavor that does not do as it is given to do, is useless. Light that does not shine is extinguished. On your own merits you will not do these things perfectly and you will become useless and left in the darkness.

Arise, shine, for your light has come. Your sins forgiven. You are salt and light. You are given your taste and are given to shine in all the house. Your righteousness is given to you, it is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus who has suffered and died for you, our Lord who is risen from the grave and gives you his light and life. Your light will shine and the Father will be glorified. This righteousness is yours and will enter the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.