



“Render to God the Things that are Gods...”

- Matthew 22:15-22

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Matthew 22:15-22 *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.

Jesus was now going to deal with an issue that apparently has been in debate both then *and* now as well as every day in between! It seems man has been trying to find a way out of paying taxes from the beginning. But this was more than just tax rebels looking for a motive. These guys were trying to trap Jesus in a no win scenario in order to do Him harm. But even more than that they were trying to provide for themselves not just an ‘out’ on their tax payments, but rather a reason to completely flush Jesus, His teachings, and any call to a life adherence. Such methods continue today as men look for any weakness, theologically ‘incorrect’ social positions, or ambiguous doctrinal stances for which to create a license to abandon the whole matter of this Jesus!

We want our deity to be *all-powerful, decisive, and all seeing*, but when He acts in a way we do not understand or we do not agree with in our flesh, we toss him under the bus as being a cold and unfeeling deity...*if He actually exists at all*, because he fails to run His operation as we see fit or as we would if WE were God!

In this case, if He answers the question in the negative, these boys will surely tell the Romans and have Him arrested for insurrection. If He says yes, *pay your taxes*, the people would stone Him for what would be viewed as support of the occupying Roman rulers. It was seemingly the perfect trap! But the very fact they would try such an approach essentially says they had no idea what they were dealing with. Certainly verse 18 speaks of His ability to see through them *and* their motives. Jesus knew the truth...the whole truth, just as He does in us today. We can't hide anything from God, and that means even our sin, our deceit, and our hearts motives!

Now on this issue of paying taxes specifically, Jesus, *and Paul later*, settles such clearly and absolutely. If we have a government over us, then we are to pay the taxes that are due, *period*. The word “render” means literally “to pay back.” If you drive on *their* roads, then pay the taxes! It is appalling how all these fringe groups will torture the text to make it say what they want it to say or will wholly disregard passages that negate their pet positions. I've heard it all. The white supremacists, the tax rejecting ‘sovereign citizen’ groups, the rabid home-church movement, the covered heads and below the knee dresses folks, the anti-birth control ‘have babies until you drop’ doctrine, the pot-smoking ‘the-earth-is-our-mother’ folks, etc etc.

Each one will ‘snack’ their way through the Bible and pick and choose the scriptures that befit their particular bent and will condemn all those on the outside to damnation. Not for ultimately failing to adhere to the totality of scripture...*they won't fight that battle with me*, but for not adhering to their unique interpretation and focus of *that unique passage standing alone outside of the rest of scripture and scriptural directives*. And further, for **not** rejecting the same scriptures they reject.

What God wants is for us to be His obedient and loving children by the cross and grace of Jesus Christ, and for us to be disciples of Christ and His Word. The **whole** Word, *with no torturing*. Part of the meaning of baptism is the “agreeing.” Meaning, I am agreeing with God...I am “saying the same thing” as He is. So let’s acknowledge... *for the record* ...that scripture clearly tells us to pay our taxes.

Now with that said, we need to also acknowledge that this passage has a deeper impact and greater ramifications than simply paying our taxes. The passage doesn’t say “render your taxes unto Caesar.” Certainly such is clearly implied, but Jesus was speaking with broader intentions and greater impact than just taxes. No specific was offered in a way to exclude all other accounts, short of the contextually implied tax issue. So one therefore must see the implications of not just *what* he said but specifically *how* He said it, and read it as “Render unto Caesar **everything** that belongs to Him, and render unto God **everything that belongs to HIM**.” And therein lies the question of the day, and the question of this message: “What **does** belong to the world and what **does** belong to **Him**?”

People say, “This is *my* house, *my* car, *my* bank account, *my* things, and *my* family.” After marriage, it becomes “*our* house, *our* car, *our* bank account, *our* things, and *our* family.” **But what about God?**

John 1:1-3 tells us that “*In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.*” So clearly that passage says the artist and the builder of *everything* was God. Wow. Pretty all encompassing huh?

Certainly, our names may be on a title or deed, but that ownership is only temporary at best. Nobody gets to take their stuff with them when they leave this earth, and it’s not like you can pick up a field and put it in your trunk and drive away. In reality, according to scripture, we are to interact with our possessions as merely caretakers. The Bible says “stewards,” with the idea that we are to take care of, nurture, use for personal joy and eternal investment. “Stewards’ and “stewardship” are terms we find in scripture, with the idea that we are to ‘kingdom capitalize’ on what God has entrusted us with. To see these things well spent, bravely magnified and multiplied, and utilized for God’s glory and kingdom furtherance.

Not only does everything belong to God, **but we do too**. “*The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. For he laid the earth’s foundation on the seas and built it on the ocean depths.*” (Psalm 24:1-2).

