

# I can't change anything!

That is a common exclamation from good people who are faced with injustice in society and choose to do nothing at all. It is wrong. It is an excuse. It is unbiblical.

Now, I have written elsewhere that Christians do not get involved with direct action, protests against the government, lobbying, and various other political measures. Neither do they act with any kind of violence or rebel against the government. So what is left you say? This is what I want to discuss in this paper because hardly anybody deals with it and yet we are all accountable on the Day of Judgment in this matter. It is a question of testimony and witness to angels that few understand.

## The spiritual witness

Firstly, I want to show you that Paul uses the matter of the witness to angels to make a point regarding certain choices in the church. Whatever your view of head-coverings (and my position is very traditional and unpopular on this, see my paper) Paul bases part of his command on the presence of angels in the church.

For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels. 1 Cor 11:10

He demanded certain action by women in the church meeting because the wrong choice offended angels. That sealed the matter for him.

This is very important because it means that our spiritual witness is very important, whatever happens in the world. Indeed, God lays a great stress on the matter of testimony in Scripture. You may have no influence in your life whatsoever, as far as the world goes, but your testimony (even if no one sees it) is crucial – angels are looking on. What you choose to think, say and do has eternal reverberations, even if no one sees it. Indeed, many obscure, faithful, praying saints will be celebrated on the Day of Judgment and set apart for high honours, even though nobody every heard of them on earth. On the contrary, many noble, famous preachers on earth will be left outside the door.

So, what we do as individuals is always under inspection, not only by God for moral appraisal but by angels who long to see the outworking of God's covenant in men. Angels look at us to see the glory of God in material action.

Now this is especially true in corporate gatherings.

To make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Eph 3:9-11

The fellowship of the mystery, that is the divine plan to unite men with God in Christ, has the purpose of displaying God's character and wisdom to angels (principalities and powers). In other words, angels look on the gathered church to see a display of the wisdom of God at work in men united with Christ.

Now angels have always been devoted to observing and serving God in heaven, being his heavenly ministers. They love seeing God glorified. Now that the church is united to Christ as a new creature, following the baptism into Christ by the Spirit, angels long to look at the material expression of the wisdom of God in mere men. They look on the church in action and rejoice to see how God's redemption in Christ is worked out in the material realm.

What the church does has an impact of heavenly beings, for good or bad. This is part of the church's testimony.

The church's prime witness is to God, to please him faithfully. There is also a testimony to fallen angels so that God can delight in his work (as he did with Job after Satan's complaint). But Scripture shows that, commonly, the church is a testimony to the gaze of angels, who then glorify God.

So, we have established that there is an important testimony to angels in the church and that this work is important whether the world sees it or not. The first importance in testimony is spiritual and not material.

### **So what determines what you do?**

In a word – Scripture. We learn from God's word what we are to do in any given situation. God's word shows us this in law, instruction, examples in history, the behaviour of the prophets, the behaviour of the apostles and, most importantly, the behaviour of Christ. From all these sources we can learn what to do when faced with any situation.

Thus faced with injustice, we should learn what God's word says to do about it.

So, for example, when faced with a situation that the government afflicts the poor, weak and vulnerable in society; what do we do? Well, we do not campaign aggressively. We do not revolt. We do not engage in direct action or street protests. We bear witness within our sphere of influence, whatever that may be. We could also act as good citizens and draw our concerns to the attention of our MP in a reasonable manner, such as a well-informed letter.

The important matter is the witness. Our position must be crystal clear and it must represent God as illustrated in his word. People should be able to look at us and see the reaction of God on an issue. Thus in certain circumstances we should be angry because God is angry. This is not an impassioned frenzy of behaviour but a calm expression of indignation at the offending matter when being asked our opinion.

For example, in the case of Britain being taken into an illegal war against Iraq, on trumped up reasons, based upon lies by our PM in Parliament and which caused over a million deaths, but which profited American munitions corporations, we should express anger when asked about it – because God is angry about it.

However, in many cases there is no need for righteous anger but for a clear presentation of the truth, even if it means a condemnation of policy.

Regarding the case of the ill-treatment of the poor and needy by government measures, this requires examination of what Scripture says. Our testimony must be directed by what God's laws states. It will be illustrated by how the prophets condemned Jewish kings for oppression of the poor. It will consider didactic passages, which show how we are to react. It will be in obedience to straight forward commands, such as 'Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy,' (Prov 31:9).

