

## What do we owe God?

Mark 12:13-17

There is conflict between the authority of heaven and the authority of earth. It began when Eve fell for Satan's deception...that God was withholding good things. That God couldn't be fully trusted. When Adam and Eve sinned, all humans and the whole planet was cursed. We naturally sin against God. We can see Satan's deception playing out to this day...human authorities trying to erase God's truth from our land and redefine goodness and justice. We draw closer and closer to the days of Noah where everyone did what was right in their own eyes. So, what can we do about it? Protest? Hide in the mountains to wait for Jesus? Do we owe God? How now shall we live?

### Prayer

We're three days into the last week before Jesus pays the ransom. The Sanhedrin's first attempt to trap Jesus failed. They stormed up to Him in the temple demanding where He gets the authority to judge how the temple system. (Blasphemy against the temple was punishable by death). But Jesus answered with a conditional question. I'll tell you my authority if you tell me John the Baptist's: heavenly or human origin? Jesus turned the tables. Now the delegation was in danger of being judged...by the crowd (stoning).

Instead of admitting their unbelief, they pleaded to a lesser charge of ignorance. But before they slithered away, Jesus warned them through a story. The story showed that they were the ones acting against God's authority. Jesus warned them that their plot to kill Him (the owner's only Son) would not gain them more authority. Instead, God would destroy them and provide other shepherds for His people (Apostles). Jesus is being rejected as Israel's building block for salvation, but He will become the archway entrance to God's kingdom

(Mk 12:10, Jn 10:7, 14:6).

### v13 Unholy Alliance

Pharisees and Herodians would normally be enemies. Pharisees were all about keeping to the law of God and the tradition of the elders. Herodians were all about adopting Roman culture and compromising the law. What could they possibly have in common? Fear, jealousy and unbelief. Jesus wields an authority beyond theirs and He is not afraid to exercise it. They saw this near the beginning of His ministry when He healed the man with the withered hand on a Sabbath (Mk 3:6). Jesus could not be controlled by them. So these two groups form an unholy alliance to kill Jesus.

The Greek word 'a-grew-oh' means to hunt down and catch unawares. To acquire information with the purpose of causing harm or trouble.

Jesus asks tough questions - not to destroy but to convict. He exposes sin so people might repent and to warn others. Better to repent now than wait till the judgement.

### **V14a Truth from Enemies**

Is Jesus God's fearless teacher? Of course.

So how can truth come from liars?

Because their father is the devil (Jn 8:44) who masquerades as an angel of light

(2 Cor 11:14), the great deceiver (Rev 12:9)

telling just enough truth to hook people in his lies and hate. Beware of flattery. It's still a tool of the enemy. The unholy alliance is willing to give their enemy credit for truth and courage because they want the tough truth answer.

### **V14b-15a A trap question**

The Greek word that Mark uses for "tax" is 'kane-sause', is a transliteration of the Latin word 'census'. The imperial tax was a census or head tax. Everyone in Judea, Idumea, and Samaria had to pay with a denarius straight to Rome. This started in AD 6 because Herod Archelaus (Matt 2:22), failed as the Jewish puppet-king for Rome so it became a Roman province. Think of how the people of Abraham would feel about

Jerusalem taken as province of Rome. Galilee, Perea and the northeast were still client kingdoms under the rule of Herod Antipas and Philip, respectively. They were permitted to collect their own taxes without the census tax. This census tax amounted to a day's wage for an agricultural laborer. Not a back-breaker but a huge blow to pride and freedom. This coin payment was a symbol of foreign domination and idolatry for it showed an image and inscription that people worshiped. Can a good Jew pay this idolatrous tax to Caesar and still honor God?

In AD 6, Judas the Galilean didn't believe so. He led a revolt (Acts 5:37) which was squashed by Rome but the deep hatred of foreign control continued and an organized resistance called the zealots lived on. It was the zealots who eventually incited Rome to crush the temple once and for all. It stands to reason the unholy alliance wanted Jesus to rebel against Caesar's tax so Rome would go after Him too. Jesus predicted that the Jewish leaders would hand Him over to the Romans for their dirty work (Mk 10:33-34).

