

Matthew 22:15-22

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 7/01/2012

Render to God what is God's!

Prayer

Father, what a tremendous privilege it is that we can come together and we can worship You. We are so thankful for all that You are and all that You have done. We praise You for who You are; You are holy and righteous and good and merciful and kind and loving. And we praise You for what You have done; You have sent Your Son Jesus to die for our sins. We are so thankful for His sacrifice and Your love demonstrated in that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Father, we are thankful that You used Your mighty word – the gospel – to pierce our hearts. It is Your power unto salvation; and that for those of us who are saved, You brought us forth by the Word of Truth. And we are so thankful that You use Your Word to grow us in respect to salvation, to grow us in the likeness of Christ. I pray You would do that today. I pray we would set aside all sin; we would confess it; we would receive Your Word implanted; we would allow it to have Your intended work in our lives. We pray that You would bless Your Word as it goes out now, and we thank You for this time. In Jesus' name, amen.

Sermon

Well, if you follow politics –I do not suggest that you do, but if you do follow politics – some interesting things happened this week: as even Bob mentioned that the Supreme Court upheld the Obama Care Law thing and for temporarily there is a big debate over if that is a tax or not and how Christians should respond to it. And even non-Christians are debating how they should respond to it. And the reality is that we live in the context of a government, right? And there has been times here at this church where there have been people who have come and gone who are very focused on political issues and governmental issues. And I am not saying that that is wrong, but sometimes that can be very wrong and we will talk about that. But just about every conversation with some of these people had to do with some issue (or not) relating to the government or whatever it might be. And yes, our government does make wicked decisions, but they also do some good things, as we will see. And it can be tempting to be focused on these things. It can be tempting to be distracted from the things above and to set our mind on the things of earth.

As citizens of this country and citizens of heaven, how are we to go about addressing the wrongs that we see rightly in government? How are we to go about it? Should we be protesting? Should we use civil disobedience? What should we do concerning abortion? What about taxes? What should we do concerning taxes? You are probably aware that much of our tax money goes to very wicked things. It is very clear that our tax money goes to support abortion which is murder. It is very clear that our tax money goes to support all kinds of bad stuff. What should we do about that? Should we not pay taxes

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because our money would then be supporting these things? This leads us to what we are going to see today, I believe; where we are going to see very clearly how we are to live in the midst of an ungodly world, that we are to render to Caesar, as we will see today, what is his and render to God what is His.

Would you turn in your Bibles with me to Matthew, chapter 22? And it has been just a wonderful study in the book of Matthew, and I have just been so blessed by it and I hope you have been blessed by it. I just love having studied this more in depth. And as we come to this point in this Passion - what is called the Passion Week (this last week of Christ's life on this earth before He would die and be raised from the dead) - it just makes so much more sense having studied the context coming into this portion, and I hope you have been blessed by that. Matthew 22 and we are going to be looking at verses 15-22.

Now as I have shared, Jesus is in the last week of His life before He would be crucified and buried and raised on the third day. He has come for 3 years. He has come to a people sitting in darkness and they saw a great light. He has taught His Word and preached the gospel, as we see. He has called for repentance, the way having been prepared by John the Baptist. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The kingdom of God is at hand. We saw very clearly that Israel rejected the truth of Jesus. They marveled at it; they were interested in what He did, but they rejected the truth concerning their need for a savior, their need to repent of their sins and to trust in Him. We see very clearly that the Lord allowed them to go their own way: that He allowed their eyes to be blinded and their ears to be clogged or to be stuffed that they would not hear and see. We saw the leadership also rejecting Christ but in a hostile fashion desiring to destroy Him.

And now we have come to the last week, as I have shared, of Christ's life on earth before He would die and rise from the dead. And remember we saw on Sunday the "not-so-triumphal entry," where the King came in, not as a triumphant general but as a humble servant on a colt. We saw the crowds cheering and sharing truth about Jesus from Psalm 118. "Hosanna, Son of David," (*save now, I pray*). But we saw the Lord Jesus as He is was coming down the Mount of Olives in Luke, chapter 19, weeping - not rejoicing but weeping - over the city as He was entering because they had missed the day of visitation and they would be destroyed in judgment. They had missed the Lord visiting them personally and offering salvation to them.

We saw Him come to the temple, look around and then go back to Bethany, lodge for the night and then come the next day (Monday morning); and as He came, He saw a beautiful fig tree, expecting to have fruit on it. And when He came up to it, that beautiful tree had nothing. It was just like Israel as He cursed it; it represented the reality of Israel. They looked beautiful on the outside; they were following all the things of God's Word, but yet they were not doing them as we see with the Pharisees. They were honoring with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. And we saw Him go to the temple and cleanse out all those who were buying and selling animals for sacrifices. We saw Him clear out the money changers, those who had turned His house into a robbers' den - a place to extort money from the people rather than a house of prayer for the nations as the Lord would say. We saw that the Pharisees were upset and the Sadducees and the leadership were upset at Jesus. He was teaching and preaching and healing and receiving worship in the temple. And on Tuesday, these leaders got the

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“guts” to come up and confront Jesus, “By what authority do you do these things?” (All the things that He had done.) And He turned the tables on them and “counter-punched” in a sense to them sharing, “Well, I will answer you if you will tell me by what authority is John’s baptism. Is it from heaven or is it from earth?” Because He knew that they did not believe. And very clearly in their wickedness, they decided to not answer because it would have revealed their guile and wickedness that they did not believe the truth of John that they needed to repent. So they said they did not know.

