

Matthew 22:15-22 ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk. ¹⁶ 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." ¹⁷ "Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites?" ¹⁹ "Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. ²⁰ And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription *is* this?" ²¹ 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." ²² When they had heard *these words*, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Background

The Pharisees were the ultimate nationalists. And they thought this was the correct understanding of the Old Testament. Israel was God's Kingdom. To promote and support a free Jewish nation was the will of God. To support a foreign ruler over Israel was contrary to the will of God. It was blasphemy.

The Herodians were those who support the Herods as the rightful rulers. They would not have been greatly in favor of roman rule but they weren't fundamentally opposed to it the way the Pharisees would have been. They normally would have been the enemies of the Pharisees, but they weren't above teaming up to get rid of this Jesus.

What a wonderful trap they thought they had for Jesus. If he said to pay the tax that would have been tantamount to a rejection of the Lord God of Israel in their minds. If he said not to pay the tax the Herodians were there to make sure the Herod and Pilate heard how this man was leading the people in rebellion against Rome.

And so they come to Jesus oh so slyly, but Jesus knew their evil. Well you would hardly need to be omniscient to realize what they were up to. First of all the Pharisees and the Herodians, bitter rivals, come together to Jesus. Then they slather the flattery on thicker than gravy. So yes Jesus knew the evil of their hearts but He answers anyway. And such an answer He gives.

Our text says that all who heard it were amazed. It was one of those things that when you hear it, it is so obvious that you hit yourself in the head, wondering how you could have missed. And yet because of our stupidity and sin it takes divine intervention to point out what should have been clear all along. That is that you can give honor to the government and properly worship the true God, and that these two things are to some degree separate issues.

This was not just shocking to the Jews of Jesus' day. This was contrary also in the extreme to the pagan nations as well. To be an Athenian meant that your goddess was Athena, remember when Paul preached in Ephesus and there was that uproar about their goddess Diana. And indeed the Ceasar demanded to be worshiped as gods. In all the cultures of all the world the worship of god was directly tied to the authority of the state.

In fact even to this day it is quite rare to find this properly understood and practiced. And no our society and nation does not really understand it properly either.

One of the very few groups that did was the early Christian church. They heard Jesus, they were amazed by his teaching, they took it to heart. This account is recorded in all three gospels almost word for word. Paul repeats these ideas multiple times in his epistles.

Peter and John give a perfect example of practicing what Jesus says in their lives. They respect and honor the authorities, even the Jewish authorities whenever they can. But they will not keep silent about Jesus.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's

So what does this mean for us? Pay your taxes and give an offering at church? Jesus is talking to us about far more than money. He is reminding us that the government has the right to expect that we honor and respect it, but our hearts always belong to the Lord.

What is due to the government? Taxes, honor, respect, and service

Why?

1 – Because authority (in the abstract) and government (in the concrete) is from God

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Authority was created and existed before the fall.

Sin corrupted authority.

Freedom (in the way that American's mean it) is largely from Satan. Consider examples of the great sins defended by this idea of freedom.

abortion – I have to be free to live my life

divorce – I have to be free to find my own happiness

same sex marriage – I have to be free to be true to my inner self

2 – Because in this way we love our neighbor

When you pay your taxes you are allowing the government to build roads and support an army so that you and your neighbor can live in peace and prosperity. When you obey traffic laws and respect police officers you are putting the well being of your neighbor above your own desires. You are serving your neighbor.

What is NOT due to the government but which belongs to God is our hearts and our worship.

“For you were bought at a price.” God is the one who created us. Jesus is the one who redeemed us. He is the one who paid the price for our sins. He is the one who will bring us peace. And it is His kingdom that we pray every Sunday might come.

Most governments of the world want not just our honor and taxes but our hearts and worship as well. They want us to worship them as gods, that is to say to think of them as the highest and ultimate good. Certainly Caesar wanted it. This was part of the problem with paying taxes. The coin not only had the icon of Caesar on it, but an inscription that labeled him, “son of the divine Augustus.” To pay the taxes on some level the Jews thought was to give honor to Caesar as a god.

Our government is not an exception to this rule. Our government wants us to believe that they are the highest authority and nothing not even God should come before them.

Judges want us to believe that abortion, homosexuality, and divorce is ok because they say it’s ok.

The Obama administration would often talk about the “freedom to worship.” The constitution says the freedom of religion. What’s the difference? The difference is the Liberals grudgingly allow us to *worship* as we please but that is it. You can do what you want on Sunday morning for two hours, tucked away from the rest of the world, but don’t you dare talk about it or bring those ideas with you into the work place

This same ideology is heavily present in India. It’s ok to be a Christian. It’s not ok to talk about your Christianity.

They want this because they think this will bring peace

Salvation Belongs To God

BUT salvation belongs to our God and that salvation does not come in the form of an earthly kingdom it comes through Jesus death on the cross for our sins. It comes through the preaching of the Word in which we tell everyone the Christ has died for the forgiveness of their sins

That means we cannot keep silent. We have largely accepted the judgment of this worlds’ culture that worship is something you do Sunday morning and don’t bug anyone about it the rest of the week.

Consider instead the example of Peter and John who give all respect to even the Jewish government and leaders, but refuse to be silent. “How can we help but speak the things that we have heard and seen. “

The Heart Belongs to God

There is no true nationalism in the heart of a believer. Nationalism is the belief that your country and/or culture is the best and the right one, and those ideals are worth dying for. But at the heart of such ideals is the idea that a good and righteous kingdom is possible on this earth. And yet everything in this world is all corrupt and sinful. "God's kingdom is not of this world."

This happens again and again throughout history. Christians confuse God's kingdom with an earthly kingdom. The Jews thought Israel was God's chosen kingdom, the early Christians thought it was Rome, and many people think the same way of America today. Israel was destroyed, Rome fell and the time will come when America will fail as well. But none of these things affect Christ's church or his plan of salvation. And so to enamor yourself with a particular nation or a particular political party, and to put your hope for the future in that thing is to set yourself up for failure. All the things of this world are filled with sin.

Christ died to take us out of this world. To remove us from the world, to redeem us from our own sinfulness. His kingdom is not of this world.

Give to your nation taxes, honor, respect and service but give to the Lord who died for you, your heart, your faith, your hope for the future. Jesus will not disappoint you the leaders of this world absolutely will.

Amen

The Peace of God that surpasses all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.