

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

Unfortunately for Peter, his confrontations with governing authority did not end in Acts 5. So that in Acts 12, we read of the murderous rage of a narcissistic ego-maniacal king named Herod, who kills James the brother of John, and has his sights set on Peter, next. But while waiting in prison to be executed, Peter is rescued by an angel of the Lord. He finds his way to some believers, letting them know of his release. Then we are told by Luke in Acts 12:17 that “he left and went to another place.” Was Luke referring to Antioch? Maybe not initially, but eventually, Peter does turn up there, probably seeking a safe haven from the animosity of Herod. While there, he learns an important lesson from Paul about not being intimidated by the Judaizers (Galatians 2:11-21). Nevertheless, he must have imparted some wisdom to Paul and Barnabas as well, in regard to the lessons learned from his Savior and the practical life lessons of Acts 4/5/12.

Paul would have been humbling nodding in agreement, since he was on the other side of that Matthew 22:21 line, using his governing authority to wreak havoc with the early church (Acts 8:3). As a persecutor of the church, and then, as a follower of Christ, he ended up permanently on the right side of the lines drawn by Jesus in Matthew 17/22. As a result, there is not a single shred of evidence anywhere in the New Testament, indicating that the apostles ever attempted to establish an alliance with any human governments for the furtherance of the gospel. Instead, we see the teaching of Christ in Matthew 17/22 being implemented throughout the apostolic era. They sought to be as non-offensive as possible, while realizing that governing authority could not ultimately help nor hinder, in the building of Christ’s Church (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

If the demonic forces of hell could not stand in the way of the advancement of the cause of Christ in our world, neither could the secular institutions of human government. As much as they were ordained of God for the good and positive purpose of restraining evil and promoting law and order, they were and are a part of this evil world system which exists in direct opposition to the redemptive purpose of God, being fulfilled in the building of Christ’s Church. Paul in his epistles to the church at Corinth, as well as John in his writings, make their understanding of this all-important truth unmistakably clear: staying on the right side of the lines drawn by our Savior is essential for the successful proclamation of the gospel. Simply put, the less direct involvement individual Christians, as well as local churches, have with human government, the better.

Tragically, that has not been the case in recent years with Evangelical Christianity in America. Politicians have become incredibly savvy in dealing with the Christian community. Fully aware of our naïve desire to become politically active, they have taken full advantage of the situation for their own benefit. How? By deceitfully telling American Evangelicals what they want to hear in order to garner a very significant voting-block. This is why Paul and John, in their own unique ways, by means of their inspired writings, have provided Christians throughout Church history with important guidelines designed to keep our priorities straight. Learning and applying those principles will keep our moral compass pointed in the right direction and our ministerial focus where it needs to be: upon the building of Christ’s Church through the fulfillment of the Great Commission. We will consider those admonitions and their relationship to the teaching of our Savior from Matthew 17:24-27; 22:15-21, next. But I will leave you with the simplest precept of all, which should be sufficient in keeping us a safe distance from the insidious and adverse influence of one’s involvement in politics, found in 1 Corinthians 15:33, where we read this –

“Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.”