

## **WHY DID JESUS SEVERELY REPROVE PETER IN MATTHEW 16:21-23?**

The answer to the above question, on one level, is simple and straightforward. It is found in the second half of v23: “for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” How could Peter become guilty of such a serious misunderstanding of God’s purpose, when he had just offered a profession of faith in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah (v16), in harmony with that purpose? That answer is found in the underlying source of Peter’s profession, in stark contrast to his error in judgment. God was enabling Peter to not only realize but proclaim Christ for who He truly was (v17). On the other hand, it was the devil (v23a), who was exerting his evil influence upon Peter in motivating his misguided objection to the redemptive plan of God, expressed by Jesus in v21. Peter’s profession of faith, and others like it, would be foundational to the building of Christ’s church (v18). But now, under the devil’s persuasive manipulation, he becomes resistant to the fulfillment of that plan, which could only occur by means of our Savior’s death and resurrection.

What was true of Peter, can also become true of us. As followers of Jesus, we must always rely upon God’s enablement while being wary of Satan’s attempts at leading us astray (1 Peter 5:6-11). For Peter, as well as each of us, divine enablement and demonic influence occur in our thought process. Peter’s profession of faith had its source in divine revelation, while his error in judgment was based on a popular trend, contemporary with his generation. As described by our Lord in v23, his mind was set on the interests of men rather than the purposes of God. To be specific, Peter’s expectation for Israel’s Messiah was that of a conquering king who would set God’s people free from the oppression of Rome. Instead, Jesus Christ, in His first advent, came as a suffering Savior who would die on a cross to pay the penalty of sin for the entire world. No wonder Peter could not handle this truth when it was given to him so clearly by Christ in v21.

Is there a parallel to be found in this current version of our American Evangelical Christian faith? In every generation, some Christians will always be overly preoccupied with the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17). But our present-day obsession with political activism occupies a unique place in Church history. It stands in direct violation of the Great Commission mandate given by our Lord in Matthew 28:18-20. Nowhere in the historical narrative of Acts, or the teaching contained in the New Testament epistles, do we have an endorsement, encouragement, nor an actual pursuit of the theocratic nation building which has caused so many Christians in our day and age to be misled (Matthew 24:11). It has moved our generation in these last days, into that tragic state of apostasy, predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, in fulfillment of the larger context of 2 Timothy 4:1-5. In that all-important passage, Paul warns Timothy of a time which would come when there would be little if any desire for learning and living out sound doctrine. Instead, Christians would be consumed with an interest in myths and fables. These falsehoods, generated by demonic influence (1 Timothy 4:1), have deceived us into thinking that we can do God’s will, the world’s way. How? By using a worldly weapon of the flesh like politics (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), for what we have so foolishly misconstrued as the fulfillment of God’s purpose (Isaiah 30:1).

**Is your life being used of God for the furtherance of the cause of Christ in these last days? Or, have you allowed yourself to become a hindrance to what God is seeking accomplish in our lost and fallen world, prior to Jesus’ return? Simply put, are you focused upon man’s interests rather than God’s? Peter certainly learned his lesson from the severe reproof given by his Savior (1 Peter 2:21-25). If only today’s American Evangelicals would be as teachable.**

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