### **15b Can't fool Jesus**

Each time Jesus' authority is questioned in public, His opponents end up being exposed as hypocrites...unfit for judging Jesus or leading God's people. But like the coyote trying to catch the roadrunner,

the religious authorities keep trying to trap Jesus. They see Jesus as a threat instead of an answer to their prayers. They won't accept that Jesus speaks God's truth and acts with God's goodness. They can't believe Jesus is the way to the Kingdom of God, the Messiah. Yet He stands before them as the only almighty authority ever to walk the planet.

Jesus sees right through them. You can't fool Jesus. He knows our heart. People still try to bend the truth or tarnish Jesus' reputation.

Till the end, there will be deceivers. The most dangerous deceivers are those who take some of God's truth and mix in their own. Have a **firm grasp** on God's word (listen, read, study, memorize, meditate)

### **15c Show me the money**

Jesus is a master teacher. He involves His pupils in the discovery of truth. And He takes control of the situation. Is anyone thinking, "Wait a minute, if we produce this little idolatrous symbol of human domination in the temple...what does that say about us?" Oops too late.

### **16 Examining a Denarius**

Originally, I had in my mind that Jesus was holding up the coin for the group to see. But that's not what the Bible says. So the delegation of Pharisees and Herodians are holding the coin for

Jesus and everyone close to examine a Roman Denarius.

The "Caesar" or emperor at the time was Tiberius (AD. 14–37). But this type of Roman coin had been in circulation for over 200 years. And much like we have today, they have different values according to their material and weight. The first time a Roman ruler was bold enough to mint coins with the image of his own head (instead of ancestor) was Julius Caesar in 44 BC. This was considered very offensive - a bid to become the first dictator of Rome. He was assassinated that year by co-ruler, Brutus. Brutus produced a coin portraying himself as the freer of slaves (rid of Julius). Dates were not affixed to these coins. Names, sayings and depictions of events give clues.

### **Slide**

If it was a newer coin, then Tiberius would be the image on one side and it would say 'Tiberius Caesar, August Son of the Divine Augustus'. The reverse side of the coin had a woman wearing a crown and holding an inverted spear in her right hand and a palm or olive branch in her left (a priestess or Livia, the wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberias). The inscription: 'high priest'. Basically, it could serve as a portable idol...promoting pagan ideals. Before we go on to Jesus' answer, consider how the twelve might be feeling about this:

- Small business owners - fishermen: Andrew, Peter, James and John who moved from Bethsaida (Jn 1:44) to Capernaum only 5 miles away. Why? Likely to avoid border taxes (east side of the Jordan river was Philip's, while Capernaum on the west side belonged to Antipas). The fish were processed (salted and dried) in Magdala – the same territory as Capernaum.
- Levi (Matthew) a tax collector working for Herod Antipas...some of those taxes went to Rome (Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea - client state of the Roman Empire).
- Simon and Jude Thaddeus nicknamed Zealots. It's possible they had been associated with radical nationalists who plotted and carried out missions against the Romans.

So Jesus disciples represented an amazing diversity or the potential for a split depending on how you see it.

### **V17 Payback**

“Since Jesus’ opponents have no trouble producing Caesar’s coin with his image, they are already paying a kind of tribute to him. They owe Caesar the tribute he demands. In effect, Jesus says, “Let Caesar have his idols!” One may owe Caesar what bears his image and name. But Jesus balances this statement with the authority of God...the One who made Caesar and allowed him to rule.” (Garland)

This idea of life being separated into sacred and secular isn't from Jesus. “The things that are Caesar’s should not be interpreted to mean that Caesar has control of the political things while God keeps control only of the religious things. There is only one sovereign Lord (12:29).” (David Garland)

Jesus is not leading a revolt against Rome. When they came to seize Jesus in the middle of the night He asked: *Am I leading a rebellion...that you come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled* (Mk 14:48-50). Jesus marches to a different drummer. Violence is not revolutionary enough...it never really conquers evil. Only a person born again is revolutionary enough. It takes the miracle of repentance and belief. People need the Lord. And what gets their attention is bold love that will turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, lend without expecting back, forgive and pray for enemies and give one's life for another.

