

## ***Whose Is It?***

Matthew 22:15-22 Text: vs. 21 *“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”*

Our text this morning is a wise and surprising answer to a tricky question Jesus gave when He said, *“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s; and unto God what is God’s.”* It has a lot of implications as to how we are to live as Christians. Jesus admitted, there is a dual citizenship: We belong to God. But we also live under worldly authority. We have responsibilities and obligations to both. But we should not neglect, or rebel, against either one. Did our Founding Fathers consider religion to be separate from our new American government and public schools? To say it another way, did our Founding Fathers consider public matters purely secular, so they created a wall to keep Christianity out of government and public schools? It’s called *separation of church and state*.

In 1802 the Danbury Baptist Association wrote President Thomas Jefferson about the Connecticut State Constitution lacking specific protections of religious freedom. They wrote, *“what religious privileges we enjoy, we enjoy as **favours granted**, and not as **inalienable rights**. The favours we receive at the expense of such degrading acknowledgments are inconsistent with the rights of free men.”* Jefferson responded. He explained his beliefs about *federalism*, which combines “federal” government with state governments as a single political system, but divides the powers between the two. In his letter he used the statement *“separation of church and state.”* And from its beginning, our country has struggled to create documents that would lead this new nation to having a *Constitution*. James Madison, our fourth president, has been referred to as the *“Father of the Constitution”* wrote 29 of the 85 *“Federalist Papers”* trying to persuade New Yorkers to ratify the *Constitution* adopted in Philadelphia in September 1787. He wrote *“Before any man can be considered as a member of civil society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe.”* That was a big statement by a founder of our nation. The *“father”* of our Constitution. He was saying, that for America, the public square is not just for people who subject themselves first to “Caesar.” It’s for citizens who subject themselves to God.

James Madison would disagree with the Supreme Court today that says the public square and the public classroom are secular places and should have no religious or spiritual basis. That God should have no say at all there. A book written some years ago tells what has happened to our children since the Supreme Court ruled in 1963 against prayer in the classroom. The book shows a clear downward trend for the health and well-being of America’s youth over the past 60 years. All kinds of things have been going on since the sixties. They’ve been bad for our youth. That decision against prayer in the classroom marks a direct pattern of change within our society. A change from honoring God in the public arena to wanting God out of the public arena. An attitude that rejects God in public life.

It was the subject of a speech given by Rep. William Dannemeyer of California who said, *“The Judeo-Christian ethic begins with God, the Creator of man and the world, who gave us moral absolutes and fixed standards. However, Moral Relativism denies the existence of God. It rejects moral standards to guide the problems which arise in everyday life. Under Moral Relativism, you are the final judge of what rules apply in any situation. Some people may ask, how did it come to that in a nation which began its existence based on the Judeo-Christian ethic, and is now involved in a cultural war where false gods promote Moral Relativism, and are seriously stating this philosophy should dominate American culture?”* He believed our nation began with standards of right and wrong, *firmly fixed* within the Judeo-Christian world view. And that the Bible— Old Testament and New— is a Book meant for public use. What he was saying was, we began with Biblical truth running through the public square bringing life to the citizens of America.

But today *everyone does what is right in his own eyes*. How did America get from such a high standard of morality rooted in God’s truth to the idea there is no universal, or absolute set of moral principles which says, *“to each his own?”* And a lot are saying, *“Who am I to judge?”* And that’s where we are today! Prohibitions against praying in Jesus’ name outside of the Chapel has been a longstanding complaint lodged by several dozen current and former chaplains in lawsuits brought against the Navy. The Navy disputes the allegations. A spokesman for the Navy said there is no regulation against praying to Jesus. The Navy has always encouraged chaplains to pray according to their faith during worship services. Guidelines announced by the Air Force call for non-sectarian prayers in secular settings. The Army is following suit. But preventing evangelicals from praying in Jesus’ name in secular settings violates the U.S. Constitution’s free exercise and establishment clauses of the First Amendment. And that’s discrimination! However just recently, on Oct. 2, Christian Newswire reported Navy and Air Force Chaplains are now free to pray “in Jesus’ name”. Congress ordered the Secretary of the Navy to rescind the “non-sectarian” prayer policy. Congress ordered Secretary of the Air Force to rescind “guidelines concerning the exercise of religion.”

