

CHAPTER 2

Caesar Or Christ?

Life is full of important choices in which we must choose one thing over against something else. Here are some examples: Should I go to church or to the beach? Should I do my homework or watch television? Should I help my parents or go out with my friends? Should I read my Bible or should I look at the newspaper? Should I participate in the ballgame or should I go to prayer meeting? Should I be in the woods with the Boy Scouts on Sunday morning or should I be in church? How should I spend my time in study hall? Should I do my school work or should I talk to my friend?

You can probably think of many other choices like these that we must make. The early Christians had to make an important choice between CAESAR and CHRIST. They had to choose between loyalty to Christ and loyalty to Caesar. This does not mean that they had to choose to be loyal to Christ and **disloyal** to Caesar. The Lord Jesus never taught His followers to be **disloyal** to Caesar or disrespectful to him (compare Matthew 22:21). But when a **CHOICE** must be made to put one before the other, CAESAR MUST ALWAYS TAKE SECOND PLACE and CHRIST MUST ALWAYS BE **FIRST** (see Colossians 1:18 where the word "preeminence" means "first place").

The Meaning of "Caesar"

The first man to use the name "Caesar" was the famous JULIUS CAESAR who was a Roman general and statesman and who was assassinated in 44 B.C. (about 40 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem). "CAESAR" was an honored and distinguished nickname that was given to this man.

Who was the Roman emperor when Jesus was born? (see Luke 2:1)

_____ Did he use the name CAESAR also? _____ CAESAR became the name or title for all the Roman emperors from the time of Augustus to the time of Hadrian (117-138 A.D.). The Roman emperor was called CAESAR just as the Egyptian king was called P _____ (see Exodus 1:8,11,22).

What was the name of the emperor who was in power when Jesus was about 30 years old (Luke 3:1 and compare 3:23)? _____ Was he a CAESAR also? _____ Tiberius was the same man whose face or image was seen on the coin (see Matthew 22:19-21). This man was also the Roman emperor when the Lord Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead.

Nero the Madman

Another Caesar that we read about in the Bible was the Roman emperor Nero. This was the man that Paul referred to in Acts 25:11—"I appeal unto _____."

In the year 64 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Nero, fire broke out in Rome. For six days and nights the fire burned. The greater part of the city was laid to ashes. The rumor got around that Nero himself had caused the city to be set on fire. This aroused great hatred in the people of Rome against their emperor. Nero had to find a scapegoat, someone to put the blame on. To turn this public hatred away from himself, Nero accused the Christians of having set the city on fire. Of course, the accusation was not true, but as a result large numbers of Christians were arrested and a terrible persecution followed.

About 50 years after this great fire a Roman historian by the name of Tacitus wrote about this event. This is what he said:

To kill the rumours, Nero charged and tortured some people hated for their evil practices—the group popularly known as "Christians." The founder of this sect, Christ, had been put to death by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, when Tiberius was Emperor.

First those who confessed to being Christians were arrested. Then, on information obtained from them, hundreds were, convicted, more for their anti-social beliefs than for fire-raising. In their deaths they were made a mockery. They were covered in the skins of wild animals, torn to death by dogs, crucified or set on fire—so that when darkness fell they burned like torches in the night. Nero opened up his own gardens for this spectacle and gave a show in the arena, where he mixed with the crowd, or stood dressed as a charioteer on a chariot. As a result, although they were guilty of being Christians and deserved death, people began to feel sorry for them. For they realized that they were being massacred not for the public good but to satisfy one man's mania.

(Tacitus, Annals 15.44)

It was under the mad and wicked rule of Nero that both Peter and Paul were martyred. Peter was crucified upside down, and Paul was beheaded.

What Should I Give To Caesar?

In Matthew 22:15-18 some Jews came to Jesus trying to trap Him and trick Him. They tried to ask Him a question which they thought would get Him into trouble no matter how He answered it: "Is it lawful to give tribute (pay taxes) unto _____ or not?" (Matthew 22:17).

Suppose Jesus had said, "Yes, we certainly should give tribute unto Caesar." Would this answer have displeased certain people? Remember the Jews hated being under Roman rule.

Suppose Jesus had said, "No, we should never give tribute unto Caesar. Don't pay your taxes!" If Jesus had said this, what then could His enemies have done? Would the Roman authorities be happy to hear about a Jewish teacher telling the people not to pay their taxes? Could the Lord have been accused of promoting rebellion against Romans rule?

The Lord Jesus did not fall into their trap. Instead He gave His famous answer found in Matthew 22:21. After they had heard these words, what did His enemies do (Matthew 22:22)?

RENDER (GIVE BACK) UNTO CAESAR THE THINGS WHICH ARE CAESAR'S.

