

## Render to Caesar, Surrender to God

Luke 20:19-26

Have you ever felt the sting of division in our world—maybe a heated argument over politics with a friend, or scrolling online and seeing Christians clash, hurling accusations over labels and loyalties? Doesn't all this divisiveness weigh heavy on your heart or do you revel in it? Jesus warned in John 10:10 that the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and one of his favorite tactics is to fracture God's people, sowing discord where there should be unity. Too often, we slap labels like "progressive," "fundamentalist," "woke," or "nationalist" on each other without pausing to understand what they mean, which turns conversations into battlegrounds before we clarify intent.

Voddie Baucham, who recently went to be with the Lord, captured this so insightfully when speaking about one of those hot-button terms, Christian Nationalism: "There is no clear definition... so there are different people who are defining it in different ways... essentially becoming a smokescreen." By "smokescreen," Baucham meant that vague or loaded labels like these are often used to caricature believers, obscure the truth about their biblical convictions, and inflame division, keeping us from honest dialogue about how our faith should shape our world. His words remind us how such confusion pulls us away from our shared mission, turning brothers and sisters into adversaries when we're called to stand as one.

Jesus Himself addressed this reality of division when He said in Matthew 10:34, "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" This is hyperbolic language, beloved, emphasizing that standing for truth in a fallen world will inevitably bring opposition—hatred, ostracism, even within our own families, as the gospel confronts sin and demands undivided allegiance to Christ. We saw this vividly in last week's parable of the wicked tenants, where the vineyard owner's messengers, and ultimately his son, were rejected and killed by those who refused to submit. That rejection divided the faithful from the rebellious, showing how truth exposes hearts and creates rifts.

Yet Jesus also prayed for our unity as believers in His high priestly prayer in John 17, asking the Father not only to make us one as He and the Father are one, but explaining that our unity would be the very way the world knows that

He was sent by God. Sadly, today, division hasn't just stayed in the world—it's crept into the church, fracturing our witness for Christ and dimming the light we're called to shine.

This is the tension swirling around our passage today in Luke 20:19-26, where Jesus confronts a cunning trap from the religious elite. Again, we're in Jesus' final intense days before the cross, with opposition rising in the temple courts. Last week, in the parable of the tenants we saw how Jesus exposed the leaders' rebellion against God's authority—not from ignorance, but from hearts hardened by a love for power over surrender. Now, their fury intensifies, and they scheme to bring Him down.

**Main idea:** As dual citizens of earth and heaven, we must navigate the plots that seek to divide us by maintaining a God-centered perspective and engaging in faithful practices that honor both our earthly responsibilities and our ultimate allegiance to King Jesus.

To unfold this theme, first we will examine the plot of the enemy to divide, second, the perspective we must maintain to stand firm, and third, the practices we must embrace to live lives as faithful representatives of Christ.

**1. The Plot of the Enemy to Divide:** navigating the schemes that disrupt unity in the Spirit.

Let's start with the Plot of the Enemy to Divide. In verses 19 through 22, the scribes and chief priests are burning with anger. Jesus' parable has laid bare their hypocrisy and rejection of God's Son, and they want to seize Him right there in the temple. But fear of the people's reaction holds them back, so they resort to deception, sending spies disguised as sincere seekers. These agents start with flattery: "*Teacher, we know you speak and teach rightly, and show no*

*partiality, but truly teach the way of God.” Then they drop their trap: “Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” Luke 20:21-22*

This question is a calculated strike, designed to corner Jesus. If He says that they should pay taxes to Caesar, He will alienate the religious zealots who see Rome’s rule as an affront to God. If He says don’t pay, He’s a rebel against the empire, which would make Him ripe for arrest. Their goal is division—pitting either the crowd or authorities against Him. Proverbs 9:8 captures their heart: *“Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.”* These leaders are scoffers, who hate Jesus for exposing their sin.

Interestingly, despite their own divisions, as some aligned with Rome’s interests, and others yearned for political rebellion—their shared hostility binds them together against God’s truth. It’s a sobering reality revealing that hatred unites even bitter rivals to oppose the work of Christ, much like the identity politics and tribalism we see today.

Beloved, this plot exposes the divisions tearing at us today. Satan, the enemy of our souls, delights in fracturing the body of Christ. As Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, our battle isn’t against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil. What are the weapons that the enemy is using today? How many of you know, he’s using politics, cultural pressures, misinformation, and lies to divide.

Just this past week, I saw a pastor’s post on Facebook that illustrates this perfectly. He made a broad-brush statement that accused most White Christians of participating in, supporting, and justifying racism because they hold a different political position than he does. Church, this is the enemy’s trap in action—taking a real issue like racism, which we must confront as sin (James 2:1-9), and turning it into a sweeping accusation that paints a whole group as guilty, without dialogue or understanding. It’s a smokescreen that caricatures believers as hateful, much like Voddie Baucham warned, and it fractures our witness rather than building it up. Instead of seeking the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17, it pits brother against brother, dimming our light for the gospel.

