

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

by

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TEXT: “Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” —Matthew 22:21

Today is Christian Citizenship Sunday where we recall the great patriots, the great Christian men and women who gave us this nation and a day to consider what we have done with this great boon that has been handed down to us—the freedom of a great and glorious land. It is a time, also, to consider what Jesus Christ said to us about the matter of our responsibility as citizens.

He has declared, “**Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.**” Here we see very clearly that there are two spheres in which we are to render our due responsibilities. There is the spiritual and eternal realm of the Kingdom of God, and there are our responsibilities to the kingdom of this world, where we are to render the things due unto Caesar.

FROM WHENCE WE CAME

First, let us notice from whence we came, and then let us consider where we are, how we got here, and what we can do about it.

Unlike some countries (for example, Australia, which began as a penal colony and has had to work its way up from that), America began with godly men who came to these shores to worship Jesus Christ. “We all came into these parts for one and the same end and aim, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That was why they came, and they established a godly civilization—so much so, that when the famous French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville came over here in 1830 and wrote his book, *Democracy*, he said that America was a righteous nation. He said there was never a nation where Christianity had such a great grasp and grip upon the people.

Unfortunately, we have come long way since 1830. We have made great progress in ceasing to be good as a nation, and we may not be far from ceasing to be great, unless something is done.

Consider where we have come from that exalted beginning.

WHERE WE ARE

Now we live in a nation filled with dangers. There are many dangerous places you could be now

as an American: There is danger on the highways with the many people who are drunk or under the influence of drugs. There is danger in our slums. There is danger walking down the street of almost any neighborhood at night. There are, of course, the dangers of war, when our young men have had to go off to Vietnam or World War II, or whatever.

The most dangerous place anyone can be in America today is in his or her mother's womb. More babies were killed in their mother's womb *last year* than have died in all of the wars we have fought since the Revolution. Abortion has become the American Holocaust—the great American disgrace.

We live in a land of pornography, where millions upon millions of people read pornographic magazines or watch pornographic movies or videotapes or television programs.

We live in a land where sexual immorality has become almost the norm—where people think nothing at all about putting two names on the mailbox that are different; where perversion, homosexuality, and lesbianism have become almost politically protected in this country.

We now have 39 endemic STDs in this country (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) and there are new ones cropping up all of the time—very virulent, terrible diseases. The worst, of course, is AIDS, which is invariably fatal.

We live in a nation where drugs have become pandemic, and we seem not to know how to stop them. I talked with a lawyer this week who told me that at any parties in Fort Lauderdale where lawyers and others go, they not only have the drinks laid out on the bar, but they also have the “crack” or the cocaine laid out for the people to pick up when they come in.

We live in a country where crime is at an all-time high, where there is scarcely a person who doesn't have two or three locks on his door. You know, when we were growing up, many people never locked their doors or cars at all. There was no need. My wife told me that they invariably left the front and back doors of their home open when they left the house. Things have changed in our country.

The quality of education, which used to be the pride of this nation, has become a disgrace; we are now one of the more illiterate nations of the industrialized world. Not only that, but what is being done to children's minds and souls in the schools is tragic beyond what most of us really understand.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

I don't want to belabor these things we all know about, but I would like to ask the question of how did we get here? What happened along the way from Plymouth Rock until 1988? Who is responsible? Is it the atheists? The Humanists? Is it the secularists or the Communists or the cultists, the New Agers, the Hedonists? Who is responsible? Is it the A.C.L.U. or N.O.W. or the People for the American Way? Upon whom shall we lay the blame?

Let me tell you a story. You remember the story, I am sure, of Dr. Frankenstein and his famous monster. Just imagine, if you will, that final scene when the monster has gone berserk and has

wreaked havoc upon the townspeople. He has left numbers of people dead and now attacks his maker and has destroyed the home, which is now ablaze and setting the sky alight with its flames. About that time, a friend of Dr. Frankenstein's arrives from a distant city and sees the carnage and chaos and says, "Dr. Frankenstein, what has happened here?"

Dr. Frankenstein replies, "A monster, a monster! A monster did this. It was terrible! He just went berserk, killed people, and destroyed the home."

The friend exclaims, "A monster? Where did this monster come from?" Silence. "Where did it come from Dr. Frankenstein?"

"Well... I made it myself," he replies.

In case you don't see the application, my friends, we have to acknowledge that a great deal of the blame must rest upon us—must be laid at the doorstep of the Church. We have failed to obey the Great Commission in this country as a whole. We have failed to obey the Cultural Mandate to be involved in every sphere of activity. We have retreated from politics, government, the media, and higher education, and we have left it to nonbelievers. We have failed to fulfill our responsibilities as citizens; we have failed to obey the command of Christ to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

Now, we didn't create this monster with our own hands, but we allowed it to grow up and take power where, with the power of the government, the colleges, the media, the courts, and the legislatures, it has wreaked this disaster, this carnage in America today. Therefore, I think we must realize that much of the blame rests with us. Christians have failed to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens in this country, and we have allowed this great blessing of a godly nation to slip through our hands.

