

'Render unto Caesar' Does Not Make Caesar a Lawful Magistrate

Matthew 22:21; 2 Samuel 23:3

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Sadly, most Christian leaders today are unwilling to declare a nation treasonous that legally and constitutionally rejects the Triune God of the Bible and rather places the Triune God alongside a pantheon of false gods; declares its own Constitution, laws, and treaties to be the supreme law of the land in direct opposition to the Moral Law of God; and legally and constitutionally protects (and therefore promotes) every false religion on earth rather than legally and constitutionally protecting exclusively the only true religion, namely biblical Christianity (as summarized in faithful Confessions like the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and faithful Covenants like the *Solemn League and Covenant*). I submit that is treason committed against our holy and mighty Triune God who established civil government as His own ordinance to glorify Him, and established civil magistrates to be His ministers for the good of all society, but especially for the good of His people. It is treason because it is (according to Psalm 2:3) rebellion against the supreme authority of God and His Christ, rebellion against the supreme law of God and His Christ, and rebellion against the only true religion of God and His Christ.

And when such treason against the supremacy of God and His Christ by a nation occurs, there will also follow tyranny against the people, whose lawful rights civil government and civil magistrates are required to protect (according to God's infallible Moral Law as revealed in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible). And so, the root and cause of tyranny in protecting (and thereby promoting) the murder of millions of unborn babies is treason against the Lord and His Christ. The root and cause of tyranny in protecting (and thereby promoting) every form of sexual immorality imaginable is treason against the Moral Law of God. The root and cause of every form of tyranny in this nation (and in all of the nations of this world) is treason in protecting (and thereby promoting) the free exercise of every false religion alongside biblical Christianity. For when we rebel (whether it be the church, state, family, or individual) against the Lord and His Christ, against His Moral Law, against His pure Reformed Christian religion, God will give us over to our own wicked desires in bringing pleasure to ourselves, even at the expense of tyrannizing others of their lawful rights and privileges as revealed in God's Moral Law. Mark it down, dear ones, where there is tyranny against our fellow man, there has first issued forth treason against the one true living and everlasting Triune God of the Bible, against His Moral Law, and against His revealed religion of biblical Christianity.

Dear ones, Covenanters are not anti-government people. We are not violent revolutionaries. We do not hate lawful authority (whether in the family, church, or state). We believe that all lawful authority is appointed by God (within these various spheres) in order to promote His glory and the welfare of those made in His image. To the contrary, we love our homeland, the land of our birth. We are peace-loving people who seek to follow the Word of God as stated in Romans 12: 18: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

However, we do grieve over the gross treason and tyranny committed by the Divine ordinance of civil government in nations throughout the world. We mourn that civil magistrates have flagrantly and obstinately abused God's authority in order to protect and defend idolatry, false religion, heresy, blasphemy, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, the murder of unborn children, sexual perversion of every kind, and legalized theft through oppressive taxation. We humbly pray that God will by His Gospel and Spirit grant faith and repentance to civil rulers that they might rule according to the lawful duties that are theirs as articulated in Scripture and summarized in the Solemn League and Covenant (which we are promised in God's Word He will

do at the time in which the nations and Israel are gathered unto Christ, Romans 11:25-26). However, until the Lord graciously hears and answers our prayers, Covenanted Presbyterians cannot (and all Christians should not) own such magistrates to be lawful magistrates or to be “the ministers of God” (Romans 13:4) who practice such treason against the Triune God of the Bible and such tyranny against the lawful rights and privileges of Christians. We can submit to such civil magistrates for wrath’s sake, but we cannot submit to them for conscience sake. Some will no doubt consider that last statement to be treasonous (that we cannot submit to such civil magistrates out of conscience), but we will stand upon God’s Word and the faithful witnesses of Christ from the past, like the godly and learned Samuel Rutherford who was assailed with the same false allegations, but who responded with these words:

Truth to Christ cannot be treason to Caesar . . . (*Lex Rex or The Law and the Prince*, cited from Mr. Rutherford’s “Preface”).

