

# “Render to Caesar”: The Christian and the State (Part 2)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>19</sup> The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. <sup>20</sup> So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. <sup>21</sup> So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. <sup>22</sup> Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” <sup>23</sup> But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s.” <sup>25</sup> He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” <sup>26</sup> And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent. (Luke 20:19–26)

- A. We looked at this text last week and I said the plan was to wrap back around this week and deal with the issue of the Christian and the government on both a broader and yet hopefully more practical scale as well.
- B. I wanted to spend a little more time on this because I think we’re regularly confused when it comes to how a follower of Jesus is supposed to engage in politics, if it all. I know I have been.
  - 1. If we haven’t felt that tension in previous years, certainly we’re feeling it now—where everything, it seems to me, is being so intensely politicized and polarized, and plenty of people who have remained relatively neutral or quiet on things to this point, are suddenly coming out with their opinions, strong opinions, and they’re drawing battle lines and sharpening their swords. Even Christians are at war against other Christians, it would seem, which we’ll talk about at the end of our time together.
    - a. So I think it’s safe to say we’re all wondering a bit about what’s our place in all this. How can we be a redemptive influence in it all?
- C. I want to try to help, if I can. The text we have before us really sets us up well for the subject. We’ll draw on it again this morning, but we’ll definitely broaden things out and go beyond it as well.
  - 1. I want to look at three things in particular: (1) The Origin of government; (2) The Function of it; and (3) The Relation between it and the Christian and church.

## (1) The Origin

## Heaven Rules!

- A. The first question we are asking here is where did government even come from in the first place?
1. Not just the American government, but the idea of it, in general—Kings and Emperors, Presidents and Prime Ministers. What is all of this?
- B. I well imagine that men should like to take credit for government, for kingdoms, for the establishment of their own realm and reign.
1. Indeed, I recall what King Nebuchadnezzar had said while walking along the roof of his royal palace in Babylon: “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30). “Look what I’ve done! Where did this kingdom come from? Me!”
    - a. But then of course God humbles him there on the spot with this singular goal in view: that “you [Nebuchadnezzar] know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Dan 4:32). Or to put it most succinctly as Daniel does up in v. 26: “that you know that Heaven rules.” “It isn’t ultimately yours to claim. It’s mine!”
      - i. The king’s authority, the state, the government—men didn’t achieve that, they received it from above. It all originates with and comes down from God.

## A Circle within a Circle

- A. Now, in our text as we mentioned last time, this is clearly hinted at when Jesus goes to talk about those things that belong to Caesar and those things that belong to God.
1. If you remember, I saw Jesus as drawing two circles or spheres here.
    - a. On the one hand, there is the sphere belonging to Caesar. Hence the command: “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” He has a realm, He has a sphere in which to rule.
    - b. But on the other hand, there is the sphere belonging to God. Hence the command: “and [render] to God the things that are God’s.”
- B. The big point here last time was that Jesus is not drawing two separate circles here, as it were; nor is He drawing two overlapping circles—as if some things rightly belongs only to Caesar, some things rightly belongs only to God, and then there’s middle space where they both have a say.
1. No! Instead, Jesus here is drawing one smaller circle (the things that are Caesar’s) within another larger, all-encompassing circle (the things that are God’s).
    - a. This is brought out quite simply when we follow Jesus’ logic. If Caesar’s things include all of that which has his image on it, namely coins and the stuff of Rome, then by extension, God’s things include all of that which has His image on it, namely

(according to [Gen 1:26-27](#)) you and I . . . including (and here's the critical point) Caesar himself.

- i. And there it is! Man's kingdom is not somehow set up on its own apart from the realm of God's reign and rule. No! Man's kingdom is set up under and within the realm of God's reign and rule.
- C. Where did Caesar and Nebuchadnezzar and Obama and Trump and governmental authority come from? Who's idea was this? Who started this? Who instituted this? God. "Heaven rules!" All earthly governments come from Him and will answer to Him in the end.

## Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2

- A. There are two critical texts on this that we will be weaving in and out of our discussion this morning. They really do, it seems to me, set forth the clearest vision for how Christians ought to engage with the state. And I'd like to bring them into the conversation at this point.
- 1. The first comes to us from the apostle Paul in [Rom 13:1-7](#).
  - 2. The second from the apostle Peter in [1 Pet 2:13-17](#).
    - a. I thought against reading them both in their entirety up front here, though I recommend you do so on your own time. I should rather like to dip into each where it pertains to the matter at hand.
- B. So for this question as to origin, in [Rom 13](#), Paul speaks plainly: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (v. 1). He goes on to say that "God has appointed [them]" (v. 2) and that they are "God's servant" (v. 4) and "ministers of God" (v. 6).
- C. Peter's words run parallel to Paul's on the matter: "<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,<sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him [God] . . ." ([1 Pet 2:13-14](#)).
- D. This is why Jesus can say what says to Pilate when He's on the stand and everyone is calling for His crucifixion. Pilate turns to Him confused that He won't defend Himself: "<sup>10</sup> 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above'" ([John 19:10-11](#)). It's from God!

