

How Your Faith Can Change the World

(Article 15: *The Christian and the Social Order*)

***“The world would have been rotten long ago
but for the presence of the Holy Spirit in Christians.” - Vance Havner***

Article 15: The Christian and the Social Order¹ - “All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.”

Exodus 20:3-17; Leviticus 6:2-5; Deuteronomy 10:12; 27:17; Psalm 101:5; Micah 6:8; Zechariah 8:16; Matthew 5:13-16,43-48; 22:36-40; 25:35; Mark 1:29-34; 2:3ff.; 10:21; Luke 4:18-21; 10:27-37; 20:25; John 15:12; 17:15; Romans 12-14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 6:1-7; 7:20-24; 10:23-11:1; Galatians 3:26-28; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; Philemon; James 1:27; 2:8.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NKJV)

¹³ ***“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.***

¹⁴ ***“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.***

¹⁵ ***Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.***

¹⁶ ***Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.***

I. You are the Salt of the Earth

1) Salt Seasons - Colossians 4:6 - Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

2) Salt Preserves - Salt in that day prevented decay; it restrained corruption.

¹ From the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000>.

3) Salt Heals - In Bible times, when little babies were born, they would give that baby a saline bath. They would salt the baby with salt, that is, to hold down infection.

4) Salt Burns and Irritates - Have you ever gotten a little ulcer in your mouth and then eaten something salty? Have you ever gotten a cut on your hand, and then got salt in it?

5) Salt Penetrates - You can take just a pinch of salt, and put it into a gallon of water, and it will permeate that entire gallon of water.

6) Salt Causes Thirst - John Wesley saw in the Moravians a peace and calmness as they were crossing through the storms in the Atlantic – a peace he knew he himself didn't have. It made Wesley thirsty for what they had. Consequently, he went to their Bible studies and was gloriously changed.

II. You are the Light of the World

1) Don't Hide Your Light – Don't hide it under a Bushel. You are the light of the world – [In the Greek, the "you" is emphatic. "You [emphatic: you alone] are the light of the world [and no one else!]."

2) Reflective Light – Eph. 5:8 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And His light shines in us and then His light shines through us.

3) Collective Light – A City on a Hill - We shine brightest when we shine together.

5 Historic Models of Christians and the Social Order²:

1) **Some Christians withdraw from the social order.** The first monks emerged in the deserts of Egypt. Desiring to remain unstained by the worldly social order, these hermitic monks found that removal from the social order did not equal personal purity. In Western Europe, selective Christians applied the withdrawal strategy through the means of gathered communities (monasteries and convents).

2) **Some Christians separate Christian discipleship and engagement with the social order.** Descendents of the Anabaptist tradition, such as Amish and Mennonites, avoid engagement with the social order. For instance, a faithful Mennonite will not serve in public office.

3) **Some Christians elevated the "Social Gospel,"** propagated by Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch. Respected Baptist theologian Millard Erickson defines the liberal Protestant Social Gospel as follows: *"a tendency to replace the gospel of regeneration with an emphasis on transformation of society through alteration of its structures."*

4) **Some Christians united the Christian faith and the social order.** For much of European history, Christendom, an impure union of society and Christianity, dominated culture.

5) **For the most part, Baptists favored a model of redemptive-prophetic witness to the culture.** Through the transformation of individuals through faith in Christ, the social order can be both confronted and redeemed. Full redemption, of course, must await the return of Christ and the full establishment of His Kingdom.

3 Practical Applications³:

- 1) Rejecting models #1-4, Christians should see themselves making an impact on the social order for Christ.
- 2) Rejecting the mere goal of societal transformation, prioritize individual transformation through the gospel.
- 3) Christians should never shy away from declaring, explaining, and opposing social sins as expressed in the Bible, including those specifically listed in this article.

² Adapted from articles written by Daniel Akin, Russell Moore and Mark Rathel

³ Ibid.