

God And Caesar.

Text: Matt 22:15-22

Suggested Hymns:

130, 164, 175, 372, 383

- 1) The Problem Of Church And State
- 2) The Relationship Of Government And Citizens
- 3) Our Obligations To God
- 4) The Example of Jesus

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 22:15-22, ¹⁵ *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk.* ¹⁶ *And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.*

¹⁷ *"Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"* ¹⁸ *But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?"* ¹⁹ *"Show Me the tax money."* *So they brought Him a denarius.* ²⁰ *And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"* ²¹ *They said to Him, "Caesar's."* *And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* ²² *When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We just can't overlook the fact that we are social creatures and that there are certain social obligations and responsibilities which dare not be neglected.

Today's Gospel invites us to stand apart and take a look at ourselves and at society as such. God intended for man to live with others when He said: *"It is not good that man should be alone."*¹ It is only when we understand and appreciate our position in society that we can hope to live in peace and satisfaction.

If the needs of the individual are not met and considered, society cannot function efficiently. God knew this, and for that reason instituted what is known as civil government.

Daniel knew that God instituted government for the good of man. Thus we hear him saying in the second chapter, *“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. ²¹ And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings.”²²* The Apostle Paul recognised the fact that God instituted government when he said in Romans 13:1, *‘Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.*

Civil government remains a divine ordinance regardless of whatever the individual believes. And what God says of the government in general also applies to the State, city, and local councils. When Paul says, *“For there is no authority except from God,”* he wants you and me, living in this 21st century, to recognise this fact and to assume our obligations as Christian citizens.

So today let us consider *God and Caesar*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Problem Of Church And State

Let us look at ourselves in the light of today’s Gospel. We know that the enemies of Jesus tempted Him when they asked the question, *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*

They felt that Jesus would say that it wasn’t; and if He said this, then they would be able to bring a charge against Him before the Roman authorities. And, of course, if He would say, “Yes, it is lawful,” then they would say that He was not true to His own nation and people.

We must remember that the Jews were held in subjection by the Romans and that they were required to pay taxes to the Roman authorities. There is no doubt that they wanted to be relieved of this yoke of oppression.

Furthermore, it cannot be denied that many of them were being unjustly taxed. And yet our Lord Jesus laid down a principle in reply to their question, a principle that must be observed and regarded to the end of days, when He said,

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

From this it is very evident that our Lord is going to demand a dual obedience of us: the one in the realm of the spiritual inasmuch as we are children of God, and the other in the realm of the State inasmuch as we are citizens of the land.

The principle of Jesus, ***“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,”*** brings us face to face with the problem of Church and State.

And when we look at this problem, we find that there are certain duties of the government and certain duties of the citizen. The position of our Church is clearly stated in the Augsburg Confession, Article 28, where we read: *“Civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries and restrain them with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace. Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded.”*

From this we see that the duty of the civil government is to promote the welfare of the people in general. It is the function of the State to promote order, discipline, and peace within its borders. Where law and order, peace and quiet, prevail, there you will find a people who are individually and collectively supporting the government which rules them.

This is one of the marks of Christian citizenship. Jesus demanded obedience to the government when He said, ***Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.*** It is for you and for me to offer up prayers for our government.

The Apostle Paul realised the importance of prayer also for the government, for he exhorted Timothy, saying in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, ***1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*** And to show how important this was in that day and time, Paul adds these words, ***3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.***

Are we meeting the problems of Church and State as we should? Are we being governed by the principle which Jesus laid down here? Are we faithful in the exercise of our citizenship?

Or are we to be classed with those people who are constantly criticising those who are in authority, criticising the government and yet never quite willing to assume their obligations as loyal citizens?

Of course, there are those who disagree with you when you tell them that they are not loyal, because they do not pray for the government, and because they are looking for all sorts of ways in order to avoid the payment of taxes and the like.

There are those whose philosophy is: "*Society owes me a living, but I owe society nothing.*" We wonder whether they ever stop to consider that the government goes all out to safeguard the life and the health of its people.

Do they stop to consider that it is because of certain laws that safety devices have been introduced in factories, that fire escapes are a part of all city buildings, and that there are certain laws for traffic and health which are absolutely essential to the welfare of a people?

Do they ever realise that the pure food laws have been enacted for the common good of all?

We feel sure that these people would be the first to criticise if such laws were not in operation. How can we hope for any order and decency within our borders if we are not willing to support the government in its administration for peace and civic righteousness?

2. The Relationship Of Government And Citizens.

When Jesus says, *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's* He lays down the principle of authority, which requires a certain obedience. Paul referred to this same thing when he said in Romans 13:7, *'Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*

Certainly we have dues or taxes which must be paid if our national health and safety are to be preserved. We know that without government we would have no protection. That is why Jesus says, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things that*

are Caesar's." God wants us therefore to look upon the government as an institution for our good. In 1 Peter 2:13 we read, ¹³ *Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.*"

Hence there can be no mistake about it, God wants us to be subject to the government. He wants us to obey those who are in authority over us, and of course this command refers not only to things on which we are in agreement.