And then at this point, Jesus in the temple shares three parables to the leadership that had confronted Him with the multitudes listening. This is the last week. This is very significant. And we have looked at those three parables already. We saw the first one, the parable of the two sons where a father asked the son to go work in the vineyard and he said, “I will go” and then he did not go. And then the father asked another son to go work in the vineyards, and he said, “I am not going to do it.” And then he felt remorse; he repented and he turned and obeyed his father. And Jesus asked in light of that parable, “Which did the will of the father?” It is the one who actually obeyed. And we see very clearly in the context of this parable that God was very clearly addressing their sin, the wickedness of these Pharisees who would say, “Yes, we will do what You say,” but yet were not obedient. And yet we will see very clearly the tax gatherers and sinners, those who had heard the message of John to repent, did turn. They had regretted their disobedience. They turned and they were following Christ, and they would enter the kingdom of heaven – not these wicked leaders.

And then we came to another parable, where we saw so, so clearly that the Lord God had reached out. He was gracious. He was gracious. We saw the parable of the tenant farmers. He had given Israel authority or given the leadership authority over Israel. And these tenants had beaten the slaves and had killed the son, representing the prophets that had come to share the truth. And they would kill the Lord Jesus themselves – very wicked. And then we saw very clearly that the offer of salvation would be turned to all; that He would go to a nation producing fruit rather than to the wicked leadership who had rejected Him, that foreshadowing of the word of God moving from Israel to the Gentiles.

And then last week, we saw a wonderful parable of a wedding banquet, a parable that shows the graciousness of God to continue to offer to Israel over and over again the offer of salvation - to offer it to them free of charge - and the leadership rejecting and ultimately killing the slaves. And we saw God’s response in this parable, that He would destroy those murderers and He would destroy their city and set it aflame (a foreshadowing of the destruction of Jerusalem because of their sin). But we also saw very clearly that the banquet would go on, that God’s offer of salvation would move. And we saw so clearly that it would move to those... they were instructed to go out on the outer roads and offer to the good and evil to come to the banquet. And we see that foreshadowing again: God’s Word going from Israel to the whole world, to the Gentiles.

And then we had one last turn in that parable, as we saw last week, that this banquet represented the reality of salvation (a banquet that the king was throwing for his son, a marriage or a wedding feast). And there was one man in there who did not have wedding clothes on; and the king spotted him right away and said, “Why do you not have wedding clothes?” And the reality is that it represents those who

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do respond to the call of Jesus, but yet respond on their own initiative, through their own abilities and in their own works, refusing the reality that Christ will clothe us with His righteousness if we trust in Him, repenting of sin. And that person was cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Three parables that very clearly were aimed at the leadership concerning their wickedness and their rejection of Christ. And after this point, giving three parables, we see the religious leadership steps up their efforts to kill Jesus.

Today we will see one of three questions posed to Jesus to try to trip Him up. The question we will see today is concerning paying taxes to Caesar. So with that in mind, will you turn in your Bibles again to Matthew, chapter 22, and we are going to see how we are to live in an ungodly world. We are going to see very clearly that Jesus with His all-wise reproof of these wicked leaders reveals who we are to truly render ourselves to. Matthew 22:15,

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said. (This is after those three parables, okay?) ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "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 therefore, what do You think: Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. ²⁰ And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." ²² And hearing this, they marveled, and leaving Him, they went away. [Matthew 22:15-22]

Now obviously, we are going to see something today that deals with the issue of taxes. But that is not the full focus of this passage. We are going to see very clearly that there are some principles that we need to understand that go way beyond this in the context of what Jesus shares to these leaders. Now ultimately at this day, Rome was over Israel and there was a great conflict at this time. You see, Israel was a theocracy; they believed that they were only under the Lord; but yet they were under Rome, and they hated it. They hated being under Rome because Rome was a pagan government with Caesar who would declare himself to be divine in that context. So these leaders are actively going to attempt at this point (after Jesus has condemned them and they know it)... they are going to try to entrap Him.

