



Lesson 2 – Salt and Light

Not too long ago a prominent apologetics ministry took out ad space for billboards in San Francisco and New York City that included the following message: “To all our atheist friends: Thank God you’re wrong.”

What do you think about such a billboard? Was it a good idea or a bad idea? Would you have voted with the ministry to pay for the ads, or would you have voted against that message?

This billboard raises important questions about engaging with unbelievers. What should our attitude and posture be? Where does being bold end and being rude begin? How do we take a firm stand and yet do so graciously? Last week we saw that we are in a spiritual battle and the most important weapons that we have are the Spirit, the Word, and prayer. This week we will study Scripture to see how it is that our lifestyle and our speech impact our interactions with those questioning the faith. Answering questions is important, but if we are going to make a difference for Christ it matters how we engage with others and how we live before them.

Why do you think our conduct and the way we interact with people matter?

Can you think of any biblical passages that might relate to the questions of how we behave and how we talk, specifically with regards to interacting with unbelievers?

The Right Walk

Apologetics, the defense of the faith, begins long before someone gives us a hard question. We defend the faith not just by what we say, but by how we live. Having a lifestyle that lines up with God’s Word and demonstrates what God wants is important for us to be heard credibly in the places God has put us. We will look at two related but slightly different passages that deal with our conduct before a watching a world.

Doing Good Works (Matthew 5:13-16)

In Matthew, Jesus tells us that we should do good works so that our Father in heaven might be glorified. He compares His disciples to salt and light, and while these illustrations overlap heavily, there do seem to be some slight distinctions.

- **Believers should be salt – they should live differently (5:13).**

People have debated what exactly Christ means by saying that believers are salt. Some have found the point of comparison to be flavor – Christians add zip to this world! Others have seen the overlap in the value of salt in the ancient world – Christians are highly valuable! Some have argued the point is that salt preserves – Christians help keep corruption from overrunning the world! Some have even pointed to the fact that salt lowers the freezing point of ice – Christians should be warm!

But the point that Jesus Himself appears to be making is found in the explanation He gives. Christians are important and valuable to the culture, but only if they are different! If they lose their “saltiness” they cease to make a difference.¹ The point of Christ is that if salt has lost its saltiness, *none* of the valuable things salt was used for would be possible. Salt is different and because it is different it makes a difference. As one book on Christian leadership put it– “to make a difference you must be different.”² Jesus warns that if salt has lost its flavor, then it is worthless. Our behavior should set us apart from others. If we don’t look and act differently from the people around us, we become useless and what we say will make little to no difference.

In what ways should believers be different? (Hint: Look at the context! What does this section come right after?)

Why do you think being different is necessary if we want to defend our faith?

- **Believers should be light – they should point to God (5:14-16).**

Not only should we be different, but we seek to be actively doing good. Jesus compares the good deeds of His disciples as a light that goes out for all to see. While our good works don’t contribute to our salvation, the expectation is that they will flow out of our salvation (cf Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26). By doing good works, we show the character of our God and demonstrate to others what He is like and the difference He can make in someone’s life.

What good works do you think Jesus had in mind when He preached these words?

Why are good works necessary for defending our faith?

In all of this it is important to remember that we are not just trying to convince someone that we have a theory that is better than theory, we are seeking to show that serving the Creator is the best way to live. If our lives don’t look different from theirs, and if they don’t see us actively doing good, why would they want what we have to offer them? While none of this removes the responsibility of verbally telling people about Christ (cf Romans 10:14), we do have the chance by our lifestyle to make a case for Christianity that our words alone never could.

¹ Some have argued that salt cannot ever stop being salt or lose its saltiness. While it is true that the chemical compound NaCl (Sodium Chloride, i.e. salt) will always have the property of salt, in ancient times the rock that they knew as salt could become mixed with impurities and thereby no longer be “salty.”

² Ken Collier and Matt Williams, *Biblical Leadership: Becoming a Different Kind of Leader*, 21-25.

Walking in Wisdom (Colossians 4:5)

Living as citizens of heaven while making our pilgrimage through earth makes for some interesting and challenging scenarios. Daniel realized this when he went to Babylon as a youth and found himself serving in the court of the most powerful man in the world. First century Christians realized this when they came to believe that immorality and idolatry were wrong – and the culture around them celebrated both. Christians realize this every day as they seek to live for the Lord while they also seek to live in a world that is increasingly hostile to what they believe.

