

God or Caesar, Which?

“Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.” (Matthew 22:15-22.)

The Pharisees and Herodians were completely answered in these words. A sharp distinction was drawn between the things of God and the things of Caesar; that is, the things which pertain to God,-religion, and the things which pertain to Caesar,-civil government. There was not one of those Pharisees or Herodians that had any ground to stand upon after He had made that answer. There was not one of them that thought it was any use to say, “That general principle is good, but you see there are some things in which God and Caesar are in partnership. What about that?” They did not dare to say a word. When He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s,” they marvelled and went their way, because in those few words He had laid down those eternal principles of right, and had so completely answered them that there was nothing more to be said.

It was announced that we would consider this evening something of the evils of religious legislation; God or Caesar, Which? or the evils which result from religious legislation, in

mixing up God and Caesar.

A PLAIN DISTINCTION

As a foundation, I want first to draw a distinction between the things of God and the things of Caesar. "Caesar" stands for civil government. The things of Caesar are those which have to do with civil government. The things of God are those which have to do with God, our relation to God, our duty to God, everything that pertains to God as a personal matter between us and God. I want to lay down for our consideration the contrast between the things of God and the things of Caesar; the contrast between the realms in which they rule, their subjects, and their manner of ruling. To make it plain we will draw a simple diagram:-

God.	Caesar.
Mind.	Body.
Thought.	Action.
Sin.	Crime.
Moral.	Civil.
Forgiveness.	Penalty.
Love.	Force.
Eternal.	Temporal.

THE TWO REALMS

First as to the realms in which they rule. God in Jesus Christ rules the *mind*; Caesar the *body*. Let us stop on this a moment. When Jesus Christ came to set up His kingdom, He came to set up a different sort of a kingdom than had existed. Human power and the kingdom of this world-Caesar- had ruled the body, they had ruled the outward conduct, but here comes Jesus Christ to set up a kingdom within a kingdom, to have a kingdom, to have subjects, and to have that right in this world, where Caesar's kingdom is.

But while men had been-shall I say satisfied-not always that, and yet it was all Caesar could do to rule the body,-Jesus Christ comes to set up His kingdom in the mind; that is, to rule the thoughts, while Caesar has his kingdom over the body, and rules actions. This is not to say that Jesus Christ does not rule actions, but He gets behind actions, and controls actions through thought. They had had laws in the world, they had God's law in the world, but Jesus Christ came to show what that law meant, to live it Himself, and to teach it as it meant to God. And so He explained it as we read Matthew 5, where Christ Himself, the very one who spoke the law from Sinai, now, with His divinity veiled in humanity, comes on the mount, and speaks that law over again, and gives it a spiritual meaning.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." This is further expressed in 1 John 3:15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." "Ye have heard how it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." He further explains that covetousness is idolatry, and this is set forth in Ephesians 5:2-5: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, *who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

This is Christ's interpretation of how the law of God applies.

This does not apply simply to the outward act. Caesar rules the outward conduct. I may stand before a man, I may hate him with a perfect hatred, and I may tell him so to his face, but Caesar says nothing to me. Caesar has nothing to do with it. But suppose my hatred grows into action, and I proceed to do the man violence. Caesar says, "You must keep your hate within yourself, or I shall come in and interfere." But I am just as much in God's sight a murderer when I hate my brother as though I had taken his life. It is better for civil society that there are laws to restrain the outward manifestation of that hate, but in God's sight I am a murderer when I hate.

But suppose Caesar should attempt to enforce this law as God explains it, will you tell me how many would be left outside the prison walls to guard those within? Suppose he should come into this tent, and, taking the law as God explains it, should say, "I am here for every man who has ever been a murderer." How many, do you think, would be left to listen to the sermon? God in Christ rules the hearts, and Christ came to do that which it is impossible for man to do, -to rule the very thoughts of the heart. And He explains that no service is acceptable to Him unless it is heart-service.

The Pharisees had plenty of religion of their kind. They liked to display it, and they kept bringing it forth. They had come to Christ to display it. They came to Him asking why His disciples ate with unwashed hands. I will not read the record, but Christ answered them, saying, "Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man." "Then answered Peter and said unto Him, Declare unto us this parable." "And Jesus said, Do ye not yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly and is cast out into the draught. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man; but to eat with

unwashen hands defileth not a man." Matthew 15:10, 11, 15-20.