After months of fighting the Navy’s “non-sectarian” prayer policy, Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt rejoiced that the U.S. Congress took decisive action to overturn recent Navy and Air Force policies that required “non-sectarian” prayers. *“Praise be to God. Military chaplains can once again pray freely in Jesus’ name!”* Klingenschmitt declared. He said, *“Although this fight may have cost my career and my pension, it was well worth it. Because now, at least, other chaplains will be given the same religious liberty I was denied.”*

John Dewey was an atheist who wanted to promote socialism. A philosopher, an educator, and social critic who helped shape American realism and progressive education. He was the primary architect of public education, as we have it today. And for over a half-century, a strong movement has been afoot to *get God out of the classroom*. President James Madison believed if we make students subject to God *first*, then they will be good citizens. Yet today, it's often said *we must get "God" out of our children*. Then they'll be good citizens.

But how many children go to church today? According to a current report by Gallup, of adults who have children under 18, only about 31% regularly attend religious services which implies today's children attend church far less frequently than their parents and grandparents did. And yet, there are some who attend every week. They have weekly responsibilities in their church. Many have developed deep connections with the people there. And they found their place in the church. So, in our lesson today, Jesus challenged us: Decide what belongs to Caesar. And decide what belongs to God. Not everything Caesar claims is rightfully his. *Sacred* is something considered to be holy. It deserves respect. Because it has a connection to God. And belongs only to God. Such as our worship, our conscience, our faith, and our allegiance. We should never compromise or surrender those to any human power.

Whose is it, anyway? Jesus wants you to give to God what is God's, which means, you recognize everything you have, and are, comes from God. It all belongs to God! You're not the owner. God is! You're just the steward of God's gifts. So, use them wisely. Use them generously for God's glory and service. Suppose you're a Christian working for a company that's doing some unethical things. They cheat on their taxes. Lie to their customers. Mistreat their employees. You're not directly involved, but you know about them. You feel uncomfortable. What should you do as a follower of Jesus? One option is to just ignore the problem. Pretend everything's okay. You're doing your job well. You're paying your taxes. You're fulfilling your duty to Caesar. But that isn't honoring God, because you're not standing up for what is right. You're not being a good witness to your co-workers and clients.

Another option could be, quit your job. Find one that matches your values. By doing that you're going to avoid any compromise. But that isn't realistic. Or wise. You might not be able to find another job. Or you might end up in a worse situation. Besides, you're missing an opportunity to make a positive difference in your workplace.

A third option is to stay in your job. Try to change the situation from within. You might speak up against unethical practices. Report them to the authorities. Seek legal action. You might also pray for your boss, coworkers, and clients, and if possible, share the Gospel with them. That could be challenging. And it's also faithful! You'd be giving to Caesar what is Caesar's. But you'd also be giving to God what is God's. Now, that's just one example of how to apply Matthew 22:21 in your life. There may be other situations where you must balance your loyalty to God and your loyalty to human authorities.

The key is always, seek God's wisdom and guidance in every situation. And remember, you belong to Him! So, what's our Matthew text saying to you? First, God reminds you, He is God. He has a kingdom. A Kingdom of Grace that will stand as governments have fallen. As governments continue to fall. And as governments will topple in the future. His Kingdom stands for you, even when you make good, and bad, decisions about giving to God what is God's. His Kingdom stands! The words of Jesus may call you to go out into the public square to witness God's truth. The truth of salvation in Jesus Christ. The truth about God's moral standard, which is the standard for all human life. Not just Christians! Dividing church and state does not mean separating God from the public square. The complete opposite is true. The wall of *separation of church and state*, which Thomas Jefferson erected, was to keep the government from telling you that you can't freely exercise your faith in God in the public square or in the public classroom. Our government has become very confused about that.

May the Holy Spirit clear our minds so we will dare to be bold. So that we give unto God what is God's! That God will send us out into His world to proclaim His truth. The truth of salvation! The truth concerning His moral standard! That's important! God wants salvation for all people! If the Christian message is locked up by the government only into church buildings, that will be a sad day!

As Christians, the absolute truth of the Bible, and Christ's example, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, must be our foundation. It should be evident in our political views. Christians are called to be the light of the world. The salt of the earth. And to speak the truth of the Bible in love. May we at Everglades Community Church care so much for those for whom Jesus died, that we become informed, find our voice, and put our feet to our conscience and go out into the public square and witness God's truth. Let us *"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's; and unto God what is God's."* Amen.