Labels like “progressive,” “fundamentalist,” “woke,” or “nationalist” get tossed around today, often without clarity. Some who are labeled Christian Nationalists, whether they embrace it or not, have a heart for biblical truth—to love our nation, obey the Great Commission to make disciples, and vote biblically to preserve our Judeo-Christian heritage—values that promote liberty and justice for all, as Jeremiah 29:7 urges us to seek the welfare of our city.

Likewise, using “woke” as a derogatory label for those upholding the Bible’s call to love the stranger, and do justice as Deuteronomy 10:19, and Micah 6:8 commands, can also fuel division. Both sides miss the mark when labels become weapons, fracturing the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17. Some wield these labels to mean exclusion or coercion, far from the gospel, while others use them to silence Christian voices in public life. One side calls biblical faith oppressive; the other veers into extremes that distort Christ’s love. Identity politics pulls us into camps, which are shaped more by social media algorithms than by the renewing of our minds through God’s Word, as Romans 12:1-3 commands. If we’re not careful—if we spend more time arguing online than praying and studying Scripture—we’ll fall into this trap, turning on one another over issues that should unite us in Christ.

To navigate this with wisdom, Patrick Schreiner offers guidance: “To maintain the unity established by the Spirit, Christians must ask what a person means by a phrase before we jump to judgment. We want to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). Or as another wise Pastor put it: “Labels can obscure truth when they’re used to dismiss rather than engage. Our job is to speak truth in love, not caricature our brothers” (John Piper). This reflects Jesus’ discernment, when He saw past the flattery of the spies and with wisdom exposed their heart’s intent. The enemy wants to distract us from our mission to make disciples of all nations, using politics as a wedge. But Jesus shows us a wiser path.

This leads to our second point:

## **2. The Perspective we Must Maintain to Stand Firm**

In verses 23 through 25, again, Jesus sees through their deceit with piercing clarity. He doesn't flinch or dodge; He answers with divine insight. *"Show me a denarius," He says. "Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They reply, "Caesar's."* Then comes His profound directive: *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."*

Again, this isn't a dodge or an attempt to please everyone—it's a divine blueprint for navigating competing loyalties. Jesus affirms the role of earthly government: the coin, you see, bears Caesar's image, so give it back in taxes. Romans 13:1-7 underscores this by exhorting Christians to submit to earthly authorities, which means that we are to pay taxes, be law-abiding citizens, even in the details like traffic laws. As Kent Hughes notes in his commentary: the state is God's design to maintain order in a fallen world. Richard Halverson, former U.S. Senate chaplain, put it well: Men will misuse the state, just as they've misused every institution, even the church. But that doesn't make government evil or disposable. Because of sin, we need governmental authority to curb chaos until Christ's kingdom comes in fullness.

We see this balance lived out in Jesus' own disciples, who modeled unity despite deep differences. Among the Twelve were Simon the Zealot, who despised Rome's taxes as a symbol of oppression, and Matthew the tax collector, who earned his living collecting those very taxes. They stood on opposite sides of a political divide, yet they were united under the lordship of Jesus, their eyes fixed not on Rome's agenda but on the eternal King. Their unity flowed from a perspective centered on God's kingdom, not earthly empires, showing us that we too can bridge divides when we fix our gaze on Christ.

Yet Jesus' words carry us even higher: *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* The coin belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, but we belong to God, created in His likeness, as Genesis 1:27 declares—male and female, reflecting His glory from the moment of creation. This truth means God claims our entire lives—not just our money, our time, or our talents, but our very selves, fully and sacrificially. Kent Hughes unpacks this

beautifully in his commentary: If we think God is satisfied with our offerings or abilities alone, we're mistaken. If we believe He's after our relationships or resources and nothing more, we're still missing the mark. God demands us wholly—heart, soul, and spirit—because we are stamped with His divine image, created to reflect Him in all we do.

This God-centered perspective puts every human authority in its proper place. For us today, this means living as exemplary citizens, honoring the government and seeking our nation's welfare, as Jeremiah 29:7 instructs God's people in exile, just as Daniel and Joseph served faithfully in foreign lands while keeping their hearts devoted to God. I've experienced this balance myself as a police officer, serving the state with integrity while serving Christ above all, finding no conflict unless human laws demanded I compromise my faith, for as Acts 5:29 declares, "We must obey God rather than men" when earthly and divine allegiances collide.

Christians can and should engage in politics—running for office, voting according to biblical values, advocating for life in areas like protecting the unborn or shielding children from harm. Our faith shouldn't be compartmentalized but fused into every sphere of life, shaping our actions with God's truth (Romans 12:1-3). As Christian author and former National Security Council official, Paul Miller noted, "Christians should seek to influence civil government according to God's moral standards and God's purposes for government as revealed in the Bible." In light of this, we must ask what someone means by terms like "Christian nationalism," as some critiques miss the mark by defining it exclusively as a coercive push to enforce faith, when many today seek heart-change through the gospel's missionary mode, not cultural dominance through crusader-like compulsion. This is often true of those who critically put this label on others because they see any Christian pushback on secular drift as dominance. If a great awakening through evangelism leads to laws that reflect God's values, that's not forcing faith on anyone—it's the fruit of hearts transformed by the gospel, bringing liberty and justice for all (Psalm 139:13-16).

