

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

Most Christians, to one degree or another, struggle with maintaining the critically important balance between being “in the world but not of the world.” Some have resolved that very real tension by seeking shelter in an underground bunker of Christian sub-culture. Others have gone to the other extreme and immerse themselves in the things of this world without giving a second thought to the admonition of the apostle John in 1 John 2:15-17. However, Jesus makes it clear that the above extremes don’t resolve anything, by telling us this in Matthew 5:13-16 –

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

As the people of God following our Savior, we dare not run and hide in a bunker, so as to put our light under a bushel. At the same time, we cannot fall in love with the world so that we lose our savor of a positive testimony for Christ. As a result, the majority of Christians eventually seem to find their way to a middle ground that avoids both of those pitfalls. Yet during the course of Church history, that middle ground has been the source of a variety of expressions when it comes to outreach. One recent manifestation has been something known as the “social gospel,” where the focus has been on meeting the immediate and temporal needs of people, while following Jesus as an example, but not necessarily as Savior and Lord.

Another iteration of that middle ground has been the “political gospel,” with an emphasis on theocratic nation building. When it appeared in Latin America, portraying Jesus as the peoples’ revolutionary, the outcry from Evangelical ministers in the United States was immediate and comprehensive. Ironically, now that the political gospel has moved into North America, depicting Jesus as a patriotic insurrectionist, with “the chosen one” doing His bidding; the cowardly silence from some pastors and the endorsement of others, has not only been deafening but disgraceful.

So where do we go from here? Why hasn’t that middle ground, avoiding those dangerous extremes, produced that necessary and spiritually healthy balance between being “in the world and not of the world?” The answer seems to reside in the mindset of those who have gone astray. They are lacking an eternal perspective which so strongly existed in the men of the apostolic era (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). This, in turn, enabled them to remain focused on the proclamation of what Revelation 14:6 describes as the “eternal gospel.” This true and eternal gospel of Jesus Christ consists of His redemptive work: His substitutionary sacrifice for sin on the Cross of Calvary, resulting in His death, burial and resurrection; providing for the forgiveness of sin and eternal life to anyone who puts their trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 24:44-49, that this was the express purpose for which He came, in fulfillment of the prophetic Word of God. Jesus commissions those same men in Matthew 28:18-20, to go and spread this good news of the eternal gospel to the entire world. Paul makes it clear to his audience in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, that this eternal gospel was his highest and ultimate priority.

Surprisingly, there seems to be a new generation of Christians who have rejected the American version of the political gospel. They are even deeply concerned and in prayer for their parents, who have swallowed it hook, line and sinker. Speaking of fishing, isn’t that what Jesus has called us to do, to be “fishers of men,” devoted to the making of disciples in every nation on earth?