

Politics and Religion

Politics and/or religion, sometimes hard to separate, constitute a powder keg of debate. No one likes to be in error. We believe our politics are in accordance with whatever religious principles we hold. If our religion is wrong, then our politics will likely be in error as well. Politics are based upon principles to which we adhere. Politics is simply “the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy” (Merriam-Webster). Policy is “prudence or wisdom in the management of affairs” (Ibid.). Most everyone believes their politics, as well as their religion, is righteous. Those with a liberal view of religion usually have a liberal view in politics, and vice versa. There is no organization, religious or civil that doesn’t deal with politics. I can recall a time when my sons were in Boy Scouts. The “politics” and games that people played in “guiding or influencing governmental policy” were amazing. In some cases, it was righteous: it was for the benefit of the program. In other cases, it was a power struggle between parents. The same is true within religion. The maxim is, “you don’t discuss politics or religion.” The fact is politics and religion are at the center of our lives. They deal with the heart as well as the mind. The mingling of politics and religion was especially true during the time of Jesus.

The Pharisees were “one of the chief Jewish religious parties which existed prior to and during the time of Christ. The Pharisees existed alongside the two other religious groups, the Sadducees and Essenes. The term ‘Pharisee’ means the ‘separated one’... During the period of Hellenization, the Jews who resisted the adoption of Greek customs separated themselves from their society and adhered very rigidly to the Mosaic law...The Pharisee had little or no interest in politics so long as he was permitted to worship as he desired” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary). Though such was the case, the scriptures indicate that they used politics to undermine the teaching of Christ. The scriptures set forth a confrontation the Pharisees had with Jesus: “Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might ensnare him in *his* talk. And they send to him their disciples, with the Herodians, (*The Herodians were “a Jewish party in the Lord’s time, favorable to the Herod family, who held hope of preserving national existence in the face of Roman ambition, despite the fact that they were Idumaeans and not Jewish. Logically they were in direct antagonism to the Pharisees, with whom however there was common cause against foreign rule, the two being united also in opposition to the Lord, Ibid. ret*) saying, Teacher, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?” (Matthew 22:15-17). These two parties, who cared not for one another, joined against what they perceived to be a common enemy and brought into the arena a political question. (For the Jews to pay tribute to Cæsar received the same response as would the citizens of the United States of America if required to pay taxes to a foreign nation.) Julius Cæsar had appointed Herod to power. The Pharisees and Herodians stood opposite of each other politically. For Jesus to say “it is lawful to give tribute to Cæsar” would put him in opposition to the Pharisees. To say “it is not lawful to give tribute to Cæsar” would put him in opposition to the Herodians and Cæsar.

In dealing with the question, the Lord said, “Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Cæsar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:18-21). In so doing, neither party could say that Jesus spoke against the Pharisees nor the Herodians and Cæsar.

The political leaders of our nation have been at each other's throats for years. Thus, the citizens will be at odds politically and spiritually in light of the actions taken by the government officials. Individuals are revolting against the government in opposition to their policies, or person. Others support the government and the person, or persons in office. What is right religiously and politically? The apostle Paul lived during the reign of the Cæsar's: an ungodly period of history and rulers. Yet, Paul's admonition to the Christians who lived in the city of Rome was "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the *powers* that be are ordained of God. Therefore, he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise from the same: for he is a minister of God to thee for good... Wherefore ye must needs be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing" (Romans 13:1-6).

The decisions and actions we take politically will affect us spiritually. Paul's admonition to Christians is, "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high places; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Timothy 2:1-3). The decisions our rulers make may not always be right, but they have the God given right to make them. And we have a God given responsibility to be subject to them. The end. ret