

## God and Caesar 11-6-05

Matthew 22:15-22 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" <sup>18</sup>But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?" <sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, <sup>20</sup>and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" <sup>21</sup>"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." <sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

It is still Wednesday of Passion Week. Jesus has answered the religious leaders' question about authority with three parables. Those parables revealed the evil intentions of the Pharisees. (Matthew 21:38-39) Instead of asking Him how they might avoid the fate their own lips had pronounced, they hardened their hearts even more, fulfilling the words of the Psalmist, "The rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed." Psalm 2:2

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. His actions were always above reproach. (John 8:46) They had to find some way to use His words against Him. They hated those words because those words challenged their convictions. (Mark 7:11-13) Though undeniably true, they grated against the chalkboard of Pharisaical teaching, exposing their selfish interpretations and applications. How do you feel about His words? Do you love them? Are they a light to your path or are you apathetic toward them. (Psalm 119:105) I think Jesus would rather we hated them, like the Pharisees did, than be apathetic toward them. At least in hating them, they had felt the sting of conviction. It gives hope for a future change. Apathy is so calloused that it leaves little or no hope of change. (Revelation 3:15)

They devised a series of three questions that they thought would give them reason to imprison or even execute Him. We will look at the first question today. It was well thought out by men who loved to argue the details in clever ways. Even the method in which it would be delivered was cunning.

<sup>16a</sup>They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. For their insidious plot to work, the ones that presented the question could not appear to be Pharisees. They wore distinctive clothing, so they sent their disciples instead. (Matthew 23:5) These were the students of the Pharisee rabbi. They were not yet qualified to wear the clothing that demanded respect. Willing to please their teachers, they willingly participated in the plot by playing their part. They teamed up with the Herodians. The Herodians must have been a political party that supported the reign of the descendants of Herod. As supporters of Herod Antipas, they would

**Commented [notes1]:** 38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Matthew 21:38-39 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? John 8:46 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." Mark 7:11-13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. Psalms 119:105 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! Revelation 3:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; Matthew 23:5 (NIV)

be favorable to Rome and Roman customs. They could not have been more different from the Pharisees, but they could agree that Jesus must be dealt with. The Pharisees' disciples would butter Jesus up and trick Him into saying something for which the Herodians could have Him arrested. (Psalm 5:9) In this way, the Pharisees wouldn't have to dirty their hands and still retain favor with the people, while achieving their goal. (Matthew 21:46) It was a well thought out sneak attack that would have tripped up the best of men.

**Commented [notes7]:** 9 Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit. Psalms 5:9 (NIV)

<sup>19b</sup> "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. This is the butter up. They didn't want Jesus to realize who they were. Pharisees would never have said something like this. Funny thing is that it was true. And don't you think they realized it was true. That is why they thought it would work. They were practicing Proverbs 29:5, *Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.* Flattering lies are evil, but flattering truth for the purpose of deception declares the person who is using it to be a despicable hypocrite. (Job 15:5)

**Commented [notes8]:** 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. Matthew 21:46 (NIV)

The expressions they used would be terms any godly man would desire to attain to. "Teacher" *didaskolos* was used of the most respected exegetes of God's word. (Matthew 26:18) "A man of integrity" is one who says what he means and means what he says. "You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" is saying that he is the one who gets it right. (John 7:18) We have a Wednesday night class on the ways of God as opposed to the ways of man. A person who knows the ways of God was equated with their great celebrity, Moses. (Exodus 33:13) And finally they said that opinions of men had no hold on him. Only those of highest character can let go of the opinions of others and speak the truth. What an intro! Did they believe it? It was all preparation for their trick question. It was all meant to trap Him. Beware of flattery, but especially beware when it is followed by a question. (Psalm 55:21)

**Commented [notes9]:** 5 Your sin prompts your mouth; you adopt the tongue of the crafty. Job 15:5 (NIV)

<sup>17</sup> Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" To understand how clever the question was, we must understand the Jewish hatred for the poll tax. That was the particular tax (*kensos*) that was being referred to. A rebellion was started over this tax because it was a per person tax. It was used to fund the occupying army. The Jews distaste for it came from their reasoning that they were God's people. (Exodus 3:10) If God owned them, then why should they pay Rome a per person tax? In their minds it contradicted the idea of being the children of God. It was so unpopular that anyone declaring it to be just became unpopular. If Jesus declared it to be just, then the Pharisees could arrest Him without fearing how the people would react.

