



## “Belonging” *the sacred / secular divide*

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.*

***Think about what you did yesterday. What percentage was secular and what percentage was spiritual?***

When asked such a question, we naturally begin to reel back in our minds and begin doing some hard math and of course some subjective analysis. Many of us would come up with various percentages... a 50 /50 split, or a 20% to 80% scenario. Seldom would any of us boldly answer “100 percent spiritual.” But here’s the thing: ***we should.***

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “*Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” In reality, everything we do should be seen as spiritual. As a reborn believer, all of our life and living should be God’s.

Our walk now through this life should be unlimited and all-encompassing in it’s dynamic of faith. For real Christianity cannot...by its very innate characteristics, be limited to church on Sundays and some personal devotions during the week. It cannot be limited to moralistic decisions and lawful abiding. If it is real and truly Spirit led, our faith will appear in every dimension of our lives.

Yet that is overwhelmingly not the way religion is lived out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have not only ***become*** double-minded, but in fact ***sanction*** it, and often ***encourage*** it! We have compartmentalized our faith, and as truth itself is in our generation, such is therefore all relative and situational. Decisions and directions are based wholly upon worldly and in fact *false* ideas of who God is, what He wants, and how He operates, and how He thinks. This divide is responsible for the popular misconception that our relationship with God can be reduced to our church attendance and fellowship activities. We believe scripture can be fudged under certain conditions because “God would want us to be happy.” We have been tricked into thinking there is God stuff, then Satan/bad stuff, and a third secular, “neutral ground” in our lives that is neither for nor against God. So the bean count plays out: *One for God, one for “the man,”* (IE government, our employer, or whatever ‘power-that-be’ that exists in our lives), *and one for me.*

All of this has had the secondary effect of perpetuating the lie that working in the church or some other spiritual calling is the only “full-time Christian service.” If all of life is spiritual and sacred for followers of Christ, then “*There is no inch of creation where Christ does not rule and consequently no dimension of our lives in which he is not present.*” (Abraham Kuyper.) As true Christians, we are *all* in the full time ministry! (*whether we acknowledge it or want it*)

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon once said “*To a man who lives unto God nothing is secular, everything is sacred. He puts on his workday garment and it is a vestment to him. He sits down to his meal and it is a sacrament. He goes forth to his labor, and therein exercises the office of the priesthood. His breath is incense and his life a sacrifice. He sleeps on the bosom of God, and lives and moves in the divine presence. To draw a hard and fast line and say, ‘This is sacred and this is secular,’ is, to my mind, diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ and the spirit of the gospel.*”

Once we rid ourselves of this worldly arrangement, we realize that God cares about everything we do. If all we are and all we do is for God’s glory and honor, then there is purpose and fulfillment even in the most mundane aspects of life.

So how does all of this fit into the text before us, which can, on the surface, seem to paint the opposite of what I am herein presenting?

*"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. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"* [Matthew 22:16-17]

Whichever way Jesus answered in this account, it seemed that He was in trouble. If He said they should *not* give tribute to Caesar, they could accuse Him of treason and subversion, and enlist the Roman army to arrest Him and condemn Him to death, which later they actually did. If He says it *is* righteous to give Caesar his due, He would immediately become an enemy of Israel by appearing to support the Roman occupation. So however He answered, it appeared that He was trapped.

But Jesus saw through their charade and said, *"Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money."* *"Render, therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's . . ."* It's his coin. Give it back to him. For Jesus, the issue was not complicated. It was simple. Because it didn't matter in the grand heavenly scheme of things.

Consider for a moment that ultimately everything is controlled by the Master. But if that is true, then are we failing to be faithful and righteous by “rendering unto Caesar” that which appears to belong to the Master?

In the story of the business manager that was going to be relieved of his position in Luke 16, the manager used what was ultimately the master’s money in a business way that garnered this response from the manager “*... the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.*” The text there goes on to say “*And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.*”

We read also in the account of the Master who left funds to be invested by the servants while he went out of the country (Luke 19). Some used his investment to further the kingdom holdings of the Master, while the third failed to do anything with what he had been given. We know the story. The third individually paid dearly for his failure to use that which was ultimately the Masters for the master’s gain.

In Matthew 17, Jesus and Peter paid the temple tax and the reason given was “*so we don’t offend them.*” Romans tells us “... *because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed...*” The idea here is that no one stands in governmental power that is not there by the “permission” of God. We may not like it or understand it, but we as believers live in a monarchy and God doesn’t ask our permission nor is He obliged to explain Himself. So God’s money is going toward God’s project and work, again whether we are voting the way God does or not.

This issue you see falls apart only when we fail to recognize the sovereignty of God. When we fail to grasp that ultimately everything is His, and as believers everything is about Him. When we fail to live holistically... that “*whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God,*” then we reject the premise that “nothing happens without God’s permission.” Of course then we naturally feel we must step in and make those decisions ourselves. We effectively usurp the authority of the king, and reject His autonomy.

