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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“GREATER LOVE”**

Matthew 2:21; John 15:12-13

○ The Lord Jesus said, {Mt 22:21} **“Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.”**

**“Give to Caesar.”** Jesus is speaking most directly of the political system, government officials and apparatus (such as the military); but “Caesar” also includes the economic structure, media, and broader culture.

**“Give to Caesar.”** Every nation has the right to make certain claims on its people, claims from which the followers of Jesus are not exempt. God’s Word exhorts us to {Rom 13:1} **“be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”**

**“But everything that belongs to God must be given to God”:** {Ps 113:4} **“The LORD is exalted over all the nations.”** He deserves our purest love and highest devotion. {Rev 4:11, 5:13} **“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive...praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!”**

☠ But we have a problem: as a consequence of sin, every Caesar demands more than its citizens owe it. Excessive taxes are the most obvious (and least popular) manifestation – but they are not the worst.

Every government, in partnership with its host society, tries to deceive, bribe and (if necessary) coerce their citizens into loving them best. Caesar whips up

unthinking nationalism, applauds blind obedience, silences dissent, distorts the law, and (not infrequently) suppresses or uses religion to its advantage. Citizens who resist Caesar are punished by their neighbors, by the government, or both.

No nation is immune. Not even ours.

Please, do not misunderstand. I am not bashing the U.S.! The Almighty has used our country as a force for good. We enjoy greater freedom to draw boundaries for Caesar than most nations. I thank God that, in his providence, I was born here.

Even so, our culture and government habitually demand more than God has ordained for them.

✧ Where is the line between patriotism and idolatry? How do we avoid crossing it?

✧ How shall we who are **“foreigners and exiles”** (1 Pe 2:11) invest ourselves in this nation? Knowing that we are {Heb 11:16} **“looking for a better country”** (Heb 11:16), how should we relate to this one?

✧ How do we determine what is Caesar’s, when he demands an ever-larger share of our money, time, and devotion? How do we give to God **“everything that belongs to God”**?

The answers do not come easily. (If they seem to, we probably are not taking the questions seriously enough.)

Still, the basic principle is clear: **“Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.”** As an act of suitable patriotism we will honor our fallen servicemen and women.

○ Before that, let us briefly consider the words of John 15:12-13. Jesus says: **“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”**

Jesus is not talking about military service. This is a matter of Christian discipleship.

Still, there are significant (though indirect) connections between this love command and Memorial Day.

☞ Every act of selfless love is a reflection of the sacrifice Jesus made when He died to win our freedom and guarantee our future. Every such act of love achieved at war and in peacetime, by combatant and civilian alike (even by those who do not confess Jesus as Savior or intentionally serve him as Lord) echoes his sacrifice.

Christ is calling us to **“Give to Caesar what belongs to him”** (and no more) and to give to God **“everything that belongs to God”** (without exception).

Memorial Day has a role in this. It can ...

★ Remind us of Jesus and his sacrifice.

★ Motivate gratitude to God, first and foremost for what He has accomplished in Christ; but also for the temporary earthly benefits we enjoy, in part because of what God has done through our fallen servicemen and servicewomen.

★ Encourage deeds of practical love for our loved ones, our neighbors, and those who are most vulnerable in our communities and country.

★ And it can inspire honorable self-sacrifice. This does not start with physical death, and it does not usually end there; but done in obedience to Christ’s command,

even small, unnoticed, un-dramatic acts of *αγαπε* (*agape*) love glorify God, build his kingdom, and help us fulfill our obligation to Caesar.

The Lord Jesus said, {Mt 22:21, NLT} **“Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.”**

Let us do so this Memorial Day.