

## Scripture Reading:

**Luke 20:19** “19 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people -- for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.

**20** So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. **21** Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: **22** Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

**23** But [Jesus] perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me? **24** Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." **25** And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." **26** But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.”

## *"Paying Taxes to Caesar"*

“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” Again we come to some of the most famous of the words of Christ that have been used and abused down through the ages. The question that is raised and answered involves what our proper relationship as Christians is to the civil government.

Some might think my having spent 25 years of my life as a Christian activist in the civil realm would make this a pretty easy sermon! Well, yes it does in one way, but it also means that I come under the greater conviction when we consider how the Bible teaches us to act. At the points where I am most emphatic today, you can be assured it is probably is where I have the greatest confessions to make!

This morning I want to consider what it means to render unto Caesar, what is Caesars’s: Asking whether we should pay taxes, and looking at what affect this teaching should have on how we respond to our civil magistrates today. We saw the inauguration of our 44<sup>th</sup> President this week, so it is a very timely message: It is also a message where I should spend a great deal of time pointing out what I am NOT saying as well.

To save time on this front, I have taken the unusual step of including the notes from the election sermon that I gave back in November as well as a copy of an article on the imprecatory Psalms that I wrote recently for Chalcedon.

*[these are included with the order of worship for 01-25-09 on the web site]*

**This is important material for us to review and study as we consider how to properly live under President Obama and nothing that I say today should be taken as softening what I have said in the past!**

**Let me begin with a few definitions so the children can better understand what we are discussing here: When Jesus says to ‘render’ that simply means to give something. When I say magistrate is means someone in authority like a king, a governor, or a president. Government refers to some means of governing or controlling. Think of a governor on a car so it can only go so fast, or a fence in the backyard to a young child can only go so far.**

- **We can talk of self-government where God has given us a conscience and His Word to help us control our actions.**
- **We can talk about family government where the rod is given to parents to help children grow into strong disciples who will hear and follow the Savior’s voice.**
- **We can think of civil government which is what we are talking about mostly today: Civil meaning public, where people gather in a neighborhood association, as a city, a state and even as a nation. They covenant together for mutual protection and agreed upon services.**
- **Finally, we can talk of Church government, which when a nation is properly disciplined is the most important and the most feared.**

**It is easy for us today to blame individuals who are not very self-governed for our problems... greed and selfishness have caused much of our economic trouble and of course it is those ‘dumb’ voters who bring us all the wrong leaders!**

**The breakdown of the family is seen as the major problem in other quarters, as no-fault divorce, a lack of discipline, sexual sins and abortion have undermined a foundational unit of any strong civilization.**

**Much fault is also placed at the feet of the civil magistrates who do all the wrong things! The big problem here is that we often then turn right around and look to the same civil government to ‘fix’ the problems that they have caused.**

**There is certainly plenty of blame to go around and each of these types of government do share some part of that blame, but the government that is ultimately responsible for the condition of our land is the Church:**

**We are the bride of Christ who has been given ALL authority and power. We have been commissioned to disciple the nations, empowered by the Holy Spirit and told that the very gates of hell cannot prevail against our advances**

**IF things are going to ‘hell in a hand basket’ as many think today, then we need to consider how the church has failed first and foremost.**

- **This is why this short passage is so powerful and so relevant for us today!**

**Jesus has arrived at Jerusalem at the appointed time and now His enemies are seeking to kill Him, coming with a series of trick questions out of fear of the people. The text says that Jesus perceived their craftiness as they began with their compliments. Just as we read in Psalm 55:21 “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, But war was in his heart; His words were softer than oil, Yet they were drawn swords.” Their sword comes out with this question:**

➤ **Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**

**If Jesus says no, He is in BIG trouble with the Roman officials, if He says yes it will allow the religious leaders to undermine His popularity with the people who hate Rome. Jesus simply turns the tables on these men by asking to see a denarius...**

**A coin of the realm**

**Not only do they have a coin to produce, but they sheepishly must answer the Lord’s question by saying that the coin has Caesar’s image or picture right on the front!**