How can we do this today? What is our responsibility to our government and to our leaders? What should we do to them and for them? Do they deserve our respect and loyalty (see 1 Peter 2:13,14,17)? Should we pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-3)? Why? Should we pay our taxes? What kind of a citizen should each of us be? As responsible citizens, what duties should we carry out? What has your country given to you? What should you give back to your country? Are you thankful for the men who have served your country in the armed services and for those who have even given their lives in the line of duty and on battlefields?

RENDER (GIVE BACK) UNTO GOD THE THINGS WHICH ARE GOD'S.

How can we do this today? What is our responsibility to God and to God's Word, the Bible? Does God deserve our respect and loyalty (1 Peter 2:17)? Should we pray to Him? Should we read His Word? What kind of person should I be before God? As a responsible believer, what duties should I carry out? What spiritual responsibilities do you have? What has God done for you or given to you? What have you done for God or given back to God? Are you a good Christian soldier? Are you serving God and fighting the good fight of faith in your home, at school and wherever you might be?

A Comparison

The following chart gives us a brief comparison between Caesar and Christ:

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CAESAR	CHRIST
A powerful ruler (from man's point of view)	THE ONE AND ONLY POWERFUL RULER (1 Timothy 6:15—"Potentate" means powerful Ruler)
A mere man (and some of these emperors were quite wicked and some were madmen like Nero)	THE GOD-MAN, THE RIGHTEOUS SON OF GOD. HE IS THE GREAT GOD AND OUR SAVIOUR (Titus 2:13)
A great king	THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev.19:16)
The Lord of the Romans	THE LORD OF ALL (Acts 10:36)
The Lord of the Roman Empire	THE LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (Acts 17: 24)
The Lord of those living in his kingdom	THE LORD BOTH OF THE DEAD AND THE LIVING (Romans 14:9).
Can save no one	CAN SAVE ALL WHO CALL UPON HIS NAME (Rom. 10:12-13).
The Caesars live and then die.	CHRIST LIVED, DIED AND IS NOW ALIVE FOREVERMORE (Rev. 1:18).
The Caesars come and go.	CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER (Heb. 13: 8)
He is the final judge of no one.	HE IS THE FINAL JUDGE OF EVERYONE (John 5:22,27; 2 Tim 4: 8)

A Choice Must Be Made

As we think about the above chart, there is little comparison. How could anyone choose Caesar over Christ? And yet, this is exactly what people have done. They have rejected Christ and honored Caesar instead.

Consider John 19:12. Pilate was a Roman governor. He was supposed to be loyal to the Roman Emperor (Caesar). Caesar considered himself to be the supreme ruler. He considered himself to be the KING OF KINGS. In John 19:12 the Jews were reminding Pilate that Caesar is against anyone who makes himself a King. CAESAR WANTS NO RIVALS.

Then in John 19:15 Pilate forced the Jews to make a choice. SHALL I CRUCIFY YOUR KING? What answer did the Jewish leaders give?

Keep in mind the chart comparing Caesar with Christ. The Jews chose the left hand column over the right hand column! What a foolish choice! Even though the Jews hated Caesar and they hated having the Romans rule over them, yet their hatred for Christ exceeded their hatred for Caesar. WE HAVE NO KING BUT _____. [What should every loyal Christian say? I HAVE NO KING BUT _____]

Caesar Worship

The emperor was not only the political leader of the Roman empire, he was also the religious leader. The emperor was known as the PONTIFEX MAXIMUS which means that he was the CHIEF PRIEST (the head priest, the number one priest). His position became so elevated that he even became an object of divine worship.

It is very easy for POSITION and POWER to go to a person's head and the person begins thinking that he is **the greatest**. This is especially true of kings and emperors who all the time have people bowing before them and serving them. They begin to think that they should be worshipped. Did King Nebuchadnezzar (the great emperor of Babylon) fall into this trap (Daniel chapter 3)? _____ What lessons did God teach this man (Daniel 4:31-37)?

The Roman government tolerated different religions. They would allow people to worship their different idols and carry out their different religious rituals. The Romans even allowed the Jewish people to carry out their religion and to sacrifice animals and to worship at the temple (at least until 70 AD. when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Romans).

Although the Romans tolerated and allowed religions, they wanted people to acknowledge the supremacy of Caesar at least once a year. They wanted people to publicly give their full allegiance to Caesar and to recognize his greatness. For example, in 250 A.D. Decius issued an edict (law) that demanded, at the least, an annual offering of sacrifice at the Roman altars to the gods and to the genius and greatness of the emperor. Those who offered such sacrifices were given a special certificate. Those who did not receive or obtain these certificates would often be persecuted.

The early Christians refused to pay divine honors to the emperor and to his statue. Christians refused to offer a pinch of incense on an altar to the divine Emperor. There are times when God's people must not bow down before men. There are times when God's people must disobey the King and obey God. Daniel chapter 3 and chapter 6 provide good examples of such times.

