

The Commands of Christ

Command # 30

“Render Unto Caesar”

Matthew 22:15-21

In tonight’s text (v. 21) Jesus utters what is surely one of His best remember phrases when he says, *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*

It is also in this verse that we find the next command of Christ. The command is found when Jesus said to, *“render (apodote - literally pay back) to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”*

But first let’s step back in time and try to understand the context of this statement. The context is that the Pharisee’s are again trying to trap Jesus. The Pharisees and the Herodians; who are normally enemies, are in this plot together. The Pharisees hated Jesus because he was a treat to their authority and agenda and thus to their religious system. The Herodians hated Jesus because they perceived him as a threat to their political arrange-ments with the Romans. About the only thing that these two groups could agree on was that Jesus had to go.

In verse fifteen we are told, *“Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. (16) And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.(17) “Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*

Verse sixteen tells that they developed a plan hoping that they could catch Jesus on the highly-charged question of taxation. The Romans collected several taxes from the Jews, beginning with the ground tax – ten percent tax of grain and one-fifth of wine and oil. Then there was an income tax, which was one percent of all cash income and the poll tax, which, of course, the Zealots and the Pharisees particularly resented. Every male Jew from fourteen to sixty-five years old was required to pay the toll tax – one denarius – just for being alive.... Altogether the Jews paid about thirty-three percent in taxes to Rome.” They did in fact pay taxes to Rome but they resented it.

They ask him a question which allows only a “yes” or “no” answer. They ask is it “lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” But these men were hypocrites, they were not really interested in Jesus solving any theological problems for them, they are interested only in trapping Jesus. They carefully framed their question so that Jesus would have to answer either yes or no, to pay or not to pay! Their trap was the presentation of two wrong choices and demanding that Jesus pick one or the other. Taxation and taxes was a sensitive subject in his day, even as it is today. The payment of taxes has never been popular. Taxes are not a voluntary contribution. To

fail to pay ones taxes or to pay less than one should is a sure way to get the attention of the government or to discover just how strong it feels about the payment of taxes. Even today not many of us send off our payment to the IRS and say, *"Boy, I feel good about that."*

If he said, "yes" they think that the people will desert Him. If he said "no" then the religious leaders could bring him before the Roman authorities on charges of sedition.

In verse eighteen, the response of Jesus was not at all what they had expected, *"But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? (19) "Show (epideixate - imperative aorist active) Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. (20) And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" (21) They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."*

Notice first the difference between what they asked and how Jesus answered. They had asked in verse 17 *"is it lawful to pay"* the word (*dounai*) is literally to *"give."* The word "give" is used because paying any tax to Rome was not considered a legitimate duty and was done only with the greatest reluctance. It was a little like the story I heard of a man who had written the IRS a letter which said, "My conscience has been bothering me. Enclosed you will find \$175 which I owe in taxes. If my conscience continues to bother me, I will send the rest." They paid their taxes, but with the utmost reluctance.

They asked *"is it lawful to give,"* underline the word *"lawful"* in your text. The word *"lawful"* here means *"is it lawful according to Scripture."* They tried to make it a theological question. The question is not whether or not any person should pay taxes but whether or not a Jew should pay taxes to a heathen, Gentile government.

Jesus responds to the question by saying *"show me the tax money"* he asking them to produce a coin, but not just any coin, but one of the coins used to pay the tax. Jesus' answer was not that they should "give" (v. 17) to Caesar but that they should "render or pay back" what already belonged to him. It is a generally acknowledged principle that authority of a king extended over the area in which currency bearing his image was used.

The mere fact that these men possessed and used these coins answered their own question, by their use of Caesar's coinage. By doing so, they tacitly accepted his rule. As Jesus pointed out in his choice of words, it was only right that they should pay back to him in tribute from his own money

Caesar provided them with government, with Roman organization, security (Pax Roma), system of roads and a legal system.

Anyone in complete obedience to God would be bound by those laws of Rome which are not in conflict with the laws of God.

There are therefore two basic questions to consider; what do we owe to human government and what do we owe to God.

What Do We Owe To Human Government?

"Render ... to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."

There is of course, an on going application.