THOUGHT PRECEDES ACTION

Every overt act is preceded by thought. No man ever does a thing he has not thought of. Now many are thinking, I suppose, "I question that, because I have done things I did not intend to do. And I did them because I did not think." I tell you the very reason you did them without thinking was because you had done them so many times before that *by thinking* it had become habit. I say that every act is preceded by the thought, and that thought is the very character of your being. It is in the inmost thought, the inner self, where character dwells. Man may be restrained by outward forms from expressing himself; he may be but a whited sepulchre. And if the sepulchre is whitewashed outside, Caesar has nothing to say; he cannot enter into the temple of the heart and control thought. Jesus Christ sets up His kingdom in the mind; His subjects are the thoughts of the heart, and no one is pure in God's sight unless his very thought is pure; no one is free from transgression unless his very thoughts are in harmony with God. Says the Scripture, "Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10:5. That is religion and Jesus Christ can do that for us. But when Caesar has attempted to invade the realm of the mind, when he has stepped out of his place and tried to control what only Jesus Christ can control, -the inmost thoughts of the heart, -then we have had written in blood some of the darkest pages of human history.

SIN AND CRIME

God in Jesus Christ deals with *sin*; Caesar deals with *crime*. The Scripture says, "The thought of foolishness is sin;" but it is not crime. Therefore as Jesus Christ dwells in the mind, ruling the thoughts, anything contrary to His thought is sin, and He deals with sin. Sin is defined in the Scripture to be

the "transgression of the law," and Jesus Christ in His kingdom deals with sin. Caesar has nothing to do with sin; it is crime that he deals with. Sin is the transgression of God's law in the thought of the heart. Sin is a lapse from holiness, and holiness dwells in the inmost heart. Anything different to that is sin; but Caesar cannot inquire about that. He waits till the thought becomes an overt act contrary to his law; because while God has a law to rule the heart, Caesar has a law to rule the action. When one transgresses Caesar's law he may or may not have sinned against God, but it is crime. There should be a very careful distinction drawn between sin and crime. Crime is transgression of human law; sin is transgression of God's law as interpreted by Jesus Christ. Sin may or may not be crime. A man may be a murderer of the blackest type before God, and not be guilty of a crime. I may be an idolater, breaking God's law every day, and not have committed a single crime. I may be dark and deep-stained with sin, and not commit any crime.

MORALITY AND CIVILITY

God's government is *moral*; Caesar's government is *civil*. Christ deals with morality. But we must understand what morality is. There is an accommodated sense of the word, in which we say, "He is not a Christian, but he is a moral man." When we come to the strict sense of the word, it means "One that is in harmony with God's law." The word "civil" has to do with the relations between man and man; the word "moral" has to do with the relations between man and God. The truly moral man will be civil, you may be sure of that, and the only purpose of civil government is to make those men civil who would not be otherwise, who are not governed by the higher law of morality, the law of God in the heart.

The object, and the only object, of Caesar's government is, - not to give men rights, God does that, - but to protect men in their God-given rights. No company of men can confer rights upon any other company of men, but they can protect them in

the proper use of those rights which they already have. Those rights belong to them, they are given them of God. Men will not be moral; then Caesar comes in with his power, and compels, and properly too, those men who will not be moral, to be civil. Outward conduct is civility; inward conduct is morality. God lives in the heart, making men moral by conferring upon them His own moral character. But Caesar cannot do this; he cannot get into the mind and see when men are committing sin. All he can do is to look at the body, see whether men are committing crime or not, and make them civil if they will not be moral.

FORGIVENESS v. PENALTY

Further, God in Christ exercises *forgiveness* in His government; Caesar knows no forgiveness, he knows nothing but the *penalty*. A man commits a sin against God, he has been a sinner all his life, but he sees Christ lifted up, and hears the promise, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," and he accepts that promise; and right there his sins are forgiven; his load of crime is entirely removed; and he stands before God as though he had never committed a sin in his life. But if a man commits a crime, he may he ever so sorry, and he may confess to Caesar, but Caesar says, "Settle that with your Maker; I know nothing but the penalty."

If we should introduce into civil government the principles God uses in His kingdom, we should have perfect confusion. Look at these principles: "Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven." "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 17:3, 4

Suppose we should apply this principle to civil government. Here is a man arrested for horse stealing. He is brought up before the judge, and says, "I am very sorry, and the Bible says you must forgive." The judge says, "You are forgiven." He goes out and steals another horse, is brought back, and again forgiven. He does that seven times over. How do you think the judge would feel? I think that by the time he had reached the seventh experience he would think that there was some mistake about the law. These principles, which are the very glory of God's moral government, the very glory of His character, we cannot apply to Caesar's government. God does forgive, even to seventy times seven, and He does it for us, thank God, but these principles do not belong here; they are for a different realm, and God, by the gift of His Son, has so provided that He can exercise forgiveness and still maintain the character of His law. By the sacrifice of Jesus Christ God has upheld the character of His government, keeps His law where it belongs, and yet holds out forgiveness to all that believe on His Son. Because of His wonderful provision for the stability of His government, God's law is not brought into disrepute when the man who has broken it again and again turns about and says, "I repent."

By forgiving, civil government would break down the whole system of government; but God keeps His law where it belongs, and yet forgives everyone who repents.

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