

On the Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity

God grant you all much grace and peace through the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In the same one, our faithful Savior, dearly beloved listeners!

Christianity is a religion for all time and all men; it is therefore so provided, that one may practice it, be a Christian, and be saved in all lands, under all kinds of constitutions¹, in every station, in every vocation, at every age², and in every economic situation. No one can say that he is in a situation in which he must do something unchristian. The Kingdom of Christ is no kingdom of this world, but an invisible, heavenly kingdom in the heart and souls of men, which overthrows no earthly kingdom, yet which also cannot be itself overthrown by any earthly kingdom. Christ can rule His Christians just as well in a monarchy as He can in a free state.

Nevertheless, while this is true, on the other hand, it is not lying to say that it is a great blessing for us that we can live, not in the monarchy of Germany, but in this great, dear free state. Although we could indeed also be Christians and be saved in our old fatherland just as well as here, still we nonetheless enjoy certain ecclesiastical benefits here, which we have regarded as precious blessings from our God.

Unfortunately, one almost never now hears of a monarch who allows Christians complete freedom of worship³ according to the pure Word of God. In nearly all royal states, false teachers and books are forced upon Christians in churches and in schools by the authorities, and they [the authorities] command them [Christians] not to organize public worship and the instruction of children according to the pure Word of God, but according to the opinions of human authorities, or all the same to be united contrary to the Word of God within the context of church and worship functions with such that change and falsify the Word of God in many essential articles of faith. Therefore, many thousands of Christians in other lands groan under this awful oppression of conscience, themselves longing for freedom from heavy ecclesiastical yoke, and desiring⁴ shepherds after God's heart, who lead them to the pasture of the pure Word of God, and teachers, who from early on imbue their children with the pure milk of the Gospel. But in vain!

O how good we therefore have it, since we have here found a new homeland, where we enjoy the Means of Grace purely and rightly without disturbance and hindrance and can produce a church and school entirely according to the pure Word of God! O how good we have it, that we are not here referred to a teacher, who directs us to the hopeless teachings of men instead of to the counsel of God for our salvation! How good we have it here, that we must not place our children under men, who contaminate their young hearts already with the contagion of unbelief! The Christians stand thus here, if they do not want to have it, they scorn it, and they will voluntarily give themselves over either to unbelieving gluttony or a work righteous spirit of enthusiasm. We are free here; the great choice here is in our own hand.

Thus we have such magnificent freedom in this country, which can bring great blessings to true, zealous Christians, but is also often irresponsibly and repeatedly abused by most here to their destruction. It does not differ much with the fatherland where they also treat their religion carelessly and sacrilegiously; the great majority suppose that one may here be free from any submission to God, free from obedience to elders and authorities, free from church and the divine service, free from obedience to elders and authorities, yes, free from all good decorum and order. One here seeks a

¹ Forms of government.

² An individual's personal age in years, not an era of civilization.

³ *Gottesdienst*.

⁴ *Verlangen* also means "to demand" or "to require."

freedom, which is nothing other than insolence and the most wicked servitude to their passions and slavery to sin.

It is very true now, there is no one here compelled to play the hypocrite; whoever despises God and His Word in their hearts can also do so unpunished also with their tongue and deeds; whoever does not wish to bear the scepter of grace, can also be excluded from the kingdom of grace without any external hindrance and can thus, in this way, be free fro God, namely, free from His grace, free from His salvation. Nevertheless, God still remains King here also; His throne is also established over this free state, His almighty hand rules also across the ocean to this outermost end of the earth; no creature can wander out of the realm of His creation His holy laws apply here as well, and whoever transgresses them, here encounters His threats as well. The Word also applies here, which Christ first spoke in our Gospel: “Give to Caesar, what is Caesar’s, and to God, what is God’s.” Thereupon let me now speak to you further.

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.”

So they brought Him a denarius.

And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?”

They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”

And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Let us now, my hearers, consider as most important the expression of Christ contained in the Gospel just read, and permit it to remain standing:

So that the command of Christ may also have its unadulterated validity in our new fatherland as well: “Give to Caesar, what is Caesar’s, and to God, what is God’s;”

1. the command: “Give to Caesar, what is Caesar’s” and
2. the command: “And to God, what is God’s.”

