



Give to Each His Due

Matthew 22:15-22

1. Setting the Trap (verses 16-17).
 - a) They used flattery (verse 16b).
 - b) They presented an either/or option (verse 17).
 - c) They arranged the witnesses (verse 16a).
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3. Applying It to Us.
 - a) Render to Washington the things that are Washington's.
 - b) Render to God the things that are God's.

For the past several weeks, my 8 year old son has been asking me about building a water bottle rocket launcher. I really didn't know how exactly to build it, so I went on the Internet to seek to find some information about what exactly I would need to build it. I also sought the help of some in this church, who can build anything! This past Monday, my son and I had some togetherness time, and we built it. The idea is pretty simple, really. You put a bit of water in a 2-litre bottle. You place the bottle upside down on the launcher. You begin pumping the launcher full of air. The more you pump, the higher the air pressure becomes. When you have pumped the pressure to about 100 psi, you pull the trigger, and the rocket will fly straight up. On our best launches, I think that we have gotten it to about 100 feet in the air. It has gotten stuck high in some of our trees. We have some work to do with our rocket design. Currently, our rocket isn't too stable, and so it whips around in circles. However, if we can keep it stable, my guess is that we can go three times as high! It's pretty exciting.

I tell you that story because it is a good illustration of this section of Matthew that we have been considering for the past few weeks. Pressure is mounting between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus has been ministering to the people of Israel for some three years at this point. These religious leaders have been plotting His death. The first we get wind of this is back in Matthew 12, when Jesus healed the man who came into the temple on the Sabbath with a withered hand. We read in Matthew 12:14 that "the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." From that point on, the pressure between Jesus and these Pharisees has steadily grown. They claimed that Jesus' power came from Satan (Matt. 12:24). They tested Jesus by asking Him to show them a sign (Matt. 16:1). They attempted to trap Jesus by asking Him about controversial matters, hoping his answers would get him into trouble with the king (Matt. 19:3). But the pressure has really intensified during the past few days of His ministry, when He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, receiving the praise of the multitudes. These Pharisees hated the fact that Jesus received this praise from children and wanted Jesus to stop it (Matt. 21:15, 16). These Pharisees questioned His authority to do these things (Matt. 21:23).

Jesus responds to their accusations, not by reducing the tension, but by increasing the pressure. In the past three weeks, we have seen Jesus tell three parables, which have been directed squarely against the Pharisees (Matt. 21:28-22:14). Every single one of them exposes the failure of the Pharisees to respond to God. Every single one of them were purposed to penetrate deep into the heart of the Pharisees, to convict them of their sin. One by one, each parable steadily added to the growing tension between Jesus and these leaders. Eventually, the pressure would be too much. Like the rocket launcher, the point will come where the pressure must be released. [\[U\]](#) The pressure would be released when the Pharisees would arrest Jesus and kill Him on the cross.

In our text this morning, we begin to see the religious leaders respond to Jesus by attacking Him and His popularity. They will ask Him three questions. It wasn't their interest in obtaining information that motivated the leaders to ask these questions. Instead, they had an explicit design in mind. These were questions intended to attack. They were intended to expose the teaching of Jesus. Each of these question were calculated to damage the popularity of Jesus from some demographic area. With a certain response, Jesus would set the Pharisees against Him. With another response, Jesus would set the Herodians against Him. With another response, the Sadducees would be set against Him. With another, the people would be set against Him.

Indeed, this is what Matthew records for us in verse 15, "Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said" (Matt. 22:15). Notice also that Matthew describes these questions as well thought through questions. Verse 15 says that the Pharisees "counseled together" to try to figure out a question that would really get Jesus.

I can easily picture the situation. A bunch of Pharisees gathered themselves together in a room. They were racking their brains for an idea of something that might work to trap Jesus. Idea after idea would flow out of their mouths. They would spend some time thinking about each suggestion. Would it work or wouldn't it work? Perhaps their discussion about one question would give an idea for another one. Finally, they came up with their question that they would ask Jesus. My first point this morning, ...

1. Setting the Trap (verses 16-17).

The Pharisees were masterful at doing this. They set the trap in several ways. Let's look at how they set the trap.

- a) They used flattery (verse 16b)

We read in verse 16 that "they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.'" This was all preamble to the question, which comes in verse 17. Before they ask the actual question, they speak these kinds things to Jesus.

