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I have been cautioned severely by my wife and charitably by others to not cross over in my teaching into the arena of politics. And I am in agreement, mostly, with that concept. But I have certain unavoidable caveats.

This morning, those two sometimes conflicting worlds collide. Because, Jesus is going to talk about church, and state. And that is a most interesting and necessary topic for us to consider at this time.

What is our role? How should we interact? To what extent? What are the limits? How does this book constrain us?

We like to sing the old chorus; *This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through. My home is way out there, somewhere beyond the blue.*

There's a real sense in which that's true. We've exited this world. But we're still in the world. But we no longer are subject to the reign of the "ruler of this world", Satan. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we are only sojourners here.

We came out of this world, and entered a realm where our ruler is God. He is in ultimate control of us. Our allegiance is to Him. We're like enemy combatants in Satan's world. Little cells of opposition. So how does that play out?

It's a tenuous balance. Sometimes it seems like a tight rope walk.

In Ecclesiastes 1:9, Solomon said *“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.”*

We have shortened that up to our idiom, **there's nothing new under the sun.**

We've just exited a week of politics. Every week is a week of politics but this last week political posturing and wrangling was in the news continuously.

And that is what is going on in the story we're considering this morning. The Pharisees who are ultimately challenging Jesus with their question which is a deliberate entrapment, are leaders of a political establishment that is ruling in Israel, and they see Jesus as a challenge.

This is politics. They want their party to remain in control, and Jesus has just entered Jerusalem and He is an enormous challenge. He's thrown their corrupt buying and selling system out of the temple. He's claimed ownership of the temple. He's surrounded by people who want Him to be King. No small number who would enjoy seeing the Pharisee party overthrown.

In middle eastern countries, to this very day, politics is a blood sport. You don't count the votes and concede the contest and try again in four years. You kill your opponent. And that's exactly what is in play. These leaders in Israel would have already killed Jesus a day ago, and even earlier this day, except they fear the size of the opposing party.

For the time being, they are working at political posturing. It's so identical to what we've watched on TV this week that I immediately thought of Solomon's idiom. There's nothing new under the sun. Truly. This is political posturing, but it's lethal. These men will kill to stay in power. We don't go that far. Unless of course you lean towards conspiracy theories and that sort of thing. Then maybe we still do.

So, for now, since Jesus is surrounded by a large throng of politically excited people who want Jesus for King, all these men can do is posture to discredit Him. And that's what this story is about. They'll catch Him in a question which will either discredit Him with many of His followers, or even better, it will reveal Him as a threat to Rome.

They've crafted the question and they're congratulating each other on the brilliance of it. This question is lose - lose. No right answer. No way to extricate yourself from this. Pure brilliance. Let's look at it.

15Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said.

There it is. Motive. Entrapment. This is a plot to entrap Jesus.

In Israel you could be arrested for what you say.

We used to value and brag about our freedom of speech in this country. It's vanishing before our eyes. Our politicians are exploring and exploiting something they will call "hate crimes". If I say things they don't agree with, it's just a matter of time before there will be pressure put against me and others simply because we say what we believe.

In Israel, that was already the case. We'll see in a few weeks (months?) that Jesus will be murdered and his crime will be; blasphemy. His charge will be brought against Him by the thought police. Things He says will be the basis for capitol punishment. In reality, it's one political party murdering the opposition. America, beware.

15Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. 16And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying,

Stop right there. Who are the Herodians.

This is fascinating. Because, normally, like the week before Jesus got there, the Pharisees hated the Herodians. Pharisees are Jewish purists who chafe under the rule of Rome. They hated Rome. They hate

anyone who represents Rome. They hate Herod who has been given the authority to rule over much of that area of Judea.

The Herodians were Jews who saw it differently. Rome isn't that bad. They allow us many freedoms. We can work with Rome. A little cooperation with Herod will get you a lot of what you want. Those are the Herodians. Normal enemies of the Pharisees.

But we also recognize something else about the human condition. Human nature. If your enemy is also my enemy . . . you're my friend. We can go back to being enemies next week, after Jesus is dead, but for now, we'll join forces.

