

**Render to Caesar
the things that are Caesar's
(and to God the things that are God's)**

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November 5, 2011

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Text: Mk 12; 14-17

Introduction

In the religious world today there is much confusion concerning the role of the church and that of the civil government in the lives of Christians. How are we to be governed and where does our primary loyalty lie?

Are we to look to the “things of Caesar” for spiritual guidance? Are these powers endowed by God to enact laws of religious and moral conduct by which we are to be governed? Certainly, civil powers cannot supplant those of God, nor can their laws, enacted by faulty and often misguided men, be of such force that we can look to them for guidance in religious matters.

In our text, our Lord pointed to a dual responsibility of his followers to these two entities. He did not indicate a dual unquestioning loyalty to both. How do we distinguish between the two?

As usual, we will consult the words of our Lord and his apostles for guidance and not self-appointed politicians or public figures who would presume to speak for God.

A holy nation

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims...” (1 Pet 4:9-11)

- Generation, “genos”... kindred, nation, offspring, stock” (1085 — Strong).

- Nation, "ethnos"... "a tribe, nation, people, group" (1484, Strong.)
- People, "laos"... "all those who are of the same stock and language" (Online Gr. Lex.)
- Strangers, "paroikos"... "one who lives on earth as a stranger, a sojourner on the earth. Of Christians, whose home is in heaven."
- Pilgrims, "parepidemos"... "a resident foreigner" (3927 — Strong) .

Citizens

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil 3:20)

- Conversation, "politeuma"... "a state, commonwealth (of citizens)"; also, "the constitution of a commonwealth, form of government and the laws by which it is administered." (4175 — Strong).

Peculiar people

(Jesus Christ) *"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* (Tit. 2:14).

- Peculiar, "laos: "a people, group, tribe, nation, all those who are of the same stock and language" 2992 — Strong).

In short, Peter is saying we are a race of people peculiar (his own) in our loyalty and citizens of a heavenly commonwealth whose head is in heaven.

Heavenly Laws

"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come un-to him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23).

Christ our head, who rules from heaven, is the author of all laws which govern his people. Throughout his earthly sojourn, he repeatedly stressed the importance of his words as laws to his people.

The words of the Lord constitute the laws by which we are to conduct our affairs in this life. *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.”* (Phil 1:27).

- Conversation, “*politeuomai*” to behave as a citizen...to avail oneself of or recognize the laws (4176 — Strong).

The Apostles

Paul stated clearly the role of the apostles’ teachings in the affairs of the heavenly king-dom. “If any man think himself to be a proph-et, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the command-ments of the Lord.” (1 Cor 14: 37).

It is these, then, that we look to for guidance in all matters spiritual and not to the laws of men which are often misguided.

Our Devotion, Loyalty, Duty

Where does our entire devotion and loyalty lie? to God, or to men? The answer is to be found in his word. *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”* (Eccl. 12:13).

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind...” (Luke 10:27).

As citizens of the heavenly kingdom, we are soldiers of the King and owe our wholehearted allegiance to our commanding officer. *“For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”* (Heb. 2:10).

Fear God And Honor The King

If our “whole duty” is to God, what responsibilities do we bear to the civil powers under which we live in the world today? We should define the powers of human governments as pertains to the word of God.

“This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the Most

High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.” (Dan. 4:17).

Daniel was dealing with Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, a proud and boastful man. *“...Is this not the great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”* (Dan. 4:30).

Conflicting allegiance

There are instances where “the things of Caesar” (civil laws) conflict with the things of God (divine laws). What are we to do?

“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:19-20).

The rulers of Israel had forbidden the preaching of the gospel but the Apostles declined to obey. Clearly, this was a case of civil disobedience. When there is a conflict between the two, our duty is to obey God, not man!

God rules

Clearly, we can see that the God of heaven is all powerful in the affairs of men, and allows ordinary men to be the rulers in their nations, no matter how base they may be. Throughout the books of the Old Testament, we find that God, at various times, used the wickedest of nations to bring about the downfall of his own people who had fallen under his displeasure.

When the 10 tribes of the kingdom of Israel had gone deeply into wickedness, God summoned the kings of Assyria and Egypt to finalize his judgment against them (See Isa. 7:17- 20). God truly rules among the kingdoms of men!

God has set the bounds (limits) of the nations of men and the times of their power. *“(God)... hath made of one blood nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.”* (Acts 17: 26)

Poor Nebuchadnezzar; he thought that he had created all the civilization around him, and failed to give the glory to God, to whom it belonged, and was to learn a costly lesson in the process.

Our lessons

So what does this all mean to us today, as subjects of the heavenly commonwealth of God? We have clear instructions as to our obligations to the civil authorities under which we live.

- We are citizens of the heavenly king-dom.
- We are pilgrims and sojourners on the earth.
- God's laws are supreme.
- When in conflict, with God's laws, we must decline to obey man.

Prayerfully,
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