It's pretty commonly known that if you want some help from someone, it is often helpful to speak kindly to them first. That's not necessarily a bad thing. If you want help from someone, speak kindly to him first. In fact, I found myself doing do this week. In our Home Fellowship Groups, we have begun a study through a book entitled, "A Journey in Grace," which is a book about the doctrines of grace. I was reading on the Internet about the author and found out that he planted a church in DeKalb, Illinois, where I grew up. I was curious to know what church it was, and whether or not it was still around. So, I emailed him this week. Here's what I said,

Dr. Belcher, I am a pastor of a church in Rockford, Illinois (www.rvbc.cc). We have begun studying through the issues of the doctrines of grace in our home Bible studies, using *Journey in Grace* as a book setting our agenda. Things have been going very well. People have really loved your books. In the future, God willing, we plan on continuing on through the other Journey books as they bring up such crucial topics for us to deal with as a church. Anyway, I was recently on www.richbarrypress.com and read the following sentence, "While at Wheaton he started another church at Dekalb, IL and spent three and a half years pastoring there as he also finished college in 1956." I grew up in DeKalb and was wondering what church you started (and whether it is still around). May the Lord continue to prosper you in your labors.

He was kind enough to reply. He told me what church he planted in DeKalb. The church is still around. (He also told me that he was working on his twelfth book, "A Journey in God's Glory," which should be in print in a few months.) My kindness to him was returned in the form of a reply. Speaking kindly of Jesus is what these Pharisees did. If you notice, everything in these opening words were very positive about Jesus. They said, (1) You are truthful. (2) You teach the way of God in truth. (3) You defer to no one. (4) You are not partial to any. All of these things were true about Jesus. (1) He was truthful. Jesus even said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Never did a false word proceed from the mouth of Jesus. (2) Jesus taught the way of God in truth. He was the One who had "the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). He was the One who brought the nearness of the kingdom (Matt. 4:17). The way to God is through Jesus. (3) Jesus deferred to no one. He had the truth within Himself and didn't have any need to ask anyone about anything. He never had to appeal or debate or wonder what He believed. He never changed His opinion. (4) Jesus was not partial to any. You become partial when you fear what others think or will do in response to what you say. Jesus often taught that you ought not to fear man (Matt. 10:28). He didn't fear man in any way.

Now, it wasn't necessarily bad for the disciples of the Pharisees to say these things. However, their motive behind these words made it bad. They were trying to trap Jesus. They were trying to harm Jesus. Never before had the Pharisees admitted to any one of these things. They accused Jesus of being deceitful, not truthful (Matt. 12:24). They accused Jesus of teaching wrong things (Matt. 15:2). They hated it that Jesus wasn't partial to any, because they had attempted to intimidate Him (Matt. 16:1). But, when they were able to be used to their advantage, they affirmed these things. This is the danger with flattery.

One dictionary defines flattery as "something that praises excessively, especially from motives of self-interest." Flattery is the technique used of the adulterous woman (Prov. 7:5, 21), who paints a deceptive picture so as to entrap her victim.

"Everything is all set up for you and me....
... I have spread my couch with coverings.
... I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon
... the man is not at home.
... He has gone on a long journey.
... He has taken a bag of money with him.
... At full moon he will come home.
... Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning" (Prov. 7:16-20).
"With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him" (Prov. 7:21).

These Pharisees are no less wicked in what they have attempted with Jesus. They were attempting to build their case that Jesus was one who answered questions clearly. They did this so that when they put the real question to Him, they could then say, "Jesus, You can't get out of answering this question." These disciples of the Pharisees knew that when people came to Jesus, He spoke forth the truth boldly, without compromise. So, when they asked their question, they were forcing Him to answer their question without wavering.

b) They presented an either/or option (verse 17).

Their question comes in verse 17, "Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" Notice how they presented before Jesus two options. They didn't ask an open-ended question. They didn't say, "Jesus, tell us, what do you think about the tax law here in Judah?" They didn't say, "Jesus, tell us, what do you think about the poll-tax." The Pharisees gave Jesus a multiple choice question. Is it lawful to pay the poll-tax? Or, Is it not lawful to pay the poll-tax?

