



Matthew 22:15-22 - ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹ "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Citizens of Two Kingdoms

-Give to Caesar

-Give to God



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
(1 John 3:1)

Have you ever met someone who has a problem with authority? From the middle-schooler who spends most of his day in the principal's office to the high schooler who flaunts his rule breaking to make friends to the college football player who resorts to fisticuffs with his coach to the employee who rehearses his "I quit and I'm going to tell you how awful of a boss you are" speech every day in his head. It's a special temptation at every stage of life – the constant thought that I know better and this person in charge is a joke. Living under someone else's authority isn't a new concept, and the struggle to do it faithfully is just as old.

It was a Tuesday, but no ordinary Tuesday. It was Tuesday of Holy Week, the last Tuesday of Jesus' earthly ministry. **Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.** Two different groups of people with two different potential gripes against Jesus. The Pharisees were wondering how to live as God's people in this bizarre situation where they didn't have Old Testament laws to address it – or so they thought. *We don't have an Israelite king on the throne, the Romans are in control of the Holy Land, and our temple was built by Herod - how do we live as God's people in this new situation?* The Herodians weren't so concerned with the Old Testament law, but with keeping power. They had accommodated themselves to Roman rule in Israel and they benefitted from it, so their influence was directly dependent on keeping connections with the Romans strong. If there was any question about less than stellar allegiance to the Romans, the Herodians would lose their influence pretty quickly. Normally, these two groups with their vastly different ideologies and allegiances would have stayed far apart. So, to see them together, putting on a united front is odd – kind of like Wildcats and Jayhawks coexisting peacefully. It was their shared hatred of Jesus that united them. Living in a politically polarized society like we do, I think we can relate. Their intention was to catch Jesus in his words. Still, the question they ask is a relatable one – as Christians, how should we live as citizens of two different kingdoms? How do we live in our unique situation?

At first, this delegation tried to butter up Jesus with some false praise – isn't it interesting how those who rejected Jesus sometimes speak the truest statements about him, but don't mean a word of it? **We know you are a man of integrity**, in other words, you never stray from the path of what's right and perfect. **You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.** Really? If they actually believed that they wouldn't be trying to trap Jesus in his words; they'd be praising him as their long-awaited Savior from sin! **You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.** Indeed, man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart...did they realize that Jesus could see theirs? Either way, they get to their point. **Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?** Sounds like a simple question, but it was a loaded one.

The Pharisees expected Jesus to echo the popular opinion of the day – that the Jews should not be subject to any foreign power, much less that they should have to pay to support them. This was a matter of staunch nationalistic pride – would Jesus really promote paying pagan princes to uphold and propagate their godless agenda? If he said, "Don't pay the tax," the Herodians would jump all over that and label Jesus as an agitator and insurrectionist. On the other hand, if Jesus said that the people should pay taxes to their foreign overlords, then his fellow Jews would label him as a traitor to God and to the nation. They were trying to trap Jesus with a perfect question, but didn't expect his perfect answer.



But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. In their question to Jesus, the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians had isolated one issue – paying taxes – from all the other duties citizens owe their government. Jesus’ answer invites them and us to stop and think about how we, as Christians, live as citizens of the kingdom of God and, at the same time, citizens of an earthly government.

Jesus’ perfect and pithy answer, **Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s**, gives us the starting point, the general premise of what it means to live as citizens of two kingdoms. There isn’t necessarily a disconnect between obligations to God and obligations to government – after all, our status as members of God’s kingdom will be reflected in our lives as citizens of an earthly government. In other words, our status as forgiven children of God and heirs of heaven will inspire the way we live here on earth. Life as a government citizen is one of our many callings (vocations) from God. Listen to what Paul said in our lesson from Romans 13: **Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience...Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.** Do you see what that means? “He’s not *my* president!” doesn’t fly. “I didn’t vote for *that* governor, senator, or congressman!” doesn’t exempt me from obedience and respect. What makes these words even more fascinating is to consider the historical context in which Paul worked and the Roman Christians lived. Do you know who was the supreme ruler of the Roman Empire at this time? Nero – ever heard of him? Emperor Nero may well have been off his rocker, but this God-appointed government had a job to do – to provide law and order to the citizens under its control. It’s no different today, no matter who’s in the Oval Office or filling the seats in the Senate Hall.