Christian leaders who promote the myth that the United States was founded as a Christian nation (or is presently a Christian nation) will have us turn to an event in the life of Christ as allegedly demonstrating that Christ Himself considered the pagan emperor of Rome (namely, Tiberius) to be a lawful civil magistrate. And if that was the case it is argued, how can we not likewise view our own duly elected civil leaders to be lawful civil magistrates? Let’s consider the following main points in the sermon this Lord’s Day: (1) ‘Render unto Caesar’ Is Not a Declaration that Caesar Is a Lawful Magistrate (Matthew 22:21); and (2) Another Argument Offered by Those Who Assert that the United States Is a Christian Nation.

I. ‘Render unto Caesar’ Is Not a Declaration that Caesar Is a Lawful Magistrate (Matthew 22:21).

A. The event here revealed in our text occurs just three days before the Lord’s crucifixion. In Matthew 21:23, several of the religious leaders of the Jews had sought to lay a trap for Christ in regard to the origin of His authority. For disciples from two diametrically opposed camps within Judaism conspire together to set yet another snare for the Lord. The first group, the Pharisees, adamantly opposed Rome’s domination and rule over Palestine, believing it to be unlawful; while the second group, the Herodians, adamantly supported it, believing Rome’s domination over Palestine to be lawful. Such a conspiracy by these two adversaries indicates just how much they hated their common enemy, Jesus. For these religious enemies were willing to join hands to entrap the Lord Jesus by His words (Matthew 22:15; Luke 20:20).

1. Dear ones, how important it is that we approach the Scriptures with a willing mind to be taught by Christ concerning His will, rather than playing the part of these Pharisees and Herodians in approaching Christ with our minds already made up, but seeking to twist and turn the words of Christ into something they do not say or He did not mean. For to continue to approach Christ in worship while avoiding the truth of Christ and the conviction of the Holy Spirit is the essence of this sin committed by these Pharisees and Herodians. Beloved, the truth does not fear the light of inspection and study; it is error that must resort to the cloak of deception, conspiracy, dissimulation, and hypocrisy.

2. And notice carefully how these conspirators begin by flattering the Lord, before they seek to entrap the Lord (Matthew 22:16). What they said was certainly true, but they were not sincere—they were simply looking for an advantage to catch the Lord off guard. “Let’s butter Him up first; then let’s roast Him.” Dear ones, God hates all such flattering words that are insincere and used merely to gain some advantage over others (Psalm 12:1-3). To the contrary, we as Christians are to be known as those who speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), whose praise and encouragements are earnest, and who are people of our word.

B. Now comes the attempt on the part of the Pharisees and Herodians to put to Christ their

entrapping question (Matthew 22:17). This question about taxes actually presupposes a further, more fundamental, underlying question: Is Caesar a lawful magistrate who has lawful authority to rule in Palestine? For if he is a lawful magistrate and has lawful authority to rule in Palestine, then he also has lawful authority to tax in Palestine. However, if Caesar is not a lawful magistrate and does not have lawful authority to rule in Palestine, then correspondingly, he does not have lawful authority to tax in Palestine. So ultimately, this question in regard to taxes is actually a question about the lawful authority of Caesar as a lawful magistrate to rule over Palestine.

1. So in what way was this a captious or ensnaring question? Precisely for the reason that there were two opposing views on this question held by the tenacious opponents that approached Christ. As noted earlier, the Pharisees were those who advocated the position that Caesar's dominion over Palestine was not by right, but rather by mere might (much like one who by mere might enslaves another human being without having any moral right to do so, as was the case with the abominable racial slavery practiced in America). Then there were the Herodians, who apparently courted the political favor of Rome and seemed to be linked theologically with the more liberal Saducees (Mark 8:15; Matthew 16:6). Thus, they believed that Caesar was a lawful magistrate and had lawful authority to rule over Palestine.

2. Therefore, the question put to Christ was framed in such a way that if He answered it with a "yes" or a "no", He would be entrapped by either the Pharisees or by the Herodians. If He said it is lawful to give tribute to Caesar, He would be charged by the Pharisees with endorsing the tyranny and unlawful rule of Caesar over Palestine (which would likely stir up the masses of people against Christ who generally followed the Pharisees). Or if He said it is unlawful to give tribute to Caesar, He would be charged by the Herodians with endorsing treason against Caesar (which would likely bring Him into a direct confrontation with Caesar and Rome, Luke 23:2).