**Commented [notes10]:** 18 He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" Matthew 26:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** 18 He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. John 7:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes12]:** 13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." Exodus 33:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** 21 His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords. Psalms 55:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." Exodus 3:10 (NIV)

However, if He declared the tax unjust, as they probably suspected He would, then the Herodians could go to the Romans and demand His arrest for treason. (Acts 25:8) The reason they felt sure that He would side with them in not paying taxes was that the coin had the image of Caesar Tiberius on front. Jews were forbidden to make graven images. (Exodus 20:4) On the back, it had an image of Caesar as the high priest enthroned with priestly robes. Either way He answered, they thought they had Him!

**Commented [notes15]:** 8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." Acts 25:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** 4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. Exodus 20:4 (NIV)

<sup>18</sup>But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?"

Hold on! Who told Him? They had done everything they could to surprise attack Him, but He discerned it. (Mark 2:8) He called them hypocrites, mask wearing actors. In other words, you are acting like something you are not. They were acting like they respected Him and desired to learn from Him, when in truth they were out for blood. (John 2:25) His question was intended to go straight to their heart. "Why are you trying to trap me? Look into your heart and see the lust for power and the praise of men that you so long for. Look at your duplicity! While praising me for being above the opinions of men, you are longing to have their praise. (John 12:43) While thinking I am susceptible to pride, in your pride you try to trick me." (Psalm 73:6)

Jesus knows what is in the heart of man. They couldn't fool Him and neither can we. (Hebrews 4:13) One popular commentator says that this was a demonstration of Jesus' omniscience. I don't think so. Because Jesus is our example in all things, I think it was His Holy Spirit guided discernment. I think it is something that you and I can do when we listen to the Spirit. I've tasted the poison tipped spear of praise before and knew it immediately. It wasn't because I'm wise or a good judge of character; it was because the Holy Spirit clued me in.

<sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, They may have been a bit set back by Jesus revealing that He knew their hearts, but they probably still thought they had Him. Eager to lead Him to some incriminating words, they brought Him the coin. Maybe they even found a denarius printed by Augustus that declared Augustus to be the Son of God. Then they would feel even more certain that Jesus was about to be trapped.

<sup>20</sup>and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription is it?"

<sup>21</sup>"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." As clever as their question was, the Holy Spirit's answer was even cleverer, more powerful and more instructive. Man is no match for the wisdom of God. (Job 5:13) He was forcing the religionists to recognize that some things belonged to the world and its governments. The coin was minted by Caesar and bore his image. If he demanded it be returned, it was his right.

It is unfortunate that the NIV uses the word portrait. The word "image" would tip us off as to what may have been going on in the mind of Jesus as He gave them the Holy Spirit's answer. Man is made in the image of God. Just as the coin bore Caesar's image, we bear God's image. (Genesis 1:27) We are a trinity of body, soul, and spirit. We are creative. The coin was an earthly thing of little eternal value. Pay back (for that is the Greek word used *apodidoma*) to Caesar what belongs to him. Pay back to God what is God's. You can give Caesar the money, but you can't give him the worship. You can give him your allegiance as a citizen, but your ultimate allegiance is to God because you are a citizen of heaven. All Christians have dual citizenship. (Philippians 2:20) By saying we are paying back, Jesus implied that we owe Caesar something, and we owe God something. (1 Corinthians 4:7) We have received from them and we owe them. The Jews received from the Romans the Pax

**Commented [notes17]:** 8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Mark 2:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. John 2:25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. John 12:43 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. Psalms 73:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 13 He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away. Job 5:13 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Philippians 3:20 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? 1 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV)

Roma, peace of Rome. It came at the cost of the Roman troops strategically placed around the empire. They had roads to travel on in relative safety. They built aqueducts to supply cities with water. That cost a great deal, and they were indebted to Rome for it.

