

“Give To Caesar, Give to God” (St. Matthew 22:15-22)

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

For your life in Christ the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction: Total and Complete Separation of Church and State?

- A. The idea is foreign to the U.S. Constitution.
- B. In *Separation of Church and State*, Philip Hamburger, John P. Wilson Professor of Law at the University of Chicago **challenges** (as stated in the introductory synopsis):

“the conventional assumption that the separation of church and state has a historical foundation in the First Amendment. The detailed evidence...shows that eighteenth-century Americans almost never invoked this principle. Although Thomas Jefferson and others respectively claimed that the First Amendment separated church and state, separation became part of American constitutional law only much later...separation became a constitutional freedom largely through fear and prejudice. Jefferson supported separation out of hostility to the Federalist clergy of New England. [Some] Protestants...adopted the principle...to restrict the role of Catholics in public life. Gradually, these Protestants were joined by theologically liberal, anti-Christian secularists, who hoped that separation would limit Christianity and all other distinct religions.”

- C. The First Amendment reads: *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”*
- D. Jefferson wrote in referring to separation: *“...thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”* (Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, 1802).
- E. The great irony confronting those who perpetuate the “wall of separation” is that when theologically liberal, anti-God humanists and naturalists misuse the First Amendment, they are in fact perpetuating and encouraging, guess what? Answer: **Their own religion!** Consider the fact that ANY position that touches on God is a **theological/religious** position. For example, atheism is a theological position.

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- F. Christians and other theists are not the only ones with resultant MORAL positions that come from their THEOLOGICAL positions. Not at all: Darwinists also have a moral position called “moral relativism.”
 - 1. When morality is based on the individual, it is called **subjectivism**.
 - 2. When morality is based on what society says, it is called **conventionalism**.
- G. Which one does Christianity support? Answer: **Neither!**

Part I: Christ Spoke Truth

- A. The people who came to Him as recorded in today’s Gospel (St. Matthew 22:15-22) were disciples of the Pharisees (v 16) and then there were also Herodians (v 16). Two distinct groups with different views about the Roman government.
 - 1. The Pharisees considered paying taxes to a pagan/anti-God government as sinful and so disagreed with the Herodians. **To them, it was BAD to pay taxes.**
 - 2. The Herodians were Jews who supported the dynasty of Herod the Great and therefore believed that paying taxes was obligatory. **To them, it was GOOD to pay taxes.**
 - 3. But they had one thing in common: they didn’t like Jesus!
- B. This tag-team of disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus with flattering words, but their intent was to trap the Lord:
 - 1. If Jesus spoke in Rome’s favor, it would cost him popular favor among the Jews.
 - 2. If Jesus spoke in the people’s favor, it would set Him against the government and He would be guilty of sedition.
- C. **The point is that the enemies of God attack God.** Do not think that they sit idle and say, “We have no opinion,” no way, they actually attack the truth.
- D. **If anyone thinks there isn’t a battle for truth, morality, and God in the world, then they are probably kidding themselves.**

E. The enemies of Christ knew the kind of man Jesus was and they approached Jesus with flattering words.

St. Matthew 22:16: “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.”

F. Actually where the ESV states “you are not swayed by appearances,” it is trying to bring out: **“You do not look at the face of men.”**

G. Many people gauge what they will say based on how they perceive people’s faces. Not Christ. He just spoke the truth period. So he tells it like it is!

H. The Lord knew what was going on, verse 18 says, **“[He was] aware of their malice.”**

Part II: Why Do We Try to Trap God?

A. Why did these disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians even consider doing what they did? Can you imagine trying to trap God? It is beyond comprehension. God who is almighty and all-knowing trapped by a man or by a woman? Even the thought demonstrates insanity.

B. But why do people continue to try?

C. The answer is that in our sin, we think we have our reasons, but the truth is that we do not want to bend our wills to His will. Because we do not want to accept God’s will, **we try to demonstrate that God is just wrong. If I can work my approach just the right way, I will show that God’s position just doesn’t work...I will trap God!**

D. It never, ever works. Jesus said, **“Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?”** (v 18).

Part III: Christ Does Not Allow a Wall of Separation

A. At St. Matthew 22:19 Jesus said, **“Show me the coin for the tax.”**

B. The coin actually said on one side, “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine August,” and on the other side, “Pontifex Maximus”

which title “high priest” made him both the highest civil and religious ruler of the land.

C. The Lord, however, is unfazed and said:

St. Matthew 22:21: “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

D. The wording “render to Caesar” amounts to “give back.” **Give back because it was given to him already!**

E. But who gave it to Caesar in the first place? Answer: God did!

Conclusion: It Already Belongs to God!

A. Jesus was once being interrogated by Pontius Pilate. Here is some of the dialog:

St. John 19:10-11:

Pilate: *“You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to crucify you?”*

Jesus: **“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”**

B. The Lord once said as recorded in St. Matthew 28:18: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”**

C. It was and it is impossible to trap the Lord of glory who has all power and authority; whose perfect life fulfilled the perfect Law of God; whose divine blood paid the ransom for all sin in the world; whose glorious resurrection has defeated the power of death so that you will live beyond death and on the day of the resurrection, even beyond the grave. Who can trap Him? Not even death!

D. So the government, yes even *the government*, belongs to God. Romans 13:1-7 and 1st Peter 2:13-17 make this clear.

E. But what about “corrupt” government? In Isaiah 45, God used the pagan Persian King Cyrus as “his anointed” (Is 45:1). God works His will and power even through an unbeliever!

F. This doesn’t mean Christians should be passive and not strive to bring good to our culture, society, and government. Of course we should! We are “salt” and “light” (St. Matthew 5:13-16). We renounce the God traps, and hold to Christ!