

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About . . . Should Christians Protest - Part 2

Was Jesus a political activist or a revolutionary? Did He seek to enforce His standards [the best standards] on those who did not want to follow Him? Jesus lived in a country that was occupied by a pagan power. There were heathen, Roman, feet in the streets of Jerusalem, the holy city. Some radical Jews known as the Zealots used violence against the Roman soldiers that they despised. What did Jesus, being a Jew, do about protesting against the Roman Empire? Absolutely nothing! There are no words of resentment and no instruction to the disciples that they should resist Roman rule or abolish it. One of Jesus' disciples called Simon had been a Zealot, but that behavior was not compatible with the peace that Christ preached and lived.

On one occasion some Galileans were slain by Pilot's soldiers while offering sacrifices at the Temple so that their blood and the blood of the sacrifices were mixed. Instead of telling His disciples to protest the Roman government because of this horrific government intrusion into the sacrifices, Jesus said, "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who lived in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5). Jesus knew that accidents happen and that a person should be prepared for eternal life in heaven rather than being concerned about political matters.

The apostles did not alter the teaching first given by Christ; they never tried to "adapt" His teaching to make it more "appropriate" to the prevailing circumstances. Paul wrote, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21).

The disciples conduct is to respect all men replacing evil for good; love instead of hate. He is to improve, by the quality of his own life, everything with which he comes into contact. He must never be the cause of injury to his neighbor. If the disciple is to behave in the manner demanded by Jesus, how can these glaring evils be put right? If the Christian refuses to be a political activist for change, would this not be a form of Christian fatalism? Those who petition for political causes are claiming the right to make a demand of worldly authority; however the disciple should discount their earthly citizenship. Paul said, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). Although the disciple of Christ, in common with others, receives the benefits which the state confers and is grateful for these, he neither expects nor demands them.

Jesus denounced the religious rulers of His day, and rebuked them for their hypocrisy (Matt. 23:1-33). Jesus lashed out at the religious leaders who were supposed to be the shepherds of the flock of Israel. Jesus did not denounce the political leaders or Roman governors, in such terms. He reminded the disciples that they needed to be poor in spirit, meek, merciful, peacemakers, and blessed for being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Jesus did not rouse them to rebellion, demonstrations, or silent marches for equality of opportunity. Rather, His counsel was to accept conditions as they found them: "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great" (Matt. 5:3-12).

Next week we will teach how Christians are to confront evil men and governmental leaders by being a shining light to the world. This would be our daily protest march against sin in this world.

Send comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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