3. There seems to be no question historically that Rome had violently imposed its rule upon Palestine and had unjustly subjugated Palestine under its feet (as Rome had done with countless other nations and kingdoms). In her greed for more and more territory, Rome (not by right, but by her mere might) had violently subjugated Palestine to her rule (a violation of the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill") and had stolen the covenanted land of Israel's inheritance (a violation of the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal", see also Micah 2:2). As Mr. Rutherford says, "Mere conquest by the sword, without the consent of the people, is not just title to the crown" (*Lex Rex*, p. 47).

4. Furthermore, I raise the question as to how a covenanted nation like Israel could ever lawfully give its willing consent to be ruled by a heathen emperor (apart from Divine revelation). God Himself had established a firm covenant with His people as to the lawful constitution of Israel, and it did not include giving their conscientious allegiance to heathen emperors (who were accorded divine titles in treasonous competition with the one true living and Triune God of the Bible). God may have brought Israel under violent subjection to heathen nations (in His providential judgment), but God's revealed will in His covenant with Israel was that He rule over them by means of godly covenanted kings and magistrates through the line of David. Thus, I submit that Caesar was not a lawful magistrate exercising lawful authority over Palestine. And if Caesar's authority over Palestine was unlawful, by good and necessary consequence, he had no lawful right (according to God's Moral Law) to impose taxes upon Palestine so as to finance his future violent conquests or unjust domination of Israel and other nations or to promote Rome's rank polytheism and immorality.

5. Of course, these considerations have implications for us as well. Nations, like individuals, can covenant to be the Lord's people. Nations, like individuals, have a moral person which binds them to moral obligations found in God's Moral Law. Therefore, the posterity of those nations and churches (such as Scotland, England, Ireland, and their former and present dominions throughout the world) that have covenanted to be the Lord's, in a perpetual covenant in the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, cannot loose themselves from that covenant bond that binds them any more than a wife can loose herself from the covenant bond that binds her to her faithful husband (or vice versa). For this reason, we view those nations of

England, Ireland, and Scotland and their posterity to be (like that wife) bound in a perpetual covenant to the Lord their God to uphold the biblical terms found in the Solemn League and Covenant. The Lord will not forget His covenant, and those who are faithful to Christ will not forget either. Thus, for the same reason that a covenanted nation (like Israel during the time of Christ) could not lawfully consent to or own the unlawful authority of a polytheistic civil government over them, for that same reason we who live in nations that are covenanted with the Lord cannot lawfully do so either. Therefore, honor to Christ and to the covenant made with Him compels us to dissent from giving our allegiance to a Constitution that rebels against the Triune God of the Bible, against Christ His anointed King, against the Moral Law of God, and against Christ's one true religion of biblical Christianity.

C. The Lord sees through the insincerity and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Herodians, and puts a very direct question to them, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? (Matthew 22:18). Dear ones, how do we deal with our own tendencies toward hypocrisy and making a pretense before others (even perhaps before God Himself) that we are earnest and sincere in our worship and obedience? The most powerful tool we can use is reflecting and meditating upon the truth that the Lord sees and knows our hypocrisies and pretenses. Who are we trying to fool? Dear ones, let Christ's fiery, all penetrating eye drive you to absolute transparency before Him and before others. He who sees all and knows all is all-merciful to those who flee to Him with all of their hypocrisies, pretenses, and flatteries. Cast it all on Christ, rest in His forgiveness and righteousness, lean upon His promises found in the Covenant of Grace whereby Christ has secured dominion over sin for all those who trust Him.

D. The Lord then asks for a coin knowing it has the image of Caesar on the coin, and He asks whose image is on the coin (Matthew 22:19-20). They answer, "Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21). It would seem that many (if not most) Christian tolerationists have assumed that Christ asked whose blasphemous, deified image was on the coin in order to confirm the lawful authority of Caesar to rule over Palestine (and therefore his lawful authority to require taxes as an acknowledgement of his lawful authority). However, carefully note that Christ did not say anything about Caesar's lawful authority as a civil magistrate to rule over Palestine. Rather the Lord says, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

1. You see, the Lord did not answer their question; for neither the Pharisees nor the Herodians were able to bring an accusation against Him (Matthew 22:22; Luke 20:26 i.e. they were not able to use His words against Him, for He had not clearly and directly answered their question because they sought to entrap Him). The Lord says in effect, "Whatever lawfully belongs to Caesar give it to him," but He did not tell them what lawfully belonged to Caesar, if anything at all. He would not give them at that time the answer to their question because they sought to entrap Him, but if they desired to know the answer to their question, they would find their answer from a thorough study of God's Word (as in 2 Samuel 23:3, "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God"; see also Exodus 18:21; Psalm 94:20; Proverbs 16:12).

