

Good Works To Be Seen of Men

Good Works to be Seen of Men (Mt. 5:16).

God Works not to be Seen of Men (Mt. 6:1).

The original Greek words, used in the two scriptural references above that are supposedly referring to the same subject of “works”, are completely different. This is due to the fact they are dealing with two unrelated subjects. Based on this fact alone, they cannot contradict themselves. In this study, the context and meaning of these two different words will be examined in order to prove there is no contradiction.

The first scripture is dealing with God’s people who are persecuted for their beliefs (cf. Mt. 5:10-12). It is erroneous to believe that the headings, which were inserted by translators of the various Bibles available today, represent a change in subject. Frequently, they do not and the subject is continuous. This is the case between Matthew 5:10, and Matthew 5:16. Therefore the admonition from Jesus Christ, that God’s people should continue to be a light or example of God’s way of life, even while they endure persecution, is the context of all six verses. It is not a coincidence that Christ used the words ‘light’ and ‘lamp’ in some of these texts because the same words are used elsewhere in the Bible to describe God’s law (cf. Prov. 6:23; Ps. 119:105),

You (God’s people) **are the light of the world** (live by God’s law). **A city** (i.e. spiritual Jerusalem) **set on a mountain** (symbolic of God’s government) **cannot be hidden.**¹⁵ **Neither do they light a lamp and put it under a measuring basket, but on a lampstand, and it shines upon all who are in the house.**¹⁶ **Let your light so shine before all men that they may see** (not hear) **your good works** (2041 Gk. *ergon*, work, deed, job, activity) **and give glory** (give credit to) **to your Father who is in the heavens** (Mt. 5:14-16; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

A light is seen but not heard and the word “light” is used to represent God’s law (Prov. 6:23). Therefore, the works that Christ mentioned in Matthew 5:16 refer to doing God’s business (SGD 2041) without fanfare, and teaching others by one’s personal example of obedience to God’s law and commandments, even under various forms of persecution. Christ set this example for his followers by faithfully obeying his heavenly Father even though he had to suffer both verbal and physical abuse (cf. Isa. 53:3),

And he (Christ) said to them (his parents), **“Why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that it is necessary for me to be in the things of my Father?”** (Lk. 2:49; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’¹⁹ **The Son of Man** (Christ) **came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners! Nevertheless, wisdom was proved righteous by her works** (Mt. 11:18-19a; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis).

“A city that is set on a hill,” mentioned by Christ in Matthew 5:14b, refers to New Jerusalem which is the location from which God’s law will emanate after this present evil world comes to an end (cf. Gal. 1:4),

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain (symbol of government) of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains (symbol of the governing authorities of the fallen host of heaven), and shall be exalted above the hills (symbol of the various forms of man’s government); and all nations shall flow to it.³ Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways (cf. Isa. 30:20), and we shall walk in His paths (cf. Mt. 7:13-14).’ **For out of Zion (New Jerusalem; cf. Rev. 21:1-5) shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem** (the city on a hill) (Isa. 2:2-3; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

So in Matthew 5:16, Jesus Christ was encouraging his followers to go about his Father’s business, as best as possible, even while suffering various forms of persecution in some cases (cf. Heb. 11:35-40). By doing this, God’s people glorify Him because it will become obvious, even to unbelievers, that His people trust Him completely and will not compromise by breaking His law and commandments (cf. Dan. 3:8-30). In fact, the commission that Christ gave members of the early church was to teach others by their example of obedience to God,

And Jesus approached and spoke to them (eleven of his disciples), saying, ‘**All authority was given to me in heaven and on earth;**¹⁹ **therefore, as you walk** (through personal example throughout your life), **make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into my name,**²⁰ **teaching them** (by word and deed, or directly if asked) **to keep everything, as much as I commanded you** (cf. Mt. 4:4); **and behold, I am with you all the days, until the full completion of this age**’ (Mt. 28:18-20, RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Unlike the instructions that Christ gave members of the early church in Matthew 5:16, the next scripture, that is used to claim that God contradicts Himself, has nothing to do with being a living example of obedience to God’s law. Instead, it has to do with those who like to make a big show when they do charitable acts,

Beware not to do your righteousness (1343 Gk. *dikaïosunē*, what is right, righteousness, legally just, correctness, uprightness, to do what is right before God) **in front of men to be seen by them; otherwise you will have no reward from your Father who is in the heavens.**² **Therefore, when you do charity, do not blow a trumpet before you, as indeed the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Amen, I (Christ) say to you they have received their reward.**³ **But when you do charity, do not let your left hand know what your right hand does,**⁴ **so that your charity might be hidden, and your Father who sees what is hidden will give to you** (Mt. 6:1-4; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Unfortunately the kind of hypocrisy that Christ commented about in Matthew 6:2 occurred in the early church after his death and resurrection, and the consequences were dire. The incident involved Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They donated money for God’s work but made it appear that they had given everything from the sale of a property they owned. Their motive was to look good and perhaps more righteous than others in the church,

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.² And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the

apostle's feet. ³ But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? ⁴ While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived (and his wife) this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.' ⁵ Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last (Ac. 5:1-5a; Ed. note in parenthesis; NKJV unless otherwise noted).

This tragic lesson confirms that God is aware of our motives and if we do charitable acts just to be recognized by men, we will be sadly disappointed. In the example of Ananias and his wife, because they added lying to their hypocrisy, they were both judged and killed for their sin,

If you (God's people) are reproached (insulted or reviled) for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (1Pet. 4:14a; cf. Mt. 5:10-16; Ed. notes in parentheses).

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a busybody (meddler) in other people's matters (1Pet. 4:15; Ed. note in parenthesis).

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1Pet. 4:17; emphasis added).

It is evident that God was not only displeased with the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira, but He also judged them according to His law and sentenced them to death for breaking one of His commandments (cf. Ex. 20:15-16; 1Jn. 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

In conclusion, Matthew 5:16 is dealing with God's people properly representing Him by their example of faithfully obeying His every word, despite persecutions from men (Mt. 4:4). In Matthew 6:1, God is making it plain that charitable deeds are to be done discreetly and not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement before men. So there is no contradiction between these two scriptural examples. Instead, they are dealing with completely different subjects.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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