



# TRUTH IN LOVE

*Shedding Light on the Word of God*

## The Light of Love

**Matthew 5:14b**

*A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*

I love flying at night and looking out the window to watch the cities pass by on the ground below. It's even better flying over some part of the country I am familiar with, and trying to pick out streets and landmarks I know. It always amazes me how bright and well-lit some cities are from so high up in the air. I am told that certain cities can even be seen from space because of the vast number of lights. However, one light by itself is not very bright. When you put the average street light in the middle of the woods, and then fly over it from 35,000 feet, you won't be able to see it. But when you take thousands of street lights, and congregate them together in one place, they can be seen from miles away. Even when standing on the earth, you can see the night time glow of a city that is beyond the horizon.

So we all understand what Christ means when He says **A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.** While a lonely house in the forest might escape notice, a brightly lit city cannot be hidden from sight, especially when it is built on a hill. But that is the interesting thing about this statement. Do you know any cities that are built on a hill? I wracked my brain to think of one city in the United States that is built on a hill, and could think of none. Sure, some cities are built near hills, and they sometimes expand up hills, but very few modern cities had their beginnings up on a hill.

But in Israel, and other countries of the Ancient Near East, it was a common practice to build a city on a hill. Jerusalem is the most famous of such cities. It is harder to build a city on a hill, but much easier to defend. When invaders came, all the surrounding people would gather together within the safe confines of the city walls.

They also served as beacons at night for weary travelers, showing the way home. They had no mile markers or road signs like we do. Few people carried maps. But the nighttime traveler could know he was heading in the right direction by keeping the lights of the city in front of him.

After Christ informs His disciples that they are lights (5:14a), He brings up this imagery of a city on a hill. The symbolism we have just gone through would have been obvious to His disciples. But in likening them to the lights of a city, He wanted them to understand that a light is not very effective when it is alone. To provide the most safety, the most guidance, and make the most impact, the lights must all be shining together. This little light of mine is not much of a light unless it is shining with many, many others.

But that's the problem isn't it? Most of us have trouble shining at all, let alone shining in unison with others. Some hope nobody notices them, and so they dim their lights to avoid being seen. They don't shine very bright out of shame or fear. These are the ones Jesus will address in Matthew 5:15-16.

Then there are those who don't shine very bright because their wick is too short, or the glass that they shine through is too dirty. Those who do not shine bright must follow the instructions of Christ in Matthew 5:3-12. His words there are a natural "light brightener."

Among those who do shine brightly, there is often the temptation to be the only light, the best light, or the brightest light. So we go about snuffing out other lights, thinking we will appear brighter in the end. But such thinking is wrong. Lights are brightest in the company of other lights. It is these that Jesus primarily addresses with the imagery of a city on a hill. He doesn't just want us to shine individually; He wants us to shine together. But how?

Here comes the shocker. Do you know how the church can shine the brightest? Not by singing the loudest. Not by telling everyone we know about the light. Not even by showing non-lights how dim they are in comparison to us, and trying to persuade them to become lights also. No, the Bible tells us that believers shine brightest when they love one another (1 John 2:9-10). When Christians spend most of their time and energy pouring out loving service and care on one another, we reveal to the world a place of safety and security. We provide weary travelers with a beacon of hope in their darkened wanderings.

Let me put it bluntly. A church that does not love one another has no business doing evangelism. Why? Because the worst thing that can happen to a new believer is to be brought into a church where there is back-biting, gossip, discord, and jealousy. Someone once told me: "If it doesn't work at home, don't export it," and

that applies to the church also. Many new believers quickly burn out in church because they often encounter more darkness and hate within the church than they did without. But when believers love and care for other believers, their light shines bright, beckoning all to share in its warmth. Furthermore, believers who are cared for in such a way will be excited to tell others what they have experienced in the church. But believers who are regularly hurt and mistreated by other believers will not be too keen on inviting unbelievers to come share the pain.

Believers are lights for the world only when we genuinely love one another. Dr. Earl Radmacher puts it this way: “Your evangelism is not your sermons to the lost, but how you treat the saints... *We will never really be successful in carrying out the great commission until we truly implement the great commandment.*”<sup>1</sup> When we love one another, only then will we be a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

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<sup>1</sup> Earl D. Radmacher and Gary Derickson, *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, OR: Charis Press, 2001), 190.

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## Family and Ministry Update

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### From Jeremy:

Summer is winding down, and my plate is filling up, but that’s okay, because “my cup runneth over.” At work this month, I spent much of my time finding and training two new employees to help out with the ministry. We will hire a third person in September to help pick up the slack since I am dropping down to 24 hours per week for the school year. As a result of all this hiring and training, most of my editing work has been put on hold, especially the work on the commentary. But it looks like we are going to publish my article called “The Gospel is More Than ‘Faith Alone in Christ Alone’” in the next issue of the *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. So that’s exciting.

Classes began on August 29. I’m taking fifteen credits: Expository Preaching; Hebrew Language, Old Testament History II; Intertestamental History; Systematic Theology 3 (Angelology, Anthropology and Sin) and Systematic Theology 5 (Sanctification and Ecclesiology). I was able to learn the Hebrew alphabet before classes started, so that helped a little bit. I can sing the alphabet to the song of “Yankee Doodle” and Wendy thinks I should teach the girls. It would be humorous to hear them dancing around singing, “Aleph, Beth and Gimel, Daleth...”

Thank you as well for your prayerful and financial support, both of which are being used to help people around the world. I regularly receive emails from people across the country and around the world asking for input on certain Bible passages or for counsel regarding various personal issues.

### From Wendy:

It is now September and fall is upon us, for which we are grateful, because now it will only be 100° in Texas (Ha ha). Anyway, we have many things to be thankful for in our family. Taylor began a dance class this month, something she’s wanted to do for about a year now. The greatest part about it is she already loves it and each day asks, “When is the next ballet class? I can’t wait to wear my tap shoes.” Greater still is how this class came about. God allowed her to receive a full scholarship for the entire year! He must have known that Taylor wanted to dance. We are so thankful for His bountiful blessings. Meanwhile, Selah and Kahlea get to spend that hour having fun with me—an extra blessing for all of us.

Jeremy began school the last week of August. Please pray for him. He’s taking on a lot again in order to finish quickly. He is also scared that too much education will puff him up (1 Cor 8:1). Pray also for him to be able to study even with the noise of three girls around him.



*The girls prepared a great birthday for me.*