Many Christians do not understand the Biblical view of government. Jesus said they owed taxes to a government that would execute Him in two days. He saw His Father as the One who places the governments of the world in their place to serve His purposes. The Apostles Peter and Paul clarified for us the Christian view of government. Paul told the Roman church, *1Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.... 5Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.* Romans 13:1, 5-7 (NIV)

Peter concurs, *13Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.* 1 Peter 2:13-14 (NIV) The Caesars that were reigning when they wrote these passages were worse than Tiberius. It doesn't matter how corrupt or evil the government is, if you receive its services then you are indebted to it to pay your taxes. This is the Christian view of government. Our government has authority over me, but not over God. They can ask what they will of me, and as a good citizen, I will obey. Christians should make the best citizens. We should be the ones that don't cheat on our taxes. (Titus 3:1) But I am also indebted to God.

What do I owe God? What have I received from Him? My very life and every breath of every day is a gift from Him. (1 Corinthians 15:10) My health and senses are from Him. The desire in my heart to seek and to know Him is from Him. I owe Him everything. In fact, my service to my government is in recognition of His sovereignty. Should they abuse their power and ask me to do something that I am forbidden to do by God's word, I will submit to the Supreme Authority. As Peter said, "We ought to obey God rather than man." (Acts 4:19) Caesar's image is on the coin, but God's image is upon me. I may owe Caesar 28-50% of my income, but I owe God 100% of my life. Anything less just won't do.

The political fury in our nation today, the personal attacks and slander that flows freely in our country is something that we as Christians should refrain from. You are welcome to your political opinion, but we are to pray for ALL those in authority. (1 Timothy 2:1-2) We, of all people, should recognize that our God is sovereign over all, and will have His way in the end. I've been particularly convicted about this recently. I don't find one word of slander toward any of the Caesar's in Scripture, and they were some of the most decadent Caesars in Rome's history. Christians didn't slander them; they prayed for them even when they were thrown to the lions.

**Commented [notes26]:** 1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, Titus 3:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them--yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. Acts 4:19 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** 1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV)

Ruling powers come and go. Nations rise and fall, but God will have His way in the earth. Rulers will answer to Him. I'm challenging us all to rise above the heated rhetoric and speak and act like Christians.

We are Christians first and foremost. Our political parties are secondary. Sometimes our adamant stances unnecessarily offend our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, not to mention unbelievers. In the body of Christ there are members of both parties, apolitical people, and probably some other ideologies, but we should agree on the Biblical perspective of government. Be a good citizen. We are indebted to our government. God is sovereign and placed our leaders in power, all of them, not just your party. Pray for them.

*<sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.*

The answer of the Holy Spirit through Jesus was so full of wisdom that they were speechless. The Holy Spirit doesn't think inside the box. His words are unimpeachable and filled with wisdom. (Luke 21:15) What could they say? He had answered in a way that completely diffused them. Part of their problem was their great emphasis on money. Almost everyone that I have met that tried to rationalize why they should not pay taxes, and I've met quite a few, did so for the same reason. They had an overemphasis on money. (1 Timothy 6:10) Whose image is on your money? George? Then give to George what you owe George, and to God what you owe God. Who can argue against paying what you owe?

Jesus was prepared to give an answer because He walked in the Spirit. Are you prepared to give an account to those who ask you about the hope you have? (1 Peter 3:15) We are if we know the Word, if we rely on the Holy Spirit. We are if He is a part of our daily life. Jesus walked in the Spirit daily, and so, when pressure came, He leaned upon the Spirit as He always did. We can't walk in the flesh all the time and expect the Spirit to show up when we need Him. Answering in the Spirit brings the life of Christ right into the lives of others. Wouldn't you love to be His instrument to bring His presence into lives, even antagonistic lives? Then you need to begin by walking in Him daily. (Galatians 5:25)

If we keep step with the Spirit, we will be praying for our leaders, not slandering them. We will be good citizens of our country, paying what we owe. Our emphasis will be spiritual and eternal, not political and temporal. We will be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have in Jesus!

**Commented [notes30]:** 15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. Luke 21:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes32]:** 15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

**Commented [notes33]:** 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:25 (NIV)