We christians do this. I do this.

I am no friend of the catholic church. I am no friend of the Mormons. But I am willing to be co-belligerents with both of them against a government that is encroaching on my religious freedoms.

Our differences will remain, but our common enemy becomes a focus that can temporarily unite us at some level. I'll happily stand with Mormons and Catholics and anyone else and take up the cause against abortion. Or the threats to our religious liberty.

That's what's going on here. And the Herodians are particularly useful to the Pharisee's because they have a connection to Herod. Herod was an Edomite. Edom is the enemy of Israel. But Rome has given Herod the authority to reign in part of Judea.

Normally the Pharisees would spit on the ground where Herod last stood, but now, he has a useful connection to Rome.

The plot thickens. The jews cannot execute anyone without Rome's permission. And execution is the solution to the problem that they seek. So Rome has to get on board some how. Hmmm. All of a sudden, the Herodian party and the Pharisee party are friends.

So that little addition of those few words; *16And they sent their*

disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, is full of intrigue and color.

So here comes the "set - up". Before I read their words, I want to bring to remembrance a rather obscure old testament sin. The sin of flattery.

Proverbs 29:5 A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. And Psalms 12:2, and 3a say; 2They speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak. 3May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,

Job 32:21, Elihu says; 21Let me not, I pray you, accept any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. 22For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away.

Flattery is a sin. It's all over the Proverbs. The evil woman entraps the foolish man with what? Flattery. The following is one of the most blatant examples in all of the Bible . . . of flattery; What makes it even more paradoxical is that they didn't believe a word of their own flattery, and every word is true.

“Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17“Tell us then, what do You think?

There's a few other things that God abhors that these spiritual leaders of Israel seem to have set aside. Proverbs 6:16 - 19

*16 There are six things which the LORD hates,
Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:*

*17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood,*

*18 A heart that devises wicked plans,
Feet that run rapidly to evil,*

*19 A false witness who utters lies,
And one who spreads strife among brothers.*

These wicked men are guilty of all seven. Our candidates today might do well to take a second look at that list. OK, that's as close to that fire as I'm going to get.

It's popular today to teach that God is Love. Wide audience acceptance. But if you want to bring a hush on a room. Start talking about a God who hates. The Bible says God hates . . . these.

This is a plot to shed innocent blood by men who are wise in their own deceit whose feet have run rapidly to do this evil. They will spread strife among their brethren, but that is secondary. Murder is their desired result.

So here is the question they have crafted.

Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"

It's a great question. Brilliant in it's evil intent.

If He says; yes, we have to pay Rome their tax, all of the people who are in the Jesus for King party get shot in the heart. They believe Jesus is the messiah. Messiah *delivers* Israel from the gentiles who are trampling it down. Messiah will restore sovereignty to Israel! The book says so!

Messiah will lead a massive battle against all comers and will reign on David's throne, Supreme ruler over His people Israel. Rome and it's taxes will be crushed under His feet.

These Jesus for King folks that are surrounding Jesus are a force of opposition to His murder. The pharisees need to neutralize this opposition. The pharisees are afraid of these folks. Jesus has to say NO taxes for Rome in order to keep the party faithful happy.

On the other hand, the Pharisees need Rome to join them in their desire to kill Jesus. If Jesus says NO we don't pay tax to Rome, He's an insurrectionist. A threat to Rome. A subversive. A combatant.

I told you. It's brilliant. Lose - Lose. No possible right answer. Either answer will work to gain Him enemies who will be in favor of His riddance.

The pharisees are all congratulating themselves. Set the trap. Pull the string. Set the net around Him. We've got Him boys.

18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?"

Malice is a good word. Malicious intent. Intentional harm.

How did Jesus figure this out? The pharisees, the rulers in Israel would have been recognizable to Jesus. They knew each other. Very well. But these men sent by the pharisees are just disciples of the pharisees. Jesus hasn't met them before. And the Herodians are new to Him.