Again our passage: “¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “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 therefore, what do You think: Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” Notice our passage begins with the term *then*. It is right after those parables of judgment upon the leadership in the temple. And we need to recognize the narrow context of this passage is that these leaders understood that Jesus had spoken against them. Look back a little bit. Matthew 21:45,

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⁴⁵ And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet. [Matthew 21: 45-46]

And we see in the book of Luke that they were concerned that they would be killed by the multitudes because of their reverence, at least in the moment, of Jesus. And we see very clearly from the book of Luke that they were so upset concerning Jesus' condemnation that they wanted to get Him right at that point. Luke, chapter 20. (Put your finger in Luke also; we will be going back and forth between Matthew 22 and Luke, chapter 20.) Luke, chapter 20, verse 17. And this goes with what we have been studying so you will remember this from the second parable that we looked at. Luke, chapter 20, verse 17. Now Jesus is looking at the Pharisees after condemning them with the parable – that one in which they had killed the servants and they had killed the son. Verse 17 of Luke 20,

¹⁷ But He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone'? ¹⁸ "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." (That is a statement of judgment. The stone is Jesus Christ. If you reject Christ, He will be your downfall. And these leaders had rejected Him; He would smash them in judgment. And notice what the next verse says. Verse 19.) ¹⁹ And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. [Luke 20:17-19]

They were actively, in the moment, wanting to kill Him. After those three parables, they wanted to get Him, and they wanted to kill Jesus after that point, as we will see. But yet they were fearing the multitudes so they hatch a different plan as we will see (and we will see that today). They hatch a wicked plan as they attempt to try to trip up Jesus in His words. Notice this wicked plot enacted. Back to our passage in Matthew, chapter 22, verse 15: "¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said. ¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians..." The Pharisees counseled together along with the Herodians. We will talk about that. In Luke, chapter 20, it appears that the chief priests and the scribes were involved in this also. The leadership of Israel was involved in this counseling how to trap Him.

Now just briefly, if you will remember, a Pharisee specifically came from the strictest sect as Paul would share in Acts 26, verse 5. The term *Pharisee* meant *separated one*. And these were those who were religious, legalistic, self-righteous, nationalistic, isolationist on their way to hell. We will see in chapter 23 Jesus' condemnation – His woes – of these Pharisees who were clean on the outside but wicked on the inside; those who were leading people into hell and who would not escape the sins of hell themselves. They were extremely prideful; they elevated themselves. They were religious hypocrites. They were legalistic, religious hypocrites - outwardly serving the God of Scripture but inwardly serving themselves. "¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said." This an interesting word *might trap*. It is a hunting term. It actually speaks of laying a snare;

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setting a trap; enticing someone into a trap. So how are these Pharisees wanting to trap Jesus? Let's look at the parallel passage that Bob read in Luke 20. How are they going to do this? Luke 20:19,

19 And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.
20 And they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so as to deliver Him up to the rule and the authority of the governor. (And then we have our passage in parallel.) ***21 And they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak... (and all this flattery as we will see.)"*** [Luke 20:19-21]

They sent spies; they wanted to trap Him in what He would say. The Pharisees did not actually come themselves, as we will see. They sent their disciples, their learners underneath them. And they are just as wicked as their leaders or their teachers. And they sent them most likely to disarm Jesus. It was not the official leadership, but someone appearing to be righteous asking a question that appears to be genuine. It is very wicked, very wicked, what they are doing. It is a wicked plot. Ultimately they want to catch Him in some statement so that they can hand Him over to the governor. And that really gives us an idea of the direction of what they are trying to do here. They are not only trying to discredit Him in front of the multitudes; they actually want Him to say something against Caesar so that they can hand Him over to the governor who has authority to put Him to death. You see, treason in this time against Rome was enough to warrant execution by Rome. And if they could hear it from His mouth, to catch Him up in His words, they could deliver Him as we saw in Luke to the governor and ultimately let the governor and the Romans kill Him. And that was their desire. So that is the plot of what they are trying to do here. And we see that here.

Back in our passage – middle of 15: ¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and counseled together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples (That is the sneaky part; that the spies that are pretending to be righteous.) to Him, along with the Herodians..." And that is an interesting, wicked alliance, by the way. If you know who the Herodians were, they were those Jews who were really rebels against Israel. They were those who wanted the rule of Rome, thus the Herodians. They like Herod; they wanted the rule of Rome. And the Pharisees and the leadership and the Herodians hated one another. But here we have an unholy alliance ultimately in the context to trip Him up because these Herodians, if they spotted Jesus saying something against Caesar, would certainly report that, would they not? So you see the wickedness in this plot. Wicked alliance. And they are trying to catch Jesus off guard by not officially confronting Him, sending their disciples – their learners – to do their dirty work. And notice, they go and do their dirty work. They are pretty well-trained from their wicked teachers.

