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# Article XV. The Christian and the Social Order

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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; 1Corinthians 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.*

(Sermon Title)

Exodus 20:3-17

It never occurred to me that someone might want to name a hurricane "Hammack." While I am willing to accept that, I am glad I don't have to live up to it! The assignments for preaching this semester were thought out by Dr. Kinchen. He wished the faculty and administration to preach through the Baptist Faith and Message. My assignment is *The Christian and the Social Order*. As I read the materials associated with that particular document, and as I thought about what the Scriptures had to say, it occurred to me that the first thing that had to happen was that we had to establish our own personal righteousness. Then we would be in a position to deal with the issues of witness, and finally we would be placed in the position where we could make a contribution to society. By way of introduction let me share what the *Baptist Faith and Message* says.

**XV. The Christian and the Social Order**

All Christians are under obligation 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.

If we are to make an impact on society, Scripture demands that we establish our personal righteousness. Now the Old Testament addresses this in the book of Exodus chapter 20, beginning with verse 3—let us read that if we may. My translation says:

*You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Verse 12, Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

When I left the house this morning, I saw this version of the Ten Commandments hanging on the wall. It is a free translation of Exodus 20 verses 3 through 17 entitled “The Cajun Ten Commandments”.

1. Jus be one God in t Heaven!

2. Don't have no idols.
3. Don't be cussin' nobody.
4. Brought yo-self to church.
5. Listen to you maw-maw an' paw-paw.
6. Don't be kilt nobody.
7. Don't sleep wit yo brother's wife.
8. Don't go took nothin'.
9. Always told da troot.
10. Don't yo wish fo yo' neighbor's pirogue

God has standards. You and I are required to meet those standards. The first four of those standards have to do with your relationship to Him and my relationship to Him. You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make any idols or worship them, you shall not take the Lord's name in vain, remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Now it would be all right if you and I were held accountable for these things only by God who knows our hearts--what we are and how we live. But other folks take a look at how we live, and what we are, and they see whether or not we live up to the standard that God has placed on us. You see, what the Scripture is saying to us is if we are going to make an impact on the world, if we are ever going to be able to do anything for or in our society to change it for the good, we must work at establishing our own personal righteousness.

We live in a small town. I feel good about who we are as a college and how we relate to this small town and this society until I run into representatives of the police department. The police are always gleefully ready to tell me where they saw you. Now, am I going to follow you around to see where you go? Am I going to conduct a full scale investigation to establish your quality of conduct? No, we simply don't have time for that. But the world knows and sees and judges—and you and I are obligated to establish our own personal righteousness. Let us talk about going to church on Sunday. If people drive by our dormitories, if people drive by our apartments and they see all these cars at home, they ask me on Monday morning "Do those folks go to church that go to school over there? Do they really?" God has a standard for man and while God does hold you responsible for it, your lost neighbor holds you to an even higher criterion than God does in terms of expectation of behavior and living. When our relationship to man is judged in terms of God's requirements, the world takes and multiplies that judgment—honor thy father and mother, do not commit murder, do not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, and thou shalt not covet your neighbor's wife, or house or servants.

I received a phone call the other day. It referred to the behavior of a student--twenty two years ago! The world does not forget. The world insists that you and I establish our righteousness according to the rules God has laid down, and then we will be in a position to say something to them. Micah 6:8 puts it like this: *He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?* That's the summary. You see He gave us the Ten Commandments and Jesus came along and He condensed them into two: Love the Lord thy God with all your heart, soul, mind and body and then love your neighbor as yourself.

