

Why Should a Believer be Involved in the Civil Arena?

Matthew 5: ¹³*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.* ¹⁴*You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.* ¹⁶*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

Salt: In Exodus, Ezekiel, and Kings, salt was presented as a purifying agent. But the most common use of salt back then was as a preservative. What Jesus was saying here is that our role as His followers in the culture is to be a purifying agent in society and to preserve the godly principles that govern the affairs of God's creation. Interestingly, Jesus goes on to say that *"if the salt loses its saltiness... it is no longer good for anything."* Obviously, as the Creator, He knew that salt itself, Sodium Chloride, is extremely stable and cannot actually lose its flavor, unless dishonest merchants performed the common practice of mixing it with cheaper substances in order to keep the price competitive. Hence our purifying and preserving characteristics as believers are diluted to ineffectiveness if we attempt to mix His values and principles with the values and principles of an ungodly world.

Light: One of the common characteristics of darkness, the absence of light, is the abundance of evil that abounds. The propensity for bad things to happen escalates dramatically after dark. Like turning on a lamp that causes bugs to flee, light dispels evil. By being light in a dark world, we expose the ways of wickedness and uphold the standards of righteousness.

Biblical Examples: Elijah was a regular fixture in the King Ahab's court. Samuel worked hand in hand with King Saul, as did Nathan and Gad with King David. And the kings and officials certainly knew who Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were. Moses, Joseph, Nehemiah, Esther... These men and women were salt and light – as citizens of the Kingdom of God, they felt compelled to bring God's standards of righteous to bear upon the kingdoms of this world. Then in the New Testament, Jesus Himself engaged the Pharisees and Lawmakers regularly. And when the Romans tried and executed Him, He was no stranger to them. Peter was also engaged, as well as Paul... all the way to Rome, the head of the Empire.

Historical Examples: While many of the churches in Germany aligned themselves with Hitler's goose-stepping Nazis and looked the other way regarding all the atrocities of the Holocaust, brave champions like the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer challenged the tide of anti-Semitism, led a resistance, and changed history! And over a hundred years before Bonhoeffer was William Wilberforce. A prominent British politician, he could have taken life easy. But his faith drove him to become the leader of the movement to abolish the lucrative slave trade in England. Although most of the churches in England nodded with approval toward the horrible slave trade, his 20-year campaign exposing the cruel and inhumane conditions of slavery paid off, and eventually led to the emancipation of millions of souls throughout the entire British Empire.

America's History: Samuel Adams, the "Father of the American Revolution" who not only signed the Declaration of Independence, but also negotiated the peace treaty with Great Britain, was once asked who was credited for influencing the ideas of American values and independence. Without hesitation, he declared that Rev. Jonathan Mayhew and Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper were the two "most conspicuous, the most ardent, and influential in the awakening and revival of American principles and feelings that led to our independence." But they were not alone. Other prominent ministers who influenced the founding principles of America were Rev. George Whitefield, Rev. James Caldwell, and the two Muhlenburg brothers, both prominent pastors of their day. Why were these Christian leaders so influential? Because of the 250 Founding Fathers that were most involved in shaping our original American government, almost all of them attended church and their thinking was shaped by the relevant preaching on the current issues at hand. Prior to the drafting of the Constitution, sermons were preached and published about the separation of powers, checks and balances, capital punishment, tax exemption for churches, and republicanism. In fact, none of the 27 issues brought to light in the Declaration of Independence were left uncovered from the pulpits of that day. The concepts of the US Constitution were original and unique to America; they were not borrowed from the other constitutions of other countries at the time. They were principles of Scripture that had never before been embodied in written laws.