

Mark 12:13-17 Caesar's Things, God's Things Falls Ch. PM 7/23/2023

Are you a good citizen? Christ never meant for our following of Him to interfere with our obedience to the civil government. In fact, following Christ ought to make us more quiet, more loyal, and more faithful citizens. The first step to that is realizing that the government over us, has been put in place by God Himself. The second step is to take our Christian convictions into the public arena, such as in our voting, and in our serving in public office.

Christ calls us to obey both the government and God, and He gives us wisdom and grace to manage our two allegiances to both.

1. The attempt to trap. (v.13)

The verb “trap” in verse 13 is a good translation. The verb has the sense of taking advantage of someone in an unguarded moment. We could say that they ‘set a trap to catch him.’ The Pharisees had teamed up with some Herodians in order to get Jesus speaking about a complex topic, with the hidden goal of trying to get Jesus to make an over-statement. Why? Verse 12, *“they were seeking to arrest Him.”* And back in chapter 11:18, they *“were seeking a way to destroy Him, for they feared Him, because all the crowd was astonished at His teaching.”* Since they wanted to arrest Jesus and they wanted to destroy Jesus, but the crowd liked Jesus, they needed a way to arrest Jesus that would be plausible to the crowd.

Before we move on, notice something significant and important - the first 3 words of our passage, in verse 13. *“And they sent...”* These Pharisees and Herodians did not initiate their own effort! Then who initiated? It was those same priests, scribes and elders in the temple that have been approaching Jesus in the temple since chapter 11 verse 27. They were the ones who sent this group to trap Jesus! Their response to the beautiful warning parable that Jesus told in verses 1-12 was not repenting. Instead, they tried to trap Jesus in order to destroy Him!

2. The hypocrisy of man. (v.14-16)

Verse 14, the first place that the delegation's hostility showed itself was with them speaking compliments to Jesus that were not really compliments. It was actually flattery. “Teacher” they called Him. But then they said to Jesus, *“we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For You are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God.”*

It is ironic that while they were telling Jesus that Jesus is sincere, they were showing themselves to be insincere. They were flattering Jesus, by giving Jesus excessive praise. Why? So that Jesus would be more inclined to answer their question than He might otherwise be.

Verse 15 tells us that Jesus knew all about their hostility, their flattery, and their chicanery (trickery). *“But, knowing their hypocrisy, [Jesus] said to them...”*

The word hypocrisy means to deliver a speech, or to deliver a line. It is an actor who delivers a line that a character would say. Speaking the right words, but not meaning those words. Hypocrisy is pretending to be someone that you are not.

How did Jesus know that they were hypocritical? Because they said Jesus truly taught the way of God. If they believed that, then they would follow Jesus. But they did not follow Jesus; on the contrary, they were hostile toward Jesus.

When they say Jesus was true, they mean that Jesus was fair-minded. The opposite of this word true is not so much the word falsehood, but rather the opposite is partiality. Fair/true is the opposite of unfair/biased.

Let's look at their trick question in verse 14. The question was framed in terms of what was permitted, or what was allowed. Under God's law, was it allowed for them to skip paying taxes to the government, for religious reasons?

Jesus saw the trick. They were subtly suggesting that a conflict exists between God's law and human law.

The answer of Jesus to ask for a denarius was genius because it exposed the idea of being a fanatic for God as a false dilemma. Instead of setting loyalty to God against loyalty to Caesar, the straightforward meaning of the words of Jesus are that both may be maintained at the same moment. A person can be loyal to God and loyal to Caesar – both at the same time. That brings us to our last verse/point.

3. The wisdom of God for two allegiances. (v.17)

The logic of the statement of Jesus is shown by the verb in verse 17 “render” or “give back.” Their trick question included their verb “pay,” which in the original was the word give. It wrongly assumed that we own our money - should we give it to Caesar or not? But the more accurate answer of Jesus is about “giving back.” That means, to give back to the receiver something that already belongs to the receiver.

Do you see this subtle shift of truth about ownership? Who owns our money? Jesus changed the debate – it was not about ‘not about giving what is mine,’ but rather it was about ‘giving back what belongs to someone else.’ Jesus changed the debate in a deep, healthy and helpful way.

If we see our money as ours, then we need to decide whether to give to taxes or give to missions. If we are on fire for God, we would like our money to go to God and His missionaries, not to the government, doing questionable things!

But if we see our money more accurately as truly God's money already because we owe God, and our tax dollars more accurately as truly the government's money, because we owe taxes, then we don't have a choice. We must return the money to the entities to whom the money belongs!

