

# The Dual Citizen: How Christians Do Politics, Elections, and the Kingdom of God

## Matthew 22:15-22

October 30, 2016  
Steve DeWitt

Happy Reformation Day. It has been 499 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the wall of the Wittenberg Church. That event is viewed as the official beginning of the Great Reformation in which the Western World rediscovered the true gospel. Next year is 500 years and we will take a Sunday to tell about it. I have a dream. My dream is that our people and our children would identify this date more with God's gracious recovery of the gospel than with costumes and candy.

Did you see the title? *The Dual Citizen: How Christians Do Politics, Elections, and the Kingdom of God*. By Christian I assume a true follower of Jesus who is seeking to live in submission to God's Word. The Bible has a great deal to say about a Christian's role in society including how we ought to live in relationship to the government that is over us. With these two weeks being dominated by the presidential election, everyone's juiced on this subject anyway so it's a perfect time to bring the Bible to bear. So we'll have two Sundays on how Christians do politics, elections, and the kingdom of God.

Before anyone gets too fidgety, I'm not going to tell you specifically who to vote for. That's not where this is going. I am going to say that voting is important and I urge you to do so. We have been criticized in the past for not endorsing specific candidates. Besides being legally perilous, it's important to us that our church retains its prophetic role in our community. If our church becomes politically-oriented, we compromise our prophetic role. Prophetic or political? We choose to be a prophetic, gospel-oriented church.

It's tempting to join the political white noise because I would guess most of us have strong and personal opinions on the state of our country, the individuals who are running for various offices, and the political ideology that each represents. Speaking on politics anytime is dangerous, especially in the charged environment we are in right now. I am going to try very hard to step where the Bible steps and walk that path with appropriate application. My goal isn't to appease the Democrats here or the Republicans here or the Independents here or the Libertarians here. My goal is to please the Lord and use this incredibly toxic political season in our country. There is one King that you can put all your hope in. His name is not on any current ballot. His name is Jesus.

I wonder if we have any dual citizens here. What is a dual citizen? It's someone who is simultaneously a citizen of two countries. Two kingdoms. Some people could be dual citizens but they relinquish one citizenship and maintain another. There also are people who have no citizenship anywhere. You may remember the clever movie starring Tom Hanks where he gets stuck in JFK airport because he is denied entry into the US and a military coup had taken place in his home country. He was a man without a country and without a citizenship. There also are people who live in one country while being a citizen of another country. There are people who live temporarily in one country while retaining citizenship in another.

So what is the Christian? ***A Christian is a dual citizen of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man.*** There are potential theological issues with this sentence but please take it in the way I mean it. What I mean is that to be human is to live in human society and

under human government. We are citizens of the kingdom of men. But there is another citizenship for the Christian. To be a Christian is to be a citizen of the kingdom of God with Jesus as your king.

We had better understand how to be faithful to both citizenships or we might live as if the earthly kingdom is the really important one or live as if the heavenly kingdom is all that matters. To be like Tom Hanks' character without faithful citizenship in either place.

For several weeks we have been studying the kingdom of God from Matthew. I'm not going to repeat material to build the case that a Christian is a citizen of the kingdom of God. God's kingdom is the redemptive reign of God through Christ. This kingdom is not as visible or tangible as the kingdom of man but is no less a real kingdom. Someday there will be no more elections because Jesus will reign here by divine fiat. Democracy will go out the window. But for now, we live in two kingdoms. What is a Christian's responsibility to the kingdom of man while simultaneously a citizen of the kingdom of God? That's a challenging question not just for American Christians but for Chinese Christians and Australian Christians and Afghani Christians.

Jesus was confronted with this same question in the highly charged and political world of his day. He lived in first century Israel which was occupied at the time by the Romans. Rome had come to power by invasion and sword and remained in power through force and overwhelming strength. They forced high taxes on the people. They had their own currency and had the hubris to put their own emperor on the coinage that Israel had to use. Did the Jews like their government? While not as bad as some conquerors, they deeply resented the Romans. There were regular uprisings against them. Revolutionary groups existed everywhere; even Jesus' twelve disciples included one revolutionary, Simon the Zealot. He was a political operative, even possibly an assassin.

