

The Pathology of a Religious Hypocrite

Scripture: Mark 12:13–17

Code: 41-61

Well, let's open our Bibles to Mark chapter 12...Mark chapter 12. We're going to begin today what is going to be the fast track through the rest of the gospel of Mark. Over the next couple of months it's going to be a wonderful experience for us. Tonight we're going to take the next section in Mark, verses 18 down through verse 27, and we're going to find out who you'll be married to in heaven. That's part of the theme of that. In case you're wondering what the answer is...No one. But we'll deal with that tonight, the theme of resurrection.

But we come to verses 13 to 17. As I said, morning and evening, we're just going to kind of work our way through these powerful, powerful hours at the end of our Lord's life, leading up to His death and resurrection.

Now as we come to chapter 12 verses 13 to 17, we need to just kind of introduce this a little bit for those of you who may not be up to speed with us. This is the last week of our Lord's life. This is the week of His crucifixion and resurrection. For three years of daily ministry throughout the land of Israel, both in the south in Judea and the north in Galilee, our Lord has demonstrated that He is the Son of God. He has proven that He is God in human flesh. He has proven it by His power over disease, over demons, over death and over nature. He has absolute sovereign power over the physical world, the spiritual world and even the angelic realm. He has displayed not only His deity by His power, He has displayed His deity by His mercy. God is not only a God of power, all powerful, but all merciful. You see God on display in the compassion of Jesus, in the love of Jesus, in the tenderness of Jesus as He eliminates human suffering for the duration of His ministry in Israel.

We also see His deity in His perfect articulation and proclamation of the truth of God. He spoke the truth regarding everything...everything, the way things were, the way things are, the way things will be. Truth about man, truth about God, truth about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of men, the forgiveness of sins, salvation, eternal life...all of it in an unparalleled, clear and powerful way.

Now throughout these three years of His ministry, His steps have been dogged by the religious leaders of Israel. They are the ones who are the spiritual gate keepers. They are the ones who were supposed to be the stewards of God, to care for divine truth as revealed in the Old Testament and to shepherd the people of God, the nation Israel, and all those Gentiles who have come to the true God.

They have followed Jesus around with one goal in mind, not to find out more about His teaching, not to be more convinced about His deity, they have followed Him for one reason, that is to destroy Him. From the very beginning He is their enemy. He is the enemy of everything they teach. He is the enemy of everything they believe and He is the enemy of everything they affirm. He is the enemy of the way they live their lives.

They either repent and believe in Him, or get rid of Him. And with few exceptions, the leaders of

Israel have chosen the latter...to get rid of Him. Their choice then is to align themselves with their ancestors, the leaders of the past in the history of Israel. In fact, this chapter began with a parable Jesus told about a man who owned a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers to care for. When harvest time was due, he sent a series of slaves back to collect what was due him. And you remember, they brutalized the slaves. They crushed the head of one. They killed others. Every slave he sent they maimed or murdered.

Finally in the story, the owner of the vineyard sends his son and they killed his son. Jesus by that parable is saying that this has been the history of Israel. Israel is the vineyard of God. God assigned that vineyard to stewards who were to care for it. The stewards who were the caretakers of the nation Israel killed the prophets, everyone that God sent to them, and now they will kill the son.

Now the leaders are there when He tells the story, along with a massive crowd in the temple yard during Passover week. Everybody hears the story and according to verse 12, they all know what it means. They all know that He's talking about the murder of the son. They all know that He's referring to these leaders. The people get the picture. They know the leaders have animosity toward Jesus. And the leaders know that they've been exposed. That's what verse 12 says. They understood that He spoke the parable against them, so they left and went away for the moment. They are the latest in a long line of murderers of the prophets of God. Jesus indicts Jerusalem later on that week by saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that stone the prophets." That's a characterization.

Also later this same day, He says they're guilty...the leaders of Israel are guilty of the blood of all the prophets, from the beginning to the end of the Old testament era, and they will be guilty of the blood of the son as well.

They are in that parable then indicted as murderers. The parable ends with the question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do with the vine-growers that murdered and maimed the slaves?" And the answer is, "He will destroy them." And so the parable not only speaks of the murder of the Son of God, but the destruction of His killers. Then the parable closes by saying, "And He will give the vineyard to others."