### **What do we owe our government?**

“We as Christians may hold citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20), but that does not exempt us from being good citizens on earth. The early Christians took advantage of Roman transportation and stability to spread the gospel. If

we make use of the state's money and benefit from its highways and sewers, we are bound to pay its taxes." (Garland)

The Bible clearly teaches the God instructs His people to submit to human authorities. Romans 13:1-7 is a starting place but also consider 1 Tim 2:1-3, where we are called to pray for our government, too. Also Matt 8:4, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:13-18; 5:5, Heb 13:17. Our duty is to live peaceful, godly lives because that's what God expects from us. (1 thes 4:11, 1 Tim 2:2). What kind of testimony is it for a believer to be jailed or fined for not paying taxes? If we must go to jail, let it be for the cause of Christ.

About money...

Jesus says not to let money master you (Matt 6). I've whined about money and taxes...it's not Christ-like. We shouldn't be so attached to money anyway. Why?

Look out at the mountains. If you had a pile of gold coins that high...what good would that do you? You can't take it with you.

**What I've found is the more I hold on to the things of this world, the more I'm held down by its gravity.**

God is the ultimate owner. Do we really own anything? Any riches are entrusted to us to use wisely. What's the better investment? Treasures that eventually rot or ones that don't. Things that distract, pamper, and create distance from others...or

anything that helps the least and makes disciples of Jesus?

The Bible says our first financial responsibility is for our own relatives, especially immediate family (1 Tim 5:8). (iPads and wifi).

So what if we happen to live in a highly taxed country. Human systems of rule and management are...human. So we live in a somewhat socialist democracy...could be worse. The closest thing to our home here...is His church, Amen? And even in church meetings, sometimes Roberts Rules can wait upon the Lord. Because Jesus is head of this church. Brothers and sisters, we should stop being so surprised by trouble in this world and wait upon the Lord.

Jesus gives a freedom from the worry of money. He did not flaunt His royal status...though if anyone deserved to be exempt it was Him. In Matt 17:24-27, Jesus did not want to offend the temple tax collector, so He made sure there was payment. Mind you, He had a little joke about it...getting Peter to pay from a fish.

As believers, we can say, "It's only money." Our heart is not with it. It will pass away. We can invest in a treasure that will never end (Matt 6), seeking God's interests. And He will see that we have what we need here. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

**What do we owe God?**

10%, nothing, good works, going to Sunday services?

“Taxes are a trivial matter compared to what we owe God. We may owe Caesar money, but we do not owe Caesar the love that is to be directed only to God.” David E. Garland

For we are answerable to higher authority. God’s currency...His coin is us. We bear His image and this is proven by the name of Jesus, inscribed in our hearts. How do we know this is true? *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* Gal 5:22-23

No human authority can stop God’s Spirit. God builds His Church anywhere He chooses and Hades can’t stop it.

We pay taxes out of obedience to Jesus...not reverence for any earthly ruler. God alone is the only Ruler, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim 6: 15).

Our duty to God is to testify to His goodness (1 Pet 2:9). And how will they know we are Christians? By our love. May our love and unity influence our family, neighbors and government to also seek God through Jesus.

Since the very first church (Acts 4:19-20, 5:29) believers have been threatened by human authorities not to spread the Gospel of Jesus. If we

are faced with that, may God give us the courage like Peter and John in Acts 4:18-20:

*Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

What do we owe God?

When we turn a page back in Mark, we see that we owe God our full trust, and a heart that holds no grudges.

When we turn a bit ahead, Jesus answers what we owe God in the most supreme way...someone asks him which of the commandments is the greatest. *“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’* Mk 12:29-31