## (2) The Function

### A Basic Platform of Justice

- A. So now that we've arrived at the fact that it is God who instituted government and the state, we should very well ask the follow-up question: For what purpose did He institute it? That He's the originator of government is now clear, but why? What's its function?

B. I like what Jonathan Leeman says here: “God instituted governments to establish a basic platform of justice for everyone created in his image” (How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?, 12). “a basic platform of justice” for all!

1. On this point he gives a list of references that I think are helpful to consider:

- a. In 2 Sam 8:15, we’re told that David, as a king after God’s heart, “administered justice and equity to all his people.”
- b. In 1 Kings 10:9, we’re told that God set Solomon on the throne of Israel [why?!] “that [he] may execute justice and righteousness.”
- c. In Prov 29:4 we read that: “By justice a king builds up the land, but he who [taxes heavily] tears it down.” If you’re going to do right by the people in the sight of God, then it will go well, but if you’re just going to manipulate the scepter to serve yourself, it’s going to crumble.

C. And, of course, Rom 13 and 1 Pet 2 fill this out a bit more for us.

1. So Paul writes that “<sup>3</sup> rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval,<sup>4</sup> for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Rom 13:3-4).

- a. So, on the one hand, governments are put in place to be a terror to bad conduct, and given the sword to leverage against it. They are avengers through whom God pours out His just and holy wrath upon wrongdoers.
- b. But, on the other hand, they are in place to approve those who do good. They are “God’s servant for your good.”

i. They are to avenge the bad and approve the good.

2. Peter says virtually the same exact thing. Governing authorities are sent by God “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” (1 Pet 2:14).

D. To punish the bad and praise the good. To avenge the bad. To approve the good. A basic platform of justice for every image-bearer. That’s what God instituted the government to provide.

## From Common Grace to Special Grace

A. In many ways we could say that the purpose of government is to create a stable space wherein God’s plan of redemption can unfold and the gospel of His kingdom can advance.

1. It doesn’t take up the sword and enforce faith in the gospel. It can’t. Salvation doesn’t work that way.
2. But it is called to create an environment of justice, order, and peace in which the church can do her job and fulfill her mission by preaching the gospel to all people in the hope and expectation that some will freely and without coercion come to repent and believe.

- a. Government is an aspect of God’s common grace given to all in order that God’s special grace of salvation in Christ may be received by some.
- B. So in [1 Tim 2:1-4](#) Paul writes: “<sup>1</sup> First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,<sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.<sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,<sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
- 1. Note the connection. We ought to pray for our governing authorities, that we might have peaceful and quiet (or well-ordered) lives, so that Christians are free to pursue a life lived out with God. And here’s what we must see: It is this well-governed life, which affords the freedom of religion and a safe space to engage the gospel, that leads to many more being saved and coming to the knowledge of the truth.
    - a. The common grace of a just and righteous government supports the cause of special grace and the advance of the gospel.

### (3) The Relation

#### “Redemptive Representation”

- A. So now, if this is the origin and function of the government, how should the church, the people of God, relate to it? What is our place in the political arena and the public square?
- B. Now last week, if you recall, I took on this question in broad strokes, looking at our various options as they appeared in [Luke 20](#).
  - 1. We could choose to relate by way of Antagonism—where it’s the church against the government.
  - 2. We could choose to relate by way of Compromise—where it’s the church bowing to the government.
  - 3. We could choose to relate by way of Withdrawal—where it’s the church pulling away from the political sphere altogether.
  - 4. But none of those answers fit what we see Jesus calling us to in [Luke 20](#) and elsewhere. No, instead we concluded we are to relate to the government by way of, what I called, Redemptive Representation.
    - a. We are to move towards the public square as salt and light, as ambassadors for another kingdom, as representatives of King Jesus.
- C. Last week we looked only briefly at what this Redemptive Representation might entail. This morning I want to really fill that out a bit more. I’ve got four aspects for us to consider.