Look at verse 16: ¹⁶And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one (I think of those little Bible videos for kids and they would have a little, sly voice, "Teacher, we know..." (in a sly, mischievous voice) You know, you can tell right now they are basically flattering. That is what we are going to see. It says, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one.");

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for You are not partial to any. ¹⁷ Tell us therefore, what do You think: Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" Everything they are saying after their question is true. Everything they are saying. Yes, Jesus is truthful. Yes, He does teach the way of God in truth. Yes, He did not defer to anyone; He taught authoritatively as God in flesh. He had no partiality. These are truths about the living God, but the only problem is these disciples and their leaders did not believe it at all. It was a lie. It was a lie. It was flattery to set Him up; flattery to catch Him off guard. And folks, flattery is a great sin. It is a great sin. It is very evil. It is very wicked. And it is usually used by the wicked. Flattery is a form of lying in order to get one's way. It is designed to disarm someone and to feed into their pride. Flattery is wicked. It is actually said that it is the reverse of gossip. Gossip is saying something behind someone's back that you would not say in their presence. And flattery is saying something in their presence you would not say behind their back because you do not believe it. It is a very wicked, wicked, awful sin. It is used to gain advantage. And they in their wickedness, because they do not believe in Jesus, believe that He might fall for this. But we know that God cannot be tempted by sin.

Flattery is always a sign of the wicked in Scripture, not of the godly. Listen to what David says in Psalm 12. Let's turn there. Psalm 12,

For the choir director; upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David . ¹ Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases to be, for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. ² They speak falsehood to one another; with flattering lips and with a double heart they speak. ³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things. [Psalm 12:1-3]

Flattery is seen in Scripture in the context of the ungodly. The godly man has ceased to exist. The wicked are here; they are flattering with their lips. May God cut off all flattery. As Bob read very clearly in Proverbs 29,

⁵A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps. [Proverbs 29:5]

There are motives behind flattery, wicked motives. And we see very clearly that those who cause divisions in church, not according to the doctrinal truth of the Word of God, use flattery. Turn to Romans, chapter 16, verse 17. Wicked men that we are all commanded to watch out for do this. And there are wicked women that do it also. The apostle Paul is giving his good-byes in the book of Romans. He is in the last chapter and he is saying good-bye, greet this person, do this, do this; and all of a sudden he breaks through with this last command compelled by the Holy Spirit to share it. It must be very important in the middle of his good-byes. Chapter 16, verse 17,

¹⁷ Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye (Scope out – skopeo – keep your eye) on those who cause dissensions (That is divisions.) and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; (And look at this!) and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting. [Romans 16:17-18]

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People use flattery to deceive you. And that is what they were trying to do. They were trying to catch Jesus off guard that He might blurt out something (at least from their viewpoint); and they might catch Him (as we saw in Luke) in His words. Flattery is the *modus operandi* - I do not know if I said that right, police officers - the *modus operandi* (or whatever that is!). You know what I am talking about. It is the *modus operandi* of false prophets and false teachers. We saw in Ezekiel that the wicked false prophets used flattering divination. They used visions and divinations that flattered people. "God is saying, 'This is going to happen to you.'" We see in Jude, verse 16, very clearly wicked false teachers use flattery for the sake of gaining advantage. Let's turn there. Jude, verse 16. Right at the end of your Bibles before Revelation. This is speaking of false teachers who have crept in unnoticed; those marked out long beforehand for condemnation. Jude, verse 16, and he is giving a description of what they are like for our warning's sake. Jude, verse 16,

¹⁶ These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, (And look at this!) flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage. [Jude 16]

That is what they are doing! You see, godly men and women do not flatter, especially those in ministry. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:5,

⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed – God is witness... [1 Thessalonians 2:5]

But, folks, the wicked do. They come with flattery – that is one of their tactics and that is what the wicked Pharisees are doing with their disciples and the Herodians. Let me share one last passage. Turn with me to Proverbs 26. We get great warning in the Proverbs concerning how we should respond to those who are attempting to flatter us. We are given great instruction. Proverbs 26:23,

²³ Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross are burning lips and a wicked heart. ²⁴ He who hates disguises it with his lips, but he lays up deceit in his heart. (Listen to this!) ²⁵ When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart. ²⁶ Though his hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. ²⁷ He who digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. ²⁸ A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin. [Proverbs 26:23-28]

Flattery is wicked sin and that is what they are doing here. "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." They are flattering for the sake of gaining advantage; for tripping Him up. Now it does not mean we cannot give compliments when God is given the glory. That is different, but flattery is where there is a wicked heart motive - maybe speaking truth to gain advantage over someone, or to deceive them. And that is what they are doing. And we have had situations here at this church. The worse situations we have had in this church were people who were flatterers. They would come to me; specifically I remember a situation: "Oh,

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Greg, that sermon was soooo good.” And they would say things that were true about the sermon, and I was like, “Yikes!” And these people turned out to be very wicked and sinful. Flattery is wicked.

And notice, they guise their wickedness in flattery. “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. Tell us therefore, what do You think?” They are coming in a level of respect. “What do You think? We are respecting what You say.” That is the guise here. And here is the trick question; here is the “loaded” question: “Is it lawful to pay poll-tax to Caesar or not?”

