

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

Our Financial Obligations

Matthew 22:15-22

¹ What are our financial obligations before God? Our passage of scripture today asks and answers one of the most important questions in each of our lives. ²

Matthew, chapter 22, verses 15 through 22 reads, Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 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. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” ¹ ³

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

¹ Matthew 22:15-17.

this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.²

Each of us have certain financial obligations: paying for the Christmas gifts you used your credit card to buy, income taxes, automobile registration, insurance premiums, etc.

Just like us, these people were required to pay taxes. But, unlike us, they paid outrageous taxes to a foreign government whose military was occupying their country! ⁴

The question is just as valid for us to ask as it was for them, “Is it God’s desire for us to pay taxes”? ⁵

Notice, first . . .

I. The Significance of the Question - v17

The significance of the question.

⁶ The people who asked it were significant. Verses 15 and 16, Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to

² Matthew 22:18-22.

trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 7

The Pharisees were the religious legalists. They were lay people who represented the conservative right biblically and socially. They were, quietly anti Roman.

8

The Herodians, as their name implies, were very pro Roman. They represented the liberal left socially and were somewhat religiously indifferent.

They normally didn't get along with one another, but since Lord Jesus was a common enemy, they banded together. 9

The buttering up process they used was significant. Notice verse 16, "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." 10

They called Him **Teacher**. But they didn't recognize

His authority to teach! ¹¹

They lied, **We know You are a man of integrity . . .** But they considered Him a false teacher!

To put the icing on the cake, they gushed out, **You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.** In other words, "Other people's opinions don't sway your teachings". ¹² The implication was, "Certainly you can trust us with what you really feel about this question!" Yeah, right! ¹³

The question, itself, is significant. Verse 17, **Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?** ¹⁴

The word **taxes**, ³ in the original language, is where we get our English word "census". It came to become a technical term for the poll tax paid whenever a census was taken. ¹⁵

What would have happened if the Lord said simply "No" to this question?

³ κῆνσος.

This would have been un-refuted testimony that He supported rebellion to the Roman government and sided with the despised Zealot Party. This would have been a capital offense! They had on their side the jealousy of Rome, ¹⁶ the tyranny of Governor Pilate, ⁴ and the cowardice of Herod Antipas. ⁵ ¹⁷

In fact, these folks, who implied the Lord could trust them, were the very ones who actually did accuse the Lord before Pilate of a teaching not to pay taxes to Caesar! ⁶ ¹⁸

What would have happened if the Lord said simply “Yes” to this question? His listeners would have been shocked! He would have lost His credibility in His claim to be the Messiah/King of Israel! ¹⁹

Now, notice the first part of the answer.

⁴ Acts 5:37 - After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

⁵ Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. He ruled Galilee. He was the “king” who executed John the Baptist.

⁶ Luke 23:2 - And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.

II. Answer: Return to the Government What Belongs to the Government - v21

Return to the government what belongs to the government. ²⁰

The background philosophies behind the question contradicted each other. ²¹

Lord Jesus asked to see a denarius. ⁷



The first was minted during the reign of Augustus; the second during the reign of Tiberius. Either coin could have been the one Jesus used. Both have the name

⁷ A Roman silver coin worth a day's wage for the common laborer.

and picture of the Emperor.

The right to coin money implies the authority to tax it. The Maccabees felt so strongly about this that they immediately began coining money as soon as they came to power. ⁸ ₂₂

The Zealot Party claimed that to pay tribute to any authority other than God alone showed loyalty to that authority more than to God! ₂₃

In verse 21 Lord Jesus provided a basic universal spiritual principle, **Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.** ₂₄ **Church and state fall into completely different spheres of authority!** Loyalty to one in no way takes away your allegiance to the other! ₂₅ Romans, chapter 13, tells us that all secular government is ordained of God. ₂₆

Therefore, support your secular government

⁸ The Maccabees fought and won independence from Greek occupation about 167 BC. Israel remained an independent nation ruled by the Hasmonean dynasty until 63 BC. Rome's occupation occurred after Pompey's conquest.

financially and obey its laws! ⁹ ₂₇

Government provides services you should pay taxes for: ²⁸ coinage, ²⁹ protection through the military and law enforcement, ³⁰ trade negotiations ³¹ and regulations necessary to have an orderly society. ³²

The Lord commanded obedience to secular laws. ¹⁰ ₃₃

The second part of that answer in verse 21 is to . . . ₃₄

III. Answer: Return to God

What Belongs to God - v21

Return to God what belongs to God! ₃₅

So, what belongs to God? ₃₆

You! ₃₇ Everything you see and experience! ₃₈

Also something else. A little boy built a toy boat. The weather had just cleared from a big storm and the sun came out. So the little boy took his boat outside to float it in some water. He found water next to the curb

⁹ Except where a law may conflict with God's will.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:41 - If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

at the street and placed it there. However, there was a strong current accumulated by the storm. It swept the little boat down the street too fast for the boy to keep up with it. Soon the boat was out of sight. The little boy had lost his boat and ran home to cry.

A few days later as he was walking down the street, he noticed in a store window his little boat. He ran into the store and explained to the shop worker about the boat. Although very sympathetic he told the boy he would have to buy the boat before he could take it out of the store.

So, the boy ran home excitedly, broke open his piggy bank and brought back to the store just enough money to buy his boat.

As he was leaving the store embracing his boat he could be heard saying, "Little boat. Little boat. You are mine twice! I made you and I bought you!"

You were created by God and you were redeemed by

God! God created you in your mother's womb. ¹¹ Then, through Lord Jesus, He suffered and died for you on the cross. He redeemed you! ³⁹

So, what did the Lord mean here when He said, **Return to God what belongs to God? ⁴⁰**

To those people in that culture it meant the tithe! When they heard this last statement the scripture all the men had memorized came to mind from Leviticus, chapter 27, verse 30, **A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. The tithe belongs to the Lord. ⁴¹ It is His demand from what belongs to Him!**

There are some things you need to be aware of. Half of the Lord's teachings in the New Testament section of our Bible are about stewardship of material

¹¹ Psalm 139:13-16 - For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

possessions. In the Gospels, one verse in seven are about stewardship of material possessions. Sixteen of the Lord's parables illustrated Jesus' teachings about the stewardship of material possessions. 42

So, the tithe, like taxes, is your obligation to your Creator! The freewill offering, like gifts to loved ones, are expressions of your love to your Redeemer! You give offerings but you pay tithes! 43

Give cheerfully of whatever your government and your God ask of you!

Then, give sacrificially beyond that as an expression of your love!

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