When I pay my taxes, do I therefore further the kingdom of God...the kingdom that He is at least allowing to exist? When I invest “my money” and “my time and efforts” in the pursuits of God and church, do then I further the kingdom of God? When I work my job, and indeed see such as a mission field rather than a paycheck, do I not further the kingdom of God? What is God’s desire for us in our living on this earth? 1 Timothy 2 tells us that it is the will of God that we “*may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior...*”

Let’s take this to the next level. How I spend money and time on temporal possessions and earthly living: does it say God is good and He loves His kids and that living under the authority of our king is a good and blessed life? Or does it say I am investing in self-pleasure and comfort firstly and my king takes a back seat? Am I building “bigger barns” to stockpile my stuff, or am I using my stuff, **and my barns**, for God and in doing so I am blessed with joy and abundance? Is everything we do about Jesus first, even if it means “rendering unto Caesar” by doing it? Does my vacation plans say this? Does my car purchase and the house I live in? Does my dating and my marriage say this?

The book of Malachi is full of this direction, finally saying in 3:10 “*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,*” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, “*I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!*” Is your life and living saying that you believe this and thus that this passage is true and faithful? Or are you guarding areas of your life and protecting your turf?

Our thinking on this matter often implies that God cares little (or at least less) about our secular lives. That He is just concerned with our “sacred lives”; *our “church stuff” and our “religious exercises.*” When presented in such a way, few Christians would openly say that their lives are consciously divided into sacred versus secular compartments. The trouble, however, is that many Christians have, to a greater or lesser extent, simply absorbed such thinking into their worldview.

Do we see the whole world through the lens of God and God’s great glory of creation? What we hold onto...what we let go of, are such decisions made in light of His presence and the understanding that all of our lives are lived in the light of the sacred? Many of us, because of wrong thinking in this area, are in a near constant state of dilemma...a continual battle in their heart and mind...the “push and pull” between God and what they see as their “normal lives.” What is God’s and what is Caesars. Thus we can be near paralyzed in fear and apprehension, instead of simply asking the question “does this please God” and moving accordingly.

Scripture says, in anticipation of this position, speaks to us: “*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.*” (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). Instead of this debate being played out in every aspect of our lives, how different we would be if we indeed “seek first the kingdom of God” in all matters of life?

Even in cases where we attempt to maneuver this minefield we still often fall short. Take for example our Monday through Friday vocation. We can “step up to the plate” and seek to make our jobs as mission fields where we are surrounded by co-workers who need to hear the Gospel. Certainly we should look for opportunities to tell others about Christ and salvation. But when we think “being a Christian at work” just means treating our job as nothing more than a place where we share the Gospel, then we still have embraced the idea that what matters (in this case, evangelism) is sacred, while our work is only *really* valuable when the sacred invades it from time to time; the work *itself* is merely secular. If this is our thinking, then it follows that one must *cease* working in order to engage in evangelism. But that is not how God sees it. Paul says in Colossians 3:23-24 “*Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.*” No part of our lives is spiritually insignificant.

The fact is, the very narrative of Scripture—from creation through the Fall and into Redemption and beyond—with each stroke, paints a portrait of how life is meant to be lived: **holistically, before God**. In Genesis 1:28, man is instructed to “*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it*”—what is often termed our “cultural mandate.” God’s intention for our lives, since before the Fall, is that, having been created in God’s image, we are to cultivate both the world of nature and a social world: fulfilling this mandate as God intends is to live a life that is worshipful (or “sacred”).

Nancy Pearcey, in her book *Total Truth* says “*The biblical message is not just about some isolated part of life labeled ‘religion’ or ‘church life.’ Creation, Fall, and Redemption are cosmic in scope, describing the great events that shape the nature of all created reality. We don’t need to accept an inner fragmentation between our faith and the rest of life. ... The promise of Christianity is the joy and power of an integrated life, transformed on every level by the Holy Spirit, so that our whole being participates in the great drama of God’s plan of redemption.*”

Ephesians 2:10 builds on this idea, telling us “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would **walk in them.***” We know of course that salvation is never the result of our works; it’s not due to any self-effort or personal achievement (2:8-9), but scripture is equally clear that, because we—believers—are a new creation in Christ, we are to perform the “good works” set before us. The idea is that our *way of life*, our view of life in its entirety, is to reflect Christ in us—and thus such cannot be restricted to church stuff and religious practices.

So go ahead. Render unto Caesar what is Caesars. Just give it up as Christ would.

“...*whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*” (1 Timothy 4:4) *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* (Col 3:17) “*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men...*” (Col 3:23)

**Now, tell me again about what you did yesterday...**

