23rd Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer, 1957

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 22: 21 Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's

A CHRISTIAN'S ALLEGIANCE

I am sure that all of us, many times, standing at attention, have spoke the words, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." In view of the fact that ungodly, unbelieving men may sometimes be put into positions of authority, that politics frequently has become a very dirty game, that corruption is to be found in every state, every town, every community, that dishonesty and moral pollution are climbing to ever-increasing heights among the leaders of our land -- the question naturally arises, can a Christian make that pledge? Can the believer in Jesus Christ swear allegiance, his eyes on the flag, his hand on his heart? This question needs to be answered, and every believer ought to be at peace with his conscience in this vital matter.

Jesus came to grips with this problem in our text under conditions no easier than those which face His followers today. Proud Rome ruled the tiny nation God had called His chosen people. Roman soldiers marched in the streets of the Holy City. Tax collectors everwhere demanded tribute money. From a moral standpoint the Roman government was very corrupt. Religions sanctioned by the state wer immoral and debasing. Caesar was to be worshipped. And all this conspired to set the stage for the enemies of Jesus to put Him in a role which they were sure would discredit Him. They had set an ingenious snare; there were certain He would not escape this time. If He said that it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar, the violently patriotic Jews would undoubtedly stone Him. They believed that any king not a Jew was no proper ruler for them. If He said that it was unlawful to pay tribute, Roman rulers would mete out swift judgment upon an insurrectionist. Jesus gave an answer, however, which not only defeated the intentions of His enemies but which also throws the light of divine wisdom clearly upon the whole matter of the Christian's allegiance. Calling for the tribute money, He drew from His enemies

an unwilling admission of their bondage. And then He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." "Rende unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's!" Give back to the state those things which are its due. The Christian is to be loyal to his country.

Repeatedly the Holy Scriptures instruct God's people to obey the laws c the land cheerfully and willingly. The Apostle Paul in the 13th chapter of Romans states: Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the Power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wher fore ye must needs be subject, not only wrath, but also for conscience sake. St. Peter states: Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.

With the Christian, obedience to the law of the land is an obligation which he owes not merely to the government, but to his heavenly Father. If it is the law of the land, then it is our duty before God to obey it. We are to exercise our citizenship, always seeking to make our country and community a place where righteousness dwells, remembering that "righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people." As individuals we are to be active in government, shaping its policies, guiding the course of its history by the Christian principles of honesty, integrity, and unselfishness which alone can best aid our country in serving God's purpose among us. As voters, as office holders, as taxpayers, as magistrates, as governors, as presidents, Christians are to take their stand for every measure that will serve the common good and against every subversive, immoral cause in government. Too often because of the risks, the dubious honors, the meage rewards, Christians have withdrawn from their civic responsibilities. They have

not "rendered unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." All too frequently they have allowed unprincipled, destructive, greedy groups to rule the city, the state, or the nation. They have been content to sit by and criticize, often not even exercising their democratic privilege at the polls. America needs more Christians today who are ready to exercise their faith and to apply it to the society in which they live. America needs bold, fearless Christians who by their unselfishness and love will set out to disprove the statement of the English philosopher Hobbs when he says, "The only motive for human conduct is selfishness."

A Christian has been brought to the Cross of Jesus Christ with the crushing burden of his sin and guilt and has been relieved of that burden by his Savior. He knows and experiences constantly the wonderful, the amazing, the marvelous love of his blessed Redeemer. He says to Himself over and over again: "I am free! I am free from the curse of hell and damnation! I am free from the crushing penalty of my dreadful sins! I am saved forever for eternal, blessed life through my Lord Jesus Christ!" In gratitude he is now eager to render whole-hearted service to his Savior and to his fellow men. Hence a Christian must of necessity be a good citizen of his country. He must eagerly take an interest in the welfare of his community and country by actively participating. He must "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

Someone has said: & rightly so.

~~Dr. Walter Judd said in a conversation:~~ "More Christians are needed in public office who will dare to be statesmen rather than politicians, who will work tirelessly for the common good of all men everywhere." Every country in our world today desperately needs men and women who will brave the hazards and bear the responsibilities of public office, citizens who will apply their Christian faith in every issue which confronts them.

How appalling it is when we read or hear of professed Christians who are involved in acts of dishonesty in public offices, who lie, cheat, take bribes, and become entangled in other un-Christian acts. These are things we can expect from the world, but not one who has experienced the love of the Redeemer. How

terrible it is to hear of professed Christian's who are caught trying to cheat the government. A prominent attorney in one of our larger cities made this statement: "Since I have been making out income tax reports I have been amazed at the number of respected citizens who are crooks at heart. Scores of prominent men and women have desired to omit from their report certain bonds or other securities with the plea that the officials would never be able to check upon them." The idea seemed to be that such dishonesty is justifiable if one is not detected in it. Yet, in the eyes of God this is sin; and no one who has so sold his soul to the devil and is completely unaffected by wrong-doing -- be it ever so meager in his own eyes -- can really be a Christian. The Christian never condones sin; he never delights in it; he never wilfully practices it. Sin, while he must confess that repeatedly he falls into its snare, is always a grievious matter to the Christian; for he realizes that sin offends his precious Savior, and such sin sent Him to the bitter agony of Calvary.

While the Christian recognizes his duty to be a loyal citizen, he never forgets that his real, lasting citizenship is in heaven. He fears and obeys God rather than men. He renders unto God the things that are God's. He may give loyalty, love, liberal participation to the affairs of the state, yes, even life itself on the altar of his country, but always his supreme allegiance is to the God who made him, redeemed him in Jesus Christ, and gives him daily all blessings. Whenever there are conflicting loyalties, he chooses God first, last, and always. No other loyalty compares to that which rises out of the love which God has awakened in the believer's heart, a deep, abiding, exalting, sanctifying allegiance to the King of that kingdom which shall never pass away. When allegiance to God comes into conflict with allegiance to Caesar, Christian martyrs are made. In apostolic times believers died by the thousands and tens of thousands because they would not deny Christ and worship Caesar.

Thus we see that the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ can pledge his allegiance to the flag of his country, recognizing that the government is a part

of that God-ordained framework under which his life is to be lived. He is not to condone or strengthen evil men or purposes, but rather as a Christian to exercise his faith as a citizen so that his nation, a power ordained of God and a minister unto him for good, may realize the Christian ideals as far as possible. When the reins of government are seized by wicked men who demand of the believer a denial of his faith, the Christian is ready to die rather than submit. His supreme loyalty requires him always to render unto God the things that are God's. May God give every one of you such a bold and courageous faith to so live your life; for Jesus sake.

Amen.