Now we need to have the historical background to recognize how wicked this statement is. And there are some principles that we can learn from it. You see, the Jews were controlled by Rome and the Romans levied multiple and different types of taxes on different goods and services. And there was all kinds of tax. But there was one tax called the poll-tax and that tax was for no goods or no services. It was levied on people who were controlled by the Roman Empire. It was a tax just for being in their empire. And that tax would remind you that you are subject to Rome. And it was usually for this reason that they would take censuses so that they could then bring about the tax upon every citizen or everyone subject in Rome – the poll-tax.

And the Jews hated it. The Jews hated it. And it was paid with what is called the denarius, as we will see. It was a silver coin minted by the emperor that was equivalent to a day’s wage. So what is so sneaky about this statement: “Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” Luke says, “...pay taxes to Caesar.” Is it lawful to do that? Well, these Pharisees rightly understood that the Jews hated being under Roman rule. They hated it! They hated paying tax to a pagan society. As we will see in a moment, these coins – this denarius – actually had a picture of Tiberius Caesar on one side in priestly robes on the throne with an inscription “High Priest.” And on the other side was an inscription: “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus.” The coin basically says, “Caesar is God,” essentially. It is a blasphemous coin to a believer, right? That is not true; Caesar is not God. God is God. Jesus Christ is God, right? So you can start to see the trap here. They are saying, “Is it lawful to pay tax to Caesar?” And probably they could discredit Him if He said “Yes” - He’s a blasphemer. Why would He pay a blasphemous tax? Why would he give honor to the one who says he is the Divine? Or they are hoping more likely, from what we saw in Luke, that He is going to denounce the tax; that He is going to be caught off guard. This is blasphemous – “No, you do not have to pay it” – and then they could send Him to the governor and crucify Him. That is basically what is going on. So they design this ultimately to throw Him off guard that He might speak rashly or fast; that He might incriminate Himself with His words that they could deliver Him up because they wanted to kill Him.

So how does Jesus respond? We all know this, but it is just marvelous to see the wisdom of God. Verse 18: “But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, ‘Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?’” Remember this is in the middle of the temple; the multitudes are there. The leadership have been thoroughly put down through the parables and shown that they are going to judgment. They understand that and they have sent these guys to come in and pose these questions. And the word *perceived* speaks of knowing, knowledge - *ginosko*. He knew their malice or the word *poneria*- it speaks of evil or wickedness. He

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knew their wickedness. You see, God knows our thoughts. God knows what you are thinking right now, and He knew exactly what they were thinking then. Jesus perceived or literally knew their malice.

And notice what He says: “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?” Very clear reproof. As we saw earlier in Matthew, the word *hypocrite* is an interesting word. From the Greek, it spoke of one who wore a mask; an actor who was playing someone other than who they really were. It came to speak of someone who gave the appearance of one thing but yet were something else. And Jesus calls it like it is. And remember these religious leaders, and ultimately their disciples as we see here, were hypocrites. On the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “You hypocrites. You come out. You share your long prayers on the street corners. You give with the bells ringing and with trumpets sounding - so the people will see you. You are hypocrites!” We saw in chapter 15, they are hypocrites because they worship with their lips but their heart is far. And if you do so, you are a hypocrite. In chapter 23, we will see the Lord Jesus make it clear that these hypocrites are not saved; they are on their way to hell because they may be clean on the outside, but their inside is full of dead men’s bones. They are still in their sins, and they will go to hell having rejected Christ; not repenting of sins and not trusting in Him.

So God is calling them to the mat: “Why are you testing Me?” It is interesting, this word *peirazo*. It is the same word used to speak of either temptation or testing. It is what the devil is called in Matthew 4:3: the tempter, the *peirazo*. These wicked leaders are trying to test Jesus. We saw it back in chapter 16, they were trying to test Him, wanting a sign from heaven. We saw it in chapter 19, they were trying to test Him with the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” And I am so thankful in James 1 that God cannot be *peirazo* – He cannot be tempted or tested like Eve was, it is not going to work because He is a holy, righteous God and He cannot be tested.

And we also see very clearly that men can and try to do evil and wickedness and try to test God. Deuteronomy 6:16,

¹⁶ You shall not put the LORD your God to the test... [Deuteronomy 6:16a]

The Lord clearly calls these men out, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?” And there may be some of you like this. You do not want anything to do with Christ so you are always asking wicked, sneaky questions to try and trip up Christians to maybe make them falsely speak so you can prove them wrong. You want to discredit God because you want to live your life your own way. But God would call you a hypocrite and would say, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?” And we will see in Matthew 23 in just a few weeks that if you are a hypocrite, if you are something different on the inside that what you are on the outside, if you are not redeemed, then your destiny is punishment in hell.

So at this point, Jesus could have said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites,” and walked away, right? There certainly is a precedent for that to walk away from a situation like this, and the Lord has been silent at times. And we will see Him be silent when He is being tested; but at this point, He does not walk away. Notice what He does. He says in verse 19 (Actually I will read back – verse 17): “¹⁷Tell us therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” ¹⁸But Jesus perceived (or knew) their malice (or wickedness), and said, ‘Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show Me the

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coin used for the poll-tax.' (Very specific. "Show Me that specific coin" because that is what they are saying. "Is it lawful to pay to Caesar?") And they brought Him a denarius."

