

The Dual Citizen: How Citizens of the Kingdom of God Live the Day After an Election

Matthew 22:17-21

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We are two days away from the election of the 45th president of the United States. In two days millions of people will be excited and millions of people will be angry and depressed. We aren't sure which party will experience which emotion; we just know that is will happen. This election cycle has been one of the most difficult in any recent memory. Not just the politicians but the electorate are deeply divided.

There will be the real temptation Tuesday night to either be too triumphant or too devastated. There is a famous sermon by Tony Campolo on the resurrection entitled, *"It's Friday, but Sunday's Coming."* I thought about entitling this message, *"It's Sunday, but Wednesday's Coming."* The day after the election is coming. How should citizens of the kingdom of God wake up on Wednesday? What should our priorities and emotions be no matter who wins the election? We are doing a little series within our kingdom of God series on human government and a Christian's responsibility under it.

First, a quick review of last week. We went to Matthew 22. The Pharisees are desperate to get dirt on Jesus. This was first century WikiLeaks. They wanted to catch him in his words either to get Rome to view him as a revolutionary and threat to their power OR to undermine his standing and popularity among the Jews. Either would work, but the Roman option had appeal as only the Romans could legally execute anyone, particularly by crucifixion.

"Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:17 ESV) Simple question. Incredible political baggage. To say yes meant an implicit endorsement of the Romans and Caesar, whom the Jews hated. To say no opened the door to the wrath of Rome coming on him. Rome tried to kill him when he was born and wouldn't hesitate to do so again should he have ambition for political insurrection.

"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.'" (Matthew 22:17-21)

That last sentence is the most important sentence in the Bible regarding human government and a Christian's responsibility to it. The Son of God sanctions human government and "things" that are Caesar's while keeping God and his kingdom over all.

There are things that are Caesar's and there are things that are God's. You could hear that and think that this is what Jesus is saying.

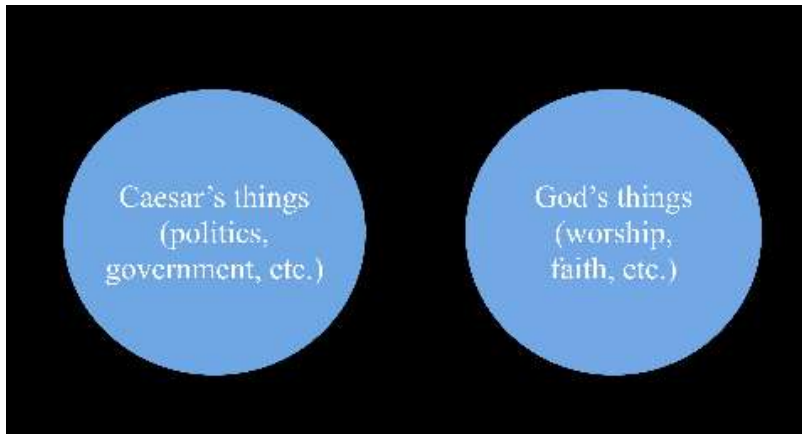


Figure 1 - Credit: Jonathan Leeman, "What Christians Should Do For Government: Love Your Nation, People, or Tribe," 9Marks.org, August 30, 2016

This dichotomy of circles and responsibility should seem familiar because it is largely how philosophical liberalism presents itself. The result is the privatization of faith and worship by tolerating it as long as it isn't brought up in polite company and definitely not in the public discourse. One Christian writer called this the naked public square meaning that faith, religion, and morality are eliminated from the life of society by forcing it to retreat behind the walls of churches and homes. (Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, Eerdmans, 1988) Don't bring it out. Don't bring it up. You can have your quirky religious beliefs but they are not to influence the halls of Congress or the voting booth. Separation of church and state has become the elimination of church from state. This is called secularism, but it's really governmental atheism. Political humanism. No God. All man.