As we saw "the others" are the Apostles who become the new stewards of divine truth and the new stewards of the people of God. That's why when the church is born on the day of Pentecost, they studied the Apostles doctrine. And all from that day on who preached the Apostles' doctrine recorded in the New Testament, are also in the long line of the true stewards of the people of God. They were false shepherds, they were stewards who were failing to fulfill their duty, they were removed and they were replaced. And all who are faithful now to the doctrine of the Apostles are the stewards and caretakers of the people of God, Jew and Gentile together in the church.

So in spite of all that the Lord did, in spite of all that He said, in spite of this direct indictment which they understood which spoke about them doing what they were planning to do, indicating to them that He knew exactly what they were planning, and in spite of Him pronouncing doom on them that they would be destroyed and their authority of power be taken away and given to someone else, they still hated Him. It didn't move them. And they were still bent on leading the nation in the rejection and the execution of Jesus

Now as we come to verses 13 to 17, it is Wednesday of Passion Week. Our Lord is in the temple. It

is a unique scene in the temple. There must be debris lying around because the day before He wiped out the bazaars that were there, the bazaars of Annas as they were called, Annas being the High Priest, all those criminal businesses that were going on, extorting people in the purchase of animals for sacrifice and in the exchange of coins. Jesus tore into all of that and vacated it all out of the place, so at least for the day, Wednesday, it was His place, it was the house of God and not a robbers' den, at least on Wednesday. And the people were all there, and the leaders were there as well, and Jesus was teaching and preaching the gospel.

They are more furious on Wednesday than they were on Tuesday. They have been furious for three years since He did the same thing three years ago when He started His ministry, went into the temple, made a whip and threw them all out. That started their long hatred. They have continued to hate Him for the three years of His ministry. They have had their hate escalated because when He came into the city on Monday, there was this mass of hundreds of thousands of people acclaiming Him as the Messiah which elevated their anger, their hostility and their fear.

Then on Tuesday He did what He did to their temple and now He's back in dominating that place with the truth, teaching the truth, and their anger has reached a fever pitch. They're afraid to do anything because they fear the people. Verse 12 says they would seize Him if they could but they were afraid of the people because of His massive popularity, at least on Wednesday.

So they have a problem. They have to turn the people against Him. And they have to get the Romans to kill Him. So how are they going to turn the populace against Him when they are so favorable toward Him and would have even appreciated what He did to the corrupt businesses in the temple? How are they going to turn the populace against Him and how are they going to get the Romans to kill Him?

So they come together, the Sanhedrin which is the ruling council of 70 plus the High Priest, total of 71, and they make a plan. And the plan has several features contingent on how the first part goes. As it turns out, there are delegations from the Sanhedrin that comes three times to Him in three ways. The Sanhedrin is made up of Pharisees, predominantly Sadducees, and scribes. The first trap is set by the Pharisees. It doesn't work. The second trap is set by the Sadducees. It doesn't work. Third trap is attempted by the scribes, it doesn't work either. But they come in waves.

As we come to verse 13, the Sanhedrin's first group is sent and this is the Pharisees. So the week looks like this. On Monday, it's "Hosanna" to Christ. On Friday, it's "Crucify Him." And Wednesday is the turning point. The shift from "Hosanna to Crucify" begins to take place as the exasperated, frustrated, hostile leaders instigate the change. They are desperate.

Now verse 15 gives us a key where it says, toward the middle of the verse, "He knowing their hypocrisy." They put their hypocrisy on display and you're going to see here something of the pathology of a hypocrite. We're going to get an analysis of a hypocrite here that is really quite insightful, along with seeing the story for its own sake. You're going to better understand the character of religious hypocrites.

First of all, let's see the initial mark of religious hypocrites. They make awkward alliances against the truth...they make awkward alliances against the truth. Satan can orchestrate all the forms of his error against the truth. So you may look around the world and look through history and see all kinds of

deceived people in all different kinds of religion coming together against the truth. The truth cannot make alliances with error, but error can make alliances against the truth, and you see that here.

