

Introduction: We continue with 2020 Reformation Bible notes, turning to the important subject of civil government, as this week marks our national elections federal, state and local races, including for the offices of President, Senate and Congress. Oh, how we need the Lord Jesus to rule our lives in these days, and to overrule the sinful plans of those who pursue elected office for the power it brings to their own ambition and wicked plans! To help us see our first duty to our Savior and our secondary duty to the state more clearly, we turn to Jesus' teaching about "giving to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22).

**Monday: read Psalm 2:1-8 and Acts 2:32-36.** How great is our joy, knowing we are not only invited to the feast which we will share with our Savior in Heaven one day, but that we are even now His royal subjects, and the objects of His tender care! Because of His victory over sin and Satan on the Cross, the Father has installed His Son on the heavenly Mt. Zion to rule over the nations (Psalm 2:6-8). As our Ascended King, He pours out blessings and joy upon His people through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). So let us never forget: it is the embattled church on earth that Jesus helps and guides. He walks among us as our Priest-King, always dedicated to defending His persecuted church on earth, (Revelation 2-3).

Meditate and Pray: "Lord, your people are under threat today, as the nations right now appear to have an increasing hostility against your church. Just as the nations gathered against you and against your Anointed Son in Psalm 2:1-3, so *we* feel that we are surrounded. Cause our eyes of faith to be opened to the vast defenses which we have in Christ and in His Heavenly host! Lord, Jesus, send forth your angels to serve and protect your saints, wherever they are persecuted today. Amen."

**Tuesday: read Matthew 22:15-18 & Genesis 4:17-24.** The Pharisees hate Jesus, and send "spies" to try to trap our Savior in His words. Their question about paying taxes here is a question which assumes the reality of dueling kingdoms in this world. Since the Fall, there have always been governments which seek to rule over every aspect of their subjects' lives. Like Caesar in the days of Rome, Cain built his cities in Genesis 4:17-24 as a lasting monument to his own murderous power. His descendent Lamech epitomizes this in his threat to shed the blood of any who cross him (Genesis 4:23-24).

This is the Bible's realism when it comes to the rule of government over mankind. It is a rule generally characterized by the accumulation of power by the one over the many, and the increase of burdens (such as taxation) placed on the backs of subjects by their rulers. What a contrast in the rule of Christ! As John Owen wrote about Christ's wise, gentle and righteous rule:

"The laws by which Christ rules as King are righteous because they are easy and gentle, and not burdensome. His righteousness and uprightness do not denote strict, rigid, severe justice, extending itself to the utmost of what can be required of the subjects ruled; but equity mixed with gentleness, tenderness and condescension: which if it be absent from laws, and they breathe nothing but severity, rigor and arbitrary impositions ... makes them burdensome and grievous... in contrast to Jesus' gentle rule – Matthew 11:30." (Commentary on Heb. 1:8-9, page 191)

Meditate and Pray: *God in Heaven, we bow to the holy power of your scepter over our lives, both in creation and providence. Thank you above all that in your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, you rule us with a grace that we cannot explain apart from your Son's assuming our nature and being tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Thank you that through Jesus, your commands are easy because they are suited to that new nature which you have given us through the Holy Spirit. Thank you, dear Holy Spirit, that the new heart and will which you give us through regeneration loves, delights and runs in the way of God's commandments!*

*O God, you delighted so much in the obedience of your incarnate Son. Likewise give us joy under the rule of Jesus Christ as our King. Cause us to see the usefulness and profit in bowing our knees to His rule in every area and at every moment in our lives. Whatever you ordain, King Jesus, is right for each step of our lives. We rest in this, and we ask you to give us always a submission to your scepter over our heads and our hearts. Amen.*

**Wed/Thurs: read Matthew 22:15-22 & Matthew 13:13-17.** Though there are many lessons to learn as we contrast “what is God’s” and “what is Caesar’s” in Matthew 22:17-22, let’s not overlook the amazing confession of Christ’s rectitude from the Pharisees and Herodians in Matthew 22:16. Here is a translation of their words as they approach Jesus:

<sup>16</sup> And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.” **ESV**

What an amazing confession of truth! Yes, these words from the lips of Christ’s enemies are tragically insincere, and are motivated by their desire to put Jesus off His guard, so that they can then ensnare Him in His words. They are hoping that Jesus will carelessly speak against Roman rule, (by speaking against Rome’s strategy of impoverishing Israel through very heavy taxation), or that Christ will endorse the Roman tax system, (and thereby anger Israel’s pious population who rejected even Roman coins as idolatrous)!