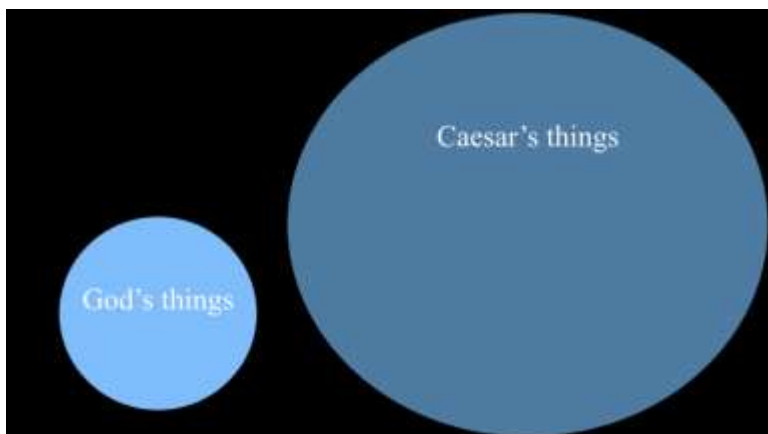


Figure 2 - Credit: Created by Bethel Church 2016

The goal is to expand Caesar's circle and to shrink the circle of God's things. This is veiled with terms like tolerance or political correctness. These are just wedge issues to diminish the circle of God and expand the circle of Caesar. Behind this is the ancient temptation of Satan in the Garden of Eden. The first secular, non-God over everything moment was when Satan tempted Eve to carve out a little kingdom of her own. *Eat and you will be like God.* (Genesis 3:4-5) Man has aspired to be God ever since and the primary way is through the consolidation of power and control. Omniscience and sovereignty. These are divine attributes aspired to by fallen human government.

But Jesus' statement doesn't give Caesar autonomy from God. Why? "[Render] to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21) What is God's? "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof." (Psalm 24:1) Everything is God's including Caesar. The picture is below.

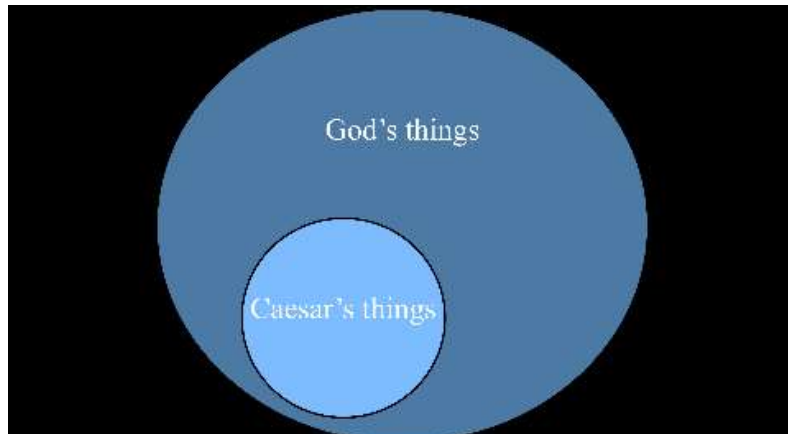


Figure 3 - Jonathan Leeman, "What Christians Should Do For Government: Love Your Nation, People, or Tribe," 9Marks.org, August 30, 2016

When we are rendering to Caesar taxes or obeying civic laws, we are doing this in the broader circle of God's will for humanity and the governing of human affairs. Caesar is also under God. The best human governments, the ones that allow human flourishing by common grace, require Caesar to render to God the things that are God's. This includes freedom of religion, social justice, punishing and threatening the evildoer by wielding the sword. The most basic responsibility of government according to Romans 13 is the protection of its citizens and the punishment of the evildoer. It must at least do that or society descends into lawlessness.

Caesar always wants to do more and grow its circle of authority and control. Because of human pride, its ultimate goal is to replace God. It wants to be the whole circle. What was the Tower of Babel? What was Nebuchadnezzar's giant golden statue? What was Rome's essential religion? Not Christ is Lord, but Caesar is Lord. The pride of man wants the circle to be all man, no God.