“Then they sent,” that’s the Sanhedrin, this is an official delegation, this is wave number one with trap number one. “Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians.” Matthew says they plotted how to trap Him. Luke says, parallel passage in Matthew and Luke, that they watched Him with close surveillance looking for the right precise moment. “At that moment, some of the Pharisees and Herodians arrived in front of Jesus.” Luke 20:20 says they were spies who pretended to be righteous...spies who pretended to be righteous.

They are masking themselves now in their usual garb. They want to appear as ministers of God. They want to appear as stewards of divine truth. They want to appear as faithful shepherds of Israel. They want to appear as the emissaries and agents of the true and living God. And so they put on their religious face.

They make a very awkward alliance here, and I’ll tell you why. The Pharisees and Herodians were two sects that co-existed in the land of Israel with an uneasy kind of relationship. The Pharisees were the most religious, the Herodians the least religious. The Pharisees were most concerned with the Law of God. The Herodians were most concerned with the Law of Rome. The Pharisees were most devoted to Israel. The Herodians were most devoted to Caesar. The Pharisees were intensely religious. The Herodians were intensely political. Essentially, the Pharisees hated the Herodians, they had sold their soul. They were sycophants to Rome. The Pharisees despised them.

Why? Because to be Herodian was to identify yourself as one who was a follower of the Herodian family. In this case, Herod Antipas who was the governor of Galilee and Perea, Herod Antipas was not even a Jew, he was an Idumaeen king, a part of the Idumaeen family. Herod Antipas was basically a petty monarch who had taken one piece of the Kingdom of his father, Herod the Great, when it was delegated to him, along with three of his other brothers. And the only reason he had any power at all, and most of his power was contained within his own little world, but the only reason he had any power was because he bowed down to Rome and Rome let him have his little petty place in the Middle East. The Pharisees despised the Herodians. But the Pharisees saw the Herodians as useful to them.

Now the Pharisees wanted to get rid of Jesus because of His theology. That was not enough for the Romans. The Romans weren’t going to kill Jesus for His theology. The only way the Romans would kill Jesus was for His political views...thus the Herodians need to be complaisant in this situation because the goal of the Sanhedrin is to put Jesus in a position where He makes political statements that the Romans will read as an open rebellion. That’s the plan. And the Herodians, if Jesus came off as being anti-Roman, anti-Caesar and a threat to the peace of Israel under Roman rule, would then make a straight line to the Romans and report Jesus and the Romans would then have to arrest Him and deal with Him.

Now the governor, placed by Rome there, it was a man named Pontius Pilate. He is in Jerusalem at this time. Herod Antipas, the Herod, is also in Jerusalem at this time for the Passover, they’re both there. So it’s not going to take long to get the word to them once it’s established that Jesus is a threat to Rome.

Now the Romans already know that Jesus has a massive following. That was displayed on Monday when hundreds of thousands of people collected around Him as He came into the city and hailed Him as the Messiah, as the King. So they're aware of that. They're very much aware of the fact that He came in and did what He did to the temple, which put His power on display as well as His popularity. So they know He's a potential problem, especially with this kind of massive following.

So the Sanhedrin decides that all we have to do is show Rome that He's a threat, get Him arrested and Rome will kill Him because He's a threat, and once Rome arrests Him, the Jews will abandon Him because they think the Messiah is going to overthrow Rome and if the Romans arrest Jesus, then He can't be the Messiah. That's the plan. Get Jesus arrested. The people will fade away. And it turned out to be that they did. And the Romans will execute Him. That's the plan.

So what do they have to do? They have to get Jesus to say something that will cause the Romans to arrest Him. That's the plan. Then He'll lose His popularity with the Jews and His life at the hands of the Romans.

The plan then unfolds at the end of verse 13, they decide coming to Him to trap Him in a statement...to trap Him in a statement. There's a verb used here, only used here in all the New Testament, only appears here and it means to capture in hunting. They're coming after Him to capture Him like an animal...aggressive antagonism. Of course they've shaken off all the evidence that He is who He is.

So the first thing you see about hypocrites is that they make awkward alliances against the truth because they're really all a part of one domain...the domain of darkness. Second thing, they will say anything to gain their ground. They will say anything to gain their ground.

