

OUR OBLIGATION TO GOD AND GOVERNMENT

Matthew 22:15-22

The religious leaders of **Israel** had one goal...*to get rid of Jesus*...and they would do this through any means possible...even if it meant cooperating with lifelong enemies. This passage illustrates just how *controversy* and mutual *hatred* often brings enemies together. Even though the **Pharisees** and **Herodians** violently disagreed about *religion* and *politics*...they wholeheartedly agreed about Jesus and were not reluctant in coming together because of this common cause against Him.

Following Jesus' series of *three judgment parables* against the Jewish religious leaders, those religious leaders are going to respond by confronting Him with *a series of three questions*...all designed to conspire against Him and to try and get Him to condemn Himself either *politically* or *religiously*.

The *first question* was devised by the **Pharisees** but they had their disciples covertly ask it of Jesus. We will look at that first question in our study today (**vs 15-22**). The *second question* was asked by the **Sadducees** (**vs. 23-33**), and the *third* by the **Pharisees** directly (**vs. 34-40**). Instead of taking Jesus' warnings to heart and asking Him how they might *avoid the judgment* and *receive mercy* from God...the only word they wanted from Jesus was that which would bring about His own destruction.

I. THE CONFRONTATION: (**vs. 15-17**)

Taxes are of major importance in any developed society, and without them government could not function. They are also a perennial point of contention for those citizens who wonder why their taxes are so high and why they are not spent more wisely.

It's this ever-present issue of paying taxes that Jesus deals with in this passage.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said (vs. 15)...This is in response to the *three parables* that revealed and confronted the **Pharisees religious hypocrisy**. They gathered privately in the Temple to conjure up a plan that **might trap Him** into making a subversive statement against **Rome** that would insure His arrest and execution as an insurrectionist.

“The scribes and the chief priests...understood that He spoke this parable against them. So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.”

~Luke 20:19-20

And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” (vs. 16-17)...

And they sent their disciples to Him...Because the **Pharisees** were easily distinguished by their dress and many of them were known to Jesus by sight...and because they were afraid to take action against Him directly...they decided to send **their disciples to Him**.

Along with the Herodians...The **Herodians** weren't normal allies of the **Pharisees**. In fact, the two were usually at great odds with each other. But should Jesus fall into their trap and make the expected objection to paying taxes to **Rome**...the **Herodians** would serve as credible witnesses.

Not much is known about the **Herodians** other than what can be inferred from their name...they were from the lineage of **Herod**...which made them descendants of **Israel's** ancient enemies the **Edomites**. Beginning with **Herod the Great**, they had received favors from **Rome** in the form of various *high political appointments*...including rulership over parts of **Palestine**.

Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any...By referring to Jesus as **Teacher** they are honoring Him in a way usually reserved for *rabbis* who had distinguished themselves as *judicious interpreters* of **Jewish law** and *traditions*.

They went on to outwardly praise Jesus' *personal* and *doctrinal integrity* by declaring that He was **truthful** and taught **the way of God in truth**. *He was God's Man teaching God's truth*.

They go on to add that they knew that He could *not be swayed* by *threats* or *opposition* but was known for *standing His ground* with

courage and *conviction*. Even though they didn't believe a word that they were saying...they couldn't have been more accurate.

After all the *flattery*...they then sprang their question to try and trap Jesus...

Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?...The **poll-tax** was the most hated tax that the **Romans** exacted from the **Jews**. It was also called a *head-tax* and was used for the purpose of conducting a *periodic census* of the people. This was the *census* that required **Joseph** and **Mary** to travel to **Bethlehem** just before Jesus was born.

In asking this question, if Jesus gave an answer *favorable* to the tax, He would become despised by the Jewish multitudes who, until then, had highly admired Him. This would allow the Jewish leaders to then be free to arrest Him without concern for the multitudes. But if He answered in *opposition* to the tax (as they presumed He would do), He would incur the wrath of **Rome** as an insurrectionist.

