

NOTES

Jesus' words continue to critique all those ways the church and empire have been wrapped in the same flag; and Christianity became a tool to sanction expansionist visions and worldly might - to justify the Crusades, or the forced conversions of whole people groups during colonial periods. This is not the Jesus-way. Period.

For us, there is a word of caution about any way that a political movement that might try to co-opt the name of Christ, treat believers like a 'voting bloc' and use Christianity to give some sort of 'divine sanction' to build earthly kingdoms. **Kingdom Orientation One: We aren't building the 'kingdoms;' we're building for the Kingdom of God.**

In recent years some Christian leaders have used our text, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God's*" to suggest that in matters relating to spirituality - we act Christianly, but the political sphere can operate as a fierce free-for-all.

As Kaitlyn Schiess has pointed out in her excellent book *The Ballot and the Bible*:

"Christian leaders used it [the phrase "Give to Caesar what is Caesars"] to...separate a person's interpersonal moral obligations and their public political obligations....Give to Caesar what is Caesar's meant playing by the rules of the world when it came to politics, and giving to God what is God meant acting faithfully in your church, family, immediate community."¹

II. The Challenge of Relating Faithfully to the State: A Crash-Course in Church History

A. Early Church

After Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension back to the Father, you have the early church, empowered by the Spirit, sent on mission. They have their directions from Jesus, to take the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

The early church is both integrated into their societies, but also living in an alternative way - a kind of alternate community that acts as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom (see Note in Endnote 2).

For nearly the next 300 years, the Christian movement spread throughout the Mediterranean world, primarily as Christians did their work with excellence, and sought the good of the cities God had planted them in.



Open Up

What have you found most helpful or encouraging so far about the current series?

What questions are still outstanding for you? (Consider writing some of these down and sending them to Pastor Dave)

Dig In

1. **Read Ephesians 6:10-20.** How does knowing that our 'battle is not against flesh and blood' inform how we might approach the challenges we see in our world? How are we told to respond in this text?
2. In the message, one implication of this text was to say: We don't 'demonize' the 'other-side' – whoever the other side happens to be. We always recognize the humanity, the image of God, in others, even in those we disagree with most.
 - a. How does seeing the image of God in every person challenge dehumanizing rhetoric, policies or actions?
 - b. Who are the neighbours most easily forgotten or reduced to stereotypes today?
 - c. How does recognizing the image of God in others shape civil discourse, especially with those we disagree with?
3. From a Baptist take, the message presented the idea that: 'We, as a church seek to win hearts through the gospel, which will lead to transformation that is not imposed or coercive. We are not 'fighting' a battle against people, but serving with influence toward the good, the true and the beautiful. We are aiming to win hearts to the true King of the kingdom of God, not trying to create a quote-unquote, 'Christian nation.' We are building for God's Kingdom, not the kingdoms of this world.'

This approach seeks to maintain religious freedom for every religious group, not just our own.

Discuss this approach.

- a. What do you think about it?
- b. What might it look like for you to step deeper into missional engagement that seeks to show the beauty of the Gospel in your own neighbourhood.

Prayer: Pray for any needs in your group. Take time for concerted prayer for our political leaders, recognizing that our struggle is not against persons but against spiritual powers and principalities. Pray for our mayor and council, for our Provincial MLAs and for our MPs and Federal government.