Caesar is head of the Roman system, is represent-ative of human government as a whole. We no longer answer to Caesar but we do answer to some form of human government. The question for us today is, *"What do we owe to human government? Is there an obligation?"* Jesus said there was. In its simplest form, Jesus tells that we should pay our share of taxes. (And no the IRS did not hire me to preach this message just before tax time rolls around!)

I have heard some use as an excuse for their not paying taxes; the fact that they refused to pay taxes to a godless government. The Apostle Paul had some interesting words of advice concerning this issue in his letter to the church at Rome, (Romans 13:1-7), *"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. (2) Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (3) For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. (4) For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. (5) Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. (6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. (7) Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."*

If in an age when the ruler was a pagan emperor, and in which Christian's were be persecuted, believers were obligated to pay taxes, how much more should modern Christians who live in free and democratic society. We are reminded that God has formed human government for our good and His purpose and God has called us to be good citizens. Our testimony as Christian demands it. And unless the government asks us to do something immoral or against the plain teaching of Scripture then we are to willingly submit and pay what we owe. We are commanded to be law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. It is what we owe. We are to take part in the political life of country. Christian's ought to be the best citizens in any country in the world.

According to the Bible God has ordained three spheres of authority in this world – the family, the state and the church. In the sphere of the family, parents are God's delegated authority. In the sphere the state human government is given authority for the enforcement of justice and the prevention of social chaos. The church is given authority in the spiritual realm.

What Do We Owe To God?

But Jesus went beyond even what they asked when he said, "*Renderto God the things that are God's.*"

Why do we owe God?

1. We are his by right of Creation.

What do we owe to Christ? We owe Him ourselves, literally and wholly. We owe God everything. The debt to God that we owe is so great that it can never be paid in full. But while the debt cannot be paid in full, it must always be paid to date.

Dr. Brouwer, a Dutch theologian said, "The coin bears Caesar's image; man bears the God's image, so give the coin to Caesar – mean pay tax – but give yourself to wholly to God." Just as the coin bore the image of Caesar and thus belonged to him, our lives bear the image of our Creator, for we are made in the image of God. Moses, in the story of the creation recorded in Genesis 1 (v. 27) said, "*o God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*"

We are God's coin we bear his image.

God is not interested collecting taxes from us but he is interested in redeeming us, changing us, conforming us to be more like Him.

2. We Are His By Right Of Purchase.

He not only created us, but he has bought us as well. The Apostle Paul says in his letter to Corinth (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (20) For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*" We have been bought with a price and Peter tells us what that price was, (1 Peter 1:18-19) *"knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* We have been bought with a price, the price of the precious blood of Christ shed at Calvary.

"Years ago I heard a story of a young boy who had spent many hours carving himself a little sailboat to play with in a stream near his home. One day as he was playing with the boat, the current caught it and pulled it downstream. He was not quick enough or agile enough to make his way through the thick underbrush down by the riverbank to catch it, and it went out of sight. It was lost. He mourned for the boat, but finally gave up looking. And it was some time later that he was passing a store which sold model and he spied the boat in the window. He thought it was his, and on upon closer examination, found that it was. He went into the store

and told the store owner his story. The store owner replied that he had purchased the boat from someone who had found it. And although he wanted this young boy to have it back, he could not just give it back. The boy would have to buy it for what he had paid for it. The boy returned home and came back with the money. And after paying for it he said to it as he walked down the street, 'Little boat you are twice mine. I made you and I bought you. Your...twice mine.' So God can say about us, 'I made you and I bought you, you are twice mine.' [J. David Hoke. "What We Owe." Sermon on Mark 12:13-17- www.sermoncentral.com]

What Then Do We Owe To God

I just want to touch on two things briefly that we owe to God.

We Owe Him Worship

One thing that believer could not obey Caesar in was his call to be worshipped, the phrase was "*Hail Kurios Caesar*" or "*hail to Lord Caesar.*" Paul said well when he stated in 1 Corinthians 8:6, "*yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*"

Let me shall with you three scriptures of why we own him our worship.

Col 1:16, "*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (17) And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (18) And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*"

Eph 1:20-21, God has "... raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, (21) far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."

Phil 2:9-11, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, (10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, (11) and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

We Owe Him Obedience

In John 14:15, Jesus said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*"