

Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #63

Our Duty to God and Government

Matt 22:15-22

Introduction:

1. Taxes are of major importance in any developed society and without them government could not function.
2. They are also a perennial point of contention for citizens who wonder why their taxes are so high and why they are not spent more wisely.
3. It is with the ever-present issue of paying taxes that Jesus deals in the present passage.
4. It was still Wednesday of Passover week, and Jesus was teaching in the Temple, which He had violently cleansed the day before.
 - a. He had just finished telling and explaining three judgment parables against unbelieving Israel
 - b. The chief priests and Pharisees were so enraged that they would have had Him arrested on the spot had they not feared the multitudes –v46
 - c. It was bad enough that He had devastated the physical domain of their concession booths in the Temple.
 - d. Now He also devastated their religious domain, exposing their unbelief and ungodliness before all Israel.
5. The religious leaders resented Jesus because He exposed their pride, hypocrisy and self-righteousness.
6. They envied His great popularity with the people
7. Most of all, they were incensed at His claim to be the Messiah and the Son of God, a claim which in their eyes was blatant blasphemy.
8. Following Jesus' series of three judgment parables against them, those religionists responded by confronting Him with a series of three questions, all designed to maneuver Him into condemning Himself either politically or religiously.
9. This first question was devised by the Pharisees but asked of Jesus surreptitiously by their disciples
10. 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 Him was that which would bring about His own destruction.

I. The Asking in the Inquiry – vs 15-17

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk. **16** And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men. **17** Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

- Each of the three inquiries came from different groups of people.

A. The Men – “Pharisees / Herodians”

1. The Pharisees were the most conservative religious group of Israel.
 - a) *They were Jesus’ most vocal and vehement enemies*
 - b) *Jesus taught in the court of the Gentiles and the Pharisees met privately in another area of the temple to plan*
2. The Herodians were the political party loyal to the family of Herod.
3. The Pharisees and Herodians strongly opposed each other.
 - a) *The Pharisees felt that Israel would be free under their own laws*
 - b) *The Herodians supported the hated [by the Jews] Roman government; yet the two groups joined hands to oppose Christ.*
 - c) *Opposites will combine to oppose Him.*

15 Τότε πορευθέντες οἱ Φαρισαῖοι συμβούλιον ἔλαβον ὅπως αὐτὸν παγιδεύσωσιν ἐν λόγῳ.

παγιδεύσωσιν verb subj aor act 3pp from **παγιδεύω** as a hunting term *lay a snare, set a trap, entice into a trap*; figuratively in the NT *catch off guard, catch in a mistake, entrap* someone deliberately by provoking him to speak without forethought (MT 22.15) From pagis, a snare or trap. Here only in the N.T.

4. See the craftiness of the men.
 - a) *The Pharisees—they sent "their disciples" instead of going themselves.*
 - b) *The Pharisees wore clothing that distinguished them and many of them were probably known to Jesus by sight*
 - c) *They would try to disguise the attackers as being other people than themselves.*
 - d) *That the Pharisees could get others to do their evil reminds us that wicked men will always find those who will do their dirty work for them.*

B. The Motivation

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

1. These men foolishly thought they could get Christ tangled up in His words by their clever questions.
2. Instead it would be easier to throw water on the sun and stop its shining than to trick Christ into saying something that would ensnare Him.
3. The attackers are the ones who got ensnared and embarrassed in their speech.

C. The Manner

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

1. These men tried to use flattery to ensnare Christ in His words.
 - a) *To call Jesus "master" or "teacher" was a high honor reserved for rabbis*
 - b) *They spoke of Christ's fidelity and fairness.*
2. But trying to flatter Christ only condemned them
3. If Christ was what they said He was, why were they trying to ensnare Him?