- **Jesus then gives His simple answer saying they should render to Caesar what is his and render to God what is His.**
- **His critics are once again silenced and we are left with a powerful teaching that has impacted history for thousands of years.**

**Of course this teaching has been misused in many quarters when it is wrongly understood to teach that civil rulers have power in the earthly realm and God has power over the spiritual realm. We need look no further than the brutality of the Soviet Union and weakness of the Russian Orthodox Church to see what is wrong with this interpretation.**

**The Bible is clear that God has empowered the civil magistrate with the sword which can certainly be misused just as a man can abuse the rule over his own family. The check against this power is the Word of God and the Church: This is why we cannot allow separate compartments: Areas for the church to be responsible for and areas for the government to be responsible for.**

**Again, each of those levels of government we discussed have specific areas of responsibility, but the Church must speak to all of these areas holding people accountable to the Word of God.**

**The rod is given to the parents, not the Church or the state. However, the church must provide proper instruction and guidelines for its use and at times the civil government might be called upon to punish someone who abused a child.**

**The Church is tasked with administering the Sacraments and it is not up to a father to baptize his children or serve family communion and the state certainly has no business interfering unless you have a Rev. Jim Jones who decides he has the right to kill his members.**

**I hope you can see how God’s system of checks and balances are intended to work! [you see checks and balances were not invented by our founding fathers, they were simply wise enough to apply God’s wisdom to their new civil government] I hope you can also see why the Church is ultimately responsible when things go poorly:**

- **IF we fail to be salt & light in all areas of life, it should not surprise us that things get dark & smelly as our nation rots around us.**

**We have focused on the second part of the instruction Jesus has given first, as it should be: To render unto God what is God’s: Remembering that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the ruler of all things who will bring all things under His control before the end of history! That should have been easy to grasp for a bunch of postmillennial, reformed, dominion oriented, reconstructionists, with a world & life view of the Bible!**

**So let’s see how we do with the first part of the instruction: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s!” Allow me to put us to the test with three important questions:**

- **Should we pay our taxes?**
- **Should we honor our leaders?**
- **Do we rightly pray for our leaders?**

**The third question I will leave as your homework when you review the article at the end of the order of worship.**

**The easiest is the question of paying taxes: In most cases we are dealing with Caesar’s laws and Caesar’s coins. We can certainly be salt and light in helping to make taxation what it should be according to the Word of God, but we must still pay those taxes until the laws are changed.**

- **Why can I be so emphatic here?**

**First and foremost because this is exactly how Jesus answers the direct question of paying taxes to Caesar. Many arguments have been made in recent years, where we have greater freedom, that we should not pay taxes that support abortion or an unjust war. Today, we are like those fish in the water who don’t think about being wet when it comes to freedom: Even after giving much of our freedom away in the past one hundred years, we still have so much more than the rest of the world, and certainly much more than these people who Jesus is addressing that we must focus on this to understand what is being taught.**

- **While we have our problems in the civil realm today, they hardly compare to the cruelty and debauchery that was Rome and yet Jesus says, pay those taxes.**

**Also, while we are complaining about high tax rates and bad programs, we must remember that the Church was mostly responsible!**

**IF God's people were faithfully bringing the tithe into God's storehouse and using that money to meet the needs of their families and the poor there would be far fewer places where we would need those government 'services.'**

**There are hundreds of "taxpayer" organizations in our nations and many campaigns to reform this tax or abolish that tax, but there is little or no concern about God getting His tax! In fact a cursory look on the Internet turned up more information on why we DON'T have to tithe today because we are under grace!**

**Another portion of Scripture I want us to consider regarding the payment of taxes will also lead us into the second question about honor: It is found in the Book of Romans 13:1 "1 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."**

- **We are subject to these authorities because we recognize that God is in control: If we resist them improperly we are saying that we do NOT believe that God is in control.**
- **This applies to not only civil rulers that we may not have voted for, but also the parents we did not choose and the church we are being raised in!**

