

Big idea: Christians must fulfill their obligations to their government and to God.

Intro –

We are told to avoid speaking about politics and religion in polite society. Today we will do both. We are edgy like that.

We go there because Jesus goes there in response to a question about taxes. It brings up questions that Christians of every generation have had to deal with.

How should we interact with our government?

Should we withdraw completely like the Amish and form our own societies within a broader society?

Should we refuse to serve in any government roles, including police, military, and politics, like the Anabaptists?

Should we utilize political tools and embrace politically progressive ideas like mainline denominations?

The first in a series of four confrontations in which the religious and social leader's attempt to trap Jesus and He astonishes them with his wisdom.

22:15-22 – poll tax (v. 22 – amazed)

22:23-33 – marriage and the resurrection (v. 33 – astonished)

22:3-40 – great commandment

22:41-46 – Jesus asks them a question to trap them – Son of David

1. Should we pay taxes to the government? (22:15-18)

a. Matthew tells us from the beginning this is a trap.

- i. The Pharisees are listed here. Mark tells us the chief priests, scribes, and elders were in on the planning as well.
- ii. Not for the first or the last time.

1. **Matthew 12:14** But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.
2. **Matthew 27:1** Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death;

b. When it came to the dirty work, the Pharisees sent their disciples rather than going themselves.

- i. They were still learning the way of the Pharisee. Perhaps they thought this along with flattery would cause Jesus to lower His guard.
- ii. Not only the disciples of the Pharisees but the Herodians.
  1. Not much is known about them.
  2. They were followers and supporters of Herod the Great and the family line.
  3. Jewish, aligned with Rome and the local ruler, Herod, who ruled under Rome.

- iii. The Pharisees and Herodians represent opposing methodologies. Although the Pharisees do not accept the Roman occupation, they express their opposition by separating themselves through ritual purity and praying for the arrival of a messianic deliverer. The Herodians, in representing the Herodian dynasty, have capitulated to the Romans and are promoters of Greco-Roman culture. Like the Sadducees, they reject any messianic hope and see political action as the way of promoting their own interests. (Michael Wilkins, NIV application commentary)
    - iv. Both groups viewed Jesus as a threat to their power.
  - c. They come with flattery
    - i. Teacher – they don't heed his teaching or view him as a rabbi
    - ii. You are truthful – literally we know you are true, usually said of a true statement but here applied to His very being
    - iii. You teach the way of God in truth
    - iv. Defer to no one for you are not partial to any
      - 1. Setting Him up, because if he doesn't reply then they could say he is not a man of integrity and is swayed by men.
  - d. The question – is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?
    - i. Sometimes questions are loaded – in Azerbaijan during the training, on the first day a deacon at one church asked what he should do if the pastor at his church isn't shepherding his people the way we had been talking about. His pastor wasn't there. Two days later, his pastor was there but the guy who asked the question was not. The pastor asked, what did we think should be done if a member of the church continually criticizes the pastor.
    - ii. The poll-tax is probably a census tax that had to be paid by every Jew.
      - 1. May have been as little as a denarius, one day's wage.
      - 2. But most Jewish people resented the tax.
      - 3. Carson – in AD 6 Judas of Galilee led a revolt against the first procurator because he took a census for tax purposes. Zealots claimed the poll tax was a god-dishonoring badge of slavery to the pagans.
      - 4. Why should they have to pay for the privilege of living in their own land?
      - 5. **Deuteronomy 17:15** you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman.
        - a. Some believed it violated this passage.
    - iii. However He answered He would be in trouble. If He approved of the poll-tax, most of the Jewish population would view Him as a sympathizer, if He said not to pay it, He was opening Himself up to accusations of treason and stirring up rebellion.
  - e. Jesus wasn't fooled.
    - i. He saw the malice in their question. He recognized it for what it was. Not an innocent question on His opinion but a malicious trap.
    - ii. He calls them hypocrites because they come with smiles and flattery but underneath are evil intentions.

- iii. **Psalm 55:21** His speech was smoother than butter, But his heart was war; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords.

2. Render to **Caesar** what is Caesar's; and to **God** what is God's. (22:19-22)

- a. He asks them to show Him the coin used to pay the tax.
  - i. It was a Roman coin, as opposed to more local currency.
  - ii. It likely had an image of the emperor's head on one side with the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus" and on the back, "pontifex maximus," high priest with another image of the emperor with priestly robes.
  - iii. You can see why the Jewish people objected to even the coin.
- b. He responds with a question, typical for Jesus. Whose likeness?
  - i. Caesar's
- c. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.
  - i. He uses render where they said "give"
    - 1. Render has the idea of fulfilling an obligation or expectation, paying what is due or owed.
    - 2. There are some things that are rightfully due to Caesar, and you should pay them as a citizen.
  - ii. As much as the Jewish people did not like the Romans, and for good reason, they did benefit in some ways.
    - 1. They had the Roman system of roads
    - 2. The *pax romana* led to free and safe travel throughout the Roman empire, incidentally allowing the gospel to flourish at just the right time in history when it could freely spread throughout the Roman empire.
    - 3. They benefited from the roman aqueducts.
    - 4. All these things took money and the money came from taxes.
- d. We are to be good **citizens** of our earthly country. (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17)
  - i. Romans 13:1-7
    - 1. Be in subjection to governing authorities (v 1)
    - 2. The authorities that exist, although imperfect, are established by God (v. 1-2)
    - 3. In general (though there are exceptions that the apostles faced) if you do good you have nothing to fear from the governmental authorities. (vv. 3-4)
    - 4. The key role of government is to maintain law by punishing those who do wrong. (v. 4)
      - a. One of the biggest hindrances to development is corruption.
      - b. People are unable to make investments in their lives and businesses because it may be taken away by an unjust government or a wicked person that the government does not stop.