We are prone to agree to the laws of our civil government when they conform to our own thoughts and ideas. Yet when there is a conflict between them, we are not so ready to accept these laws and regulations. Remember the injunction of Jesus, *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.*

3. Our Obligations To God

Jesus told His enemies, *"Render therefore ... to God the things that are God's."* In this Gospel we are told that ²² *When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.* There is something about our association with God and His Word that causes us to marvel.

We marvel at the goodness of God in the grace which He bestows through Christ, our Saviour. By faith in our Saviour we hold a higher citizenship than is ours in this world, citizenship in heaven. We are cleansed by the blood of Christ, made children of God, and heirs of eternal life. This is something which is always uppermost in the mind of the Christian.

We realise also that without God and without His grace in Christ we can accomplish nothing, and it is only when we recognise the grace of God in our own lives that we will bow ourselves in subjection to the will of God and to *"Render ... to God the things that are God's."*

We thank God that it becomes much easier for us to render to God the things that are God's because we are living in a land where religious liberty and freedom are the right of the individual. We have the right to enjoy religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

No one has a right to dictate to you and to me as to how we shall worship. Even in this we see the hand of God. We have a right to choose the occupation or work which we desire. We have a right to the freedom of speech and freedom

of the press, which makes it so much easier for us ***“Render ... to God the things that are God’s.”***

But what are we doing when moral decay, political degeneracy, civil unrighteousness, intolerable dishonesty, wickedness, and corruption rear their ugly heads? Are we taking our stand on the side of God and rendering to Him the things that are His? Are we, because we by our faith in Christ have become new creatures, exerting a strong and powerful influence for good in the community in which we live? Are we trying to touch all the areas of life with the Gospel of Christ?

What about the dark shadows of sin and evil? Can we say that we are rendering to God the things that are God’s when we permit those shadows to be untouched by the cleansing rays of light that proceed from the Gospel of Jesus? Are we being governed by the godly principle of Christian love? Are we as unselfish as we ought to be in our relationship to God and to our fellow men?

Do we permit something of the spirit of Christ to fill our hearts so that by the life that we live we are letting others know that we are rendering to God the things that are God’s? It cannot be denied that we are observing the principle as laid down by Jesus in the text when we try to touch every area of society with the truths of God.

There is the Christian home, where we have every opportunity to render to God the things that are God’s through reading the Bible and family devotions.

There is your congregation that you support and render to God the things that are God’s. There are the Sunday Worship Services, and Sunday School, which give you a wonderful opportunity to render to God the things that are God’s.

There is the community in which you live, where worthy civic and social demands are being made and where you, too, have an opportunity also in this way to render to God the things that are God’s.

There is that friend or acquaintance in both spiritual and temporal need. Do you see in his difficulties and troubles, the way in which God wants you to render to God the things that are God’s? There is that matter which you wanted to take care of for some time but till now have neglected. Look at it again. Isn’t it God’s way for you to ***“render to God the things that are God’s”***?

4. The Example of Jesus

There are so many things in our world today that are tearing away at the very foundations of the social structure and making it so much more difficult for the State to fulfil its obligations to its citizens.

We think now of the general moral laxity of people, the increase of drunkenness and immorality, the love of pleasure in place of the love of God, the breakdown of the home and the breakdown of Christian ethics, industrial strife, class warfare, and the like.

And this is where our Christian citizenship becomes very necessary. It is the good Christian who makes a good citizen. Because he recognises the standards of Jesus as the principles of living, he is willing to take his stand on the side of right and to oppose evil. He renders to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

And because he renders to God, he knows how to render to Caesar. He follows the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When Jesus was brought face to face with the problems of Church and State, He Himself showed His willingness in the payment of taxes and in the expression of allegiance to God the Father.

We recall how He sent Peter fishing, and miraculously the coin which was necessary to pay the taxes was found in the fish's mouth.³ Again, when a young man came to Jesus with the request, "*Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.*"⁴ Jesus refused to be the judge because such matters belonged to the courts. There is not a single instance where Jesus usurped the functions of the State. He was mindful of His great mission. He wanted people to know their dual responsibilities. Jesus did not meddle with the affairs of the State.

Look to history, and you will find that where the State controlled the Church and, vice versa, where the Church controlled the State, there was no peace, only disharmony, strife, and at last war and bloodshed.

For this reason Jesus laid down the principle of the separation of Church and State. This is a principle which we need to observe and preserve with our very lifeblood. Where the two are confused, you will find unrest and dissatisfaction and hypocrisy almost beyond comprehension.

Let us thank God for the truth of our text. Let us always observe it so that at the sound of the voice of Caesar or the voice of God we shall not tremble, but rejoice in anticipation of new tasks and duties to be done for the good of our fellow man and the glory of God.

Let us hasten to the Cross and pray that God may forgive us all our neglect in these matters. Let us pray to God for a faith that will prompt us to live the positive life for good, just as Jesus did. Then we know that it will become second nature with us to *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Gen. 2:18

² Daniel 2:20

³ Matthew 17:27

⁴ Luke 12:13