You can imagine: you have these crowds in the Temple. They are hanging on every word that Jesus is sharing. The Pharisees are trying to set Him up, and you have Jesus sharing here. And they go to get the coin, and they bring it back. In verse 20: "And He said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?'²¹They said Him 'Caesar's.' Then He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.'" I want to point something out here just so you remember it later, but they in their question say, "Is it lawful to *didomi* or give to Caesar the poll-tax?" Jesus will say *paradidomi* – give back. It is a different word, and we will look at that in a minute. And it is important.

So He says, "Show me the coin used for the poll-tax," and they give Him a denarius. And the question was "Whose likeness....?" There is a picture on there, right? None of us have pictures of our current President on our coins, do we? No! But Caesar was there on their coins. He was the leader – Caesar Tiberius at this time. And He says, "Whose likeness and inscriptions is this?" And they said, "Caesar's." Remember on this coin there was his picture; he was in priestly robes. He was the high priest, in the sense, on that coin. And on the other side, very clearly it said he was the son of the Divine – very blasphemous. He says, "Whose is it?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." So Jesus said to them, "Then render (Give back, not give. Give back,) to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God, the things that are God's." And we have this famous – very famous – proverbial truth that Jesus gives: *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*. You all have probably heard this. And this is where it comes from. God in marvelous fashion through His infinite wisdom, through the person of Christ in whom there are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, confounds these religious hypocrites attempting to destroy Him. And from this, we see their wicked plot failed. Take a look at Luke, chapter 20, verse 24 again. Same situation, different writer, account, from the gospel of Luke. Verse 24, chapter 20,

²⁴ "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's." ²⁵ And He said to them, "Then render (give back) to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²⁶ And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent. [Luke 20:24-26]

They were silenced. They were like that man in the parable, totally silenced. They had no response to the ultimate, perfect wisdom of the living God confronting sinful man. No response – they were silenced. And here we see a principle established and I want to share this just for a moment concerning this "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's." We see a principle established here that God has instituted authorities –even wicked authorities – and we are to give back what is due to them. And we will see that. We are to give back and I want to digress for a moment because this is the basis of what we will see in Romans, chapter 13; 1 Peter, chapter 2; and also in Titus, chapter 3. We are going to look at a few of these things.

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Rome was a wicked government and they used their money for wickedness; but yet the very things they did with it also did some good things. They took care of prisoners and criminals, but they also falsely accused and killed people. The very coin used was blasphemous. And remember back in chapter 17 in Matthew, the Lord Jesus Christ paid the tax to the temple to not offend those. He paid them that very tax that would be used - the money out of the treasury - to pay for His betrayal by Judas. So here we have Jesus saying, "Give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Let's take a look. Let's turn to Titus, chapter 3 for just a minute and take a look at some passages really briefly that carry these principles. And then we will move back to our passage. Titus, chapter 3. Wonderful passage, and I wish we had time to get into it (I had to cut my notes down quite a bit on these passages) because they are so wonderful. We have gone through them before and if you really want to look more in depth, you can grab a sermon from out in the hall in Titus and also in 1 Peter. Titus, chapter 3, verse 1. Paul tells Titus, who is to appoint elders in Crete, he says here:

¹Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, ²to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. [Titus 3:1-2]

Remind them to place themselves under the authority of rulers and authorities; to be obedient. The word is an interesting word. It means *obedient to authority* or *obedient to rulers*. It is not the regular word for *obedience*. "... to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." And as Paul had said earlier, those in Crete were not the greatest guys. Cretans are lazy beasts and evil gluttons and liars so you can imagine what their government was like. He says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities..." We are to be subject. You know why? Because God says so! "... to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." That is a wonderful statement on how we are to relate to our governments. If you take every action that you have in light of your political involvement or whatever it is and you lay it across the Word of God, it will reveal how you should behave. Obedient. "...ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious (There are a lot of contentious Christians in politics.), gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Why? It is not that we do not realize that those things are wicked; it is not that we do not realize they need a Savior – it is not that. But he says,

³For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. (We were just like them!) ⁴But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior... [Titus 3:3-6]

Be subject to rulers and authorities. And we going to see in a little bit that that includes paying taxes, even to wicked governments. Let's take a look at 1 Peter, chapter 2, just really briefly. First Peter 2:12.

