**Render To God the Things that are God’s**

Based on [Matthew 22:15-22](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt22.15-22)

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This Gospel is in itself plain enough and easy to understand. It contains two teachings. First, the enemies of Jesus are hypocrites, and will stop at nothing to silence him and his Gospel. Second, Jesus teaches rightly that a thing belongs to the image it bears, the Government to the Government, and God to God.

The enemies of Jesus are hypocrites, and will stop at nothing to silence him and his Gospel. In Jesus’ day, they studied all sorts of devices and way to catch him in his words and condemn him. The enemies of the Gospel are no better in our day. They would put Christ out of the way if they could, and thus it will be even to the end of time, with the same result. Amen.

Matthew 22, 15Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. 16And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He alone is the light of the world, and in him there is no darkness at all. No one can hold a candle to him. Therefore, there is no “good faith” opposition to Jesus, and the Pharisees have long since proven their bad faith. When Jesus cast out demons, they said he did so by the power of Satan. They condemn him for healing on the Sabbath, when they themselves suspend the Sabbath in an emergency. Whenever Christ does good things, they slander his motives. They expect of Christ and of his disciples what they do not do themselves.

And now, they expect Jesus to answer a question they are not willing to answer themselves. The Pharisees send their disciples to Jesus along with the Herodians. **This is so that Jesus won’t expect their malice. The Pharisees had the reputation of being strict observers of the law. They would—presumably—argue that paying taxes to the government is idolatry, the worship of Caesar and not of God.** The Herodians were in support of Herod, who was a Jew ruling Galilee on behalf of the Roman Government. Presumably, they would be the ones arguing that taxes should be paid, because like Herod, they would not oppose Roman rule. So they ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not.”

Do not overlook the malice and insincerity of the scene. It should make you nauseous. It is a set up. If Jesus comes out in favour of Caesar, he can be charged with idolatry. If He comes out in favor of God, he can be charged with rebellion. **Of course he’s neither an idolator, nor a rebel, but they don’t care.** They are hypocrites, who are likely still licking their wounds from earlier when Jesus made them give answer to a politically impossible question, “The baptism of John, is it from heaven or from man.” “If we say from heaven, He will say ‘then why didn’t you believe him’; if we say from man the crowds will oppose us.” So they did not answer.

But they expect Jesus to answer. And their come in utter pretense, as though the Pharisees and herodians are trying to settle a dispute and need his help. They approach him with a neat introduction of flattery, as though they had the best of intentions and were really in earnest about the matter. **With such praise a young fool might be mislead to preach what people want to hear, looking for the approval of men rather than that of God.** They accept honor, and preach what is paid for; where their pay ends, there also ends their preaching. But despite their guile and artifice—in spite of themselves—they speak the truth about Jesus when they sy, “you are true…and do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.”

No He is not. And it is ironic, they try to flatter him by telling him he is immune to flattery. But they fall into their own trap. This man they just called honest, calls them liars. This man who they said is not a hypocrite calls them hypocrites. If they change their opinion about him now, they only prove their duplicity. The proverb is true, “A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet” (Proverbs 29:5). But the saying is also true, “**The Lord will have them in derision**.” No trickery will avail with Christ, who catches all false spirits in their craftiness.

**18But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? 19Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 21They said, “Caesar’s.”**

Jesus asks for a coin, and amazingly his opponents produce a coin. A denarius, with the Emperor’s image engraved upon it. This is the final check-mate for his opponents, and shows their insincerity. **The first commandment, “You shall have no other Gods” included for the Israelites, “You shall have no graven images.”** Yet those who would argue against taxes because of idolatry have no issue carrying around an idol in their pockets, and even into God’s temple!

Jesus taught his disciples, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye. **You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye”** (Matt. 7:3-5). These men were quarreling over taxes, something never addressed in the Old Testament, while carrying, collecting, and putting in the temple coffers a graven image that was explicitly forbidden. And this was the main problem with the Pharisees, not that they fretted over how best to keep God’s commands. We should be so earnest in seeking God’s will as they seemed to be. The problem with the Pharisees was that they would strain out a gnat while swallowing a camel. They would tithe, mint, and dill and cumin while ignoring the weightier matters of the law. They would rescue their own ox or donkey from a well on the Sabbath, but condemn Jesus for healing a crippled man.

And today Christianity has fallen off the road into the opposite ditch. In order to avoid the charge of hypocrisy, they refuse to judge at all. They think, “If I don’t presume to take the speck out of my brother’s eye, then I don’t have to worry about the log in my own.” Jesus says, “cut off your own sins, so that you can see clearly to judge your brother’s.” The church today says, “Who am I to Judge.” Truly truly I say to you, anyone who says “Who am I to Judge” feels unqualified because, either by laziness or self-rightousness refuses to pray, meditate, and suffer with God’s word to remove the log from their own eye.

But the Pharisees and herodians prove themselves to be blind guides with lumber in their eyes. Jesus forces them to show their hypocrisy by catching them red-handed with an idol. But Jesus is not offended by the graven image. He has come to fulfill the civil laws and ceremonial regulations of the Jews. Now that he is come, no longer do God’s people need to fret over a Sabbath day, for he is lord of the Sabbath. No longer do they need to fret over what they eat, for he has made all foods clean. Neither do they have to avoid all graven images and statues, for he is the true image of the invisible God made flesh and we have seen his glory.

And Jesus, the perfect teacher *who can pack worlds into a few words* says simply, “**Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are Gods.”** Really, Jesus took the answer from their own lips when he asked, “Whose image is on the coin” and they are forced to confess “Caesar’s.” The coin belongs to Caesar, part of his system of governance that they are a part of, and to whom they owe such earthly tribute.

And if this principle holds, that “a thing belongs to the image it bears” then all hearing Christ’s words then and now would to well to remember these words of Genesis 1, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Render to God the things that are Gods.