Yet here's the crucial key: Our minds must be renewed by Scripture, not conformed to the noise of this world, as Romans 12:1-3 urges us.

If media, politics, or cultural debates shape us more than God's Word, we'll end up idolizing earthly causes and deepening division among ourselves. Jesus' perspective—render to Caesar what is due, but surrender to God your everything—keeps us anchored in truth and unites us under His lordship, just as it did those early disciples.

This brings us to our final point:

### **3. The Practices We Must Embrace to Live as Faithful Representatives of Christ**

In verses 25 and 26, Jesus declares, *“Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.*” Luke 20:25-26

Brothers and sisters, this teaching unveils a profound call to live as faithful representatives of God's kingdom, a call that shapes how we embody our dual citizenship in a divided world. Jesus' wisdom silenced His opponents, not with cleverness but with divine truth, showing us what it means to honor earthly authority while giving our whole selves to God. His life modeled perfect faithfulness—obeying the Father's will even to the cross, yet engaging the world with grace and courage.

Again, Hughes drives this home in his commentary: Jesus' answer reveals that we, bearing God's image, are called to reflect His glory in every choice, every action, every moment of our lives.

The spies stood in awe, unable to trap Jesus, for His words demand a response—not partial devotion, but a life wholly surrendered to God's purposes. As citizens of His kingdom, Jesus beckons us to follow Him, living as faithful ambassadors who live out His truth with courage and love in a fractured world.

So, how do we live this out as faithful Kingdom citizens?

First, prioritize spiritual disciplines. To resist the enemy's divisive traps, we must spend more time in prayer and Scripture than in the echo chambers of political debates. Psalm 119:105 declares that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, guiding us through the fog of cultural confusion.

Second, pursue unity over division. Just as Simon and Matthew bridged their political differences under Jesus' lordship, we're called to do the same. Ephesians 4:3 exhorts us to make every effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Similarly, Romans 12:18 commands, *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."* This is our higher standard as followers of Christ, namely to engage others with respect and humility, even when faced with hostility, listening to understand their heart and speaking biblical truth with grace.

A just and civilized society depends on this ability to exchange ideas openly, without resorting to name-calling or justifying violence. When divisive labels like "progressive," "fundamentalist," "woke," or "nationalist" arise, follow Schreiner's advice: ask what someone means before judging. Are they seeking to advance Christ's gospel, making disciples and reflecting His love, or are they fueling division with agendas driven by pride or control? Control your words and attitudes, trust God to work in hearts, and speak truth in love, as Ephesians 4:15 urges, so that our witness reflects His glory, and brings healing to a divided world.

Third, engage honorably as dual citizens in this world. Be the salt and light Jesus calls us to be: Vote in line with biblical values, seek to preserve our nation's godly foundations, but never confuse patriotism with the gospel. If God leads you into public service, serve faithfully like Daniel in Babylon, but always keep Philippians 3:20 in view—our true citizenship is in heaven. And if human laws demand that we compromise our faith, obey God rather than man, without descending into anarchy. 1 Peter 2:17 encapsulates it beautifully: *"Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."*



These practices, rooted in Jesus' call to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, equip us to live faithfully in a divided world, balancing earthly duties with our heavenly calling. Beloved, these practices make us faithful ambassadors who not only seek the welfare of our nation, but above all fulfill Christ's mission to make disciples of all nations with integrity and love.

## Conclusion

As we close, let Jesus' words in Luke 20:25 take root in our hearts: *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* You bear God's image, as Genesis 1:27 declares, stamped with His glory from the dawn of creation, called to surrender your whole life to Him—heart, soul, and spirit.

To whom does your life, in word and deed, show your ultimate allegiance? Reflect on this, and let's confess where we've sown division, misrepresented Jesus, or failed to speak gospel truth in love. Repent of these and realign your heart to Christ's kingdom. This week, audit your daily consumption—are you feasting more on Scripture's truth than the world's screens? Pray earnestly for unity in our church and nation, so that our love may shine as a testimony, as Jesus prayed in John 17.

If you've never surrendered to Christ, don't wait—pray with me now: "Lord Jesus, forgive my rebellion; I believe You died to pay the price for my sin. I trust You as my Savior; make me Yours." As Voddie Baucham reminds us, "We are not seeing terrible things in our culture because we vote the wrong way. We are seeing terrible things in our culture because men love darkness rather than light." Jesus paid the ultimate price on the cross to bring us into His light; let us live as His ambassadors, radiating His truth and love to foster gospel peace over division for the redemption of lost souls and for the greater fame of Jesus.