Think of a Roman official coming to a group of early Christians: "Please comply with our orders or you will be in real trouble. All we want you to do is to confess with your mouth that CAESAR IS LORD! Just recognize that Caesar is the sovereign one. Caesar is supreme and if you acknowledge this we will give you a certificate. We will let you worship your gods and carry out your religious practices, but at least once a year we want you to show your loyalty and devotion to the great Caesar by saying CAESAR IS SUPREME! CAESAR IS LORD!" If you had been one of these early Christians, what would you have done? Why? What might be the cost of doing this? What would be the cost of **not** doing this?

When a choice had to be made between loyalty to Christ and loyalty to Caesar, Caesar was bound to take second place. Christians must never let any man rob Christ of first place. Suppose Islamic terroristss were to overtake our country by force. Suppose they were to force everyone to confess with their mouth this statement: "ALLAH IS MY GOD AND MOHAMMED IS HIS PROPHET. JESUS CHRIST IS NOT GOD. I MUST BE LOYAL TO ALLAH ABOVE ANYONE OR ANYTHING ELSE!" Those refusing to say this would be punished and in some cases put to death. What would you do?

Do you think that there are places IN OUR WORLD TODAY where believers are being persecuted and even martyred for refusing to bow down before men and for refusing to deny Christ? Every Christian believer recognizes that there is only _____ Lord (Ephesians 4:5). True, many people call themselves LORD and lift themselves up (1 Corinthians 8:5), but there is only ONE PERSON who can rightfully be called Lord! People must make this personal choice: WILL I ALLOW HIM TO BE MY LORD?

The Lordship Of Jesus Christ

Caesar is no Lord, although people have made him to be lord. In Isaiah 26:13 we read, "O LORD our God, other _____ beside _____ have had dominion over us." OTHER LORDS BESIDE THEE. This is man's problem. He lets OTHER LORDS take the place of THE LORD. He lets CAESARS get in the way of Christ.

Do you have any "lords" that are taking the place of Christ in your life? Do you have any "Caesars" that you are worshipping and bowing down before?

Most people have a Caesar within them called SELF. This SELF is exalted and elevated and given a SUPREME place. SELF is MADE LORD! The person honors self, serves self and lives for self. Christ may get LIP SERVICE but self gets the real service. Is this a problem in your life? What can be done about it?

As BELIEVERS we are to CONFESS WITH OUR M_____ that Jesus is LORD (Romans 10:9). Have you done this? Do others know that Jesus Christ is your Lord? How do they know this? How do you show this? Do your friends in school know? Who is it that helps a person to understand what it really means to have Jesus Christ as Lord so that a person can confess Christ sincerely and truthfully (1 Cor. 12:3)? _____ Did the early Christians acknowledge Christ as THE LORD (Acts 2:36; 10:36; 17:24)?

Is Christ really LORD? Is He really MY LORD? If so, what does this mean? Does MY LORD demand anything from me? Here are several things for every believer to think about and be reminded of:

1. LORDSHIP DEMANDS OBEDIENCE.

If we claim Him as our Lord then this means we should do what (Luke 6:46)?
 _____ What was Paul's attitude toward his Lord when he was first saved (Acts 9:6)?

_____ Why is it inconsistent to call Christ Lord and then disregard and disobey what He says?

2. LORDSHIP DEMANDS SERVICE.

Who is it that we serve (Romans 12:11)? _____ What does Colossians 3:23-24 teach us about our SERVICE?

Who should we daily be seeking to please (Eph. 5:10, the word "acceptable" means "well-pleasing")? _____ What do you think Caesar would do if one of his men refused to serve him?

3. LORDSHIP DEMANDS FELLOWSHIP.

What has our God called us to (1 Corinthians 1:9)?

God's Son is here identified as Jesus Christ our _____. The average Roman citizen could not have much fellowship with Caesar the great emperor. Caesar was unapproachable to the average person. It was difficult to even get near him or talk to him. How is the believer's relationship to his Lord much different than this?

4. LORDSHIP DEMANDS LOVE.

What did Paul say about those who do not LOVE THE LORD (1 Cor. 16:22)?

Many Romans served Caesar out of compulsion not out of love (because they had to, not because they wanted to). Do you serve Christ out of love or compulsion? Do you come to church because you want to or because you have to? If no one told you to read your Bible would you read it anyway?

Someday what will all men do (Philippians 2:9-11)?

Someday will all the Caesars of the past stand before Christ and bow the knee before Him? Will they confess that JESUS IS LORD? Have you done this? Do it today out of love or you will do it in the future out of compulsion!

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*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord,
and do not the things which I say?
(Luke 6:46)*

Christ, not Caesar, is LORD!

Has this fact changed your life?
Are you surrendering to His Lordship,
letting Him have His way and sway over your life?

BEGINNING OF A SUCCESSFUL MAN