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You see the way we behave in the world is either going to pave opportunities for the gospel and salvation for others or it is going to become a stumbling block to them. First Peter 2:12,

¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles (Well, they were Gentiles too – this is a term for non-believer. “*Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles...*”), **so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.** (Maybe that day that God visits them in salvation, they will glorify God because of your behavior which they used to slander you about.) **¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake** (Not for my sake; not for your sake; not for someone else's sake. For the Lord's sake.) **to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,** ¹⁴ **or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.** **¹⁵ For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.** (We saw very clearly the Lord silenced the ignorance of these fools by saying - “Give to Caesar's what is Caesar's. And give to God what is God's.”) **¹⁶ Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.** **¹⁷ Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.** [1 Peter 2:12-17]

We need to submit; we need to obey; and we also need to pray. Another passage: 1 Timothy, chapter 2. Turn with me. First Timothy 2. The apostle Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1,

¹ First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (And notice who he delineates here.) **² for kings and all who are in authority** (We are to be praying for those in authority over us. Why? He says here...), **in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.** (And ultimately we are going to see that it is “pray that they get saved.”) **³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior** (It is good and acceptable that we be praying for them and they will lead a quiet life.), **⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** **⁵ For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,** **⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.** [1 Timothy 2:1-6]

Submit, obey, honor and pray when it comes to your leadership. So if we take these verses and lay them across our actions, we should really see where we stand in light of the political issues.

Last passage I want to turn to which really focuses on what we see here – an expansion of what Jesus says – is Romans, chapter 13. Let's turn there together. Jesus lays the principle, as we saw in chapter 17, and He lays the principle with government here in chapter 22. And now in Romans 13, we see God, through the apostle Paul, laying these principles. Romans 13:1,

¹ Let every person (Who does that include? Everybody, right? “*Let every person...*”) **be in subjection to the governing authorities** (This is Rome. “*...be in subjection.*” Let every

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soul literally be in subjection to the authorities. Rome was in charge. Every person. And he says here is why – the end of verse 1.) **For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. [Romans 13:1]**

You cannot dodge around this. No authority is there except from God, and those who exist are established by God. This is the point Jesus made before Pilate. I will read it to you in John 19:

¹⁰ Pilate therefore said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above... [John 19:10-11a]

Be subject to all governing authorities for there is no authority except from God. We need to understand that. And then look at what happens to those who resist – maybe do not pay taxes, as we will see. He says back in Romans 13:2,

² Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. [Romans 13:2]

If you resist authority, you are resisting God. And we will talk about it; there are some qualifiers with that. I do not want you to misunderstand this because we are to obey the authorities in everything they ask until it causes us to sin, right? Right? Do we obey the authorities when they cause us to sin. A few real quick passages. Turn to Daniel, chapter 3 – actually I am just going to share it. You can read it later. Daniel, chapter 3, verse 13. You remember in the book of Daniel: Daniel and his friends submitted to the pagan governmental authorities, and Daniel very graciously requested that he might have a different diet. He did not come in and say, "I am a Christian, a follower of the Lord. I have to eat this food and you know you are not going to do this to me. I have rights!" He submitted, right? And he graciously asked and God was with him. And then we saw his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – they would not bow down and worship. They resisted authority at that point when it came to the worship of idols.

Acts, chapter 5. You can look at this also on your own time. When Peter and John were commanded to not speak in the name of Jesus, they said, "We must obey God rather than men." There is no authority except that which has been given by God. We are to submit in every area, every authority, except when it calls upon us to sin and the specifics are worshipping other gods and not speaking of Jesus, in that context. Back to Romans 13. Let's finish this up. Verse 3,

³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good (By the way, if you are on the freeway and the speed limit is 55, if you do not want to fear the police, then drive 55, right? If you are going 65 and sinning, you are going to be looking in your mirror, right? If you want to have not fear of authority, then obey, right? "Do what is good...", **and you will have praise from the same;** (And here you go!) **⁴for it is a minister (a diakonos) of God** (These

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wicked governments are ministers of God.) **to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword** (Swords are for killing, by the way.) **for nothing. For it is** (a *diakonos*) **a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.** ⁵**Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath** (Not because you are looking around behind you), **but also for conscience' sake** (because God says so and you are conscious towards God. "I need to obey Your Word, Lord God." Okay? And then look at verse 6.) ⁶**For because of this you also pay taxes** (Right?), **for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.** (He says, 'For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants [different word – *liturgis*; they are these ministers for God]. Aha! "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's." You see God uses government. He serves us with it – even wicked governments. And He says, "Pay taxes. Render back what is due to them." Render back what is due. Verse 7.) ⁷**Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor** (because God has put them all in authority, right?). ⁸ **Owe nothing to anyone** (Now that is not speaking of borrowing money for a house or something like that; it is speaking of your debt in the context of government here. "Owe nothing to anyone...") **except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [Romans 13:3-8]**

Back to our passage in Matthew. "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's." Pretty simple principle, right? Give back to Caesar; it is not complicated. And for us, we need to submit and obey and honor and pray concerning the government. So here, the Lord Jesus (back in our passage in Matthew as we finish up here): "Then He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.'"