Lord, our ruler, You who are worshipped by all thrones, principalities, and dominions in heaven and has ordered that the angel serve the archangel and the man the man, and You who has confirmed this order in heaven and upon the earth by Your eternal Word, help lest we be indignant toward You, and grant rather that we serve You in humility and submit to Your representatives upon the earth to the glory of Your name and for our own well-being. To that end, now bless Your holy Word through Your grace and truth. Amen.

I.

The command of Christ: “Give to Caesar, what is Caesar’s,” seems, my hearers, to not stand here in the Bible for us, since we live in a free state, in which no emperor, nor any king or prince yet has any authority over his citizen or charge. However, it only seems that way. The proper interpretation of that statement will show us, that it applies to all men in the world. It is like the sixth commandment: “You shall not commit adultery.” According to the sound of these words it also appears that the sixth commandment has nothing to do with a great portion of men, namely, unmarried people; however, from the splendid explanation of Luther: “We should fear and love God, that we live a pure and decent life in words and actions,” we understand clearly, that the sixth command also has been given to all

men, whether they have at this time entered into the marital union or not. So also the command of Christ: Give to Caesar, what is Caesar's," applies to all men, whether they have now in reality taken up their residence under an emperor or in a free republic.

We must indeed know the following. The Jews had the false delusion, when the Messiah would come, then he would not only liberate them from the yoke of the Roman emperors, but also would in general make all Jews earthly lords, and subjugate all the other peoples of the earth to them. Then each would reign and all submission by the Jews would come to an end. Therefore, when Jesus appeared in Judea, declaring Himself to be the Messiah, and yet moved along in poverty, obscurity, and frailty, and made absolutely no preparations to liberate the Jews from the political pressure of Rome, many were angered by that and therefore wanted to make Jesus out as not being the real Messiah. For this reason in particular the Pharisees gathered together. The same ones thus said to Christ, in order to trap Him, as we hear in our Gospel, the aforementioned question: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" They thought, "if Jesus says 'no,' thus we can accuse Him of rebellion before the Roman authorities; if He says 'yes,' thus we can show our people, that it is impossible for Him to be the real, promised Messiah." "Now since Jesus perceived their wickedness, He said, 'You hypocrites, what do you seek from Me? Show me the tax money.' And they brought him a coin. And He said to them: 'Whose is the image and the inscription?' They said to Him, 'Caesar.' Then he said to them: 'So give to Caesar, what is Caesars, and to God, what is God's.'" In this Christ wanted to say: if you have Caesar's tax money in your land, then show yes with it, that you are subjects of Caesar and he is the authority wielding power on your behalf; for this reason, also thus give to Caesar, what is Caesar's; if he supplies the government of your land, then give him the dues, the obedience, and the honor, which belongs to him.

Let us now consider the reason, upon which Christ made the statement: "Give to Caesar, what is Caesar," and the context, within which these words stand, so we may understand clearly from that, that Christ with the same words is not enjoining perchance only obedience to a sovereign prince, but that he want to express the universal truth, that he as the Messiah has not come to dissolve the arrangements of God among men, and that accordingly those, who believe in Him, are in no way liberated from the obedience to those, who have the right to rule from Him according to the arrangement of God in the realm of His power.

Hereafter it is clear, that also in this new fatherland of ours the command of Christ still has its unalterable validity⁵: "Give to Caesar, what is Caesar's," for also in this free state the arrangement of God applies, also here we are not all alike.

First, it applies here also in all respects to federal and state authorities.⁶ Without these indeed no state⁷ can endure, without them our possessions would be without protection, without them we could not sleep peacefully through the night, without them not one hour of our life would be safe, indeed, our free state would then no be free at all, or there would be nothing other than the most dangerous and destructive evil of our land. "So give to Caesar, what is Caesar's," Christ announces to us for this reason also in this free republic of ours. Our authority also, although it is here put in place by the highest will of the entire people and is answerable to it, is nevertheless still by the arrangement of God and is the handmaid of God, into whose hands God Himself has given the sword of protection and the scale of justice. Their laws, therefore, should holy and unassailable to us, their commands should be for us the command of God, their decree the decree of God. With joy we should offer up the taxes, which they impose upon us, to support not only their charitable institutions, but also to fulfill the holy will of God. Yes, with joy we should be ready to offer our life itself if our authority calls upon us for the preservation of public safety, to fall in the field against the enemies of the land. It is also no trifling sin here to maliciously transgress a command of our government, legally placed over us by us ourselves, by cheating them of their taxies and duties, or to deny their headship confirmed by God in any business

⁵ The German word implies legal force.