I remember a few years ago when the leaders of the BYU, university, the religious department, the gatekeepers of Mormon theology came to talk with me because they wanted me to know how much they loved the Lord Jesus Christ and they wanted to celebrate our common love for Christ and tell me that the book I wrote, The Gospel According to Jesus they were using as a text book at the Mormon University and they wanted me to know that they had a lot more in common than I might have thought and they wanted me to come to BYU and speak to the faculty and speak to the students. They said all kinds of very kind things.

And I said, after many hours of conversation, and it's been followed up by many years of letter writing and some further conversations, there's just one small problem here. I appreciate all the kind things you have to say, but I must speak the truth to you. You do not know the true God. You do not know the true Christ. You do not know the true way of salvation and you're lost. That's the truth...that's the truth. You have a God...their God is a created being. Their Christ is the spirit-brother of Lucifer, also a created being. And their way of salvation is by works. So I said, "Apart from God, Christ and the gospel, might have some common ground."

I said it in a gracious way and they're men whose souls I have prayed for. Flattery is a ploy in false religion to gain its ground. And this is what we see here. They came and they said to Him, they're bold, they come right up to Jesus. "Teacher," that's a term of honor...reserved for rabbis. That must have been hard for them to say. But apparently they were able to bring themselves to say that and a whole lot more.

The next thing they said must have given them no end of pain. “We know that You are truthful.” Wow! Why would they say that? They don’t believe that for a second. Of course they don’t, they believe the opposite. They think Jesus is a deceiver and a liar and a fraud and has to be stopped in silenced and killed.

Why would they say that? They say that because they’re flattering Him. Now the popular consensus among the people is that He’s a teacher...that He is a rabbi. The popular consensus among the people is that He’s a truth teller, that He speaks for God, that He’s telling the truth. So they’re identifying with the people, to convince the people that all they want is the truth, all they want is the truth, they’re honest truth seekers, they’re coming to a true teacher, one who speaks truly and they’re going to ask an honest question because they really want an honest answer. So they want to appear as legitimate truth seekers. But that’s only their secondary cause of this flattery, to identify with the people. The primary people is to set the bar so high for Jesus that He has to answer the question the way they think He has to answer it.

If somebody comes to you and says, “You are so truthful. Everything about you is truthful. You always tell the truth. And by the way, you never defer to anyone and you’re not partial to anyone, you always speak absolutely the truth, then ask you a question.” You’re going to be fairly pressured to tell them exactly what the truth is. You’re going to have a hard time equivocating because the bar has been set so high and your pride is going to force you to give them the truth, whether or not you would prefer to do that. That’s what they’re doing here.

On the one hand, they want to identify with the people. Even more importantly, they want to put Jesus in a position where He has to answer the question truthfully because they’ve set the standard so high that His pride would force Him to do that. They understood pride very well. It wasn’t an issue to Him, but to them it was the main issue.

So they said, “You are truthful, we know You are truthful.” And then they piled it on, “And defer to no one.” Luke 20 says, “You speak and teach correctly.” And he uses the Greek word *orthos* from which we get orthopedic or better, orthodox. You speak straight. You speak in an orthodox way. “And You defer to no one, for You are not partial to anyone.” In other words, You don’t care who You are talking to, You don’t care who You’re eye-to-eye with, You don’t care what rank that person has, You always speak the truth. You have no consideration for the consequences or the impact. Negatively You just speak the truth and we honor You for that.

By the way, it was absolutely true. They were saying the truth, but they were saying it for devious reasons. It is completely true. The people knew that to be true. In fact, later that day Jesus would face those same Pharisees and He would give them a message recorded in Matthew 23 and it goes like this...I won’t read all of it but this is how it goes when He did speak face-to-face with the Pharisees.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Woe to you blind guides, fools and blind men. You blind men...woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you serpents, you brood of vipers, sons of hell. How will you escape the sentence of hell?” That’s pretty

much direct.

Yes, He was truthful and He spoke the truth and He didn't defer to anybody and He wasn't partial to anybody. This is completely true. They are saying things about the Lord that must have agonized them to say and it was all true and they had to say it. But they were willing to say it to get what they wanted to get, even though they hated the very notions that were coming out of their lips.