In case you are wondering, the poll-tax was a tax upon every individual. Each year, the Romans demanded a tax from every citizen of the country. It wasn't a sales tax. It wasn't an income tax. It wasn't business tax. It was a tax that was levied upon every individual in the country. Those with bigger families had a bigger tax to pay. The Jews hated this tax, and would have loved to have it eliminated. In fact, in 6 A.D., a man named Judas of Galilee rose up in protest of this tax. He said, that "this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery" and "exhorted the nation to assert their liberty" (Josephus, Antiquities, 18.1.1). Judas asserted that "God is to be their only Ruler and Lord" (Josephus, Antiquities, 18.1.6). To give money to Caesar was, in effect, to support a false God. Many bought into this revolt. But, it met a terrible end. Many died, but nothing was changed. We are told in Acts 5:37 that Judas, Himself, "perished, and all those who followed him were scattered." **Thirty years later, this tax was still an issue for the Jews.** The Jews hated this tax and would love for it to be removed.

But, the Romans needed this tax. This tax was used to support the governmental infrastructure. It helped the Romans build roads and aqueducts. It helped the Romans maintain the peace that the Jews enjoyed. It helped pay for protection from foreign nations rising against them.

Either way Jesus answered this question, He was going to be in trouble with someone. If Jesus said, "Yes, pay the poll tax," then the Jews would be angry with Him, claiming that He was a traitor. If Jesus said, "No, don't pay the poll tax," then the Romans would be angry with Him, claiming that He was an insurrectionist. These Pharisees were smart.

c) They arranged the witnesses (verse 16a).

In the first half of verse 16, we see that these Pharisees "sent their disciples to [Jesus], along with the Herodians." The Pharisees didn't go themselves. They sent their "disciples" to Jesus. I believe that the Pharisees had several motives in this. One of them was certainly the level of conflict that Jesus and the Pharisees already experienced. The Pharisees had already demonstrated their hostility toward Jesus. They demonstrated that by testing whether or not Jesus would heal on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:10). They had also been testing Him by demanding a sign (Matt. 16:1). And they engaged in questioning His authority (Matt. 21:23). For the Pharisees themselves to ask such a question would surely have raised Jesus' awareness to their deceit. Perhaps these Pharisees believed that their disciples would be less threatening to Jesus. Perhaps Jesus might not realize that all of this was a trap.

Also, these disciples would be a credible witnesses to what Jesus said. If Jesus sided with the Romans, they would certainly have enough credibility to give testimony to what was said by Jesus. They could spread it around that Jesus was a traitor to the nation. These disciples of the Pharisees were to be instigators and witnesses to the response of Jesus to this question.

But, there was also another group of people that the Pharisees brought along. This group was called, "The Herodians." It is difficult to know exactly who these people were, as this scene is the only time in ancient literature where they are mentioned. (Josephus does use the word "Herodians" on one occasion, but it is questionable whether or not he was referring to these people). As their name suggests, we can best assume that these people were followers of Herod. They were representatives of the Roman government. I believe that the Pharisees invited them to be there in case Jesus sided with the Jews in the matter of this poll tax. These Herodians could go back to Pilate and testify that Jesus is a traitor of the nation.

Either way that Jesus responded to the Pharisees, He would alienate a group of people. To say, "Yes," would stir Jewish hostilities against Him. To say, "No," would stir Roman hostilities against Him.

2. Diffusing the Bomb (verses 18-22).

Jesus was not caught off guard by their trap. He knew exactly what was going on. He knew their plans and their intents. The Proverb is true, "It is useless to spread the net in the eyes of any bird" (Prov. 1:17). We read in verse 18 that "Jesus perceived their malice." Jesus knew that they weren't coming to Him seeking genuine help. He knew that they had other motives. He knew that they were using flattery to try to trap Him. He knew that they were putting before Him and either/or option that would indict him either way He responded. He knew that it wasn't an accident that the representatives from the major religious and political parties were present, waiting on His every word. This is why Jesus responded by saying, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?" (verse 18). They were acting like they were interested in knowing about taxes. Actually, they were interested in trapping Jesus. They had put forth the false appearance of virtue, though evil intent was in their hearts. This is what hypocrisy is. It is playing the part of an actor. But, that's another sermon for another time. When we get to Matthew 23, we'll deal more with hypocrisy.

I love how Jesus answered the question. He said, "Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax" (verse 19). Apparently, Jesus didn't have the coin on Himself. He didn't have one in His pocket. So He had to ask for one. We know that when Jesus walked the earth, he came as a poor man. Either Jesus didn't own that much money, or Judas kept the money for himself. We don't know. But after a few moments, "they brought Him a denarius." A denarius was worth an average day's labor and was the coin that was used to pay this tax.