⁶ *Land*-federal; *Stadt*-state; *Obrigkeiten*- authorities.

⁷ *Staat* probably best fits the idea of nation.

transaction or practice. If we want to be Christians then, so we must here act conscientious according to the Word of God: "So give to Caesar, what is Caesar's," accordingly give to the authority, whoever it may be, what it wants, what belongs to it, or as the holy apostle says in Romans 13: "Let each one be submissive to the authority, which has power over him. For there is no authority except from God; and where authority is, it is established by God. Whoever now sets himself against the authority, strives against the arrangement of God; and those who resist, will bring judgment upon themselves. For they do not wield the sword for nothing, they are God's appointed servants, an avenger to bring punishment upon those who do evil.—So now give to each one what is their due: customs to whom customs belong; taxes to whom taxes belong, fear to whom fear belongs, honor to whom honor belongs."

Yet not only the state and land has their appointed head from God himself, but also each house and each family. The Word of God clearly proves this headship of the elders, when it says: "You children, be obedient to your elders in the Lord; for that is just. Honor mother and father, that is the first command that has a promise; so that it may go well for you and you may have long life upon the earth." Clearly the Word of God further establishes the headship of the master and lady of the house, when it says: "You slaves be obedient to your temporal lords, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not with service only before their eyes, as to please men, but as the servants of Christ." Clearly the Word of God finally establishes the headship of man over wife, when it says: "Let the wives be submissive to their husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife; likewise also Christ is the head of the Church, and He is the Savior of His Body. So just as now the Church is subject to Christ, let the wives be to their husbands in all things." From this we see, that also over the doorposts of all houses and familial residences: "Give to Caesar, what is Caesar's."

Oh note this still, you sons and daughters, you indeed dwell here in a free state, where men give you a great freedom and you in particular, if you have come of civic age, to also free yourself from obedience to your mother and father. The Word of God reads otherwise. If you want to be the children of God and to have His grace, you must thus remain obedient, grateful, and humble children of your elders until death. Do not be fascinated by the great heap of those children, to whom the person of their elders is not holy, who inquire nothing from their directions and advice, who abandon their elders and do not serve them in their old age, as they have served them in their youth. These are wretched children; they are not in God's kingdom of grace; yes, they are accursed in time and eternity and remain so in all their ways, if they do not humbly and repentantly turn back and seek grace by their earthly elders and their heavenly Father. Consider also, you sons and daughters, your elders are perhaps weak, they perhaps let it go unpunished, that you do not look up to them as the consecrated representatives of God and obeyed them in childlike humility and served them; this compliance to your elders will not one day be excused; It is God, whom you despise in them, it is accordingly also God, who seeks his honor and will frightfully avenge the scorn of the holy link that He has attached. For that reason, then, honor father and mother, for that is the first command, which has a promise: So that all will go well for you and you will live long upon the earth.

Note this also, however, you servants and maids. Serve who you may, you serve not mere men, but Christ Himself, your Savior, allows Himself to be by you through your master and lady of the house. Therefore believe it: when you serve only for the sake of money, so your entire ever so sour service is sinful, reprehensible, and damnable before God. Oh, only to demonstrate it to many young people, that they do not serve for the sake of God, for when there is great need in a house, difficult work and not high reward, then the hard pressed father of the house can find no servant, no maid; and when even something small in a house is not becoming them, when the master and lady are only a little eccentric, thus they abandon them unfaithfully and after that do not inquire whether need or shame arises thereby for their master. O you, you who serve thus, how far are you still removed from true Christianity! You already therein have your reward; truly, if you do not turn and learn to gaze upon Christ alone with your service and on His account also bear difficult burdens with willingness and humility, then Christ

will one day call to you: I have never known you,” you unfaithful servant, you profit seeking maid; “Depart all from before me” eternally, “you evildoer.”