And they came with such earnestness. They use the most respectful title. Teacher. Help us with this problem we've been muddling over. We need your wisdom, please. We aren't wise like you. We defer to you. Please render an opinion. We admire you and desire the weight of your opinion.

Most of us, maybe all of us, would fall into that trap. It's a good trap. A well crafted trap. Who tipped Jesus off? Why hasn't the trap worked??

John 2 reveals something about Jesus; *24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.*

God is omniscient. Jesus, in His incarnation left some of His Godness behind and assumed the lower estate of being fully man. But not all. Not all of it. John is clear that Jesus knows what is in men's hearts.

No one has to tip Him off. He has these folks number. Their trap might be effective on you or me, but not on the Son of God. He perceives

their intent. He knows, omnisciently, that these men are malicious. They have come to bring Him harm.

They didn't believe their own flattery when they said; *we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any*

but He will prove true to this statement. He doesn't mince words. He immediately defers to no one, including them, and tells them who they are. He calls them out. *“Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?”*

You aren't thoughtful learners deferring to a wise teacher seeking His valued opinion on a matter of real concern. Not at all. You men are hypocrites who are testing me. The word testing is a court room word. It is used of a test that proves a hypothesis.

These hypocrites haven't come to seek wisdom, they have come to prove a verdict. They are trying Jesus in the court of public opinion.

Jesus says; *19“Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. 20And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21They said to Him, “Caesar’s.”*

The poll tax was a once a year tax collected from every person living in territory controlled by Rome. It was equivalent to a days wages.

The fact that the coin is recognizably numismatics of the nation in authority is telling. Who's picture is this? Ceasar's. Does that tell you something??

Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

NEXT.

The question was brilliant in it's evil. The best that human minds could devise. But the answer is brilliant above man's brilliance.

You don't tug on superman's cape. Don't spit into the wind. Don't pull the mask off the old lone ranger, and don't think you're going to outsmart God with your brilliant question.

22And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

Was everyone happy with that answer that day? I don't think so. I think the Jesus for King people are standing around grumbling. He isn't a true conservative. Grumble grumble grumble.

This is not outside of the plan of God. Many, perhaps even most of the people who followed Him to Jerusalem chanting Hosanna's, the Jesus for King party, will turn on Him and join the ones shouting Crucify Him! Crucify Him.

They've come to see a Messiah crush Rome. The wind isn't blowing that direction. This Messiah seems to be on the attack against Israel, not Rome. And now this. Pay your taxes. Even to Rome. Grumble grumble.

So, in some sense, the pharisees did gain some ground. All of this is in the divine plan of God and under His sovereign control. Jesus will be dead in 2 more days. Things are moving smartly in that direction. Under God's sovereign plan. Not because of smart pharisees.

You think we're done . . . but we're not. Relax. There are some profound profound truths here that are relevant to us right here, right now, in the 21st century. Some application.

Fast forward to 2016. We're having a lot of discussion about church and state. Separation of church and state. And I want to launch off of Jesus words here in this passage, and give you a biblical perspective.

This is where I'm going to cross over into politics, because politics has crossed over into church business.

Jesus spoke in His divine answer and recognized 2 category's.

Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.

These are 2 broad category's. 2 houses. Church, and State. Worship, and Government. God owns them both. And He has defined boundaries for both.

Now put your thinking caps back on and stick with me for a few more minutes. Jesus recognizes 2 things that I am to be in subjection under. Both have authority over me. God. And Government. I must obey both.

But we need to understand where the boundaries are. In one category we'll lump together some things. God. Worship. Church. Revelation of God in His book that defines morality and has authority over men. That responsibility falls to us. The church. Spiritual authority over men, based in God's word

In the other category, God has designed that there be Government that has a bunch of responsibilities also. Government is to keep order. It is there to punish lawbreakers. The church defines morality as given by God. You shall not lie. You shall not murder. You shall not steal.

Government is given the power to enforce that morality. The policeman beareth not the sword in vain. He has power, ordained by God of very God, to use that sword if it becomes necessary to protect property and order.

