

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” With these Words the Lord defeats the treachery of the Pharisees, and teaches us of the Kingdoms of the left and of the Right, or of the civic realm and the Kingdom of God. Sinners, however, confuse the kingdoms of men with the Kingdom of God, seeking earthly gain in the Kingdom of Grace, and righteousness unto salvation in the civic realm.

God is omnipotent. He is over all. Civil government exists according to His will. Civil government is put in place for the protection of the civilly righteous, and for the punishment of the civilly unrighteous, the thief, the murderer, the liar, and the scofflaw. God ordains civil government that through it peace and justice might rule in our land.

In a system where sinners govern sinners, there will never be perfection. Our government is proof of that. Like all earthly governments, it is imperfect, at times quite dysfunctional. Still, it is the will of God that civil government regulate sinful and perverse behavior, provide protection for the citizens, and bring correction to those who break the Commands of the Second Table – Honor thy Father and thy Mother, thou shall not murder, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not steal, thou shall not bear false witness, thou shall not covet.

The Lord summarizes all these in teaching “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” For this the governing authorities, God’s ministers in the civil realm, as St. Paul calls them, exist, and are appointed by God. And whoever resists them resists the ordinance of God, and bring judgment on themselves.

To operate, civil government has the right to tax. The Bible, the Word of God, upholds that authority. And Christians must respect that right. Caesar counted himself a god, and several Caesars forced men by civil law to worship them. Still the Lord, knowing this fully, says “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.”

And the Apostle writes of civil authority “...if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.”

And yet when Peter and John were arrested and brought before the council, and the council commanded them not to preach publicly or to teach in the Name of Jesus, they answered “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” And when the Apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin, they testified “We must obey God rather than men.”

The kingdoms of the left and Right are both of God. But because civil government is populated by sinners, the two kingdoms are frequently in tension. Consider our country. Perversion prevented by the clear Word of God is legal, and even promoted by our government. The murder of the unborn child breaks God’s Command, and is against His will, but it is widely practiced among us, even supported by the taxes we pay.

What is the Christian to do? We must pay the tax, and then publicly proclaim the Truth that perversity and murder are sin according to God’s Law. According to natural law and human

history societies that confuse male and female, societies that kill their young, societies that allow and even celebrate adultery and promiscuous living, such societies do not stand for long. Consider the great Roman Empire - as powerful as they were, there are no Caesars today.

But the final judge is not a civil judge, not the supreme court. The final judge is God. All those who promote and practice such sin, indeed those who commit any sin against any of the Ten Commandments, will stand before not Caesar, not before President, not before earthly Prince or King, but before God, the True King, on the Day of Judgment.

Unafraid of judgment, doubting His public teaching, rejecting His Divinity, the Pharisees desired to entangle Jesus in His talk. The serpent in Eden and the devil in the wilderness tried the same. Sin is frequently born of such deception, of trying to wordsmith the clear testimonies and teachings of Scripture to find a way, if it were possible, around the will of God.

In sin, you have done the same. And when you have sinned, you have looked for a way to excuse your sins, if not by twisting the Word of God, then by fallen reason. So by sinning, you have stood with the Pharisees trying to trap the Lord in His Words.

If He answered that it was wrong to pay taxes to Caesar, He would have been an insurrectionist and violator of civil law. If He answered that it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, He would have been subject to the condemnation of the Jewish ruling council, the church of His day, which held that it was blasphemous to pay the tax.

They thought they had Him. But so it is with every sinner. Sinners, in the delusion of their fallenness, in the drunkenness of their debauchery, think that they can out maneuver God. It is madness, lunacy, but such are fallen men. So the Apostle writes that “their end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame – who set their minds on earthly things.”

But the Lord has true Wisdom. He is omniscient. He perceived their wickedness. “Whose image and inscription is this?” “Caesar’s”, they answered. “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”, the Lord taught, and “Render to God the things that are God’s.” For Caesar has nothing that God didn’t give Him, and God is God of all things, of heaven and earth.

And soon after, the Lord rendered unto God that which was God’s – full payment for your transgressions. More than bearing the image and likeness of God, He is God, and still He suffered crucifixion and death to pay your debt.

And then He defeated death, forever robbing physical death of its power, and ascended into heaven, the One possessed by God the Father at the beginning of His way, before His works of old, God the Son returning to His rightful throne, God rendering to God what is God’s – all power and dominion, all glory and might, all laud and honor, all wisdom, strength and authority.

In Christ your citizenship is in heaven. You are a citizen of His Kingdom. To you, O Christian, you forgiven in Christ, you washed in the washing of regeneration, you redeemed by His Blood, to you the Apostle writes Words of hope. For “Your citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious Body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

By grace through faith in Christ you have been rendered unto God, for you are God's, chosen from eternity. In Holy Baptism He placed His Name upon you, that you bear His Holy Inscription. And the image of God lost in the fall is restored in you by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God filling you, God giving you a knowledge of His will, God imputing to you His perfect righteousness, God declaring you to be holy in His eyes, God leading you to do the very things that are pleasing to Him.

Soon, on the Day of Judgment, on the Last Day of this creation, the One through whom all things were created will return. Then all civil government will end. And you who bear His image and inscription will be rendered for eternity to your Maker, to your Redeemer, to your Sanctifier, to the One God in Three Persons, the only true God.

Until that Day, in His mercy, the Lord who took on your image and was made Man invites you to hear His Saving Word, to receive His Holy Absolution, and to banquet at His Holy Supper, where Christ the True King is your Host and your Meal. He who is True, He who teaches the Way of God in Truth, He who does not regard the person of men, cares for you. He cares for your soul. He feeds you of Himself, joining you to Him, bringing you into Communion with God and with His Holy Church, a citizen of His Kingdom, marked with His Seal, given eternal life.

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