Don't forget, Revelation prophesies that someday this will happen. There will be one world government and all commerce for the world will be centrally controlled. Things will be upside down. It will be mankind rendering to Caesar the things that are God's. Fascism and Communism and other forms of the elevation of government foreshadow what is coming. It will be the Tower of Babel all over again.

We still haven't answered how we should wake up on Wednesday.

What is a Christian's Responsibility to Government and How Should Our Presence Affect Society?

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

These are well-known words and are often quoted, even by politicians. Historically, people like John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan used this language to describe America as the shining city on a hill. That is more patriotic than biblical. The city on a hill isn't America or any other country or kingdom. The city on a hill is the collective witness of citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus defines the light people see as "your good works" which leads people to give glory to our Father in heaven.

He goes on to say that nobody who has a light puts it under a bushel basket. No, the purpose of a lamp is for its light to be seen. Light overcomes the darkness. Just like salt changes the flavor wherever it goes and light changes darkness so people can see, faithful citizens of God living in man's kingdom will change the world around them. There are comfortable categories we all agree on. Ministry to the poor, widows, and orphans. Kindness to strangers and loving our enemies. All good. Classic Christianity at its best.

But what about Christians involved in government? Seeking office? Even voting? What do salt and light seek to do in political office or the voting booth?

I'm indebted to two writers in particular in this message. Jonathan Leeman and Professor Wayne Grudem. Leeman points out three errors Christians can easily fall into with civic responsibility. (Jonathan Leeman, "What Christians Should Do For Government: Engage with 'Convictional Kindness,'" *9Marks.org*, September 26, 2016)

Three Ways Christians Fail Human Government

Disengagement

This is the monks and the monastery approach or churches and Christians that think, *the world is going down anyway, let's just get into our bunker and watch the world burn.*

Many of the heroes of the Bible influenced society and government. Here is a sample.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Empire</u>
Joseph	2 nd to Pharaoh	Egyptian Empire
Nehemiah	Cupbearer to the king	Persian Empire (Artaxerxes)
Mordecai	2 nd to King	Persian Empire (Ahasuerus)
Daniel	High Official/Wise man	Babylonian Empire (Nebuchadnezzar)

Daniel in particular provides a counter to those who want to disengage from government. He was taken to a foreign land but soon his knowledge and character put him in close proximity to the ruler of the world at the time. He didn't shrink from it, but he also didn't compromise, even facing the famous lion's den to be a faithful witness in the pagan Babylonian empire. Dare to be a Daniel. Light doesn't disengage from darkness. That's not an option.

Surrender

This is the capitulation option. This is the German church under Nazi rule or the Russian Orthodox Church under the USSR. They tried to maintain relevance by surrendering to the government and becoming a political tool. That's not an option.

Worldly engagement

This error occurs when we equate political success with spiritual success. So the church becomes just another political action group. Local churches are called to preach the gospel but their gospel sounds a lot like a political rally. To this day, you say Moral Majority and what do people think? Christians forcing their agenda down our throats. Even former leaders of the Moral Majority have repented of this approach. Beware of wrapping the cross in the American flag (or any other flag for that matter).

So if we shouldn't go into a bunker, or surrender, or compromise, what should we do? I agree with Dr. Wayne Grudem and what he calls...

Significant Influence

"The 'significant influence' view says that Christians should seek to influence civil government according to God's moral standards and God's purposes for government as revealed in the Bible (when rightly understood). But while Christians exercise this influence, they must simultaneously insist on protecting freedom of religion for all citizens. In addition, 'significant influence' does not mean angry, belligerent, intolerant, judgmental, red-faced, and hate-filled influence, but rather winsome, kind, thoughtful, loving, persuasive influence that is suitable to each circumstance and that always protects the other person's right to disagree, but that is also uncompromising about the truthfulness and moral goodness of the teachings of God's Word." (Wayne Grudem, *Politics to the Glory of God*, p. 55)

Significant influence means that the church must retain its prophetic role. Anything that smells like politicizing the church or the gospel must be avoided. So as an example, Billy Graham was an advisor to presidents but he didn't endorse them.