PRIVATIZATION OF RELIGION

If deTocqueville were to return today, would he see that this is a righteous nation where Christianity had a greater hold than in any other country in the world?

How have we allowed this to happen? Largely through what has been called the privatization of religion. Religion has left all of the public spheres and retreated within the stained glassed walls of the church or the prayer closet. We have left government, we have left politics, we have left media, and we have left education to the unbelievers to take over and destroy what the Founders of this country gave to us with those things.

Of course, we can say there are many preachers who have failed to preach. I have had laymen lament to me that their preacher will not speak about the great issues of our day because they are too controversial, and they don't want to step on anyone's toes. We can't lay it all at the feet of the preachers, because there are many laymen who simply don't want to be bothered. They don't want to hear about it. They are only interested in "me and my wife and our daughter and our son John, us four and no more. I don't want to know what's going on out there. I just want to live my life."

A man said to another American, "We need your help. We need your leadership."

And the American replied, “I really can’t, because you see, I have a family, my business is growing, and I have to give myself to that. I have my own personal needs, and I must take care of those. I just can’t get involved at this time.”

“But, General Washington, what will we do if you don’t lead us?”

Now that conversation never took place, but what if it had? Where would we be? If some of you lived in his shoes, that’s exactly what you would have said. The privatization of religion. We don’t want to know about the larger concerns and how they are going to affect our nation.

PIETISM

This was rampant in the teens and the twenties in the Weimar Republic in Germany. There was the Pietistic Movement that had become very big at that time. They didn’t want to be concerned with what was happening out there. They hardly noticed when somebody named Adolph began to move into prominence and take over.

In 1917, while the revolution was getting started in the streets of Moscow, a gathering of bishops from the Russian Orthodox Church from all over the country was engaged in a great controversy. They didn’t even hear what was going on outside; you see they were debating what color vestments they should wear—a pietistic religion that was concerned only with self.

FALSE SPIRITUALITY

A great majority of Christians in our country today are only interested in personal peace and personal prosperity. They are interested in “me and mine” and all they want is to get something that is going to help them “right now.” The selfishness and self-centeredness and shortsightedness of this are so pitiful and tragic.

The most tragic thing of all is that they cloak this self-centered egocentrism, this shortsighted piety, with the name “spirituality.” It’s what Dr. Francis Schaeffer called a “false spirituality.” It’s what the Christians in Russia lived to lament—the shortsightedness of the Christians that did not obey the command of Christ to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. This gave birth to the Gulag Archipelago.

In this country it was, and still is, the difference between a patriot and a politician, between a statesman and a politician. The difference, basically, is that the politician says, “What’s in it for me?” and the patriot says, “What good will it do for the county.”

A lady who works in one of our precincts said that the average turnout in her precinct is 10 percent. The result of this kind of thinking in the Church, according to the latest study, is that 18 1/2 million evangelical Christians are not even registered to vote! Half of those who are registered never vote, and a good number of these few who do, don’t even know what they are voting for; they are not informed.

THE RESULT

The result of this, my friends, is that we are hip deep in pornography, abortion, sodomy and every kind of evil imaginable, so that you can't even find a decent film to take your family to any more. It is getting so you can't even turn on your TV set. If things continue to go the way they are (and the way they went in Europe), there will come a time when you won't be able to turn it on at all.

When will we wake up? I thank God for those in this church who have awakened a long time ago and who are active—who are obeying not only the Great Commission, but the Cultural Mandate; who are not only rendering unto God, but rendering unto Caesar what they should. The result of this fact that the majority has not awakened is that we have a judicial system and Supreme Court that is either ignorant of, or hostile to, the basic biblical principals upon which this nation was founded, and legislatures pass laws that are completely antithetical to the Law of God.

This has resulted in 20 million babies being aborted and the sluice gates of pornography opening, so that America is living in slime like the Jamaican people are living in the floodwaters of hurricane Gilbert. It has come into the homes and is everywhere to be seen. Court decisions have produced this pornography, produced this abortion, and have produced this great increase in crime in this country. Coddling criminals and even sending first degree murderers home for weekend passes has made our criminal justice system a joke and our nation unsafe to live in.

WHAT WE CAN DO

What can we do? The changes were made by people, and they can be undone by people as well. Three Supreme Court Justices will, no doubt, be appointed by the next president. Do you realize what that means? If three conservative, Constitution believing, judges are appointed, there will be a total transformation in the attitude of the Supreme Court. Instead of having an overwhelming liberal court, there would be a court where you would have a conservative majority of eight to one. What happens in this election is going to determine the outcome of this nation for the next 50 years, simply because of those appointments. Do you realize what that would do—how that would change this country? The liberals know.