So, how does the government do it’s work? When you see road construction, it’s not just a headache and adding time to your commute, it’s the government maintaining property for the good of its citizens. When the bad guys try to break into your house, and the police come to the rescue, it’s not by chance, it’s the government protecting its citizens as best it can. The government operates according to laws formed by humans to provide peace and stability for its citizens. The government bears the sword both to punish the wrongdoer and to commend the one who obeys the law. As Christians, living in two kingdoms, God calls on us to respect, support, and pray for our government officials. It’s not a red state/blue state issue; it’s not about whether you watch Fox News or CNN, it’s a matter of living as citizen of two God-ordained kingdoms – in the church (the kingdom of God’s right hand) and under the government (the kingdom of God’s left hand). **Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.**

So, if law and order are the government’s job and **taxes, revenue, respect, and honor** are our obligations to the government, what about the church? We see what we give to Caesar, but what about the other half of that equation? What task has God given to the church? It’s pretty simple, really. **Go and make disciples of all nations.** What tools has God given the church to carry out this eternally important task? His Word and Sacraments – **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** The government’s task is peace, order, and stability. The church’s task is sharing the gospel. The trouble comes when we expect one to do the other’s work. Do we really want that? Think about how that has played out in history – the Inquisition, “Convert to Christianity or die!” The Crusades – conquest and murder, supposedly in the name of Jesus. The ever-present temptation to think that if we could just elect a solid Christian leader, or if only our government would just pass more “Christian” laws then we’d be a more “Christian” nation. But when you think about it, does that make any sense? Is it the law and threat and compulsion



that bring about faith in Christ? Not at all – only the gospel does that! God has tasked the government to provide law and order. God has given his Church the charge to spread the gospel.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. How and what do we give to God? The temptation for us is to see supporting the work of the gospel kind of like we see supporting the work of the government. Another obligation, another bill, and if I can get away with having to give less, good! But does that make sense? **Give to God what is God's**, so stop for a moment and think. What is God's? In short, everything. From the clothes on your back to the shoes on your feet to that car in the parking lot to the air you breathe to the beating heart inside your chest. Giving to God is so much more than 10% of my income in the offering plate. God doesn't need your money. God doesn't want your money. He wants more than that – he wants all of you! And so it becomes clear that everything I do, everything I am and have – my life itself – is an offering to the God who saved me. The work he's enabled me to do isn't just a 60 hour a week grind to put food on the table, it's a way I can glorify God by working faithfully. The family he's given me isn't a burden, but a way I can reflect his goodness and grace and forgiveness to those closest to me. The citizenship and freedom he's given me in this country isn't a license to tear down reputations or start a revolution, but a chance to reflect the perfect citizenship he's given me in his kingdom through faith in Christ.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Why give to God? Because he's given everything to you, but not just your life and your material goods. God wants all of you, and to make that happen, he had to give all of himself first. Look, and see the Supreme Ruler of the universe literally humble himself to death, even death on a cross – for you. Watch as the King of kings and Lord of lords stands before an earthly government official, Pontius Pilate, silent as a sheep before the shearers - for every time I've let fly my distaste for authority. See the Just and Righteous Judge condemned by a kangaroo court – to suffer the punishment that your sins and mine rightfully deserve. Watch the eternal Son of God give all of himself to forgive your sins and make you his own – to live under him in his kingdom and serve him in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. **Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.** We can live and give generously to both, because God has given us his all in Christ. God bless you, dear Christian, as you live as citizens of two kingdoms to the glory of God!

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.