With the object lesson before them, Jesus probably held up the coin as an example, and said, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (verse 20). At the time of Jesus, there were several types of coins floating around Palestine. Some had images of Caesar on it. Some had images of Pompey on it. Some had images of Augustus on it. With the case of this denarius, it was Caesar's image that was on the coin. And so, "they said to Him, 'Caesar's'" (verse 21).

Their coin would have been similar to our coins today. For example, on the United States quarter, there's an image of George Washington, and there are words around it. At the time of Jesus, most coins would have had the following inscription:

"Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus"
"Pontifex maximus"

The Jews would have found the inscription to be very offensive to them. First of all, this coin identifies Caesar as being a god (i.e. divine). It also identifies Caesar as the "pontifex maximus," which could be roughly translated "high priest." Both of these statements about the Roman governor would have infuriated the Jews.

In verse 21 comes the climax of this story. Jesus said, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." In effect, Jesus was saying, "If the Romans minted the coin, then, fundamentally, it's their coin. Somehow, you received it from them. It does you no harm to give it back to them. You aren't defiled by such an action. It is lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar." But, Jesus also said that, "There are things that are God's. These things you ought to give to God."

This response was masterful! Jesus answered in such a way that He spoke the truth. He taught the way of God in truth. He deferred to no one. He was not partial to any. (verse 16). His answer satisfied the disciples of the Pharisees. His answer satisfied the Herodians. In verse 22, we get a sense of their response, "and hearing this, they marveled, and leaving Him, they went away." With this simple response, the bomb was diffused. The trap failed to catch Jesus. Though, it is interesting that later, they would use Jesus' words to accuse Him before Pilate, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar" (Luke 23:2).

I'd like now to bring us to my third (and final point) this morning, ...

3. Applying It to Us.

What Jesus did here would not be unlike me requesting a quarter from one of you. Then, holding it up, asking all of "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" You would say, "Washington's." And I would reply, "Then render to Washington the things that are Washington's; and to God the things that are God's." The statement is easy enough as it is. The two applications of this text come flowing from it. (1) Render to Washington the things that are Washington's. (2) Render to God the things that are God's. The difficulty comes when you try to understand what types of things are Washington's and what types of things are God's. Certainly, the world, and everything in it is the Lord's. That's straight from Psalm 24:1. So, in one sense, everything is God's possession, and we ought to give back to Him everything that He has given to us. It must all be used for His kingdom and for His glory. However, this is not to exclude the government. We are not to be another Judas of Galilee, rising up and protesting against the government because we believe everything on the earth is the Lord's. God has ordained the governmental rulers in this land.

In Romans 13:1, it is clear, "There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Paul wrote to the Romans and reminded them that the pagan, Roman authorities have been placed there by God, Himself. Even Nero, a wicked ruler who persecuted anyone who would take the name "Christian", was given his authority by God. The same is true of Dioclesian, who issued an edict in A. D. 303 to have all Christian churches destroyed, all copies of the Bible burned, all public offices taken away from Christians, all civil rights deprived from Christians, and all Christians to sacrifice to the gods under penalty of death. Even his authority was established by God. So, next time you want to complain about your taxes, just think of how the taxes come from the God ordained rulers of the land. Also, next time you want to complain about a particular politician, remember that it is God's man in the office. I want to give you a few practical points under this application.

a) Render to Washington the things that are Washington's.

Render your submission. Romans 13:1 says, "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities." Submit to the government. Pay your taxes. Obey the traffic laws. Pay your dues. Be a model citizen, who gives back to society much more than you ever take away from society. Act in such a way that all government authorities look favorably on you.

Express your thanks to governmental employees. I remember having the opportunity of driving around Los Angeles with a friend who is a police officer for the LAPD. At one point, we were watching a police man talk with gang members, and a man came up and leaned in our window. He said, "I want to thank you for your service to our city. I go to the church down the street, and I want you to know that we thank the Lord for you and your work to keep our city safe. We pray for you often. Keep up the good work. May God bless you!" That's an example of the submission that we need to express to our local authorities, that they might regard Christians as being model citizens. This is giving to Washington the things that are Washington's.