What belongs to us belongs first to Jesus. But what is so staggering is the fact that what belongs to Jesus belongs to us also! 1 Corinthians 3:21B-23 says “*For everything belongs to you — whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.*”

This is because God is generous. He's got more for us than managing what belongs to Him. God is excited about blessing us as we faithfully care for His things. *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?"* (Luke 16:10-12) He wants great things for us, not just for Himself!

So if our money, possessions, time and everything belongs to God, how does that affect us? How do we care for, utilize and invest what we have been loaned? Well, we know again that everything exists **because** of Jesus and **for** Jesus. Hebrews 2:10 says *"God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation."* To determine how to use something lies in understanding what Jesus created it for and loaned it to us for. If my car belongs to God, I can loan it to a friend a ride when his car is in the shop. If my house belongs to God, I can use it to fellowship and interact with others so more people can see what a life looks like that is following Jesus. If God owns my finances, I can use my money to provide for people in need and build His Church.

2 Corinthians 9:10-13 tells us *"For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving — the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. Everything belongs to God and we get to share in what belongs to Him. We get the joy of both receiving and giving the abundance He possesses."*

For many of us, this issue before us is a source of constant strife, guilt and struggle in our lives as we debate within ourselves the issue of ownership and 'first use' priority. Few issues play so significantly into our discipleship or the lack of such. Some folks will jealously guard their time and finances, and God and church get the 'floor sweepings' when we are done. When Jesus asked the Herodian *"whose picture is on this coin,"* He was essentially asking *"who do you see in this possession?"* Maybe that is where we must go to understand this issue. When you look at your possessions, who do you see? When you look at your money, do you see yourself? Do you see yourself in your car or in your family? If so, it is easy therefore to see it as *yours*. When we look at our car and see Jesus, or our house and see the Lord, it changes both use and priority.

Those who have at one time lived with very little often find this matter less of a battle. For me, it is easy to grasp the concept of God owning it all because I have at times lived with very very little. Those also who have lost what they thought they actually *had*, have come to understand this truth, albeit such can be a bitter and painful lesson learned. A death of a family member, a job and income lost, a house burned, a car wrecked. Job 9:12 says *"If He takes away, who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, 'What are You doing?'"* See, it is not a matter of you *giving* it God, *He already owns it whether we acknowledge that or not*. And losing it simply proves it! God in Ezekiel 18:4 reminds us clearly that *"Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine..."*

Must we, like perpetual children, be reminded repeatedly that we came into this world with nothing in our hands and we will leave it with nothing in our hands? Ecc 5:15 says it all: “*We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can’t take our riches with us.*” I had a dream once where I was holding a large pearl in my hand and I suddenly realized that I was indeed dreaming. So as I slowly woke myself up, I tried to hold onto the pearl but literally felt it fade away as I awoke. Such is a fitting picture I think, of all this stuff we have and call our own. Psalms 90: 5-6 says “*For life is like a dream that ends when morning comes. We are like grass that grows and looks so fresh in the morning, but in the evening it is dry and dying.*” Psalms 144:4 also tells us that “*Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.*”

Wouldn’t it be better and more pleasing to the Lord if we acknowledge His ownership with joy and would it not please the Lord and glorify Him to live in such a manner without force and battle? Those who do not rest in this matter seem to always be in struggle and angst and the lack of peace is clearly evident in every situation of their lives. How many of us, like children with a bag of M & M’s at the kitchen table live saying “one for you, and one for me.” (or maybe *two* for me!)

Because of this oft attitude of entitlement we fail to be good stewards of what God has loaned to us, and thus, according to scripture, He gives us no more. We survive off of the ‘common grace’ of creation, and fail to every experience the real joy of the ‘bounty of the Lord.’ Psalm 34:9 tells us “*O fear the LORD, you His saints; For to those who fear Him there is no want.*” And Psalms 34:10 “*...they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.*” Because of our lack of righteous stewardship, He does not entrust us with more. Not more material, not more ministry opportunities, not more relationships. We ultimately find ourselves lonely, struggling and often suffering while we stand guard over the one coin that God gave us that we buried in the ground to protect it.

In 2010, a 67-year-old Chinese pensioner named Wo Chen buried his money in the ground and years later dug it up to find it had all rotted away. 5000 dollars...his life savings was gone because he believed that no one could protect his money better than he. In the end, it was gone. Christ warned us... “*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal...*” (Mt 6:19)

It is all so much a matter of faith. A faith for which without it is “impossible to please God.” **Do** you trust God? The one who sent His only Son to His death so you might live? How much He loves us! How much He wants to share in His Creation and the bounty of His blessing. Luke 6:38 says “*Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.*”

Ultimately, all of this makes us a worshipper or not one. We live in thanks to God, our church and church family, and we count them a valuable blessing to the quality of our lives. Or *we do not*, and in the end it is inevitably lost....

Can you truthfully say it today?

“*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want...*” (Psalm 23:1)