Now there are some who have suggested that there is a dichotomy between the spiritual life and the physical life. "We do this in the physical and then we have this other area which is a spiritual area. Render to Caesar his – that is that area. Render to God His - that area." This is not what this is saying, I believe. Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and in this context, God has ordained that Caesar was over them, right? And then He says, "Render the things (Literally that is implied there) to God the things that are God's." This is an incredibly profound statement from an all-wise, all-knowing God. The things in context that were Caesar's were the things that God had granted him the authority to: to collect taxes. The things that are God's are the same in the context. They are the things He has ultimate authority over. Caesar had authority over collecting taxes. Render to Caesar. What does God have authority over? Everything! And more specifically, us. The things that belong to God are the things we see very clearly that He has authority and possession over. They are His belongings, right? Render back to Him His things.

What does that mean? First and foremost, we are His possession, right? You are not your own if you a believer; you have been bought with a price. As Paul would say in 1 Corinthians:

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**²⁰You have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.
[1 Corinthians 6:20]**

We have no right over ourselves. Render to God the things that are God's. We see in Colossians, chapter 1, that He made everything for Him and by Him, right? By Him and for Him – everything is for Christ. God alone, not Caesar, is worthy of worship, right? Render to God alone worship, not Caesar, right? Deuteronomy 6:13. You can turn there with me. Deuteronomy 6:13,

¹³You shall fear only the LORD your God (Hear that? *"You shall fear only the LORD your God."* Are you fearing anything else? *"You shall fear only the LORD your God."*); **and you shall worship Him, and swear by His name.** **¹⁴You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the people who surround you,** **¹⁵for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.** (This is speaking of Israel.) **¹⁶You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him in Massah** (That is when they were grumbling.) **[Deuteronomy 6:13-16]**

You shall fear the LORD your God. Offer to God the things that are His. Worship is to Him alone. All your time is His. All your money is His. All your talents are His. All your giftedness is His. Where you live, where you work is His decision. Are you offering those things to yourself or to others or to God? Are you giving back, rendering back, to God the things that are God's? Who do you worship and serve? The apostle John says in the end of his first epistle, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." We raise up idols in our lives all the time. And I want to ask you, are you rendering the things to God that are God's? Romans 12:1,

**¹I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.
[Romans 12:1]**

Are you offering yourself up to God in everything you do? It is not just worship time when you come here; it is a life of offering yourself to Him, submitting your members to Him rather than to sin. Render to God the things that are His. You are His! And worship alone is His, not Caesar's; Not to Caesar.

Let's finish here. Verse 22 back in Matthew. "And hearing this, they marveled, and leaving Him, they went away." Here is how Luke puts it:

²⁶And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent. [Luke 20:26]

How awful is this! He has condemned them of their sin. He has made it clear that judgment is coming and they are going to lose the kingdom, in that sense; their authority over it. He has confronted them. He has, through His perfect wisdom, unveiled their hypocrisy. He has revealed their malice. And they are marveling at His answer, but yet they are not repenting. How awful is this! Some of you marvel at

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the truth of God, but yet have not repented and turned to the living God. And this is a warning before it gets too late. These people were hardened. They were hardened to the truth. They were hardened to Christ. And even after Him confronting them in their sin and clearly revealing His perfect wisdom, they marveled; but yet, they walked away.

I began talking about paying taxes and government, and I hope we see the context here. We are to render to the authority God places in our lives the things that are theirs because God is sovereign over them. We are to submit, honor, obey and pray. We are to render what is due, what is due. But in like fashion, we are to render to God the things that are His, and that is the most important part. There are some of you here who are on the precipice of judgment like the Pharisees. But God is gracious to offer you salvation. You need to acknowledge your sin, and you need to acknowledge that you are worthy of His judgment, that you are sinful as God says so. You need to recognize that He died for your sins and He went to the grave and He rose on the third day; and that if you place your faith in Jesus Christ, turning from sin to Him, calling upon His name, He will save you. Do not let your heart be hardened like these Pharisees who would be eternally damned, as we will see in chapter 23 because of their sin and rejection of Christ.

Some of you live a life using flattery; it describes how you interact with people. You try to manipulate people by saying things good about them. It is an evidence you do not know the Living God. And I would encourage you to repent of your sin and trust in Christ. He is gracious. He will forgive you. He will forgive you. And those of us who know God, we are tempted, aren't we? We are even tempted to flatter at times, aren't we? We are tempted to do evil. We need to confess it and we need to be convicted by that. We need to render everything to God. Are you rendering everything to Him, the things that are His? What areas of your life are not rendered to Him? I mean, just be honest. What areas of your life? Just look at each part. What areas are not rendered to Him? Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but to God the things that are God's.

Prayer

Father, thank you for Your Word. It is convicting. And Lord, help each one of us to analyze our lives in light of Your Word. Help us see things rightly, to not deceive ourselves. Lord, for those who do not know You, may they recognize their state before You and repent and believe. But for those of us who do know You, may we truly render to You the things that are Yours. Convict us of areas we are holding onto, Lord God - whatever it might be. It is all Yours. May we yield our hearts in every area. "Lord, Your will be done. Whatever You want, Lord God; whatever You say, Lord God, I will do it, if You empower me. And I know You will." Lord, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your Son Jesus who brings about forgiveness of sins. And it is in His name we pray, amen.

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