Get involved. My tendency is to be so consumed with the church that I fail in my civic opportunities. My tendency is to focus almost exclusively upon the second application this morning, "Render to God the things that are God's." In some ways, this comes about because of my conviction that the only real good that will last is what is good for souls, as people come to faith in Christ. So, the vast majority of my labor is focussed upon the church. What good does it do, ultimately, if we work really hard to have a good, moral nation? Ultimately, if people continue to reject Christ, all of the benefits that a moral nation would bring amount to people being moral, but on their way to hell? To legislate morality is similar to putting a cushion on an electric chair. And yet, there is a clear application for us to be involved in civil affairs, as this text indicates. You won't hear me say this too often, as the majority of the Bible is concerned with spiritual matters, rather than civic matters. But, this text is clear, and I must sound forth its application.

Communicate. You do this by voting. If you didn't vote in this past election, shame on you. As a citizen, you have the opportunity to let your voice be heard. Let it be heard! You do this by communicating with your governmental representatives. Write to your senators and representatives and local newspapers. Even if the world hates and spurns our message, it is still our responsibility to communicate to the world what is right and what is wrong (see Ezekiel 3:4-7).

This past week, I attended a football game at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb with my children. It was pretty cold that night, but my oldest kids really wanted to go. So, we went and saw a decent game. But, the half-time show was horrendous. I would even say that it bordered on being pornographic. When I came home, my soul was stirred. I felt that I must stand and express my disappointment at what took place. I did what I could to express my protest. I wrote a letter to the *Northern Star*, which circulates among the campus at Northern Illinois University, as well as the *Daily Chronicle*, which is the newspaper for DeKalb county. I wrote, ...

"Editor:

I attended the Northern Illinois University football game this past Tuesday night. Certainly, I was disappointed by the loss to the University of Toledo. However, I was much more disappointed by the half-time performance, which bordered on being pornographic. It's one thing for someone to choose to watch pornography in their homes. It is another thing for a crowd of thousands of people to be exposed to such explicit behavior, especially my children whom I brought to the game. I can only hope that the Huskie Marching Band will choose to perform more appropriate material in the future."

It was printed on Thursday in both newspapers. I also sent it to those in the leadership of the Huskie Marching Band. I fear the much of it fell on deaf ears, as the leader of the Marching Band replied to me, expressing her sorrow that I didn't like the performance. Then, she told me that they try to have various themes that appeal to all sorts of people. I replied to her that it wasn't a matter of liking or disliking. It was a matter of being appropriate or not.

I think of what I did to speak out against the half-time show, and it's such a small part of the opportunities that are available to us to be involved in our community. Let's be bold and tell the world what is right and what is wrong. There are issues that we can speak out about locally. For example, on the front page of the Rockford Register Star yesterday (November 13, 2004), there was an article about how Illinois Senator Dave Syverson has changed his view regarding gambling in Rockford. At one point, he was against the idea, but now is for it, as Beloit, Wisconsin, is considering a casino. He is worried about Beloit taking tourism dollars away from Rockford. Jan Klaas of the anti-casino group Concerned Citizens for America said the casino proponents "downplayed the social costs, which are more serious than they think." I don't know much about this, but I have read a bit about the terrible effects upon society that gambling brings. Perhaps one of you might have a heart to be educated in this matter, and help mobilize the church to do what it can do to be a voice of right and wrong in this society.

Also, our Illinois senate is considering authorizing stem cell research in Illinois this week. The bill is called, "The Stem Cell Research Act" (HB3589). It would allow human cloning to create and kill human embryos for scientific research. The bill specifically states that "research involving the derivation and use of human embryonic stem cells ... from any source, including somatic cell nuclear transplantation, shall be permitted." I received an email about this bill this week that called it "a wolf in sheep's clothing and a blatant attempt to foist human cloning on the good people of Illinois. It clearly condones human cloning, encourages abortion for research, and betrays an ignorance of stem cell science." Perhaps one of you might have a heart to be more informed on this matter and help the church know what it can do to prevent such wicked things from taking place in our state.

The opportunities for us abound. Here are a few. Run for public office. Volunteer at the Pregnancy Care Center. Help coach a youth team. Serve at the Rockford Rescue Mission. Volunteer your time at the local hospital. Bring the gospel to those in the jails. Open up your home to those without family during Thanksgiving. Adopt a child into your home! Get involved in the local school. Volunteer to help your U. S. Representative. Help at the polling stations when it comes time to vote. Help at a nursing home. Sign up for a big-brothers/big-sisters program. You certainly can't do all of these things. But, you can do something.

Recently, I heard D. James Kennedy on the radio interviewing a man named, Gary Cass, who has been a pastor for the past 15 years at West Hills Christian Fellowship, in El Cajon, California. He was talking about being involved in the society to effect a change. His story is quite encouraging. The following is a transcript from the conversation.