But nevertheless, their words are true, and *because* they confess that Christ, “teaches the way of God”, they are exposed to the question, “Why then don’t you listen to Him?”. But they don’t see how their words are self-incriminating. As Matthew 13:13-17 makes clear, they are hardened beyond the ability to see their need for Christ’s saving rule in their lives.

*Meditate and Pray: Lord, save us from even one ounce of insincerity. As we see the sure and certain doom hanging over those who reject your Son, and as we confess your right to justly bring them to “a wretched end” (Matthew 21:41), please remove any blinders by which we can deny the danger of our own unbelief. Make us to see our sin, and to sincerely confess that you know all things about us, as we seek your forgiving grace anew. Take us, Lord, and hide us from the incriminating speech of this world, by which men laud Jesus to the skies as a great teacher, while stubbornly refusing to conform their lives to His Lordship. Amen.*

Sing this hymn of commitment as a prayer for sincere faith in Jesus (# 491):

<i>Take me, O my Father, take me;</i>	<i>Fruitless years with grief recalling,</i>
<i>Take me, save me, through Thy Son;</i>	<i>Humbly I confess my sin;</i>
<i>That which Thou wouldst have me, make me,</i>	<i>At Thy feet, O Father, falling,</i>
<i>Let Thy will in me be done.</i>	<i>To Thy household take me in.</i>
<i>Long from Thee my footsteps straying,</i>	<i>Freely now to Thee I proffer</i>
<i>Thorny proved the way I trod;</i>	<i>This relenting heart of mine;</i>
<i>Weary come I now, and praying,</i>	<i>Freely life and love I offer,</i>
<i>Take me to Thy love, my God.</i>	<i>Gift unworthy love like Thine.</i>

**Fri/Sat: read Matthew 22:15-21 and Hebrews 1:8-12.** We see from the Bible’s testimony in places such as Hebrews 1:8-12 that Christ lacks nothing of the Divine power and glory of God when it comes to sitting on and ruling from God’s throne. No one can resist His will, and He will rule over the peoples who rebel against His Kingdom “with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2:9).

How amazing it is, therefore, that such a mighty King should find joy in saving sinners and ruling over them in love! Christ can make the mightiest bow to His rule! Why then should He take so much time to rule over such

misfits as we are in our sinful weakness and foolishness? Here we see the cause of the “oil of joy” with which Christ is anointed in Hebrews 1:9! *His* joy is in those He died to save, and who become His blood-bought Bride! As Luke 14:21 enumerates them, it is the “poor, crippled, blind and lame” who bring the most pleasure to both the Father and the Son! How different is Christ from the “Caesars” of this world, who consume their own people to aggrandize themselves! Christ loves to rule over the lowly and those who cannot help or defend themselves!

Meditate and Pray: This is the first way in which we are to obey Christ’s command in Matthew 22:21 to, “render to God what is God’s”. We must render all our affection and adoring thankfulness to Christ’s rule of grace. We are not to give any world government, career or occupation the absolute devotion of our hearts and lives. We are to save the best for the Lord Jesus, who alone delights to save sinners!

Sing about the devotion which Christ’s Kingdom of grace deserves from us with the words of this Scottish hymn (with bold verses emphasized):

*Lord, in the fullness of my might,  
I would for Thee be strong:  
While runneth o’er each dear delight,  
To Thee should soar my song.*

*I would not with swift wingèd zeal  
On the world’s errands go,  
And labor up the heavenly hill  
With weary feet and slow.*

***O choose me in my golden time:  
In my clear joys have part!  
For Thee the glory of my prime,  
The fullness of my heart!***

***I would not give the world my heart,  
And then profess Thy love;  
I would not feel my strength depart,  
And then Thy service prove.***

*O not for Thee my weak desires,  
My poorer, baser part!  
O not for Thee my fading fires,  
The ashes of my heart!*