Far worse than a democrat or republican in the oval office, was Rome in the oval office. Jesus was confronted with this flammable political issue. Matthew 22 tells us what happened,

*"Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, '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.'" (Matthew 22:15-16)*

The Pharisees were desperate to take Jesus down. What better way to do it then to catch him in the political inferno of his day? Here is the trap: *"Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"* (Verse 17) Behind this seemingly simple question is TNT. On the surface, it is a question of taxation. Sure, you should pay your taxes. But the question is, should we pay taxes *to Caesar*? Caesar was the head of Rome. Tiberius Julius Caesar ruled the known world. Do you see any irony here? In terms of kingdoms and power, who is greater, Caesar or the one answering this question about him?

That is why this is so helpful for our issue today. Rome was the governing kingdom of the day. Jesus is the King of the kingdom of God. The question is addressed to the King of kings about duty to a lesser king.

Do you see the dilemma they pose to Jesus? If he says you shouldn't pay taxes to Caesar, now he is a revolutionary and they can leverage that to get Rome to kill him. Remember Herod hearing the wise men tell of a king being born and Herod killing all the children around Bethlehem, and Pilate asking Jesus, "Are you a king?" Even the inscription above

him on the cross speaks to this Roman hysteria, "*The King of the Jews.*" (Matthew 27:37) Any claim to kingship was a threat to Rome and Rome didn't play nice.

But if he said, *yes, pay taxes to Rome*, in the eyes of the people, he was a capitulator. An appeaser. A sell-out. A first century Neville Chamberlin. Why? The Jews hated Rome, their tax collectors, and the taxes. So what would Jesus say?

*"But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away."* (Matthew 22:18-22)

What an incredible answer! Can you imagine Jesus in a presidential debate? He handles this question so skillfully. He asks for a denarius. Realize this coin was itself agitating.



The Roman currency had the image of Caesar on it. Every day the currency was a reminder of being under Caesar's thumb. We put heroes on our money. Imagine using money every day with Hitler or Bin Laden's picture on it; that's kind of what it was like.

So they bring him a denarius and Jesus asks a simple question, whose picture is on it? He knew whose picture it was. He was simply beginning them on a path of reasoning. *Caesar. We all know it. Duh. Why you are asking such an easy question?*

### **Render to Caesar**

*"Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* (Verse 21)

In one sentence Jesus lays out how to be a dual citizen. Caesar represents human government, the kingdom of man. This kingdom has "things" including money, taxation, and with it our responsibility to submit to it. Jesus sanctions submission and involvement in the activities and responsibilities of human government. He doesn't stop there, but what if

he had? We would think that government and political power was *the* most important thing. We would give all our time and energy to it. All our hope would be in government. We would pursue political power like a religion.

Are there people like this? They show their spots every election cycle. The fury and animus they show over the election makes you think that for them, this kingdom of man is the only one that matters. It also shows itself in people who think government is the great hope of mankind. They want more and more of it. The more the better. Certain political theories are all about rendering to Caesar. *The more rendering the better! Caesar can fix our problems. Hail Caesar!*

But Jesus doesn't stop with, "render to Caesar." Why? Jesus knew a secret. Do you know this secret? ***The answers to man's real problems don't come from man.*** No matter how brilliant or wise Caesar is, man's basic problem remains. That is why even the most extreme forms of governmental control (like socialism, communism, and totalitarianism) eventually collapse (the USSR is the most recent extreme example). No human government or system can survive whose ultimate hope is in the power of man. You can't name one in history that has. We can render to Caesar all we want but it doesn't change the basic problem of the human heart. We have a basic corruption which every politician takes into the public office. Power doesn't corrupt, power reveals corruption, and absolute power reveals corruption absolutely.

It is the second part of the sentence that is so critical. "And [render] to God the things that are God's." (Verse 21) What things are God's?