Folks, if you do not establish your own personal righteousness by the rules God lays down, all the work at learning what happens to the individual in relationship to God's rules is a waste of time. All the hard work put into studying, all the hard work establishing your knowledge of the Bible, goes out the window if you lose your influence through a lack of righteousness. Yes, God's Scriptures, demand the establishment of a personal righteousness. Those same Scriptures demand those Christians give personal witness through a godly lifestyle. Go to Matthew chapter 5, you'll find this word. In verse 13 it says:

*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does a man light a lamp and put it under a peck measure, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Yes, God expects us to live by His commandments and thereby establish our own personal righteousness and then, go and give personal witness through the godly lifestyle we live. Our role as Christians is to be the salt of the Earth. Now when you think in terms of what salt does, you have to admit to me that one function of salt is to flavor food. Yes, you are to give flavor to the world, making it a tastier, better place to live. But, you also have to function as salt does in terms of preservation. Salt is used to preserve food. You are used to preserve the world. And unless you and I engage in those activities in a way that it will impact the world then world is not going to be preserved. It is going to destroy itself. God speaks to us and He says you are literally the light of the world. And whether you like it or not, once you become a Christian, you are like a city on a hill. You cannot be hidden. You are like a lamp in a lampstand. People light the lamp and they put it up so it will light the house, they do not tuck it under a bushel. You and I are to take our Christian social responsibilities seriously because people expect us to take that responsibility seriously. You see we are not only judged by our own heart and by God, we are always severely judged by the world. The world is not going to hear a thing we have to say unless they see in our lives what they have been taught to expect to see there.

Scripture teaches us, first of all, to establish our personal righteousness using the Ten Commandments as a standard. Secondly, the Scriptures teach us that you and I are responsible for giving testimony to what God expects of us and of others. Unless we can give that testimony based on our personal righteousness, it is ineffective. And it is only when we have reached the point where we have established that personal righteousness and we have given testimony to God's love and God's grace and God's forgiveness that we are in a position to have any impact on society at all. Turn with me to Luke chapter 4. In Luke 4:18 Jesus says: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.* That my friend, is a mandate from Jesus to improve the world, to make society a better place.

Now the New Testament reveals several specific areas of social activity for which you and I hold responsibility. First of all, we are to oppose racism, greed, selfishness, vice, sexual immorality, and other forms of sin. We do this not only to improve society, but to give witness to the grace of God. Now, you probably watch enough television to have seen the television show entitled Greed. In fact, if you go through the television schedule channel by channel, you are going to find more people interested in winning money than anything else. In our day, driven by material ambition and a pervasive consumer culture, greed becomes a constant temptation. Why do you think people go and gamble in the gambling houses? They want something for nothing. They think if they go there and invest a pittance, they will come away millionaires. It seldom works out that way because in the process of doing that, we lose all sense of proportion. We often lose everything we've got. Christian Stewardship requires us to recognize material goods belong to God, and calls upon us to build a just and equitable society. Now I want you to know, in this passage of Scripture, Jesus not only felt obligated to preach the Gospel, He felt obligated to meet specific human needs. If Jesus felt obligated to meet specific human needs, Christians also bear responsibility. You and I, the church, are called upon to minister to the abused, the sick, the poor and, yes, the outcast. If you follow Jesus' career, you will find He had a special place in His heart for the people who were rejected by society. In the past, society was most evil when it came to relating to the helpless. It was not uncommon for children to be killed if they were imperfect. It was not uncommon to take someone who did not have full control of their faculties and have them tossed into a jail and left for the rest of their lives. As the church began to grow, it established asylums, established hospitals, orphanages, schools and the like. Now today churches do the same things. For the most part, they have gotten out of the hospital business, but they have developed local assistance programs, they have developed disaster relief programs, and everybody participates. If you want to know why that disaster relief van pulls up behind Hurricane Hammack, category five, it's because you and I have a responsibility of meeting people's needs. You are also called upon to look after the defenseless. The New Testament focuses on helping the widows and the orphans, the defenseless of that culture. Our culture is called upon to oppose abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, human cloning, and technology and research that have some kind of involvement with the human embryo. All of those people cannot do anything for themselves. We are obligated to make

certain that we protect them as best we can. Our objective should be to protect the unborn, the aged, the sick, and yes, the outcast of society.

