

Week Seven: *What About...Politics?*

Matthew 22:15-22

Spend FIFTEEN – Day One

1. Read Matthew 22:15-22. How was the purpose of the Pharisees' question described in verse 15? Is this how you feel about discussing politics in general? Why or why not?
2. Look again at verses 16 and 17. Why might the Pharisees have brought along a large group of people while trying to trap Jesus?
3. Why do you think they phrased their question in the manner they did?
4. Let's look at another example of a religious leader who had a question for Jesus. Read John 3:1-21. List some of the ways this leader's actions were different than the ones in Matthew 22.
5. Think back to your days in school or think about a time when you needed clarification from a supervisor. What is the best way to ask a question when you truly seek to understand?
6. So often discussing politics can feel like a trap, to us and others. How can we have a discussion that feels safe to others when politics comes up?
7. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, ask God to help you always be kind and assume a posture that seeks to understand when discussing politics.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Two

8. Do you think that the United States is a Christian country? Why or why not? On what basis do you make your determination?
9. Look again at Matthew 22:15-22. While Americans may disagree on whether or not the United States is considered a Christian country, there was no doubt in the minds of the Hebrew people—they may have been forced to live under the rule of Rome, but they were certainly not Romans! God had established the Jewish people as a theocracy, a separate nation ruled by God. How do earthly governments differ from a theocracy?
10. Why would the Jewish people object to being ruled by Rome?
11. It's important to note that the imperial tax needed to be paid with a specific kind of coin that had Caesar's image on it. Since the Jews considered graven images, like the coin with Caesar's image on it, to be idolatrous, how could Jesus' answer put him at odds with the Jews? How did they receive his response?

12. The Pharisees, who considered themselves the best, most faithful religious people, also happen to be standing in the temple (holy ground). What does this say about the practices of the Pharisees when one of them pulls a coin out of his very own pocket?
13. Now read Titus 3:1 and 1 Peter 2:12-14. What are followers of Jesus called to do? What is the result when Christians obey the laws of the land?
14. Finish your FIFTEEN for today, praying that all of the governments on Earth serve their people for their good, not to their harm.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Three

15. Read Romans 13:1-7. What are Christians called to do?
16. God has allowed governments on Earth to establish order. What types of things would be impossible if we did not have centralized governments? Make a list of very practical things governments can provide.
17. While governments on Earth are necessary, their authority comes from God alone. How should that impact your obedience to the laws of the land? (Look again at Matthew 22:15-22.)
18. While God allows earthly governments, they are still made up of fallible humans who may not always enact just laws. In your opinion, how would you rank the U.S. compared to the other nations in the world? List some of the benefits of our system of government that helped you determine your ranking.
19. Maybe one of the freedoms you listed in question #16 is our peaceful transfer of power. During election years, people can engage in some downright salacious behavior toward one another. However, our elections are typically decided by vote, not bullets. It's one of the outstanding things about our system of government. As you end your final FIFTEEN today, give God thanks and praise for the freedoms we so often take for granted.

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Four

20. Look again at Matthew 22:15-22. What else are we to do besides give to Caesar what he's due?
21. Yesterday we talked about the governments that God allows on Earth. Martin Luther and the other reformers referred to these governments as the "Kingdom of the Left Hand." But there is another kingdom, known as the "Kingdom of the Right Hand." If the Kingdom of the Left Hand is about earthly governments, what do you suppose the Kingdom of the Right Hand is about?
22. Look again at Romans 13:1-5. List some of the benefits that come from obeying the Kingdom of the Left Hand.

23. While the Kingdom of the Left Hand is important for an orderly life on Earth, what is the benefit of pursuing the Kingdom of God? Read the following verses and list just a few examples you find in them.
- a. Matthew 6:25-34
 - b. Matthew 19:24-26
 - c. Mark 4:3-32
24. The Kingdom of the Right Hand is so much greater than any earthly kingdom. Earthly kingdoms may help with temporary order on Earth, but the Kingdom of God brings peace, life, and wholeness. Which kingdom is worthier of our obedience?
25. Why is it sometimes hard to keep that in perspective?
26. As you end your FIFTEEN in prayer, thank God for making a place for you in both kingdoms!

Spend FIFTEEN – Day Five

27. Begin today by reading Psalm 66. Why is God worthy of our praise?
28. As we saw yesterday, there is nothing greater in heaven or on Earth than the Kingdom of God. How does that truth help you keep the politics of our earthly kingdoms in perspective? Does it change your attitudes toward politics?
29. What steps can you take to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's?
30. When you think about all that God provides you and what the government provides for you, in theory, to which do you owe a greater debt?
31. Read Matthew 20:25-28. What do you owe God?
32. Jesus came to be a king, but he had no intention of building a government; Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God—and he did so by giving up his own life free of charge. Now that is a King worth serving! End this FIFTEEN in prayer.