II. THE CHALLENGE: (vs. 18)

But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?" (vs. 18)...With *divine discernment*, Jesus knew their flattering tongues were filled with *poison* and *hatred*...so before answering their question, He threw a question of His own back at them..."**Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?"** He let them know that their scheme was transparent to Him...that He knew that their purpose was to **trap** Him...they weren't seeking *wisdom*. Thus, He exposed them as the **hypocrites** that they were.

III. THE CONSIDERATION: (vs. 19-21a)

Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax (vs. 19a)...Although several coins were used in **Israel** at that time (both **Greek** and **Hebrew**)...and were easily exchanged from one to another...only the **Roman denarius** could be used to pay the **poll-tax**.

And they brought Him a denarius (vs. 19b)...A **denarius** was the *daily wage* for a **Roman soldier** or *common laborer* in **Palestine**. It was a *silver coin* minted expressly by the *emperor*, with an engraved image of the *emperor* on one side, and an *identifying inscription* on the other. That fact alone made the coins especially offensive to **Jews** for several reasons...the least of which was the

fact that the **Mosaic Law** forbid the making of images (**Exodus 20:4**). But it was also a reminder of the **Roman oppression** that they were under.

And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (vs. 20)...Even though any child would have known the answer to His question, these men anticipated that Jesus was about to, at last, speak words against **Rome**.

Because Jesus had claimed *deity*...calling Himself *God's Son*...the **disciples** of the **Pharisees** were confident that He was about to denounce **Caesar** as a false god...**whose likeness and inscription** He was holding up before them.

They said to Him, "Caesar's" (vs. 21a)...The tone given in their response was one of *excitement*.

IV. THE CHARGE: (vs. 21b-22)

Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." (vs. 21b)...The understanding of this statement is often missed because of its simplicity.

Render...Gk. *apodidomi*, means *to pay* or *give back*...*implying a debt*. It carries the idea of *obligation* and *responsibility* for something that isn't optional. Jesus' answer to the original question (vs. 17) was therefore..."**Yes, it is entirely lawful and right to pay the poll-tax to Caesar, because that tax is Caesar's, and it belongs to the things in his dominion.**"

Notice that Jesus didn't use the word *give* as was used by the **Pharisees'** disciples in asking the question. They (and for most of the Jews) didn't consider paying taxes *a legitimate duty*...and was only done with the *greatest reluctance*. Jesus was declaring that the payment wasn't only perfectly *legal*...but was a moral *obligation*.

Paul later wrote...

"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God...Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to

all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”

~Romans 13:1, 5-7

We aren't only to **submit** to such rulers but also to **pray** for them.

“I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.”

~I Timothy 2:1-3

Teaching the same principle, **Peter** wrote...

“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

~I Peter 2:13-15

Paying taxes is a legitimate duty of every person...but is especially binding on believers because we are bound to God's Word.

And to God the things that are God's...Jesus isn't separating *secular human society* from the *spiritual*...because all things and every area of life belong to God. Jesus was still talking about **Caesar**...saying that **the things that are God's** don't belong to **Caesar** and should never be offered to him...but only **to God**.

This isn't implying that you are to live one way during the week while at work or school...and then live another way while at Church. We are not to surrender our souls or the souls of our children to the government. We are called as children of God to be good citizens.

And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away (vs. 22)...They had nothing to say...so they at least had the presence of mind to leave before exposing more of their *ignorance* and *wickedness* and *hypocrisy*.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS PASSAGE:

- **To resist and rebel against government is to resist and rebel against God.** To refuse to pay taxes is to disobey God's command. By God's own declaration, to pay taxes to **Caesar** honors God. It's one thing to resist government and its over-reach...but it's another thing to openly rebel against government for one's own agenda.
- **The only time that a believer can righteously disobey civil government is when it directly violates God's Word.** But when called to *civil disobedience*...the believer must be willing to receive the consequences that come with that resistance (**Acts 5:28-29**).