

No one had to tell you to be male or female. You didn't decide coming out of the womb. The doctors didn't ask your parents. There was no need for an instruction manual with all sorts of directions to make it happen. You just are. And because you are you can just be who you are. Females are females. Males are males. It comes naturally.

Being a Christian is not the same as being male or female. It's not something that happened naturally. But natural things happen when someone is a Christian. When those automatic things aren't happening it calls into question the Christianity of that person. Might it be that being a Christian in an antichristian world is too hard? It might be because of the reaction others give. Or it might be because of worry about the quality of Christianity we can accomplish. The reasons are many for why we are but we're not being what we are.

Last week we started reading the sermon of the Lord, the one delivered on the mountainside. He started with blessings all true believers receive. Now he transitions to the expectations for believers. True believers will be a blessing to others around them. We study the gospel for today and see that...

You are...so be
Salt and light to the world
Examples of Christ's righteousness

Salt is a preservative. In places with little fresh food during long winters salt was used to counteract decay in meats and vegetables so they would last through winter. Many foods today still include salt largely for its preservative quality. But it might surprise us that Jesus compares a Christian to salt. ***"You are the salt of the earth"*** is not addressed to the masses. He's not talking about good hardworking people of the land. Think in terms of preservative qualities. Speaking directly to Christians, directly to you Jesus says you are salt. You act as a preservative in this world to counteract decay.

Did you ever stop to think what unbelievers think when they see you praying in a restaurant? How they look over and wonder. Have you heard the whispering as you bow your head briefly before eating your lunch even at your desk? "Look at them," they might say, "Why do that here?" Prayer in restaurants, kindness to neighbors, or honesty in the workplace are just some of the ways you preserve this world as salt. It's nothing big and showy. But it rubs off. Unbelievers you don't know see your actions and feel compelled to act the same way. Some see your good deeds and stop their bad deeds. Without even knowing it you are salt.

Lighthouses are an essential navigational tool for ships moving along a coastline or coming back to shore. Their piercing light announces the location of rocks to stay away from. Their light shows the way to travel safely. Building a lighthouse only to cover up the light would be foolish. It wouldn't accomplish its intention. Jesus said about you, ***"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl."*** Putting a Christian's light into hiding goes against God's intention.

God wants others to see your good deeds, and they do. You are on display for the world around you. God wants you to know this so that when the crosses come and difficulty happens you won't be surprised. Christ is using you to reflect his light. You cry at funerals, but you don't cry like those who have no hope because you have hope in Jesus. That's reflecting Christ's light. You experience car trouble, but you don't walk into the auto parts store cursing. That's reflecting Christ's light. You suffer in the interoffice politics game, but you don't bad mouth your boss. That's reflecting Christ's light. You are a reflector of Christ's light and that's what you are doing.

Christ made you. You are salt and light, so be salt and light. And understand the world would much rather have you be sugar than salt. The world would much rather your light be dimmed so it's not so piercing in their lives. Resist the temptation to lose your saltiness. Stand out in the crowd. Don't go along with everything just to fit in. Don't hide the light of Jesus. Let people know you're a Christian who believes in Jesus. Do your good deeds in front of people to get noticed. Don't boast in yourself, but glorify God.

Notice Jesus didn't say you were becoming salt or light. You are, so be. This is what Christ made you to be. By the saving blood of Jesus your heart has been changed to have a preserving power. Jesus shines light on you so you can reflect it to the world. How do you continue to be what Christ made you? ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** ***"Your word is a lamp for my feet and light for my path."*** The answer is simple. Jesus is our light and his Word is our connection to him. To be godly people in a godless world we must be connected with God our Savior. Good works are not how we connect; they're a byproduct of that connection.

It is a great boost to our confidence knowing that Christ has already made us who we are. We don't have to wonder what he made us or if that transformation is complete. You are salt, so be salt. Be sprinkled into this world to preserve it from evil. You are light, so be light. Don't hide your good deeds in the darkness but let them be seen by everyone around. Jesus works through these good works to draw others to hear more. Hearing more is focused on getting people right with God. This happens by Christ. Because of your connection with Christ you are right with God. That means you're something else. You are righteous so be examples of Christ's righteousness in the world.

I've heard people categorize the entire Old Testament as old fashion. They say we don't need it anymore because we have Jesus and we have the gospel. Jesus would beg to differ. **"I have not come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."** Something perfect like God's Law is not something Jesus thought useless. The Law and Prophets, that is the Old Testament, still had purpose; just not a saving purpose. Many people already tried to save themselves by it and failed. Many had given up because they knew they never could. Others added to it thinking that would be what made God happy with them. Nothing worked though. That's because no one had ever come and kept it perfectly.

As you do your taxes this year one thing you'll be checking is the placement of the decimal points. Little things like how many zeros before the decimal point can make a big difference. Jesus said the same thing about the Old Testament. **"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."** To be right with God the Law needs to be kept down to the teeny tiniest little mark. Who can accomplish that? Certainly not any of them. Certainly not me. Certainly not you. There's no law we can keep, no payment we can make, nothing that we can offer to make God happy. What are we to do?

We cannot do anything, but God did something. **"Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."** Mercy means Jesus kept every single law on your behalf. He made sure that not one law was left undone. He dotted your "i"s and crossed your "t"s so that God considers you having accomplished the entire Law perfectly. Because no law is left undone, through Jesus we're forgiven of our sins and eternal life is ours as a gift. We offer nothing to God to be saved other than what he has already given us in Christ.

The righteousness you've received from Christ you now can carry forward as an example of Christ's righteousness to others. **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."** You have one purpose; to declare the praise of God. When you're down and out you rest secure in his arms. When prayers seem unanswered you are content with what you have. When you sacrifice to come to church, volunteer, or serve in some way you do it with joy. You're less selfish, more considerate, kind, loving, and helpful. You might say that people can see Jesus in you.

You are many things. Male, female, husband, wife, single, daughter, son, brother, sister, employee, employer, retired, unemployed, and all sorts of others. You are also Christian. That brings privileges, and also responsibilities. Christ made you to be something different from the rest. You don't go along with the crowds when you know something isn't pleasing to God. You're a person God put on a pedestal so people might see you for what you are. You are a Christian. You stand out as a Christian. You declare praise to God, you sing about his glory, you live for him. You are what he made you to be. You are, so be.