Kennedy: How did you come to realize the need for Christians to be involved in cultural activity?

Dr. Gary Cass: You know, this is kind of an interesting sojourn, because it certainly was not a part of my theological training. I just saw that Christians needed to be able to speak out on the issues. So, I was very much caught up into the pro-life movement at the end of the eighties with Operation Rescue, and actually went out and was part of that movement and did a little bit of civil disobedience -- me and hundreds of hundreds, if not thousands of people, across America. We realized though, after going through that cycle (which, I do believe that God was working in), that we came to face the fact that the problem with the culture is that the people sitting behind the bench and the people that are running the culture were antithetical to our beliefs. And civil disobedience, while it's got a long and glorious history, we needed to re-focus our energies and work more in reclaiming those places of power and influence that the church had abandoned. So, I got busy doing that and in that process, felt convicted that, as a minister, that I had a duty to be on the local school board in my area. This came as a result of reading a book by Samuel Miller (a great Presbyterian minister of the early 1800's). I read in a book that he had written on thoughts on public prayer. In the introduction, he listed what the expected duties were of a minister in that time of the history of our nations--in the early 1800's. The obvious things were there: the ministry of the word and prayer and visitation. But, what leapt off the page to me was the idea that the minister in that community was expected to be on the school boards. Not just dealing with religious education, but all forms of education. And when you think about it, what could make more sense than that? And yet, when I decided to run for the school board, you would have thought that it was the greatest controversy of the ages that a minister would dare run and have a voice in the education of the children of the community in which he lives.

Kennedy: Isn't that amazing, when you stop to think that for at least 150 years, Christianity controlled virtually all of the public and other education going on in this country. And interestingly also, the students learned a lot more, based upon educational tests that have been given.

Cass: The literacy rates were higher,

Kennedy: Absolutely.

Cass: ... and they were actually reading the Bible.

Kennedy: And then, you came to realize that you wanted to do something about the schools, the high schools in particular in the San Diego area.

Cass: I ran for the school board (I wish I could say successfully). The first time, I was soundly defeated. The second time that I ran again, there was a stable of eight candidates. There was only going to be one elected member and so I ran and I came in second. And, my son said, "Well, dad, you are the first loser." But by God's grace and the help of the saints and maybe by a little bit of stubbornness. I ran a third time and I was able to be elected to the school board. And so, that started a very exciting time. I was the lone conservative Christian on the board. This was a district that had been very contentious, and the media loved to keep things stirred up. We started an adventure. Not more than a couple of months into my tenure on the board, they tried to bring forward some very provocative policies relative to the homosexual agenda. Some of them dealing with non-discrimination. But, some of them actually dealing with the curriculum and content. Fortunately, because I had lived in that community for so long, I was able to call a lot of my friends, who were pastors, and I told them that if they cared about the kids in their church and what was going to be taught in the schools, that they needed to show up for their school board meetings. And over the course of three school board meetings, we went from the course of 500 to 800 to 1000 people begging this school board not to pass these policies. But, because the Christians had not been involved up to

this point, these other elected officials were beholden to another group of people. And it was real a wake-up call. Because, even though we had the numbers (we had parents, we had students, ...). We outnumbered them 10-1 in those meetings. Nevertheless, that board voted against them and implemented those policies.

Kennedy: That was a self-destruct button they were passing.

Cass: Yes, that was the shot over the bow. That's how I got connected with the center for reclaiming America, because we began to process a recall against the chairman of the board at that time, who was very liberal. We targeted him. We went through the whole recall process. It was very arduous and expensive, and unsuccessful, ultimately at the end of the day because of a clerical error. That was very disheartening. We had the numbers of signatures that we needed. Everything was there, but it just did not come through. It was one of those very intense, emotional moments, when you are saying, "Lord, we are doing the right thing, and we worked so hard" and then to have it seemingly fall apart. But, that movement helped us to connect with others who agreed with us on these issues. And out of that failed recall effort, we were able in the next election cycle to get one more Christian on the board. And then in the year 2002, we took complete control of the board. It had four Christians on the board. And this election cycle coming up, it looks like we will have a 5-0 Christian board.