2. And in God's revealed Word we see that even when Israel lived under the tyranny of domestic and foreign rulers, they could subject themselves out of fear for their lives to these tyrannical rulers, but they could not lawfully render active allegiance out of conscience to such tyrannical rulers. They could pay taxes to those who had no just title to rule, if they did so merely for wrath's sake. But they could not do so for conscience sake (to the contrary, **a ruler without lawful authority has no more legitimate right to our taxes than a thief does to our wallet**—but we may submit out of fear to **his might to rule**, even if we do not submit out of conscience to **his right to rule**). For to pay taxes for conscience sake is an honor reserved for those alone who are the lawful ordinance of God and lawful ministers of God to thee for good (Romans 13:4,7).

3. Thus, the answer of the Lord Jesus to this question of the Pharisees and Herodians has a universal application in its present form: Render to Caesar all that is *lawfully* Caesar's. If he has lawful

authority, render him honor and pay him taxes for conscience sake. If he has unlawful authority, you may pay him taxes for wrath's sake without sin, but you cannot render him honor and pay him taxes for conscience sake (as that alone is reserved for one who is a lawful minister of God to thee for good and not for evil).

4. Dear ones, the Pharisees, who hated Christ, would have jumped at the opportunity to accuse Christ if they thought He had declared Caesar to be a lawful magistrate with lawful authority over Palestine. If the Pharisees could not pin an accusation on Christ in declaring Caesar to be a lawful magistrate to whom taxes lawfully belonged, then what makes Christian tolerationists think they can so clearly interpret the words of Christ to mean that He declared Caesar to be a lawful magistrate, and therefore, we must likewise declare our treasonous and tyrannical civil magistrates to be lawful as well? They can't do so from this passage, and I submit that the key passage on this subject (Romans 13) teaches by good and necessary inference that Caesar was not a minister of God for good to those in the Roman Empire and especially was not so to the Church of Christ (as we saw in a previous sermon in this series where we considered in detail what Romans 13 actually teaches).

E. But let us not forget, dear ones, that Christ also declared that we must render to God what is *lawfully* God's. The problem so often is that we are more concerned about the first part of the statement ("Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's"), but forget or ignore the second part of the statement ("and to God the things that are God's"). What lawfully belongs to God? Everything ("For of him, and through him, and to him, are ALL THINGS: to whom be glory for ever" Romans 11:36). In other words, civil government and civil magistrates belong to God as His ordinance and as His ministers. They are, therefore, bound in their official capacities to render to God their office, their decisions, their laws, and their constitutions for His approval. Literally everything that I own, even my family, and everything that I am is God's and is to be voluntarily rendered to God.

1. Dear ones, your children lawfully belong to God by way of covenant. In Ezekiel 16, the Lord judges Israel for its many abominations in taking the good things that the Lord had given them (such as their food, and possessions), and having offered them to the false gods of the nations. And as if that was not abominable enough, they also offered their own children to these false gods by way of a fiery sacrifice. And although this was murder (and a great abomination in and of itself in violation of the Sixth Commandment), the Lord declares that what made this abomination even more abominable was that Israel had offered His (i.e. the Lord's) own children (His own covenanted little ones) unto these false gods in sacrifice (Ezekiel 16:20-21).

2. You will recall that when Christ's own disciples thought that parents were a nuisance in bringing their infants and little children to Christ in order that He might bless them, Christ made it ever so clear concerning the place that infants and little children have in the Kingdom of God (i.e. in the Visible Church of Christ) in the words that He uttered in Mark 10:14 (the parallel passage in Luke 18:15 says that these little children were infants as well, who were unable to know and understand what the Lord was doing to them in blessing them and unable to exercise faith in Him at that young age): "of such is the kingdom of God" (i.e. "of such ones is the Kingdom of God"). How do you as parents voluntarily bring your infants to Christ and render them unto God since He says they are His? You render your precious little ones to God by praying for them and committing them to Christ all their life (from womb to tomb). You render your children to God by bringing them to be baptized in order to receive the sign and seal of the Kingdom of God, to which Christ said they belong (Mark 10:14). You render them to God by giving them a distinctly Christian education (not an atheistic education as found in the public schools), by training and leading them in the paths of righteousness and truth, and by seeking to remove all stumbling blocks in their paths that would lead them away from Christ by way of worldly temptations.

