

Oct. 20, 2002

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 22:15-22

Goal – Give where God wants

Malady – Playing games with God, apathy

Means – God's gift of giving

The setting of this lesson occurs in a culture in which the government believed it had the right to charge whatever taxes it wanted. The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Should we pay taxes or not?" Jesus answered, "Let me see one of the coins used for paying taxes." They brought him a coin. Jesus asked, "Whose picture and name are on it?" The Pharisees answered, "The Emperor's." Then Jesus told them, "Give to the Emperor what belongs to him and give to God what belongs to God."

If you examine any coin or paper money in your wallet or purse, you will find the picture on it is that of a government official. Jesus continues to explain, "Give to the government what belongs to the government, and to God what belongs to God." What does that mean? Does it mean that all the money belongs to the government because it has a government image on it? Does that mean money belongs to the government and worship belongs to God?

We are to obey even when the laws seem unfair to us. "Obey the rulers who have authority over you. In all countries, human authorities serve at God's permission. Our personal wishes are not as important as the welfare of the nation. We would do well to give respect to the government and respect to the law.

"Render unto Caesar" is not a particularly good translation. The better verb would be "give." This is a parable about giving, though it is not multiple choice, as though we could choose to give some to God and some to Caesar, and some elsewhere.

It is not that some resources are God's and some are the government's, but all resources are God's. We simply return part of what already belongs to God. It is the stewardship of life. We give our whole life gratefully to God. Jesus says that he himself belongs to God.

We belong to God. God made us. God bought us. Giving ourselves to God comes from our gratitude, from the heart. Giving is a gift. We honor God when we give. We honor the gift of giving when we return to God. Jesus says the government has a right to our money, and God has a right to all that we are and have – our money, our possessions and our lives.

I invite you to give all you are and have in your stewardship. I invite you to take the step of faith and grow whatever step you are willing to grow out of gratitude for what God continues to give you.

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