#### Aspect #1: Influence

- A. If it is true that the Caesar’s realm falls within the broader sphere of God’s realm, if it is true that it is God who has instituted government and set forth its purpose and function, then it makes sense, does it not, that we the church, Christians, the children of this God and those who have been particularly entrusted with His Word and truth, ought to have much to say out in the public square about it.
1. Should we not then seek to influence the government that it might move more and more in the direction of that for which God designed it?!
    - a. Indeed, I would say that is precisely our call. As J.I. Packer writes: “Christians are to urge governments to fulfill their proper role. They are to pray for, obey, and yet watch over civil governments, reminding them that God ordained them to rule, protect, and keep order but not to tyrannize” (Concise Theology, 238).
- B. And if this is true with regard to the Christian and government in general, how much more so here in America, where, as Abraham Lincoln put it, we have a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”
1. America is a Democratic Republic, which means that, as voting citizens, we are all, in one sense at least, Caesar. The government goes as the people vote. What a privilege. What a burden.
    - a. So here in America, you and I bear a unique authority in the governing process and therefore have even more a responsibility to influence for King Jesus and see to it that laws that promote justice, peace, and good order for all are put into place.
- C. Now, I realize there may be some who right off the top will object on this point and say: “You cannot, indeed, you must not as a Christian, in any way, try to legislate your morality.”
1. The impulse, I think, here is understandable and even commendable. The idea, if I understand it correctly, is we ought not to try to force people to be Christian if they are not. And this is right. As we’ve said, you cannot convert by coercion. The government’s sword never replaces the kingdom’s keys.
    - a. But enforcing Christian worship and enforcing a biblical sense of morality, justice, human rights, and liberty for all are different things.
- D. Secular culture would have us believe in the myth of a “naked public square” where there is neutrality—no religion, no faith brought into things.
1. But this is disingenuous, and I think they know it. If the government exists to promote the good and punish the bad, well, who decides what the good and the bad are? And on what basis?
    - a. You see, every judgment concerning what is good or bad, right or wrong is a moral judgment and an inevitably religious and faith-based estimation. The question is never “Should we legislate morality?” but “Who’s morality should we legislate?”

- i. And as Christians, we know the God over all, and His moral Law that's been written on the hearts of every man ([Rom 2:15](#))—what is truly good and truly bad. Therefore, we need to get in the mix on this!
- E. If Christians buy into this myth and excuse themselves from the public square, then we leave it in the hands of unbelieving people to define what is good and bad for all.
  - 1. If they decide killing an unborn baby is a mother's right, who's there to stop them?
  - 2. If they decide white people are inherently superior to those of other skin color, who's there to push back?
  - 3. If they decide to go to take us to war for unrighteous gain or glory, who's there to draw the line?
  - 4. And on it could go.
    - a. Don't you see? If they can push us out of the political arena, they get to call the shots. In the secular worldview there is no transcendent reality, nor absolute truth, nor some universal moral standard. "I make the truth. I decide what's right and wrong. Not God."
      - i. So it's our high calling, Christian, to press in and remind the governing authorities why God instituted government in the first place, to warn them that they will be held accountable by Him for whether they fulfill that function or not, and then to labor with all our might to influence them towards an understanding of what is truly good and truly evil that they might rule and judge accordingly.
- F. This is why all over the prophets, we see them not just warning and seeking to influence Israel's kings, but even Gentile kings.
  - 1. The moral law—what's good, what's bad, what's just—it's not just for the church . . . it's for all. And every government will give an account to God for whether they rule in light of it.
    - a. So Daniel, again with Nebuchadnezzar, warns: "[O King . . . break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity](#)" ([Dan 4:27](#)). "Let there be justice in the way that you rule."
      - i. Separation of church and state doesn't mean separation of influence. Daniel didn't try to take over the Babylonian kingdom, but he did try to influence it towards justice and shalom in the name of YHWH and for the good of all people.
        - (1) And we ought to do the same as Redemptive Representatives of King Jesus.

## Aspect #2: Submission

- A. Now, Redemptive Representation not only involves Influence, it also involves Submission. While we are passionate about our cause and perspectives, we are at the same time humble, meek, and submissive.
- B. In not so many words, this really is the sort of thing Jesus is clearly calling us to in our text back in [Luke 20: “\[R\]ender to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” \(v. 25\)](#). “Pay your taxes. Stop belly-aching about it. It’s just money.”
1. So Paul in [Rom 13: “<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. . . . <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” \(vv. 1, 7\)](#).
  2. And Peter in [1 Pet 2: “<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors . . . <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God . . . <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” \(vv. 13–17\)](#).
- C. There are a couple quick things to bring out from [1 Pet](#) in particular.
- D. First, we are subject to governing authorities “[for the Lord’s sake](#)” (v. 13).
1. When we pay our taxes, or obey the speed limit, or follow inconvenient laws we wish we could just disregard, when we honor the emperor . . . we do it in honor of the Lord, we do it “[for the Lord’s sake](#).”
    - a. As John Piper said concerning this: “I’m not submitting to the government because the government has final sway over my life. I’m submitting to the government because the One who has final sway over my life told me to. The government is relativized. It is stripped of any divine claim, any excessive authority. Jesus is over and under the government”
      - i. Here we come back to that circle within a circle again. I am not choosing to either submit to Caesar or submit to God. I am submitting to Caesar as a way of submitting to God. Do you see?
        - (1) So I wonder where your heart is on that? Christians, as Christ’s Redemptive Representatives, we ought to be characterized by radical humility. Our King “[<sup>6</sup> did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant . . . <sup>8</sup> And . . . he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” \(Phil 2:6–8\)](#). Is that you? Or are you always demanding your rights and bucking the system?
- E. And this leads to the second thing I wanted to bring out. I know in our American minds there seems to be a tension between v. 13 and v. 16 of [1 Pet 2](#). In the former we’re told to submit and “[be subject](#)” to all manner of authorities. But in the latter we’re told “[live as people who are free](#).”



