

## Is It Lawful To Pay Taxes To Caesar?

Mark 12:13-17.

Sunday morning, August 17, 2008.

### I. The flatterer's net. Vs. 13-15.

#### A. The parties involved.

##### 1. The Pharisees.

Empty formalists; greatly concerned about rigorous enforcement of external forms, but unconcerned with matters of the heart.

##### 2. The Herodians.

Sympathizers of the dynasty of the Herods; of Greek customs and Roman law. They were secularists. If they had any religious sympathies it would have been with the Saducees, the liberals.

##### 3. What brought these unlikely partners together was their opposition to Jesus.

As early as Mark 3:6 they had joined forces to destroy Jesus.

The Lord had opposed both philosophies in His ministry; that of secularism and that of empty formalism. "Beware of the leaven (evil influence) of the Pharisees, and the leaven of Herod." Mark 8:15.

#### B. The hypocritical flattery.

##### 1. The summary of Christ's Person and ministry:

- We know that You are true...
- You care about no one for You do not regard the person of men...
- You teach the way of God in truth.

##### 2. The hypocrisy involved:

All the things stated were true enough.

The hypocrisy consists in that none of these things were of any concern to either the Pharisees or the Herodians. They aimed at nothing less than His downfall and destruction by catching Him in His words.

#### C. The nature of the question.

"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"

##### 1. If the Lord said, "Yes it is lawful."

- the Pharisees would accuse Him in their religious court of denying the freedom of Abraham's seed (John 8: 31-36.)
- They would accuse Him of siding with the enemy and against the plight of the people of God.
- They would accuse Him of idolatry. On the dinarius (a coin representing one day's wages which was the annual tax to Rome) was this inscription: The head of Caesar Augustus with the words "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus." On the other side of the coin Caesar was sitting on his throne with this inscription, "Highest Priest."

##### 2. If the Lord said, "No it is not lawful."

Now the Herodians stood ready to accuse Him of insubordination to Roman rule, and of inciting the people to rebel against Roman authority. This they would do in the Roman court of Pilate.

##### 3. Either way, they would use his answer to destroy Him.

### II. Evil Intentions thwarted. Vs. 15-17.

- A. Christ calls attention to the image and inscription on the dinarius.  
They were issued by, and they belong to the government of Caesar.
- B. Christ calls attention to the fact that there are things that belong to Caesar, such as his currency, and if he wants some of his coins back, he can do so by asking for them in the form of taxation. This is part and parcel of the privileges of his office as Caesar.  
In answering thus Christ answers the Pharisees who saw themselves as too holy to pay Rome with coins such as the dinarius represented in its inscriptions.
- C. Christ calls attention to the fact that there are things that belong to God.  
Things like His worship; His people; His ordinances; His law and His Word outwardly speaking.  
Inwardly speaking things like love, mercy, justice, faith, humility, hope and joy.  
In answering thus Christ answers the Herodians who made little of religion in general, and certainly made not much of heart-religion.
- D. Who could argue with this approach? Giving to each their proper due is the righteous approach, and so they marveled at the Lord. They had thought that there would be no escape from this question; that they had Him one way or the other.

### III. Implications and applications.

- A. Here we have the foundation in Christ's teaching for the separation of church and state. They represent two kingdoms. One temporal, the other eternal. One this worldly, the other, other worldly. And the Kingdom of God passes through the kingdoms of this world and leaves its mark on them. In relation to the kingdoms of this world, the citizens of God's kingdom are a pilgrim people; transient; just passing through. Yet, while passing through, the King has given instruction how we should behave toward the kingdoms of this world. That is, with humble submission in temporal affairs, all the while giving to God what properly belongs to Him.
- B. The Cretans had to be reminded of this: "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work." Titus 3:1.  
The Romans too: "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities... Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake." Romans 13:1,5.
- C. The good soil out of which such submission and obedience naturally grows is the grace of humility. In the absence of that any submission and obedience grows into a slavish burden. Do you have this grace before God in the things belonging to God? Do you have it before the temporal powers in the things belonging to them, as you pay your taxes; obey traffic laws; building codes and other ordinances? Do you know where to find this grace? Are you seeking it? God's Word, Spirit, ordinances, and His providences are on your side in this matter. As opportunity affords it therefore, humble yourselves before both God and man, that the Lord may lift you up in due time. 1 Peter 5:6.