There is another thing here. Our church has finally addressed the issues of racism. We were a little late---but we saw the light. The Book of Revelation paints a picture of the church in which believers are gathered from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. In Revelation 5:9 you will find these words: *And they sang a new song, saying, Worthy are Thou to take the book and to break its seals; for Thou were slain, and purchased for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.* We are not quite a full generation away from severe racism in Southern Baptist churches. Folks, I didn't get the message until I became a graduate student. I'd like to tell you that it was a fine Baptist minister, a godly deacon, or my mother or someone like that that taught me what it meant to be a racist and see the evil of my ways. None of those people did that. I received my lesson in racial relations from my major professor at Tulane University. A Baptist drop out—not sure he was a Christian—but he made the Montgomery March. He knew what it meant to love people and give them a chance. He committed himself to making certain that everybody around him was treated equitably. And he finally got to me. And as a result of that, I've been able to help some others along the way. I don't know where you are in terms of that particular issue, but I will tell you this: that racism is not something that you and I should be engaged in as Christians. We are called upon to fight it with every fiber of our being. But I must move on.

Another issue that we must deal with as Christians and certainly here at *The Baptist College of Florida* is the issue of sexual immorality. This is a matter of severe difficulty for us today. The sexual revolution has become institutionalized and has been perpetuated through social habits and laws and customs. If we adopt those things we throw out the premise of marriage and the model of sexual purity. Here is what the Bible says about sexual purity. Hebrews 13:4 says this--*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.* I know sexuality is abused by commerce, it is the focus of the entertainment industry; and quite honestly it has become the focus of everyday life. If you turn on the television, you are assaulted by it. If you bring up the computer, the temptation is there. Hear this: we live in a pornographic society, we celebrate the erotic at the expense of biblical sexuality and marriage, and it is tearing us apart. It is destroying us. Because once this gets into our hearts and souls there is very little that can pull it out except the blood and forgiveness of Jesus. If I had one word of advice for you, as Christian young men and women, I would say to you flee from this! You don't need that. God has picked out a mate for you and he wants you to preserve yourself for that mate. In His time and in His choosing those things will come to pass that you so eagerly anticipate.

Another great sin and even greater challenge is to speak against the sin of homosexuality. Sin can be forgiven; lives can be transformed through the grace and mercy of our Lord. You and I are called upon to love these people but also lovingly explain what God's requirements are. It is not an easy task, but the Bible is clear. Homosexuality is a sin. Pornography is a sin. Adultery is a sin. Fornication is a sin.

You can make all the excuses you wish, but sin is sin and must be faced. But God can't forgive until we are willing to claim it, confess it, and let Him deal with it. Some of you have already surmised that I am the chief disciplinary officer of the college. Nothing breaks my heart more than having to send one of you home for something like that, and I don't want to do it. But hear me. If you let the devil get control of your heart and you engage in this kind of activity, I won't have any choice. You don't want to bear that burden. It shouldn't be imposed on your mate or your girlfriend or your boy friend. That kind of activity, that kind of burden should not in any way be associated with God's people or God's church. And it takes a long time to come back. Fellows, just remember that you bear a heavy responsibility. If you are going to be successful preachers, if you're going to be successful servants of God, you must live by the Book. If you refuse to live by the Book, you can destroy your call and usefulness to God. Only those individuals who are willing to live pure lives will be able to bring industry and government and society under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth and brotherly love.

God is asking us to make certain our lives before Him are pure and then He says to you and me to give testimony to God's love and God's forgiveness; then you can make an impact on human society. Unless you do that, you not only will make no impact on human society but you will do grave harm to the Christian church. Let us pray together.

Heavenly Father, we ask that you would open our hearts and lives to your love. Help us to seek out and to live by your requirements. Help us to give testimony to your love and forgiveness. Help us to take those opportunities we have and give the world a chance to be saved. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Dr. R.C. Hammack - Senior Vice President