3. Dear ones, it's only as we first understand how we ought to render to God all that is lawfully due Him that we will understand how we ought to render to every man (including the civil magistrate)

what is lawfully due to him or what lawfully ought to be withheld from man (and the civil magistrate), as the case may be.

F. These rulers “marveled” at His answer, but they did not turn to Him in faith. Will you only marvel today as you hear the Word of God preached to you? Will you only respond by saying that you were convicted of sin, or that the sermon made sense? Dear ones, God does not call us to merely marvel at the words of Christ as did the Pharisees and the Herodians. Christ calls us to receive His words by faith, to rest in them, to love them, and to obey them. Those who only marvel at Christ, but do not receive by faith alone Christ and His righteousness will have an eternity to marvel about Christ in the Lake of Fire. Dear ones, let us do more today than stand aloof from the Lord and stand in awe of His wisdom. Let us cast ourselves upon Him and entrust everything we have and everything we are to Christ. Christianity is not a philosophical or intellectual trip, it is embracing by faith alone the obedience of Christ for sinful, guilty sinners like you and me, and then going forth to make His glory known through our words and deeds to those around us.

II. Another Argument Offered by Those Who Assert that the United States Is a Christian Nation.

A. It is argued that national memorials and monuments in Washington D.C. make it clear that the United States is a Christian nation. For example, one will find high on the Eastern Pediment of the Supreme Court Building (which is the back side of the building) a sculpture by Hermon A. McNeil (entitled “Justice the Guardian of Liberty”) which depicts Moses sitting and holding Two Tablets at his side (representing the Two Tables of the Ten Commandments). It is alleged that this clearly demonstrates that this nation was founded upon the Moral Law of God as a Christian nation, and that it pictorially declares that the Supreme Court is to rule according to the Two Tables of the Ten Commandments.

B. My response: Actually, it should be noted that Moses is not the only personage represented in this sculpture. On both sides of Moses, there stand two other figures: Confucius on the left as you look at the sculpture (representing the lawgiver from the Orient), and Solon stands on the right as you look at the sculpture (representing the lawgiver from Greece). In other words, the sculpture, if religious at all, is not distinctly Christian, but polytheistic. It would appear, however, that the sculpture intends not to promote any particular religion, but rather to indicate that the laws of the United States come from divergent sources (whether by means of Moses, Confucius, or Solon). There does not appear to be any intention on the part of this sculpture to declare the supreme law of the land to be the Ten Commandments or to declare the United States to be a Christian nation. In fact, Mr. McNeil, the sculptor himself, submitted the following description of his work to the Supreme Court Building Commission,

Law as an element of civilization was normally and naturally derived or inherited in this country from former civilizations. The “Eastern Pediment” of the Supreme Court Building suggests therefore the treatment of such fundamental laws and precepts as are derived from the East. Moses, Confucius and Solon are chosen as representing three great civilizations and form the central group of this Pediment (Office of the Curator, Supreme Court of the United States, <http://www.supremecourt.gov/about/eastpediment.pdf>).

Notice that the sculptor describes law generically as an element of civilization that we have derived from a pluralistic mixture of many ancient sources including Confucius, Moses, and Solon. If this sculpture was intended to portray biblical law (in particular and uniquely) as the source of our laws, it would have had perhaps Confucius and Solon lying prostrate beneath the weight of the Ten Commandments. But such is not the case. To the contrary, Confucius and Solon share top billing with Moses who holds the Two Tables of the

Ten Commandments, thus putting Confucius and Solon as lawgivers alongside Moses and the Ten Commandments.

In future sermons, we will consider other national monuments that are alleged to declare the United States to be a Christian nation, but as seen from the example just cited, what we consistently find is not the portrayal of the United States to be a Christian nation, but rather the sad and treasonous portrayal of the United States to be a polytheistic nation, or a nation that has established religious pluralism as its official religion.

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