- "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." (Psalm 24:1)
- "The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them. (Psalm 89:11)

These and many, many other verses make it clear that God is the owner and ruler of everything. *Render to God the things that are God's* doesn't mean Caesar owns some things and God owns some things. Rather Jesus is describing where our allegiance should be.

We all have Caesars and various levels of them that are over us. In the US, the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court are our Caesar. We also have state governors and legislators, local government officials, and police officers fall under this. What should be our posture toward government that is over us? "Render to Caesar."

Paul says it this way in Romans 13: "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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." (Romans 13:1-2) How do we render to Caesar that which is Caesar's?

### **Submit to Caesar**

Willing submission is part of so many relationships. We are told to submit to God, wives are to submit to their husbands. Jesus submits to his heavenly Father within the Trinity. Submission must be a good and holy thing if we find it within the Godhead itself.

*"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities."* (Romans 13:1) Why? *"For there is no authority except from God."* A Christian understanding of government authority begins with there being a higher authority that endows the lesser with authority. Human government is a lower throne. A much, much lesser authority than God but a real authority none the less.

A Christian is called to submit to the lesser authority as an act of obedience to the higher authority—God himself. This doesn't mean our hope is in government any more than a wife's ultimate hope is in her husband. That will be a very disappointed wife and when we hope in human government we will be severely disappointed.

A recent quote I heard has become a favorite and it has to do with political theories that elevate human government by centralizing power. So this quote works for socialism or communism. The quote is, *"Socialism is like a nude beach; it sounds great until you get there."* (Dennis Miller) For centuries man has tried to create utopia through government. There are all kinds of ideas on how to do this, but no matter what they are, when you get there, when you live under it, it's never the nirvana promised. Caesar is no Jesus.

We are not told to hope in government; it would be foolish to do so. Our hope is always to be in the God who gives government its authority. The best human governments will recognize this. We are blessed to live in a country whose founding documents and system of checks and balances closely align with this truth. *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."* (*The Declaration of Independence*) This statement is based on what is known as natural law. Natural law says that human dignity and worth comes from a higher place than government. While not strictly Christian, it echoes *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."* (Matthew 22:21) Our rights come from a Creator.

What happens to the rights given by the Creator when government denies there is a Creator? Why does the atheistic People's Republic of China hate Christianity? Secularism and atheistic worldviews undermine natural law. If our rights don't come from a Creator, then they are only given to us by government. If government can give them, government can take them away.

So not only should we render to God the things that are God's, Caesar should render to God the things that are God's. Yet Rome didn't believe in natural law and Jesus still said, *render*. Government ceases to be a devil when it ceases to be a god. Submit to the authorities over you. Are you prepared to do so no matter who wins any election? We must, as an act of submission to God.

### **Pray for Caesar**

*"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior."* (1 Timothy 2:1-3)

It's easier to pray for politicians you like. Those seem harder to find these days. What should we do? Pray for them. Pray for President Obama. Pray for our other leaders. But what kind of prayer? I think many people miss the rest of the verse, *"that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life."* What is the connection between our prayers and our peaceful lives?

The content of our prayers and the policy choices of our leaders. I take this to mean we pray that they would have wisdom. We pray they would govern by policies that allow gospel ministry to freely take place. We pray they would afford us freedoms of worship and evangelism. We pray they would govern toward these things. We pray that they would render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Caesar must see himself as a little king under the authority of the King of kings. From there flows ethical government and social justice and loving our neighbors as ourselves. When government renders to God, it receives the natural blessings God built into his purpose for human government.

*"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."* (Proverbs 14:34) Here is my final exhortation: if we are called to pray in that direction, shouldn't we also vote in that direction?

That is next week. How should Christians involve themselves in the political process and what should be the effect? Do we isolate ourselves? Do we vote? Do we serve in government? Those are thornier questions. Here are the safe ones. Christian, render to Caesar, submit to Caesar, and pray for Caesar.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2016 by Steve DeWitt. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Bethel's website address ([www.bethelweb.org](http://www.bethelweb.org)) on the copied resource.