The essence of our behaviour will be to do what is right; only by doing this can we be righteous.

### **But isn't God sovereign?**

Of course he is. God has engineered all that goes on in the nations throughout history. God controls the heart of kings and even David Cameron. This is why we do not rebel or take direct action; the situation has been allowed by God and we do not want to rebel against him.

However, that does not alter the command that we should be righteous and being righteous means that we must take a stand for truth and bear a good testimony.

Firstly, this means that people must be able to look at us and see what the reaction of God is to a matter. Our job is to testify to him, to represent him. When Jesus called Herod a fox, that was a testimony to what God thought about his wicked actions. No one was in any doubt what Jesus felt about the political intrigue, and the hedonistic excesses of Herod's court; to say nothing of killing the last true OT prophet.

So we must represent the truth. Afflicting the poor and making the sick suffer more is something that we cannot be silent about, even though God is in control of the politicians that did it, we must declare that it is sinful and worthy of judgment.

Secondly, the example set for us by godly men and prophets through the OT shows us that condemning the oppression of the poor by rulers is something required by God and we must speak up within our sphere of influence. For a prophet like Amos that meant leaving his husbandry and condemning the court in person. For us it is usually something a bit smaller in the world, but remember that angels are watching us. God actually raised up Amos to be a prophet of condemnation of Israel's oppressive elite in a temporary short prophetic ministry. The oppression of the poor caused God to change Amos' profession for a time and authorise him to speak divine condemnation.

This brings us to the third reason; we must make a true testimony to the angels. When faced with oppression in front of us, we must make a public declaration (even if it is to a small circle) so that angels see that the condemnation of God in heaven is being worked out in his people on earth. They rejoice when our judgment is in tune with God's. Remember the command, 'open your mouth ... and plead the case of the poor'.

Now we do not get involved with all the intractable political intrigues around a given situation; we simply stick to basic facts about injustice. Amos didn't analyse the intricate political details of oppression; he didn't state the pros and cons of the situation;<sup>1</sup> he just issued condemnation and warning. Thus condemning welfare cuts that afflict genuinely disabled people is not a general comment upon the pros and cons of the whole benefit system or a general statement about what it means to be poor and how to get out of it. We stick to simple facts – it is wicked to afflict the genuinely sick when they can do nothing about it and when they will suffer severely as a result. This angers God and it is unjust oppression. We testify to that straightforward fact. This has nothing to do with benefit fraud or scroungers or even a welfare society; it is a particular statement of condemnation about hurting the genuinely poor and weak.

### **The sin of doing and saying nothing**

Let us be clear; sins of omission are still sins. Provision was made for such sins in the Mosaic Law and the prophets condemned many examples of sins of omission in Israel; particularly neglect of true divine worship, neglect of the poor and neglect of the year of Jubilee. We sin if we do not do something that we ought to do.

Righteousness is doing right and failing to do right is as unrighteous as doing wrong. We have no choice in this matter. In order to maintain a good testimony, to angels and men, we have to take a stand on contemporary modern issues. People need to see what God thinks about any current issue and they find out by examining us. Christians are meant to be a weathervane to point to what God thinks and expects.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance he did not isolate the genuinely poor and needy as compared to the poor who had become poor by their own sinfulness. He condemned the action of the court in afflicting all the poor.

Far too many Christians have their ethics determined by the propaganda they read in the papers and the media outlets, despite much of this being lies or being deliberately engineered. Every believer would be better off not reading a newspaper at all in my opinion. It is God's word alone that must form our opinions on all matters. This then requires action: we think through a matter, we come to a considered Biblical opinion; we then speak that out. If necessary, we also may take some action, such as helping a neighbour who is poor or sick. People must see God in us. This is having a good testimony and angels rejoice to see it. If we have no opinion and say / do nothing, we sin.

Thus to say, '*there is no point regarding this matter because I cannot change anything; there is nothing I can do*', is wrong. Yes there is something you can do; you can, at the very least, be a good testimony to God and reflect his views to others.

