

still waters

home church studies

Psalm 99

[Worship]

1 The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! 2 The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. 3 Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he! 4 Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. 5 Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he! 6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the LORD, and he answered them. 7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees, and the statutes that he gave them. 8 O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. 9 Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy.

Consider:

In most of the civic discussion since Sept. 11, 2001, religious language and symbols have been seamlessly woven into political language and symbols. This enlistment of religious language to advance our nation's policies is tremendously dangerous, despite most American Christians' love for the full text of the Pledge of Allegiance. This fusion collapses our national security and way of life with the will of God, which makes questioning the pledge or squirming under the blare of "God Bless America!" billboards tantamount to blasphemy. But in willingly handing over Christianity in the interest of security, we forget that the reign of God always exists in tension with competing claims of authority.

The Pharisees and Herodians who ask Jesus about paying taxes are also concerned with security. They have chosen to compromise with Rome in exchange for some degree of religious

and political freedom. They are not necessarily comfortable with their situation, but consider Jesus' refusal to "show deference" to anyone an arrogant failure to appreciate the complexity of their situation.

Their strategy backfires when Jesus refuses to accept the terms of their argument. His statement "give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" is not a mandate to pay (or not to pay) taxes, but an assertion of God's absolute authority. Despite the emperor's omnipresent image, his claims to ownership have no meaning in light of God's singular ownership of the world.

Can you blame Jesus' opponents for finding him exasperating? His answer provides no clear manual for what, if any, aspects of national duty to accept. But Jesus' stance ought to encourage and embolden us to refuse the terms of our nation's debate—the presumption that military and financial security are unquestionable values—even though we risk being called a friend of terrorists and a national traitor. — Kari Jo Verhulst

[Scripture]

1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 9 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

