

NOTES

God's patience with Caesar reflects His patience with us. But Jesus also teaches, "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded;*" (Luke 12:48b). If Caesar fails to steward his authority toward justice, he too will answer to the true King.

Jesus' teaching fits within Scripture's broader story of humanity developing structures of authority. As societies grew from tribes to cities to complex governments, roles became more defined. In Israel kings did not often have the roles of priests or prophets. In God's common grace, there are distinct spheres of human responsibility. Even where God is not acknowledged, authority still operates under His sovereignty. This allows Jesus to say, "*...Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's...*" (see Mark 12:17).

Both Paul the Apostle in Romans 13:1-7 and Peter the Apostle in 1 Peter 2:13-17 expand on this teaching. They describe governing authorities as servants of God bearing the sword in at least three important ways:

- Government 'bears the sword' for the maintenance of law and order.
- Government 'bears the sword' against threats to its people.
- Government also 'bears the hammer' to build and maintain public systems and services to promote the general welfare of its people.²

We recognize this authority within God's sovereignty and respect and submit to it, up to a point.

Honour, however, is not the same as worship. Scripture is clear - governmental authority is limited. Jesus, Peter and Paul all faced execution under Roman rule for treason against Caesar. When commanded to stop speaking about Christ by the ruling Jewish council, the apostles declared:

"Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:19-20

When it is between Caesar and God there is no question - God always wins.

NOTES

Jesus warns:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

Matthew 6:1a

How do I know I'm worshipping Caesar?

When our voice protects image over God's truth, we worship Caesar.

C. HUNGRY FOR WORLDLY POWER

A shorthand used throughout history for political worship, and other tendencies like it, is being 'worldly.' Living within the worldly frame is short-sighted, self-preservative and, usually, combative. Living 'in the world' is the devouring, biting and destroying indicative of living 'in the flesh' (see Galatians 5:16-17).

Power and authority are part of God's good ordering of the universe. But there are 'worldly' and 'Kingdom' ways of using power.

"...You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you..."

Mark 10:42b-43a

Worldly power is inherently coercive, abusive and domineering. Because, without a God in heaven, our issues are up to us to solve. It is the inherent atheism of modern politics which lends it a fevered pitch.

How do I know I'm worshipping Caesar?

When fear and image drive us to abuse, manipulate and destroy enemies because their existence threatens our party or power.

D. DESPERATE FOR IT NOW

Political worship is urgent, impatient and narrow. When each election cycle is an apocalypse, every opponent an anti-Christ, then we have bent the knee to the wrong lord.

How do I know I'm worshipping Caesar?

When I cannot think past today, this election or these borders.

IV. WORSHIPPING JESUS

Christianity's central claim, its organizing reality, is the total lordship of Jesus Christ. We come into faith by proclaiming Jesus is Lord overall.



Open Up

What did you grow up expecting from government? How have you had to correct or grow in your understanding of it and its role?

Dig In

1. **Re-read Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17, John 19:11**
2. Make space to share openly without judgment. Trust the Spirit will lead us through the process of engaging in these questions together.
 - What do you think ‘honoring the emperor’ means in our democratic context?
 - If we’re connected to people who ‘worship Caesar’—lead with their political affiliations—how can we encourage them to put the political back in its proper sphere?
 - How do we engage in the political while being realistic about human sinfulness?
 - What issues connected to public life has the Spirit most placed on your heart? What ways, both political and through private action, is He calling you to act?
 - How do we keep our hope before us when bombarded by hopeless rhetoric?

Prayer:

Perhaps there are some in your group engaged in a way which is bring healing and transformation to culture. Take time to encourage each other in the work you are doing.

Perhaps someone in your group has a potential gift for a more public expression of witness, encourage them as such.

Take time to pray for our leaders and our country, pray against the continuing rise in all forms of extremism. Pray for the Kingdom to come.