As you read through your Bible you will discover both of these houses, in Israel, ordained by God. There were Kings. And there were Priests. Government, and worship.

But what you'll see clearly in the Bible is that the priesthood and worship, trumps the King. The King is in subjection to God, under the priests, and the prophets.

Nathan comes to David the king, and he says *You are the man*. You're

guilty David. You stole Uriah's wife, and when you botched the red headed stepchild solution, you murdered Uriah.

David doesn't say, wait just a minute. You've crossed over a boundary of church and state here. Don't you realize that I'm the KING!!

The church imposes morality defined by God in His revelation, on the state. Church trumps state.

The state cooperates with the church by enforcing moral laws. And, AND, and, the state is responsible to give the church protection. Security.

In Israel the boundaries were crisp. The King was never allowed to do the priests job. And the priest was not allowed to do the King's job.

Some day, Jesus will be both Priest AND King. Until that day though, the offices, those two houses, are seperated.

2 Chr. 26 tells the story of Uzziah, one of Israels better kings, who crossed over that line;

16But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men.

18They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God." 19But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.

20Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold,

he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him. 21King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land.

God set those boundaries of House of Worship, and House of Government. Kings are kings, and priests are priests. They have different jobs to do.

The men who founded this nation understood these truths very well. Very well. The government would honor and support and protect religion but it would not weild any influence in spiritual matters. The government would not meddle in affairs of church.

They respected the same pattern that the Kings in Israel honored before them. The nation would be subject to the morality defined in God's book and the government they defined would honor and protect that spiritual office. No interference. The church and the state would be seperated as it was in Israel.

Fast forward to 2016. The state no longer recognizes the church's authority in matters of morality. It rejects the God of the Bible. It rejects the morality of the Bible. It rejects any premise that says this book has authority over men. And it has re-defined seperation of church and state to mean; Do not tell us what you think is right or wrong.

State trumps church. State declares the new morality.

So now, the state will punish the church if the church refuses to abide by the morality that the state has declared.

We're playing word games now. Conviction and conscience based in revealed truth are re-defined by the state as "hate".

Well defined God given roles of men and women, boys and girls are summarily dismissed and anyone who honors God's moral code is

labeled as guilty of discrimination.

The state has crossed over and gotten totally into the church's business, and it's going to get worse, not better. And the rate of change is alarming, to say the least.

The same people who cried out for separation of church and state, have stormed those boundaries and crossed over.

The title of Francis Schaeffer's 1976 book "How Should We Then Live?" has become incredibly relevant to this generation we've found ourselves in.

How are we to intersect with Caesar who has gotten into our business?

That's a huge topic and one we will not exhaust this morning.

We have many examples for us in the book. The Bible.

The apostles were in subjection to the authorities, and took the beatings and mistreatment but drew the line at the state, as it were, telling them to not do what God had clearly told them TO DO.

They said, *You judge whether we should obey God, or men.*

And they went to prison. And they were summarily martyred. But not before God accomplished His purposes in this world.

That's our example. We will not back down to this onslaught, when it comes. It will get to Tonopah. In the mean time, considering what we've discussed this morning, give some new thought to the next to the last line in Jesus disciples prayer. The Lord's prayer.

Lead us NOT into temptation. But deliver us from evil. We will need to pray that with new meaning as government encroaches and enforces and punishes those who will not bow down to their agenda.

Wednesday night I was listening to some of the speeches at the

convention on the car radio while I was working in the field. One of the speakers *did* impress me. I wonder how many people caught it. Not many I should think, but he impressed me because he humbly wove some words of the 2nd wisest man who ever lived into his speech.

He said; *For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?"* A direct quote from Soloman out of 1 Kings 3.

I'll read it from 1 Kings in it's context; 8"*Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted.* 9"*So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?"* 10 ***It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing....***

Pay your taxes. Honor those in authority over you. The government beareth not the sword in vain. Worship God. When Ceasar tells you to stop worshiping God, to obey Ceasar and not God, then you disobey Ceasar and take your lumps.

You won't be the first christian who suffered.