1. Well, which is it Peter? Am I submissive servant or am I free? And Peter would say: Yes! Those that have truly been freed in Christ are able to submit to and honor everyone!
  - a. Here's how you know you're truly free: You're not worried about your rights any more. You're not demanding that you be respected. You don't care if you get your way. It doesn't bother you to submit to another's authority because you know Jesus is an even higher authority and He's got you, you're His boy, you're His girl. And that's enough.

F. In a culture where everyone is clamoring and clashing for their own, we stand out as free from all that, a compelling counter-culture. A Christian cross-culture. A culture that looks like the cross. A people that Redemptively Represent their King.

### Aspect #3: Resistance

- A. Though on the whole, we are submitted to governing authorities for the Lord's sake, there are times where, for the Lord's sake, we will need to resist them.
  1. John Stott puts it succinctly for us: "We are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God. But if the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God."
- B. God is the bigger circle. He is our ultimate authority. Caesar can have our coins, but only Jesus has our hearts. And if Caesar oversteps His bounds, the people of God must resist and receive whatever consequence that may bring on them.
- C. So Peter—the very one who just told us to be subject to the government—is seen resisting when that same government demands his disobedience of God. God has said and go into all the nations and proclaim the good news of Jesus' death and resurrections—there is forgiveness of sins and salvation in His name! But the governing authorities are saying: "Enough with this talk. It's stirring things up. Quiet down . . . or else."
  1. But Peter responds in [Acts 4:19-20](#): " <sup>19</sup> Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, <sup>20</sup> for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."
  2. And again in [Acts 5:29](#): "We must obey God rather than men."
- D. Obviously, some feel, as Christians, we are in a time for resistance right now.
  1. Well known pastor, John MacArthur, down south, has used our text about rendering to Caesar and God, as the basis for his decision to reopen his church in defiance of the government's orders. "This is governmental overreach. This is persecution. They're lying to us. They're targeting us. God says don't forsake assembling, so we must obey Him, not man."

2. That's one perspective, and a valid one. Obviously, there are others. As a church we've chosen to take a stance that's more submitted to the government for the Lord's sake on the basis of a number of things that I don't have time to go into here.
  - a. But there's room for a variety of opinion here. And I suppose this really leads to the last aspect I would want to bring out.

#### Aspect #4: Charity

- A. With this I'm simply calling us to be patient and kind actually with fellow Christians who may feel differently from you on political matters—when to resist; when to submit; what issues to try to influence; the right way to go about influencing; etc.
  1. You've seen the divisiveness, haven't you? The vitriol? The back-biting? The in-fighting? The angry rhetoric? Even between brothers and sisters in Christ!
    - a. How can we redemptively represent Jesus well out in the public square if we, His people, are all at odds with each other right here within the church? No one is going to take us seriously when we talk about the love of God for sinners in the gospel, the concern He has for justice and shalom in our cities, the wonder of Calvary and the cross—if we aren't showcasing that as a community, within our community.
- B. The church is supposed to be a new humanity, a new community, an outpost of the kingdom of heaven here on earth. Jesus is bringing together all manner of different people. Jew and Gentile, men and women, rich and poor . . . and, dare I say, Republican and Democrat.
  1. I wonder if you realize that within Jesus' little group of 12 apostles were Simon the Zealot—a Jewish nationalist bent against Roman occupation, and Matthew the tax collector—a Jewish sellout, working for Rome to get a buck.
    - a. These guys are on opposite sides of the political spectrum and yet because they both have Jesus and the gospel, they can come together.
- C. So let me end with this. There's an awful lot of space between the biblical principles we should all agree on and the way we think these things will best work out in political policy and process.
  1. In other words, we should all agree, racism is wrong, police brutality is wrong, abortion is wrong, we should be concerned for the poor and oppressed, we should care for the environment, etc., etc.
  2. But the calculations we work out for which issue is more important, what strategy should be taken to get there, which candidate offers our best chance at moving forward, etc.—we may disagree on that. Let me rephrase: We will disagree on that. And that's okay.
    - a. If we can gather around the cross together, listen before we speak, learn from one another, at the end of the day, we may still agree to disagree, but we'll have more respect for each other and, hence, we'll garner more respect out in the public square.

- i. We'll look more like the King we're called to Redemptively Represent. God help us!