

Matthew 5b

Jesus now moved from explaining what a disciple *is* to what a disciple *must do*. The Greek term for “disciple” in the New Testament basically means “student” or “learner.” But a disciple is also a “follower,” someone who adheres completely to the teachings of another (like a rabbi).....making the rabbi his rule of life and conduct. True believers today are disciples of Christ.

How did Jesus describe His disciples (v. 13)? As “*the salt of the earth*.”

How are disciples like salt? They are to the world what salt is in everyday life. There were two purposes for salt in the first century—preserving food and enhancing flavor. His disciples are called to be “preservatives” in the world, slowing down the advancement of moral and spiritual decay (Psalm 14:3).

Salt was also used as a flavor enhancer. Jesus was instructing His disciples to “enhance” the flavor of life in this world—enriching its goodness and making God’s work stand out from the normal way of doing things. (Luke 6:35). Disciples, if they are true to their calling, make the earth a purer and more palatable place.

Once the salt loses its flavor, however, there is no way to restore the true, natural taste and it is good for nothing. Salt loses its flavor when it becomes diluted or contaminated. In the same way, Christians can lose their flavor (influence) when they blend in with the world.

The most obvious general characteristic of salt is that it is essentially different from the medium into which it is put. Its power lies precisely in this difference. So it is, says Jesus, with His disciples; their power in the world lies in their difference from it.¹

How else did Jesus describe His disciples (v. 14)? As “*the light of the world*.”

How are disciples like the light? A light is meant to shine and give direction. Individuals Jesus described in vv. 3-10 would obviously radiate light and point others to the proper path. Their influence would be evident, like a city on a hill or a lamp ... on its stand. A concealed lamp, placed under a bowl would be useless. Light-radiating people live so that others see their good deeds and give praise not to them but to their Father in heaven.²

Jesus calls Christians the light of the world. He likewise spoke of Himself as “*the light of the world*” (John 8:12; 12:46). The relationship between these two statements is that Jesus is the source of light; Christians are the reflection of His light. Their function is to shine for Him just as the moon reflects the glory of the sun.

The Christian is like a city that is set on a hill: it is elevated above its surroundings and it shines in the midst of darkness. Those whose lives exhibit the traits of Christ’s teaching cannot be hidden.

Salt and light balance each other. Salt is hidden: it works secretly and slowly. Light is seen: it works openly and quickly. The influence of Christian character is quiet and penetrating. The influence of Christian conduct is obvious and attracting. The two go together and reinforce each other.³

Jesus never challenged us to *become* salt or light. He simply said that we *are* – and we are either fulfilling or failing that given responsibility.

For what purpose did Jesus NOT come (v. 17)? Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to free the law from the way the Pharisees and Scribes had wrongly interpreted it. In other words, Jesus’ purpose was not to repeal the Word, dissolve it, or render it invalid. The Prophets will be fulfilled by Jesus and the Law will continue to accomplish the purpose for which it was given (Isaiah 55:10-11).

What does he mean by the Law and the Prophets? "The Law and the Prophets" was evidently the most common way that Jews referred to the entire Old Testament in Jesus' day (cf. 7:12; [Luke 16:16](#); [John 1:45](#); [Acts 13:15](#); [Romans 3:21](#)). He was not referring only to the Mosaic Law here.⁴

If Jesus didn't come to *abolish* the Law or the Prophets, for what purpose did He come (v. 17)? To *fulfill* them.

What does it mean to fulfill the Law? And the Prophets The predictions of the Prophets concerning the Messiah would be realized/fulfilled in Jesus; the holy standard of the Law would be perfectly upheld by Christ, the strict requirements personally obeyed, and the ceremonial observances finally and fully satisfied.

He died as a Substitute for guilty lawbreakers, even though He Himself was sinless. He did not wave the law aside; rather He met the full demands of the law by fulfilling its strict requirements in His life and in His death. Thus, the gospel does not overthrow the law; it upholds the law and shows how the law's demands have been fully satisfied by Christ's redemptive work.⁵

In living a perfect life, Jesus fulfilled the moral laws Christ came not to destroy the old religious system but to build upon it; He came to finish the Old Covenant and establish the New Covenant.

What does v. 18 mean? Jesus emphasized the eternal nature of the Word of God. God will preserve His Law until everything in it has happened as prophesied. It is as permanent as heaven and earth (cf. 24:35; [Isaiah 40:8](#)). Clearly, Jesus did not come to abolish the eternal Law.

There are only two things in our world that are eternal – The Word of God and the souls of men/women. It goes without saying therefore, that a certain amount of our time and effort should be devoted to/directed toward both.

What is the message of v. 19? The Jewish rabbis had graded the Old Testament commands according to which ones they believed were more authoritative and which ones less, i.e., the heavy and the light commands. Jesus corrected this view. He taught that all were equally authoritative. He warned His hearers against following their leaders' practice. Greatness in His kingdom depended on maintaining a high view of Scripture and treating all of it as the Word of God ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)).⁶

What is the key to entering the kingdom of Heaven (v. 20)? Jesus made clear the responsibility of the people. The righteousness they were currently seeking—that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law—was insufficient for entrance into the kingdom Jesus was offering ([Philippians 3:6-9](#)).

To gain entrance into the kingdom, our righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees who were content with religious ceremonies which gave them an outward, ritual cleansing, but which never changed their hearts. Jesus used hyperbole to drive home the truth that external righteousness without internal reality will not gain entrance into the kingdom. The only righteousness that God will accept is the perfection that He imputes to those who accept His Son as Savior ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)).⁷

The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on the Law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of conduct, but they neglected the major matter of character. Conduct flows out of character."⁸

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 159. .

² Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 29.

³ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 159.

⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁵ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1218.

⁶ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 166.

⁷ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1219.

⁸ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 167.