Paul challenges the Colossian believers that as they live for Christ they must walk in wisdom toward unbelievers. As they seek to obey Christ there will be challenging situations that arise, and so they must use wisdom in their interactions with others.

Do you have any personal examples of how it can be challenging to live wisely in an increasingly ungodly culture?

One interesting aspect of this is that Paul will transition to talk about speaking graciously and answering questions that come up. Paul here seems to connect wise living and opportunities to share Christ.

What is the connection between making wise decisions and having opportunities to share Christ? Do you have any examples of this happening?

Making the right choice in confusing situations will often be hard. But when we follow the guidance of the Spirit in difficult and challenging situations, we can demonstrate the difference Christ makes and invite questions that can lead to sharing the gospel.

The Right Speech

What we say is important, but so is how we say it. Our speech is important because when we speak we represent our King. The Bible directly addresses how we should interact with unbelievers, both being bold but also being gracious.

Our Speech Should Be Gracious (Colossians 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:22-26; 1 Peter 3:15)

Paul ties together right conduct and right speech when sharing the faith in ***Colossians 4:5-6***. He begins by telling us that we should walk in wisdom towards outsiders, but then helps flesh out what that looks like specifically in our speech. Paul says that our speech should be “with grace” and that it should be “seasoned with salt.” Whereas earlier the point of salt was that it made a difference by being different, here the idea seems to be that our speech should be “flavorful” in the sense of being warm, gracious, and kind.

Why do you think God would want us to answer questions with warmth and kindness?

What happens if we fail to be gracious in our answers?

In **2 Timothy 2:22-26** Paul gives instructions to Timothy about how to live as a Christian minister. He begins by warning him to have an exemplary life, much the first half of this lesson. He then tells him that he should avoid “foolish and unlearned questions” because such distractions create strife.

What is the difference between avoiding foolish and unlearned questions and studying apologetics?

Instead, we are told, the servant of the Lord must be patient, able to teach, and patient. This gentle meekness may be used by God to bring someone to a point of repentance.

In what ways can we be quarrelsome when we interact with unbelievers?

Why do you think it is that we are tempted to be quarrelsome when we are correcting others? Why do you think it matters to God that we be gentle?

Finally, Peter makes a similar point in **1 Peter 3:15**. Christ must be honored in our hearts, but then we must be prepared to give an answer³ for the hope that lies within us. Yet notice once again the way in which we are supposed to answer these questions: with meekness (or gentleness) and fear. The “fear” could mean a respect towards people or a reverence towards God, but in either case the attitude of the one giving the answer is measured, humble, and kind.

What would a meek answer to someone about a topic as serious as the truthfulness of the eternal Word of God look like?

Our Speech Should Be Bold (Romans 1:16-17)

Sometimes cowardice can be passed off as being gracious (and sometimes harshness can be passed off as courageous). But having a gracious attitude doesn’t mean shy away from making uncomfortable statements. If we genuinely preach the gospel, even if we do it in the kindest way possible, Christ warned us that the result will be a whole lot of division (Matthew 10:34-37). We want to make sure that if people are offended, they are offended at the message and not the delivery of the message. But people will be offended by the message and that shouldn’t stop us!

Paul stated that he was not afraid of the gospel, because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16-17). At the same time, Paul asked for the churches who supported him to pray that he would have boldness as he shared the gospel (Ephesians 6:19). Even Paul, as bold as he was, realized that he needed God’s help to proclaim the gospel. We too should remember the power of the gospel to save and ask God for courage to make known the glorious message of the gospel.

How do we balance being bold while also being gracious in our responses? What does genuine boldness in our witness look like?

We saw last week that apologetics is more than a carefully crafted argument seeking to persuade someone that I’m right and they’re wrong. It’s a spiritual battle for the souls of the lost, and the only hope we have for success is the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and prayer. In this lesson, we’ve seen that the

³ The Greek word here for “answer” is *apologia*, from which we get the word “Apologetics.”

answers we give will be affected by two important factors: how we live and how we answer. God has called us to be salt and light, to make a difference and point to God. And God has instructed us that the answers we give should be done in meekness, graciousness, and humility. As we look at specific issues and answers in coming weeks, we need to remember giving the right answer alone isn't enough. The life behind it and the spirit in which we give those answers matters a lot.