The picture of Caesar on the coin symbolized the dependence of the subject people on the benefits of the rule of the Roman Empire over their lives. To use that coin to pay the tax was to recognize that they were indebted to the Roman

government, and its chief representative Caesar, for the basic items needed to live their lives. For example, their safety was because the Romans have paid soldiers to protect their cities and territories. Their travel was because the Romans built roads.

What belongs to Caesar. Caesar's things, are the obligation of each citizen to pay the tax that was asked of him. This teaching of Jesus here is the tiny acorn that would grow into the full oak tree of civic responsibility.

As the coin bears Caesar's image, so every person bears God's image! What is owed to God is our very selves!

Jesus showed that there exists no conflict between what God requires of us to do for God, and what God requires us to do for our government. Allegiance to Christ that is holy, pure and roaring like a fire, is completely and fully compatible with turning over your tax payment, knowing that a portion of it will be used to fund an unholy, impure, and deadening agenda.

CROSS – yes, we must render to God the things that belong to God. but we will never be saved by rendering to God the things that belong to God. We are not saved by what we render to God, but rather we are saved only by what God renders to us. God renders to us the righteousness of Jesus. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“For our sake [God] made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God.”* This is the great exchange. God took out our stony hearts of rebellion and placed within us the soft hearts of obedience and love and trust. Because Jesus died and rose again to give us these new hearts, we now have new hearts that genuinely desire to render to God all that belongs to Him!

Conclusion:

1. Pay to God what is due by not having a bad attitude about paying taxes.

Pay your taxes, but also watch your attitude!

In Romans 13:1-7, the apostle Paul gives God's explanation. God commands us to obey human government! Why? Because God is the One who set up human government over us! So, if we rebel against the human government, we are rebelling against God Himself! Romans 13:6, *“because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are [representatives] 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, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”*

Clearly the teaching of Jesus here in Mark 12 is the basis for a more developed teaching from God the Holy Spirit through the pen of the Apostle Paul.

We can add another apostle named Peter. 1 Peter 2:13-17, again we read how it is possible to be true to God and government at the same time. Peter says it very broadly to all the government, not just to the taxing agency. *“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution...(v.15)...for this is the will of*

God... (v.17) ...honor everyone. ... Fear God. Honor the emperor." Honor the emperor! This is not just paying your tax bill. That is not honoring the government leaders and government employees.

SI - Steven Piotrowski, a Montgomery County, Pennsylvania resident paid his 2013 property taxes on the day that the government was due to seize his home. But since Piotrowski describes property taxes as "unethical, unchristian-like" and a form of "financial slavery," he decided to make a statement. "Since I'm being forced to pay for something against my own will, I'm paying in pennies."

Though he'd planned to pay the entire bill with 83,160 pennies, Piotrowski was only able to get 50,000 coins from 15 different banks in the three days before the deadline. On the last day, he threw in some extra change and bills, put it all in a wheelbarrow that he bought special for the occasion, and headed for Continental Bank in West Norriton Township, where walk-in payments are accepted. The underwhelmed bank employees accepted the mounds of change and Piotrowski's home successfully escaped a sheriff's sale. I would say that is a sinful attitude!

So, for Jesus, for Paul, and for Peter, the normal situation is that our loyalties are compatible both vertically and horizontally. Yes, there come times, with sinning governments, that dilemmas come up, and difficulties multiply. However, for the most part and in most situations, there does not exist a conflict for believers in obeying God and obeying Caesar.

2. Pay God what is due by being more loyal to God than everyone else put together. Never become overly-loyal to any one human person or group of persons. On the flip side, never assume someone is guilty and condemn him or her without proof. We cannot afford to get things wrong one direction, nor the other. Leviticus 19:15, "*You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.*"

God expects us to be like Jesus, showing no partiality, no favoritism. This means we have no person who, in our book, can be above the law or outside the rules. We know that partiality is a sin, and that a characteristic of God is that He has no partiality. Never develop a favorite person whom you permit to get away with anything without being confronted or brought to account. Nor find one person who is the scapegoat and takes all the blame for all of the problems. God will not allow us be biased in either direction.

Galatians 2:6, "*God shows no partiality.*" (also Acts 10:34, Rom. 2:11)

In Acts 5, Ananias sold a piece of property and kept back some of the money. His wife Sapphira knew. Turns out that she had a person whom she would allow to get away with anything. That person was her spouse! How did God deal with that? Not with partiality! First, Ananias came in to present the money, and God caused him to die right then and there. Second, his wife Sapphira came in 3 hours later, and she fell dead also. God expects us to have no one that we allow to

harbor sin. No one. Not a spouse, friend, parent, sibling, child or grandchild. What God expects is a loyalty from us that is greater than our loyalty to everyone else put together. This loyalty is one of God's things. We owe it to God. Do you pay it? Matthew 10:37-40, *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."*

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