

WHY WERE THE APOSTLES NON-POLITICAL? (Part-one of a ten-part study)

It is one thing to employ an argument from silence. It's quite another to produce positive, tangible evidence in support of a particular assertion. As we consider the text of the New Testament in its entirety, it becomes obvious that the apostles were not involved in political activism. They neither participated in overt political activity, nor did they endorse such behavior in their epistles. Their non-political stance becomes apparent due to the complete silence of the New Testament for concluding otherwise. Yet there must be a variety of reasons as to why this was both their ideological perspective, impacting their personal lifestyle and philosophy of ministry. That will be the focus of this study.

We will begin our search for those answers by looking at the interaction which took place between the Lord Jesus and the apostle Peter. The first relevant instruction he receives from Christ is recorded for us in Matthew 17:24-27, where Peter is asked by the tax collectors whether or not Jesus pays the two-drachma tax. Initially, Peter says, "yes," and then a discussion ensues between him and his Savior, where we read the following in vv25-27 –

“He said, ‘Yes.’ And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?’ When Peter said, ‘From strangers,’ Jesus said to him, ‘Then the sons are exempt. However, so that we do not OFFEND THEM, (emphasis added) go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me.’”

Jesus here teaches Peter an important lesson about being a child of the King, while living among strangers in a lost and fallen world: he must be careful not to give offense! Why? Because as followers of Jesus, we are seeking to “win” them to salvation in Christ. This is confirmed by the apostle Paul in declaring his evangelistic strategy in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, where his goal was to identify as strongly as possible with those who were unsaved, so that he could win as many as possible to a saving knowledge of Christ. But the instruction to Peter had to be clarified even further, and is provided to him, as well as the other apostles, and all of us in Matthew 22:15-22. In that instance, the Pharisees seek to trap Jesus in answering a particular question about a poll-tax to Caesar. He recognizes their insincerity and says this in vv19-22 –

“‘Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.’ And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.’”

This very familiar distinction established by Christ between God and Caesar must have greatly impacted Peter and the other apostles. They begin to understand that in dealing with governing authority, it was critical to not give offense, unnecessarily. But when rendering to both creates a conflict between the two, then what? We will begin to answer that thorny question in our next segment. In the meantime, I would like to challenge you to consider the reason why Jesus poses the question recorded in v20? Surely, our omniscient Lord would have known the name of the person portrayed on the inscription of that coin. So why did He ask that question?