



Coronavirus Update: 7 July 2020

A Little Bible Study on God's Two Kingdoms, Christian Citizenship, and the Right to Resist

Matthew 22:21 gives us one of the most famous passages in all Scripture, known even by those outside Christ's Church: *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's*. This is the foundation of the so-called "Two Kingdoms Teaching" in the Scriptures. Quite simply put, Christians live in two realms—the realm of the Church and grace (the so-called right-hand kingdom), and the realm of the State and society and the Law (the so-called left-hand kingdom). Belonging to the kingdom of the right doesn't relieve us of our responsibilities to our neighbor in the kingdom of the left (hence: *Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's*), nor does living in the kingdom of the left relieve us of the things that are ours in the kingdom of the right (hence: *Render unto God the things that are God's*).

Why? Because the God we know through Christ Jesus rules and gets things done in both realms, just in different ways. That, too, is the teaching of the Scriptures. Just as God is the Lord of the Church (Colossians 1:18: *[Christ] is also the head of the body, the Church.*), so is He Lord of the left-hand kingdom, as well (Romans 13:1-2: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.*).

As a matter of fact, our "dual citizenship" in both kingdoms is mutually informing. As a "corporate entity," the Church has Christ as its head. But as His Body it also willingly obeys myriad laws—for example, laws governing incorporation, fire codes, finance, disbursement of benevolence funds, health insurance, human resources, and zoning. As to their own persons, though their salvation is in Jesus Christ alone and not in the works of the Law, Christians willingly obey the speed limit, traffic signals, and marriage laws, pay their taxes, enlist in the armed forces, obey the draft, and the list goes on. This is all 4th-Commandment stuff.

But being a citizen of the right-hand kingdom in the left-hand kingdom isn't just about obedience. Christians as Christians also advocate in the public square for laws that accord with God's Word. For example, we are pro-life because God is pro-life, and so we seek to protect life in the womb. We are for law and order because God has revealed in the Scriptures that He has set up the governing authorities for human good.

All these things we do not for our own good, but for the good of neighbor (Philippians 2:1: *Not looking each to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*). I am not pro-life for me, but for my unborn neighbor; and law and order gives my neighbors the stable and just platform on which they can support body and life and protect the property God has given into their hands, the reputation God has given them, their own marriages, etc.

And here emerges another point of tension between Scriptural teaching and American doctrine. American doctrine teaches us to vote, advocate, and act out of self-interest in the kingdom of the left. Scripture teaches us, informed by God's Law, to look to our neighbor's interests.

In fact, the Scriptures go even further: they command us even to suffer injustice: *Do not resist evil; but if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles* (Matthew 5:38-41), *Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you* (Matthew 5:44), *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'* (Romans 12:19). These teachings apply to us not only as individual Christians, but as the Church.

Luther once expressed this tension of life lived in God's twinned kingdoms in his characteristically pithy way: "A Christian person is a perfectly free lord over all things, and subject to no one; a Christian person is a willing servant of all, and subject to everyone" (WA 7.21). In the right-hand kingdom, under God's grace, we are perfectly free lords over all things with Christ Himself; in the left-hand kingdom, under God's Law, we are utterly and nothing but servants of neighbor.

Now, get this: though I am a lord with Christ over everything, service to neighbor includes *obeying* and *honoring* the authorities—those above me. I can't love my neighbor, the governing authorities, by disobeying or dishonoring them. I do my neighbor no good when on some principle extraneous to the Scriptures I assert a purported right by disobeying the authorities. I frankly have no left-hand rights but those that the Lord gave me through the governing authorities. Through those left-hand authorities God can give me more or less rights. He can add to them, and He can take them away. My job is just to obey.

So may a Christian resist the authorities? Yes, but only when the authorities command action or belief contrary to God's Word. Then *we must obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29). My resistance under such circumstances will be not be revolt, rebellion, or revolution, but simply not engaging in the action commanded or continuing the action God commands despite the authorities. And if I do resist, I must take my lumps without retribution, as St. Peter says, *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name* (1 Peter 4:14-16).

So let's apply all of this to what we've experienced in the last many months and now again with the mask order. Have we Christians reached the point of the resistance? The answer's "No." Attending church has become more inconvenient (think SignUpGenius!) and maybe less pleasant (not 100s of voices singing God's praises, but only a fraction of that). Perhaps you've become aggravated at the authorities—whether the Democrat Laura Kelly, the Republican Donald Trump, or our county commissioners. And certainly all of us are frustrated, whether by the pandemic, the circumstances, or the authorities. But none of that constitutes a "right to resistance." God's Christians can still gather to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light in speech and song. God's Sacraments can still be administered to us. The rites of the Church can still be observed among us. The proclamation and hearing of the Absolution and sermon still goes on in our midst. And no one has commanded conscience and body to believe or act contrary to God's Word.

On a final note, I anticipate that there will be sharp disagreement on whether wearing masks is effective; that many of you are suspicious of political agendas behind pro-maskers and anti-maskers; and that while some of you think all of this is ridiculous, others believe no one's taking it seriously enough. That's all fine and good. But at the end of the day, such opinions don't really matter. Why? Because for our purposes as Christians and as a congregation we take our guidance from God's Word, not the pundits.

So let's not allow these pressures coming on Christ's Church from the outside to become divisive *within* Christ's Church. Christ is not divided (1 Corinthians 1:13). In promulgating the mask order, the divinely instituted authorities (the Governor of Kansas and our county commissioners) are doing their job of governing. Let's say nothing more or less about it and let's not turn it into a bone of contention within our walls. Satan has done plenty already in effectively using coronavirus against God's Church. He's made the faithful fearful of gathering, he's laid a stumbling block for the weak, and he's provided a handy excuse to those disinclined to attend church anyway so that they've deprived themselves entirely of God's Word for 1/3 of a year. That's Satan's marvelous work in our congregation, and he's been doing it pretty much unchecked for 114 days. Lord, have mercy! So let's not let the mask order wreak any more havoc on Christ's Church. Instead, let's remember the words of the epistle from two Sundays ago, *Beware your adversary the devil, who prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, firm in your faith* (1 Peter 5:9).

"For I am certain that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8.38-39)

For more information from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the LCMS Kansas District check out the [COVID-19 resource page](https://www.lcms.org/covid-19) at [lcms.org](https://www.lcms.org) and the [Coronavirus Resources Page](https://www.kslcms.org/coronavirus-resources) at [kslcms.org](https://www.kslcms.org).