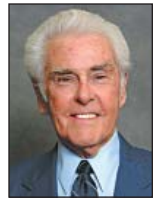


## Distinct in my influence

In my church, when a candidate is baptized, the pastor has the candidate remain in the water after immersion for further instructions. He places a pinch of salt on the candidate's lips and encourages the new member to become salt in the world to create a taste for the gospel. He then takes a votive candle to hand to the person being baptized with encouragement to become the revelation of the light of the saving knowledge of God to his or her world. The brief ritual amplifies the candidate's acceptance of the new life that baptism represents.



**John Howell**

When H. H. Hargrove was pastor of Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, he preached a sermon series from the Sermon on the Mount. In his exposition of salt and light, he emphasized the topic of our lesson today — the power of one's influence. One of the means used to impact the world "is the example of Christianity given by their redeemed lives. Their influence is to be a light to show men in the darkness of sin that there is a victorious way of life.... Christian influence is a positive force for human welfare and the glory of God in the world" (At the Master's Feet, pp. 44-45).

**You are God's salt that creates an appetite for the gospel (Matthew 5:13).** Salt in an abundant mineral that was used as a flavoring for food and as a preservative symbol of covenant. The scripture reminded worshippers, "Season all of your grain offerings with salt" (Leviticus 21:13). Job is expressly correct about the need for salt in food when he asks, "Is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the white of an egg? I refuse to touch it; such food makes me ill" (Job 6:6-7). Ininsipid salt "is no longer good for anything; except to be thrown out

and trampled by man."

Most of us have seen clear examples of Christians who exemplify salt of conviction in their witness for Christ and we want to be like them. Unfortunately, we have also seen Christians whose salt has lost its flavor and they have become poor influences for our Lord.

**Influence others by being the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16).** Candles and lamps were essential instruments of life in the biblical world. Lamps of the Old Testament period, made of pottery, burned olive oil as the main source of light. It is amazing how much light a candle or lamp can provide in the midst of intense darkness.

When I was a child, my parents took me to visit Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. As we walked into the caves, electrical lights lighted our pathway and it was exciting to progress into the cave. But at one point we came to the end of a cave and all the lights were turned off. The darkness was so intense it could almost be felt! Then one small light was gradually turned on to represent a sunrise over a lake. How welcome was the light!

As I have reflected on candles and lamps burning in the darkness of the night, I understand Jesus' teaching that we don't light a lamp and then cover it with a bowl. Instead, we "put in on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." As Christians, our light is shining before men, "that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

**Influence others who know you by your obedience to God's Word (Matthew 5:17-20).** The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were committed to maintaining obedience to the Law as they interpreted it. The Law was their most precious possession and this Jesus seemed to be committed to destroying it. But Jesus intends to make clear to them that he had come to fulfill the Law

## Bible Studies for Life

January 31, 2016

Scripture: Matthew 5:13-20

rather than abolish it. His fulfillment would be in accordance with God's direction for his life.

New Testament scholar A.B. Bruce provides an excellent summary of what fulfillment means for Christ. "He fulfills by realizing in theory and practice an ideal to which [Old Testament] institutions and revelations point, but which they do not adequately express. Therefore, in fulfilling He necessarily abrogates in effect, while repudiating the spirit of a destroyer. He brings in a law of the spirit which cancels the law of the letter, a kingdom which reaches prophetic ideals, while setting aside the crude details of their conception of the Messianic time" ("The Synoptic Gospels," The Expositor's Greek Testament, p. 104).

The insistence on the permanence of the Law has caused some interpreters to believe that verses 18 and 19 were added by some ultra-conservative Judaist writer who was offended by the recorded text. Against such concern, it is important to hear Paul's word to the Galatians: "Before this faith (Christianity) came we were held prisoner by the Law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the Law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law" (8:23-25).

The vitality of your commitment to the word of God revealed in Jesus Christ will influence others to want what you have. So let your salt and light guide them to accept that word of salvation that has captured your life in this world.

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