But that doesn't mean hiding in a bunker. Light influences darkness wherever it goes and Jesus called Christians the light of the world. We should do everything we can to influence society and government toward the light. God's truth is light and governments that govern according to God's precepts and principles are blessed by outcomes God built into the moral fabric of society. This is known as common grace.

"Righteousness exalts a nation, sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34) Where Christianity influences, that influence is toward God's wisdom and will. It influences things like human dignity, morality, the inherent value of human life, religious freedom, social justice, punishment of evil, and the promotion of his gifts to society including marriage, family, and loving your neighbor. Think of the moral principles behind the influence of William Wilberforce in England two centuries ago or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Both appealed to man's conscience in the treatment of human beings. One changed the British Empire, the other the American empire. Both did so for good along principles God established.

"But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7) God tells Jeremiah to be a *significant influence*. Exiled Jews were to work for the good of the Gentile community around it. Seek the good of your city. Pray for your city. Its prospering is your prospering. What does this mean?

Christians should seek to significantly influence every category of society

We should do this not for personal ambition, but for the good of our fellow man. Love your neighbor as yourself includes using every tool available to promote human flourishing. Seeking the welfare of our city. Influencing stakeholders and powerbrokers toward love and justice for our neighbor. Not just the person next to us, but as the Good Samaritan shows, any person we can be neighborly to.

Christians can serve in government as a means to significant influence

Some Christians may choose to seek public office. This is completely legitimate as long as political power isn't seen as a means to an end that only the gospel can provide. For hundreds of years the church was over the Holy Roman Empire and by most accounts, it was a disaster.

Christians in political office serve the people as an act of service to God. There are challenges, but holding public office provides opportunity for significant influence in the laws of the land.

In a democracy, voting is a Christian stewardship

Pastor Mark Dever makes the point that "in our democratic context, part of submitting to the state means sharing in its authority." (Mark Dever, "How to Survive a Cultural Crisis," *9Marks, org*, October 24, 2014.) We have a vote and that vote has a personal responsibility attached. We are Caesar. If we are to pray for peace and the good of our city, shouldn't we at minimum vote toward those same goals? Vote for candidates who as best we can tell, will lead and legislate toward those goals? They are all sinners so nothing is guaranteed. Sometimes it's easier to identify candidates who are more clearly seeking directions against God's plan for society. Vote against them. I urge you to vote.

In this election, there are particular challenges. So my personal approach is to view the whole platform as indicative of a general direction and ideology. We aren't just voting for a president. He or she is a figurehead. We are voting for thousands of people who will govern with them. Supreme Court justices who will decide law for decades to come. With so much mudslinging, it's easy to miss that there are too very divergent governments represented by the two major parties. I'm encouraging you to vote, and vote for the general direction that most aligns with a society that renders to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Caesar is Fading; the True King is on His Way

Human government as we know it is part of a world order that is passing away. The Caesars are temporarily on the stage and then they are gone. Nations are on the stage and then they are gone. Whoever wins Tuesday will be here and then soon be gone.

History is telling us something about the future. There is a future government. It is a monarchy. On the throne is the only King worth our full allegiance and worship. He will rule with perfect justice. The effect of his earthly reign will be the flourishing of the peoples of the world. Dry deserts will bloom and rejoice (Isaiah 35:1ff.) *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them."* (Isaiah 11:6) Until then our prayer and longing is for that king to come, for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Our cry is, *"May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth!"* (Psalm 72:8)

So wake up Wednesday looking forward to the day when there will be no more elections, for Jesus will reign forever.

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