I wouldn't put all the blame on the Supreme Court, but a lot of it rests there. I believe we could see a change in this Court that would result in a change in this nation beyond the imagination of most people here. We have seen what 50 years of liberal court decisions can do to one nation. Let me say, this November may begin 50 years in the opposite direction.

The purpose of government is to defend its citizens and restrain evildoers that we may live godly and peaceable lives. We have had government who has failed to defend its citizens and has encouraged evildoers rather than restraining them.

RENDER UNTO CAESAR

How do we render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's? First of all, we should pray regularly, faithfully, and daily, for those who are in power—for our President and Vice President, for our Cabinet, the Supreme Court, the Congress, the Senate, the House, and those who rule locally.

Second, we should register to vote. Eighteen and a half million evangelical Christians are not even registered to vote. That is a tremendous tragedy. Do you realize that those 18 1/2 million people could have totally changed every election that has taken place in the last 50 years! Christians have had it in their power to change all of these things we lament and complain and grumble about constantly, and we just haven't done it. I wonder if I asked all of you who are registered to vote to stand. Some of you would be sitting there with red faces.

May I say to you that not to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's is to specifically disobey a direct command of Jesus Christ, and the least that involves our doing is voting. In order to vote, you must register; therefore, it is violating a commandment of God not to vote and it is thereby, by definition, a sin.

For non-Christian Americans, voting is a privilege and responsibility; for Christians, it is a DUTY demanded by God that we should fulfill.

Third, we should become informed, so we don't simply walk into a voter's booth and close our eyes and punch holes in cards. You should get your information from many sources. Then, get involved.

Do more than just vote. Support candidates of your choice. There are many Christians who have run for office and have lamented that they have received very little help from other Christians. Support candidates. Work for them. Run for office. I am grateful we have had people in this church who have run for office and have been elected. I hope some of you will pray about doing the same.

Vote! Vote not only in the national elections, but vote in the primaries as well. Twenty percent in Broward County voted in the primary election. There you have an opportunity to do great things. This church, by itself, could determine the outcome of most primary elections in this area, if we would simply be faithful to vote.

WE CAN CHANGE AMERICA

Friends, we can change America! People made it what it is, and we can make it what it ought to be. Do you really believe that? Paul said, **"I can do all things through Christ ..."** (Philippians 4:13) and Jesus Christ tells us to be faithful citizens of this county. Remember those men who worked indefatigably, who pledged their lives, their fortunes, and sacred honor to produce this country, who were willing to sacrifice everything. Many gave their lives that we might enjoy the freedoms and the blessings of this nation, but we are letting it slip through our fingers like sand.

I wonder what many people will have to say to their grandchildren when they ask, "Granddaddy, where were you when America lost its freedom? What were you doing? What were you doing when America became a godless nation? What did you do to stop that?"

We can stop it and we can change it, if we will simply be obedient to what Jesus Christ has told us to do and fulfill our responsibilities as Christian citizens. This is my dream. I believe it is possible with all my heart. I hope you will believe it is possible that we can see a nation:

- Where babies can be conceived and born without the fear of being hacked to pieces in

their mother's womb.

- Where this tremendous vile ocean of pornography can be cleaned up and removed from our land and we can go to see a film without worrying about what is going to be contained in it;
- When we can turn on television and not expect to hear the name of Christ blasphemed or see all sorts of unseemly things that are done;
- When we can have a society where drugs are not rampant and where it is safe to walk the streets again.

These things are the blessings that Christians can bring to a nation. All the blessings this nation has enjoyed have come from Jesus Christ, and it is up to us to bring Him and His teachings and His Gospel back to this country. Of course, ultimately, people need to come to know that Gospel of grace, to know Him who loved us and died for us that we might have eternal life.

If you do not know Him and you have never accepted Him as Savior and Lord, you are part of the problem and not part of the solution. I urge you right now to repent of your sins and ask Him to come into your heart and change your life, to cleanse you, renew and transform you, and give you a godly heart and mind and a design for a godly America, so we can once more say, "God bless America, land of the free."

Prayer: Father, bless this, our native land, and yet, O God, we know it is only by thy grace that thou dost not destroy it. So vile it has become in many ways, and how it must grieve Thy heart. O Lord. May our hearts be grieved as well. Forgive us that we have lived a selfish life in so many cases—that we have not been involved. We have done little or nothing. We haven't cared enough. We haven't been willing to stake our lives, our fortunes, our sacred honor upon the cause of freedom and a Christian nation. Help us, Lord, to do that. Change America, we pray, O God, and do it through us. We thank Thee that all over this nation churches are urging their people to become involved in changing this county—that Christians are waking up, at last. O God, may there be a great awakening and may all believers stand in amazement at what is done in this next decade, by the power of Thy Spirit. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

This is the complete unabridged sermon as delivered Dr. D. James Kennedy at the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.