### **Practical advice on what to actually do**

#### *Love your neighbour as yourself*

The chief way of maintaining a good testimony is what we actually do, as well as what we say. It is one thing to represent God and condemn evil; it is another to represent God and do good. I have written on this many times. It is especially important that the local church is committed to acts of love within the local community.<sup>2</sup> A church that does no local good works is pointless and is rejected by the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

Example: a small church that I know well found that a local man had cancer and had no local relatives or friends. On top of that administration errors resulted in his meagre benefits being stopped. At one point he was found shivering in bed with no heat and no food. This church supported this man in various ways. One family continually supplied him with hot meals brought to his door. The church also helped him financially as required. This testimony showed that man genuine Christianity in action. To him, when Christianity is ever discussed, he will associate it with acts of practical charity. This is how we prepare for the Gospel. Those receiving our love will better receive our message.

Everybody, instead of complaining that they cannot change anything, can actually change someone's life by doing good to them. If you look for opportunities locally you will find ways of doing good in your community, even if it is only by giving money.

At this point I should remind readers that, contrary to what almost every church practises, the giving of the local church is primarily to relieving the plight of the poor and needy.

#### *Be a good citizen*

This means to take the opportunities provided by the current political protocols.<sup>4</sup> Your local MP is supposed to be the true representative of your constituency. Therefore, it is entirely right and proper for you to write to him or visit his clinic to remonstrate on behalf of the poor and needy in society. If no one interacts with their MP for the good of the community, how can he represent local feelings?

Before you ask, yes I have done this. I recently wrote to Sir Peter Bottomley in a nine-page letter, demonstrating how the government's policies had damaged the poor and the local infrastructure and how this was counter-productive in economic terms. This was before the current swingeing benefit cuts in the Welfare Reform Bill. I gave details and sources of examples of this damage and told him that this was contrary to God's law and that his

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<sup>2</sup> Rm 13:3, 'do what is good'. Eph 2:10, 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.'

<sup>3</sup> Rev 3:15-16, 'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.'

<sup>4</sup> Paul saw nothing wrong with taking advantage of his Roman citizenship, despite teaching that he was a citizen of a heavenly kingdom.

party (and he) were guilty before God and would have to give an account. He telephoned me on receipt and had a conversation with me about the matter and offered a follow up consultation (which I am now considering).

### **The Day of Judgment**

We will all be judged on this day; every secret thought, let alone action, will be published for all to see and will be evaluated by God.<sup>5</sup> Some Christians think that believers will escape divine judgement; that is a mistake. We will escape condemnation but we will still be judged for good or evil at the tribunal seat of Christ to see how faithful we were in service.<sup>6</sup>

Since this is the case, and since God demands pleading the case of the poor, we should take every opportunity to do good to those in society who are in need and champion their cause. For every cup of cold water we give to a thirsty person in the name of Christ, we will be rewarded on the Last Day.<sup>7</sup> How much more if we feed them, provide for them, care for them, alleviate their suffering, do work for them etc. While the government passes laws that worsen the conditions of the needy, the church should be a shining light striving to help them. Such work receives rewards.<sup>8</sup>

However, if we did nothing; if we cared little; if we never condemned injustice and oppression, we will suffer loss on the Day of Judgment and during our lives failed to be a testimony for God.

### **Conclusion**

The church is not here to change the world; the poor will always be with us and the world will become worse and worse. A global golden age is a mistake made by modern triumphal postmillennialists.<sup>9</sup> However, the church is called to change individuals within the local sphere of influence. The chief way this is done is by evangelism; people are changed when they are converted to God; but even small acts of charity can turn a person's life around and give them a fresh start.

Thus it is foolish to look at global, or even national events and say, 'I can't change anything', and use this as an excuse to do nothing at all. There is much that we can do.

We are first called to represent God and maintain a good testimony by declaring what is good and what is evil. When the poor are oppressed we are to condemn that as iniquitous. This is first to maintain a good testimony to God, then to witness to men, but also to be a good example to angels looking on. Subsequent to that we must express love in practical ways to our neighbour, alleviating what human suffering we can in our sphere of influence.

**Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Gal 6:10**

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<sup>5</sup> Matt 12:36, 'But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment.'

<sup>6</sup> Rom 14:10, 'we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.' 2 Cor 5:10, 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.'

<sup>7</sup> Matt 10:42; Mk 9:41.

<sup>8</sup> Gal 6:9, 'And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.'

<sup>9</sup> Notably, radical Charismatics.