

NOTES

The [other] ...condemns sexual immorality and secularism but grows silent when its political allies fan the flames of racial resentment towards immigrants and minority communities. When the church, in the interests of acquiring political power, aligns too much with the current age's secular left or right, it is sapped of both spiritual power and credibility with non-Christians.

We see 'the political captivity of the faithful.'

The solution cannot be some imaginary apolitical withdrawal (as if that were possible). Christians must learn to do something new – to engage politically, yet critically, not capitulating to any reigning ideology, in order to be 'salt and light' in a society rather than part of its decay."³

Jesus, in His answer, shows us how He avoids political simplicity. He's being presented with a false alternative – it's either *this* or *that*. He resists that partisan simplicity.

III. The image of God and rightful human authority

"...Bring me a Denarius and let me look at it."

Mark 12:15b

These coins were portable billboards of propaganda for the Roman Empire. But look at the question Jesus asks: *"Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"*

Humans are those who bear **the image of God**. So, when Jesus says, *"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's,"* (Mark 12:17b) there are layers and layers of meaning.

A) Jesus does recognize human authority. He says, in essence, 'That coin has Caesars image on it, so give him back his coin.' Like, pay the tax. You don't avoid being involved in the political system. The governing authorities do have *some* God-given role. Jesus affirms human authority; so, we do as well.

B) Jesus affirms human authority, but also demotes it to its rightful place. Where the political powers seek ultimate allegiance, Jesus subverts this idolatrous move. Any human authority is only *under* God's authority.

Jesus followers "must...resist any would-be lords who want to be worshipped in some cult, whatever form it might take."⁴

When leaders seek unquestioned and total allegiance, you can be sure they are on the wrong side of God.



Open Up

On a scale from 1 ('dumpster fire') to 10 ('super swell/happy days'), what has your experience been with discussing the intersection of Christian faith and the public sphere?

Our message started with 'a bazillion caveats' (but really only three) for this series: 1) Ask for clarification if something seems off; 2) Be humble; and 3) We're not going to be partisan.

How might these three 'caveats' help in your discussions, or 'lower the temperature' so your thinking and learning can create less heat and more light?

Dig In

1. **Read Mark 12:13-17.** Jesus can see through the political trap that is being set for Him. What are some ways that help us discern if a discussion on the political sphere might be fruitful or not?
2. In the message we heard one feature our pastoral team uses for discerning political engagement. 'No other organization has been given the specific task that the church has: to bear witness to the Gospel and Kingdom reign of Jesus Christ. Other organizations and ministries may be tasked with other distinct goals, but Gospel witness is the unique ministry of the church.'
 - a. Does engaging this issue add to our witness in the community or detract from it?
 - b. In what ways might engagement with, or promotion of this issue help us bear witness to the saving work of Jesus and his kingdom reign?
 - c. Will addressing this question from the pulpit cause undo confusion about the meaning of the gospel or the Christian life?
 - d. Will we compromise our overall witness to enter the debate on this issue publicly?

Take a moment to discuss those questions. Why might 'mission' and 'credibility of our witness' be so important? How might this set of questions help you think about your own engagement with 'hot button' issues (either with friends/family/neighbours, or online)?



3. The 'Pharisees and Herodians' represented different political 'camps' – different approaches to Rome. Jesus resists their 'false alternatives' question that was trying to put him in one camp or another. Discuss the wisdom of Jesus' answer – that avoided their political simplicity. Where do you, or your group, need to resist that same kind of polarity in your own thinking or approach?

4. Jesus offers the most incredibly wise answer that resisted their trap, and their polarizing, simplistic framing of the question when he says: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." This isn't creating 'two distinct spheres of power,' but it does recognize human authority, while also demoting it into its proper place under God's ultimate authority.

- a. Are there ways where you've maybe compartmentalized your political thought that needs to be brought back under the reign of God?
- b. What would it mean to let your allegiance to God, your love for Him (see Mark 12:28-31) be the priority for how you approach your public-facing faith?

Prayer

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-3. After taking time to pray for your group, in response to your discussion, take time to pray for our leaders: in Kamloops, in Victoria and in Ottawa, that we may "...live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."