**2 "Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."**

- **Paul could not make this point more clear as well as the fact that we will not enjoy the consequences**
- **Some argue that the next verse qualifies verse 2, but it does not: Paul simply goes on to describe the proper role of the civil magistrate:**

**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."**

- **Paul's reference to the sword clearly refers to the civil realm, but the principles apply to the family and church as well**
- **We are subject to and honor the parents God has given us: Children need not fear the rod if they obey!**
- **We are subject to and honor the Church leaders that God has placed us under – In the case of wives or children it may not be of our own choosing. Again, we need not fear them if we obey.**

**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."**

- Here Paul leaves no doubt that we are to pay those taxes... Not just because we are afraid of the sword that the civil magistrate has been given, but also for conscience sake, knowing that God has put authorities over us.

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.”

Verse seven brings us to the tougher second question about honor:

- Jesus said to pay those taxes or customs
- We know that God has given the civil magistrate the sword so proper fear is always a good idea
- BUT what about honor to whom honor is due?

This is a tough question because we have lost an appreciation for honor in our modern world: Today it is better to be hip and casual than to be proper and boring!

We have come a long way from being an honoring society and we often forget how far we have come. After the dramatic landing by that plane on the Hudson River, the reporters took special note of the fact that woman and children were shown to the exits first: Year’s ago this would have been expected not seen as unusual.

Adults were shown the proper respect by a child which is something we certainly see little of today: Do children wait to be recognized before interrupting an adult conversation? Do they address adults properly using their last names?

We have even lost the concept of showing proper respect or honor in the way we dress... Casual dress was OK for work or play, but everyone dressed up to go to the city or even a simple shopping trip. It is interesting that we have maintained this standard in most cases with weddings, but even Church has become not only a place where being casual should be accepted but in some circles seems even mandatory.

I bring up all of this because I think it contributes to the struggle we have today with what Jesus and Paul are commanding when it comes to giving honor to a civil authority. We do not give them honor because they are on their best behavior and ruling well & then withhold it when they do something we disagree with.

- We give them honor because they hold an office that has been appointed by God and because they hold power ONLY because it has been given by God.

We don’t have Kings or Caesars so it is hard to relate this in the civil realm, but there are simple things that I will argue apply today with our office of the President and the latest occupant of that office.

- Our president should be referred to as Mr. President or President Obama.

**We should honor the office and speak respectfully about President Obama EVEN when we are disagreeing with what he is doing or holding him accountable to God's Law.**

**If you choose to write a letter to the President regarding his recent actions to provide more money and support for abortionists, it should be addressed properly and our speech should be respectable. Again we may be warning him that he should kiss the Son lest He be angry, but that can be done forcefully and respectfully.**

**Some may argue that we should not render honor to those who do wrong: They might cite Proverbs 26:1 "As snow in summer and rain in harvest, So honor is not fitting for a fool." to make the case that we should not give honor to any politician who supports abortion because the Bible clearly says that fools love death. It is not very tough to make the case the President Obama or many other elected official today are fools by God's standards, but this is the VERY point that this Proverb is making**

- **The person who holds the office of President is to be given honor because of the office and if a fool holds this office, it is like having rain fall during the harvest!**

**God will hold President Obama accountable for his actions & we will continue to pray and sing Psalm 2 and others to remind us and him about this truth & his responsibility. BUT God will also hold us accountable for how we treat the office that God has established.**

**This can be a good place for us to learn once again how to practice proper honor: We chuckle at the thought of men tipping their hats to women or children saying yes madam or yes sir, and we bristle at saying Mr. President if the current holder is not from our party... They may seem like little things, but when you consider the current state of our civilization it might be time to take the instructions from Paul a little more seriously!**

**We should remember the wisdom many of us read in the Book of Proverbs this week in chapter 24: "My son, fear Jehovah and the king..."**

**So let this be our bottom line for today:**

- **We will pay our taxes!**
- **We will show honor to the office of the presidency**
- **AND when we are tempted to forward some presidential joke or call President Obama improper names, let it be a reminder to stop and pray for him instead!**

*Communion Meditation:*

*John 13:1 "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."*