And finally also note, you wives, who have sworn at the altar of the Lord to your husband, to live not only affectionately with him, to pay attention to his wishes and suggestions with tender care and to become a helper for him, who wants not to make life difficult for him, but easy, but you who also has sworn to your husband, to be subject to him as your head according to the holy arrangement of God and to honor and to fear him as the image and honor of God. It does not simply exonerate you before God, that your husband is so indulgent, weak, and obliging, that he permits it that you rule over him, either through craftiness, flattery, and persuasion, or possibly even with the power of anger and bickering; your husband himself cannot throw away the scepter, which God has given him in his hand, for the headship of man is God’s arrangement. Therefore, *pfui*, shame on a wife, who is known to accomplish their will and to break the will of their husbands! They overturn the holy arrangement of God, they are a disgrace among Christian wives, held in scorn among the holy angels, and one day will have a difficult accounting before God, whose establishment they wantonly overturned. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear!

II.

Since we now have seen the application the words of Christ “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” have for us also in this free land, then secondly let us now also consider the full validity even now of the following words of Christ, “and [give] to God what is God’s.”

Not without the most important reason, has Christ added these latter words to the first, because not a few indeed wish to give to every man his due, but they do not think of the debt which they have before God Almighty. Not a few think if they are respected citizens, obedient children, and good roommates, then they lack nothing that could be demanded of them, then they are good Christians and salvation is assured to them. Not a few also let themselves be hindered in their service to God by the relationships in which they stand before men and swear by the principle: *Herrendeinst geht vor Gottesdeinst*.⁸

Christ now opposes all these, with His addendum, “and [give] to God what is God’s.” These important words teach us that more belongs to being a Christian than that a man only walks honorable before the world, than that one only is blameless before men. These words say to us that if we want to come to God some day, we must give God all that belongs to Him. But what belongs to God?—Everything that we are and have belongs to God; our body and soul belong to Him, our heart, our life, our abilities, our joy our honor, in short all things because He is the Creator of all things, the Lord over all things, the source from which all things flow and into which all things must flow back again.

Who could now believe that the Almighty in a so-called free land would have a few rights over us and a few demands on us as elsewhere? Certainly no one! Now then let me ask you, “Have you, beloved hearers, already given God what is God’s?” For whom do you live? Do you live no longer for yourselves, but for your God alone? Is it really your sincere desire to use every hour of your live to honor God? Do you really believe that you actually have nothing to do in this world that to glorify God in all things? Is this the goal for which you are hunting? Is this the care which fills you? Is this the point at which all your wishes, all your yearnings, all your longings come together?

Consider: By nature every man lives for himself; by nature every man carries a certain hostility toward God in his heart; by nature every man seeks namely his rest, the gratification of his heart in the world and its goods, peace, and honor. However, if a man learns truly to know Christ and His grace and salvation through the Word of God and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, then a great change occurs with a person, then he goes entirely away from himself, recognizes God as his highest good, completely unites with God to become an offering for him. Who among us has already experienced this change in his heart? Who among us hangs his heart no longer on the joys and goods of the world,

⁸ Service to the master comes before the worship service.

so that he without lying can say with Asaph, “If I only have You, O God, then I ask nothing from heaven and earth”?⁹ Who among us, if he is praised and honored, speaks in his heart, “Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory”?¹⁰ Oh, let no one rely on this, that he gives his being to all if he does not give his whole heart and everything with it to God, for Christ say not only, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,” but also “and to God what is God’s.”

Here perhaps many say, “I would like to serve God indeed with my whole heart, but I am employed where I must associate with purely godless people and must work uninterrupted the whole day long that I can think very little about God and salvation.” Another perhaps says, “I would like to be an eager Christian, but I have parents or a wife or a husband who love the world and I must submit to them and live to please them. Those who excuse themselves in this way listen what Christ says to explain our text elsewhere, “Let the dead bury their own dead.”¹¹ If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.¹² Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”¹³

See, my beloved [hearers], it must be separated; if we want to go to God someday, then we must already forsake all things here, go out from the world and of ourselves, and submit ourselves entirely to God.

Oh therefore whoever up to now has either not asked about God or has still divided his heart between Him and some other creature, he finally scratch himself loose though he comes not to rest or to God some day but will find himself with everything he has carried outside of Christendom. But whoever rests already in God through faith, he is already saved in God here, already enjoys here the peace which this world can give to no one, a peace which transcends understanding; his heart is for of comfort and hope and finally in death God offers him the dwelling of eternal peace and allows him to enter perfect glory and salvation from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

⁹ Unable to find reference.

¹⁰ Ps 115:1

¹¹ Luke 9:60

¹² Luke 14:26

¹³ Matthew 10:37