**Show Me the Mask for the Mandate**

Based on [Matthew 22:15-22](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt22.15)

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In today’s lesson, Jesus famously makes a distinction between church and state. And today, we have inherited certain values and conclusions about it. On the one hand, christians owe a duty to the state, to Caesar, to pay taxes and to obey the laws of the land. On the other hand, the state should not tell people they need to believe or do to cleanse their conscience. Baptism gives you a clean conscience, and that is the job of the church. Both church and the state are from God, but the state has been given the “sword” to punish evil; the church has been given the “keys” to unlock the gates of heaven.

Think of the example of St. Peter. Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, and Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church and will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven”. But when Jesus was arrested, Peter took the sword and cut off a soldiers ear, and Jesus said put your sword back in its place.” The church is given the keys to heaven, but not the sword of punishment. Likewise, Caesar is given the sword of punishment, but not the keys of heaven.

In the middle ages, this distinction was confused. The church was presented as having the sword of punishment. So, many people branded as heretics...some rightly and some wrongly, were burned at the stake. Heresy is evil, worshipping false gods is wicked, but that does not mean such people deserve to die at the hands of men. False doctrine is bad, unbelief is worse...but worse still is the idea that men on earth should decide when and whether to punish other men for what they profess to believe.

This is activity of Satan. It was, of course, how they got Pilate to give the “go ahead” to crucify Jesus. Pilate, having the sword as it were, was no saint...no god-fearer. But he was sensible in the sense that he knew the state shouldn’t go around killing people simply for what they say they believe. And so he was rightly confused when they brought him Jesus to be killed for what he said he believed. So what if he says he’s the son of God? He can say he’s a ham sandwich for all I care. That’s no sensible reason to kill him. And yet, it is the political reason Jesus was killed.

The pharisees send their disciples to try and entangle Jesus in his words. This is not because they want to preserve the truth, but because they want to preserve their power. It is purely political. They want to say “this man believes this, and anyone who believes this deserves to die.” Do you know why, in Nazi germany, the parting phrase “Heil Hitler” was always used? It was a password. It was a way of making sure that everyone professed to believe the right thing...that Hitler was in charge and the party was right. And if you refused these beliefs, you were worthy of execution. In the end it didn’t matter whether you believed that Hitler should be saluted. It was a way to assert power over consciences.

During this pandemic, these sorts of passwords are being used, and the state has assumed the churches role of the keys. By that I mean that the state has not only mandated the use of masks in public places, which are its jurisdiction. It can make laws and punish transgressors. But it has also set up a standard for allowing good people into heaven. “Good people” take the pandemic seriously. “Bad people” don’t take it seriously.

This might be true, but it sets up a situation for sinful humans beings (but I repeat myself), for sinful human beings to bite and devour one another. Are you someone who takes it seriously or not? And so, like professional pharisees, people will wear our phylactery masks long and to prove we take it seriously. Or they don’t wear them in order to rebel against the pharisees. All the while we forget that mask wearing is neither commanded nor forbidden by God, and left to christian freedom.

Render unto Caesar what is caesars, and to God what is God’s. If Caesar tells you to wear a mask you should wear a mask. If Caesar says you don’t have to wear a mask at recess, or when you’re seated at a restaurant, then you don’t have to. But don’t let someone judge you based on your attitude towards masks, and pandemics, and hand washings. Obey the government, but do not let the government legislate doctrine about good or bad people. And don’t presume to preach about new moons, or sabbaths, distinctions of meats, mask wearing, or other “traditions of men”.

Would Jesus wear a mask? Yes, he would wear a mask where Caesar told him he had to. Maybe, he would go two miles and wear it even when he didn’t have to in order to make sure others were safe. But he would also rebuke the pharisees who try to condemn people based on their own traditions of hand washing, distancing or mask wearing.

And the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they asked him, “Teacher we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us then, what you think. Is it lawful to wear a mask or not? But Jesus aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the mask for the mandate. And they brought him a mask. And he said to them, who is telling you to wear it? They said, “Caesar”. Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Obey Caesar, give him your outward service. If he wants you to wear a mask, so be it. If he says you don’t have to elsewhere, you don’t have to. Only be careful not to judge your neighbor, for there is only one Judge, and he is Lord of all. And he says do not Judge your neighbor, but love him. But if Caesar tells you what doctrine you have to believe to get to heaven, or to be a good person, know this. Caesar may speak Gods Word, but it is not God’s word because Caesar speaks it. It is not God’s Word because “the experts” speak it. It is not God’s Word because you speak it. It is God’s Word because Jesus speaks it. And he says that you are made in the image of God, and your soul belongs to him you are to render it to God.