

263 Christ's Light, Truth and Peace

"Ye are the light of the world ..." (Matthew 5.14) – a statement of fact regarding His disciples spoken by the Lord Jesus as part of the "Sermon on the Mount". At that time Jesus' disciples were Jews only, for the great events and consequent truths of the Christian Gospel were yet to be put in place through Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection and ascension. Now all those events have indeed happened, and all the Gospel truths are indeed long-established: Jesus' disciples of today are members of His body, the Church, (the "ekklesia, literally, the "called-out"), and any former distinctions of status, such as between Jew and Gentile, bond and free, or male and female, no longer exist between members of that body (eg., Ephesians 2.13-22 / Galatians 3.26-29 / Romans 10.12). Thus all of us today who put our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord are included in the "Ye" when it comes to being "the light of the world". This clearly is a great privilege, and even more so, a great responsibility.

We see first, from the KJV's use of "Thou" and "Ye", that this light-shining is corporate as well as individual – "Ye". We, not just singly but also together, at different levels and in different ways, right here and now, are "the light of the world", appointed to display the actual light of Christ "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life" as the Holy Spirit puts this, through Paul, in Philippians 2.15-16.

Now we call to mind Jesus' earnest prayer to the Father, that His followers, that is, the Church, "may all be one ... that they also may be one in us ...that they may be one, even as we are one ... that they be made perfect in one" (from John 17 vv 21-23). Jesus longs for this one-ness for one simple reason - "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them and hast loved me" (vv 21b and 23b); in other words, unity among Jesus' disciples plays a crucial role in our effective light-shining in the world. Unfortunately therefore the splintered Church of today makes it harder for Christ's disciples to shine clearly as "the light of the world", and thus also harder for the world to see Who Jesus really is and where He came from.

In response to Jesus' desire for one-ness we see many sincere efforts to build unity across church denominations, and no doubt some Christ-pleasing progress has been made, especially at local level. But sooner or later there arises the ever-tricky relationship between Truth and Peace. The prospect of Peace, and therefore unity, is always alluring, and a form of Peace embracing all the churches of the world could probably be put in place by next week if Truth were to be set aside! But such a Peace would not be a genuine Christ-Peace, for such a Christ-Peace is only ever a consequence of the Christ-Truth being properly in place beforehand (eg., John 14.6 / II Corinthians 13.8 / Galatians 6.14-16 / Ephesians 2.12-22 / ...). Truth must always precede peace, and clearly attempts to reverse that order will never be blessed. Our task as Christ's disciples therefore, in whatever part of the Church we may find ourselves, is to do our humble best in today's less-than-ideal situation to uphold the right relationship between Truth and Peace as we shine as lights in the world.

We do this light-shining, as we well know, by our “abiding in Christ” as much as possible (John 15.1-8), regularly receiving into our lives by the Holy Spirit the precious scriptural teachings concerning doctrine and practice in the Christian life.

Such lives will inevitably be different, they will stand out, they will be noticed - that is all part of “the shining”. Yet we do not set out to be different, with a motive of “Just look at us!”. Always our concern is to uphold and honour the Lord Jesus as humbly and faithfully as we can. It is by our practising “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12.2a), that the light shining from our lives will indeed “just happen”, pointing, by God’s grace, to the Lord Jesus and to God the Father.

We live in troubled and threatening times, with a whole range of false versions of “the Truth” on offer. In this mix are placed Christ’s redeemed disciples, in the world yet not quite of it (eg., Romans 12.2). Through no merit of our own we are the recipients of the genuine and unique Good News, and are appointed to hold forth Christ’s Light, Christ’s Truth and Christ’s Peace.

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