- c. Read about one family living in a central American country. A relative was killed and no police action was taken, despite eye-witnesses. Their two milk cows were stolen and when it was reported, the police just shrugged and said that type of crime is to be expected. Why buy another cow if you think it will be stolen again?
    - d. On my trip I saw a fancy new government building. Our translator said it was a government branch dedicated to fighting corruption. But later he told me that corruption is rampant and only a few families control the government and the majority of wealth in the country.
  - 5. It's appropriate to pay taxes and give honor to those in authority. (v. 7)
- ii. 1 Peter 2:13-17
  - 1. Submit yourself to the king or to lesser authorities (v. 13)
  - 2. Again the emphasis is on the role of government to punish evil (v. 14)
  - 3. As we follow the law as model citizens, we don't give unnecessary ammunition to those who say we are a deterrent to society. (v. 15)
  - 4. We are to honor all people, love other believers, fear God, and honor the king. (v. 17)
    - a. Obligations to other citizens – honor
    - b. To believers – love
    - c. To God – fear
    - d. To the king – honor
      - i. We don't have a king, we have a president. Verse 15 is more broad than just a king, it's any human governmental institution.
      - ii. And we live in a country where there is freedom to critique without losing your head. And that's a good thing.
      - iii. But regardless of who is in the Whitehouse, we are to show honor to the office and to the person. This is true under a democrat or a republican, whether you voted for them or not, whether you agree with them or not.
- iii. If you're pleased with your country's leaders and direction, that's easier. What if you're not?
  - 1. How does this apply to believers in Azerbaijan, China, Russia?
  - 2. Encouraged to hear of a pastor in Azerbaijan speak of his love for his country.
- iv. But what if the government is unjust? What if the rulers are wicked?
  - 1. They certainly were during the times of Paul and Peter, even leading the charge in the persecution of Christians. And yet they still wrote these words.
- v. What if they forbid us to do something that God commands or command us to do something God forbids?
  - 1. Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."
  - 2. Example on my trip of believer's sharing the gospel although illegal.

- e. We are first citizens of heaven. (Philippians 3:20)
  - i. This went beyond their question. They didn't ask about this.
  - ii. What was on the coin?
    - 1. An image of Caesar.
    - 2. Therefore give it to Caesar.
  - iii. Where do we find God's image?
    - 1. Us. Humans.
    - 2. Therefore we have an obligation to God. We are to give ourselves to Him.
  - iv. As Creator He has the sovereign right over His creation. We are to live as stewards of His creation. We are to give Him our worship and primary allegiance, something we give to no nation.
  - v. We are to be good earthly citizens precisely because we are first citizens of heaven.
    - 1. **Philippians 3:20** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;
    - 2. Much like the first commandment is to love the Lord, the second is to love your neighbor.
- f. Christians have struggled to work out these two citizenships.
  - i. The danger for religious leaders is a tendency to go to extremes. On the one side they either withdraw completely from Caesar, like the Essenes at the Qumran community, or withdraw socially, like the Pharisees. On the other side they may capitulate by joining league with Caesar, like the Sadducees and Herodians, or they may take matters into their own hands and fight against Caesar, like the Zealots. As we look around at the various groups within the larger world of Christendom today, we find the same kinds of extremes. Some separatist Christians withdraw to their own world, like the Amish, or stay socially separated, like some fundamentalist groups. Others go to the other extreme and capitulate, like various liberal denominations that use politics as their primary agenda, while others use violence and bomb abortion clinics to advance their cause. Jesus' words should help us stay balanced. (Michael Wilkins, commentary on Matthew)
  - ii. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century through the Reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the church and state were united.
    - 1. People were forcibly compelled to be part of the church.
    - 2. Continued even under Luther and Calvin.
  - iii. Anabaptists insisted on a firm separation.
    - 1. They wanted a true and pure church of believers – the wheat only, not the tares.
    - 2. Insisted on baptism for believers not babies because they didn't believe that everyone born into the "Christian country" was automatically a Christian.
    - 3. They were persecuted and killed by Catholics and Protestants alike throughout Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.
    - 4. One of the most famous in this movement was Menno Simons, from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. His followers became known as Mennonites. Still more than half a million

throughout the US with a range of different groups – some almost like Amish, others similar to standard evangelical churches.

- a. As well as a commitment to believer's baptism and the responsibilities of a local congregation (rather than a state church) he rejected any Christian participation in government. This was to remain a common feature of Anabaptist thought.

3. Give God what is His – you.

- a. More than an intellectual exercise on the proper role of the government, the importance of this passage is that we are created by God and owe Him our very lives.
- b. Sin is rejecting God's ownership and authority over our lives, choosing instead to run the show and make the rules ourselves.
- c. **Romans 1:18-21** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
- d. **Romans 3:23-24** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;
- e. **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



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