Kennedy: Well, that is fantastic. [2]

Now, I don't want to run for a seat on the local school board. I have enough on my plate as it is, and my heart isn't to do this. But, what a wonderful thing this would be if God would put this on your heart to be on the Rockford School Board. Perhaps a majority of Christians on the board would help our school district. Perhaps if we focused our minds upon rendering to Washington the things that are Washington's, our society would not be on the slide that it is. So, I encourage you to be involved in our society. If nothing else, perhaps you will devote yourself to praying for our government. Paul wrote, "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Regarding this, there are some biblical examples that I'd like to point out. Remember Joseph, Daniel, and Hezekiah. All these men were Christians who were charged with leading governments. Hezekiah reformed worship, re-instituted the Passover, and destroyed the idols in the land. God commended him (2 Chr. 31:20-21). Josiah did similar things. Perhaps one of the things we need to restore is the idea of corporate responsibility. God judges cities and nations for their sin. When you read through books like Isaiah, this is abundantly clear. In Daniel 9, Daniel, himself, confessed the sins of his nation. He felt responsible for them. Don't think that the abortions that take place in this city won't affect you. Just as the blood of Abel cried out to God from the ground (Gen 4:10), so also does the blood of babies. I believe that somehow, in DeKalb county, legislation has been passed to prohibit abortions from taking place in DeKalb County. I don't know the details about this, perhaps there is some type of city ordinance that has prevented abortion clinics from opening in DeKalb County (or something like this). Perhaps some of you might look into pushing for similar restrictions in Winnebago County.

At this point, I feel like I need to sound a warning. You need to be careful in all of these activities that I have just suggested. As much as we may strive for a moral America. A moral America saves nobody. Case in point: The Pharisees. Of all people that have ever lived in this world, the Pharisees were the most moral of all. They were scrupulous in the way that they dressed. They took care in the ways that they ate. They made sure that they kept the Sabbath. They worked hard at memorizing the Bible. They sought to uphold morality. Furthermore, we are told that they had "a zeal for God" (Romans 10:2). And yet, no one has ever received more condemnation from the mouth of Jesus than these people. Of all men, they are most to be pitied. The amount of truth that they knew was staggering. And yet, they failed to understand the grace of God. They sought to "establish their own righteousness" (Rom. 10:3), and never entered the kingdom.

So, I would encourage you to balance these two admonitions of Jesus:

- a) Render to Washington the things that are Washington's.
- b) Render to God the things that are God's.

And when it comes down to it, focus your attention upon the second. The apostle Paul never sought to pull away from the world. Rather, he encouraged us to help those within the world. Listen to Galatians 6:9-10, "And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and **especially to those who are of the household of the faith.**" We are to do good to all men. Not just believers, but also to non-believers. We are to do good to society, and to our government. And, especially, you are to do good to those who are of the household of the faith. That's the church. Do you know why that is? It's because, the things of God are eternal. They will last forever. They are of most benefit to you and to others.

I want to close my message this morning by giving you a few practical thoughts on rendering to God the things that are God's.

Make the worship of God a priority. Privately, be spending time reading God's word and praying. Worship God in your homes with your families. Be faithful in your attendance at church. It's rendering to God the things that are God's. It's here that we are constantly reminded of the glory of God and the sufficiency of Christ. It's here that we continually affirm that it's not our works that save us, but our trust in the righteousness of Christ. It is so important for you to have this constantly upon your mind.

Serve others in the church. If you see a need, fill it. If you can help someone, help them. This goes far beyond Sunday morning. This goes into your weeks. Be around the people of the church and help them. It's a matter of you beholding the need, and having a heart to meet the need, and then doing it!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 14, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] At this point in my message, I pulled the trigger on the water bottle rocket launcher. Little did I realize how high it would go. I was anticipating that it would pop to the ceiling and fall harmlessly to the floor. However, little did I realize the amount of pressure that I had pumped into the launcher. It shot up into the drop ceiling and stuck into one of the ceiling tiles some 20 feet above the floor. The audience gasped, and I was shocked. It took a few moments to continue on with the sermon, as laughter, surprise and shock continued to set in. One man in the congregation later wrote to me (in jest), "Too bad it didn't hit the light panel. That could have been a stunning visual, especially if it produced a shower of sparks and knocked off power in the building, causing the fire department to rush over."

At any rate, after church, several men came forward and willingly replaced the ceiling tile. This event will certainly be remembered with laughs as a pastoral *faux pas* for years to come.

[2] This transcript was generated by me from listening to the Truths That Transform (www.truthsthattransform.org) radio show which aired on October 11, 2004.