D. The Money – vs 17

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

1. "tribute"
 - a) *Of the many taxes enacted by the Romans, the poll-tax was the most onerous to the Jews*
 - b) *It was often called a "head tax" because it was payable yearly by every individual*
 - c) *Romans conducted a periodic census for the purpose of collecting this tax – this sent Mary / Joseph to Bethlehem*
 - d) *This tax helped pay for the Roman occupation army*
 - e) *The Romans built roads and aqueducts*
2. If Christ said the Jews ought to pay taxes, the Pharisees would accuse Him of being subservient to Rome; and that would have condemned Him before the priests and Jews as a traitor of the Jews
3. If Christ opposed paying taxes to Rome, the Pharisees would accuse Him to Pilate as leading a rebellion against the Roman government.
4. They thought they had Him no matter how He answered.
5. But they learned quickly that Christ would not be trapped by their question.

16 Καὶ ἀποστέλλουσιν αὐτῷ τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτῶν μετὰ τῶν Ἡρῳδιανῶν, λέγοντες, Διδάσκαλε, οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς εἶ, καὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ διδάσκεις, καὶ οὐ μέλει σοι περὶ οὐδενός, οὐ γὰρ βλέπεις εἰς πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπων.

Their disciples (tous mathētas autōn). Students, pupils, of the Pharisees as in Mark 2:18. There were two Pharisaic theological seminaries in Jerusalem (Hillel, Shammai).

The Herodians (tōn Herōidianōn). Not members of Herod's family or Herod's soldiers, but partisans or followers of Herod. The form in -ianos is a Latin termination like that in Christianos (Acts 11:26). Mentioned also in Mark 3:6 combining with the Pharisees against Jesus.

The person of men (prosōpon anthrōpōn). Literally, face of men. Paying regard to appearance is the sin of partiality condemned by James (James 2:1, 9) when prosōpolēmpsia, prosōpolēmptein are used, in imitation of the Hebrew idiom. This suave flattery to Jesus implied "that Jesus was a reckless simpleton" (Bruce).

^{BYZ} **Matthew 22:17** Εἶπε οὖν ἡμῖν, τί σοι δοκεῖ; Ἐξεστὶν δοῦναι κῆνσον Καίσαρι, ἢ οὐ;

II. The Answer to the Inquiry – vs 18-22

- Christ's answer, as usual in such cases, was not what they had anticipated.
- It was full of Divine wisdom which overwhelmed His enemies and defeated their purpose.

A. The Perceptiveness for the Answer

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

1. He Perceived Their Corruption - "Perceived their wickedness."
 - a) These wicked men did not fool Christ.
 - b) He saw how corrupt they were.
 - c) You will never fool God about your dirty heart.
2. He Perceived Their Craftiness - "Why tempt ye me?"
 - a) Christ not only perceived their corrupt hearts but also their crafty purpose in questioning Him.
3. He Perceived Their Hearts - "Ye hypocrites."
 - a) Christ knew what kind of persons these attackers were and called them by their true name.
 - b) We need to call sin by its right names.
 - c) False labels can be misleading and poison people.

B. The Penny in the Answer

19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. **20** And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

1. The word translated "penny" is "denarius."
 - a) There were Hebrew and Greek coins at the time but this tax could only be paid with a Roman denarius
 - b) It was the day-wage of a Roman soldier or common laborer
2. So it was not a small amount.
3. The image on the penny – vs 20
 - a) Typical of most money, the carving on it was of an important man.
 - b) In this case Caesar, the ruler of the Roman empire, had his image carved on the coins.
4. The conquering in the penny.
 - a) The image of Caesar constantly reminded the Jews of the Roman oppression
 - b) Roman emperors often claimed to be deity and Mosaic law forbade the making of images – Ex 20:4
 - c) The coin spoke of the rule of Rome over the Israelites, for money reveals who is in government.

