

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

So why did Jesus ask that question in Matthew 22:20? I believe that there is a clear connection between the question posed in v20 and the answer given in v21. Christ had already promised His disciples that He would build His Church in Matthew 16:18. And now, He is seeking to instruct them that this building project would **NOT** be a cooperative effort between His followers and human government. Going forward, it would be up to them to maintain that distinct separation.

And it would be Peter who would be given the initial opportunity for putting that principle into practice in the garden of Gethsemane. When the governing authority of the Roman army, working in conjunction with the Jewish Sanhedrin, sought to arrest his Savior and Lord, Peter didn't hesitate. He was ready to fight; not realizing that Christ's arrest, leading to His death on the Cross, was the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan for the entire world. That, coupled with his spiritual failure in denying his Savior, made a lasting impression on Peter's perspective.

Shortly after Pentecost, as the apostles are fully engaged in the building of Christ's Church, Matthew 22:21 is put to the test; with Peter, John and the other apostles, successfully resolving the dilemma of when and when not to render unto Caesar. As the Sanhedrin orders them to cease and desist from the proclamation of the gospel, they knew it meant obeying God rather than man, even if it also meant being persecuted for their faith (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-32). Why? Because Caesar, in the form of Jewish governing authority, was sticking his nose into God's business. And if the apostles were to render unto God that which was God's in the preaching of the gospel, it would mean refusing to obey the man-made orders which they had received.

It seems that they now fully understood that rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, would not be an end in itself, but a means to an end. That "end" would be their ultimate and eternal priority in rendering unto God that which is God's. They learned from Christ's teaching that the governing authorities of this present world system, and the building of Christ's Church in the midst of a lost and fallen humanity, must be viewed and maintained as mutually exclusive categories. The reason is simple. For 2000 years, the many Caesars of this world have appeared and then disappeared, only to reappear. But the building of Christ's Church remains constant.

The practical application from Christ's teaching and the apostles' example for all of us is just as simple, yet critical. We must do our best to avoid offending governing authority **unnecessarily**. To do so would create an unwanted hindrance to the successful fulfillment of the Great Commission mandate. But when it becomes necessary to obey God rather than man, we dare not be on the wrong side of the distinct line which Jesus draws for all of us in Matthew 22:21. Unfortunately, throughout Church history, some have misinterpreted the relationship between Matthew 17:24-27 and Matthew 22:20-21; and have crossed that line in the sand laid down by our Savior in 22:21. How? By believing that the avoidance of an unwanted hindrance from human government, actually means seeking their help. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The apostles came to an understanding that the involvement of human government in the building of Christ's Church is both unnecessary and irrelevant. Have we? Have we learned from Church history, that every time the distinction laid down by our Savior in Matthew 22:21 has been forgotten or overlooked, that the results have been nothing short of tragic? As Christians living in the last days of the Church Age, we must be willing to learn that lesson from the example of the apostles and not cross the line which Jesus established for them and us. Successfully applying that lesson becomes far more likely, if we maintain a safely-distanced/non-offensive posture toward those authorities, rather than allowing ourselves to be found in bed with them.