C. The Pronouncement in the Answer

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

1. "Render"
 - a) Render is from *apodidomi* – to pay back, to pay a debt
 - b) It carries the idea of obligation and responsibility
 - c) Jesus did not use the word "give" as did the questioners in vs 17 – they saw no obligation to pay taxes to Rome
2. Christ put down both the Pharisees and Herodians with this answer.
3. The Pharisees did not want to pay tribute to Rome but wanted to rule Rome; the Herodians did not want to make allowance for God but wanted Rome to rule religion as well as everything else.
4. Christ's answer said neither was right—it was proper to pay taxes and it was proper to support religion.
5. The church was not to have a monopoly over the government, neither was the government to have a monopoly over the church.
6. Our nation's constitution has it right, but the courts favor the Herodians.

BYZ **Matthew 22:18** Γνοὺς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πονηρίαν αὐτῶν εἶπεν, Τί με πειράζετε, ὑποκριταί;

BYZ **Matthew 22:19** Ἐπιδείξατέ μοι τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου. Οἱ δὲ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δηνάριον.
Tribute money (to nomisma tou kēnsou). Kēnsos, Latin census, was a capitation tax or head-money, tributum capitis, for which silver denaria were struck, with the figure of Caesar and a superscription, e.g. "Tiberiou Kaisaros" (McNeile). Nomisma is the Latin numisma and occurs here only in the N.T., is common in the old Greek, from nomizō sanctioned by law or custom.

20 Καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Τίνος ἡ εἰκὼν αὕτη καὶ ἡ ἐπιγραφή;

This image and superscription (hē eikōn hautē kai hē epigraphē). Probably a Roman coin because of the image (picture) on it. The earlier Herods avoided this practice because of Jewish prejudice, but the Tetrarch Philip introduced it on Jewish coins and he was followed by Herod Agrippa I. This coin was pretty certainly stamped in Rome with the image and name of Tiberius Caesar on it.

BYZ **Matthew 22:21** Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Καίσαρος. Τότε λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ἀπόδοτε οὖν τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ.

Ἀπόδοτε verb imper aor act 2pp from **ἀποδίδωμι** - (1) as fulfilling an obligation or expectation *give, give back*, with what is given derived from the context; *pay taxes or wages* (MT 20.8); *award a crown* (2T 4.8); *yield fruit* (RV 22.2); *give a witness* (AC 4.33); (2) of divine or human retribution or reward *repay, recompense* (MT 6.4); (3) as returning something *give back, hand back, pay back* (LU 19.8); (4) middle, as giving up something one possesses for sale *sell* (AC 5.8) "Give back" to Caesar what is already Caesar's.

7. Christians are to pay taxes to govts
 - a) *Jesus made no qualifications or exemptions here*
 - b) *Remember that the Roman rulers were blasphemous, pagan and idolatrous*
 - c) *In a few days Rome would nail Him to a cross*
 - d) *We owe our govt*
 - (1) Homage and subjection
 - (2) Obedience and taxes
 - (3) Thanksgiving and prayer
 - e) **Ro 13:1** *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*
8. Let's not forget to render to God the things that are God's
 - a) *We owe allegiance to govt in material things and allegiance to God in spiritual things*
 - b) *Just remember that God owns all things and all areas of life belong to God*
 - c) *What should we render to God?*
 - (1) Our time – especially our youth
 - (2) Our substance
 - (3) Our children
 - (4) Our hearts
 - d) *How to render things to God?*
 - (1) Thankfully without murmuring
 - (2) Humbly without ostentation
 - (3) Wholly and without reserve
 - (4) Permanently without draw back

D. The Product of the Answer

22 *When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*

- Christ's answer had a big impact upon the attackers.
1. The praise - *"They marveled."*
 - a) *The word translated "marveled" involves admiration in its meaning.*
 - b) *The attackers could not help but admire the wisdom of Christ. He was too smart for them.*
 2. The parting - *"Left him, and went their way."*
 - a) *The attackers stopped their attack and left.*
 - b) *They were defeated.*
 - c) *But they made a mistake in leaving Christ, for with Christ was wisdom.*

BYZ **Matthew 22:22** Καὶ ἀκούσαντες ἐθαύμασαν· καὶ ἀφέντες αὐτὸν ἀπῆλθον.