And then they say, "But You teach the way of God in truth." What a statement. That is right, that is right, He...He did teach the way of God in truth. But they have to say what they hate to say. The design again is to set the bar of Jesus' reputation so high that He has to live up to it. To set the level of His honesty so high that He has to sustain it. To set the affirmation of who He is and His fearlessness in speaking the truth without guard for the consequence or reprisal so high that when they ask Him the question, He's going to be forced to say the truth because His ego is going to demand Him to do so and they're going to have Him right in the trap where they want.

So, hypocrites make awkward alliances and hypocrites use any devious means they can. This is the interesting thing about hypocrites, they will speak the truth for devious ends if they need to. Be careful. We always say false religions are like the clock that doesn't run, it's right twice a day. If it was never right, there wouldn't be any deception. So they will say what they need to say to gain the ground they need to gain.

The next thing you see about false religion is that they falsely pursue the truth...they falsely pursue the truth. They don't really want the truth out of Jesus, they want to discredit the truth. We see this in verse 14, "They came to Him and they said, 'You're truthful, You speak the way of truth, that's all so wonderful. So along that line, let me ask You a question, is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar or not?...then verse 15...Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?'"

And there are...there are a number of these Pharisees there with the Herodians standing by and so the question is coming, "Yes, Yes, So-and So, do we pay or do we not pay? Yeah..do we?" You can just hear them. Is it lawful for us to pay a poll-tax to Caesar or not? Is it lawful by divine law?

Okay, they're asking a rabbi, they're not asking a Roman. They're asking a rabbi, teacher, truth teacher who won't flinch, who will speak the truth. "Should we pay taxes to a Gentile, idolatrous, occupier, invader of God's holy land? Should we pay taxes to an oppressor of God's people, or should we not pay?"

Now they've already decided that the only answer Jesus can give is "No, No, we shouldn't be paying." The people, if you ask the question, turn and ask the crowd, "Should we be paying taxes to Caesar?" The people would say, "No, not by divine law, it's against God's law. We're forced to do this. We're strong-armed." You remember, tax collectors, Jews who bought franchises from Rome, were accompanied by a local Mafia who were the strong-armed thugs that got the money out of the people. No, the Jews hated Rome. They hated the occupied presence of Rome. They hated the taxation of Rome because Rome was idolatrous and Rome was pagan. They hated the notion of giving Rome anything.

A poll-tax is what is recorded here. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar? Poll-tax is *kensos*, the word simply means that, paid by everyone, one denarius a year, that's a day's wages a year, a poll-

tax, like a census. If you live, you pay this tax. Luke uses plural, taxes. And he uses the word *phoros* which means taxes in general. So that's how the conversation...should we pay a poll-tax? What about this tax? What about this tax? What about this tax?

There were land taxes, a tenth of the grain, a fifth the oil, a fifth of the wine. There was import tax, when it came into the harbor, when it came across the border, when it came through the city gate, there was tax, tax, tax. Do we pay these taxes? Is it lawful according to God's law? That's the assumption when you talk to a rabbi, he's talking about God's Law, is it lawful?

A little bit of background on this. What precipitates this question is that this is a question that the people have already in some measure answered in their hearts because of their history. If you go back about the time our Lord was born, let's just say in general, about the time He was born. He would have been a little child at this time, 6 A.D., there was a man in Galilee named Judas, not the one who became the betrayer of Christ. There was a man named Judas who led an insurrection, according to Josephus the historian, against Rome, Roman occupation against Israel, and the whole insurrection was the reaction to a census. When the Romans required a census so they could collect that one denarius tax from everybody, Judas and his friends revolted because they said the tax was ungodly, it was against God because it was leading to paganism.

Well, Judas was killed and all his followers. That's referred to, by the way, in Acts 5:37, a reference back to that insurrection that was quailed by the Romans and he was killed and all the people who followed him. But it made public the issue and the sentiment didn't die when Judas died and the sentiment didn't die when his friends died. Josephus says that Judas established a conviction and that conviction surfaced sixty years later in another insurrection in 66 A.D. And that insurrection in 66 A.D. was over the issue of paying taxes to Rome. And one of the first acts in that revolt was that the Jews minted new coins because the Roman coins were distasteful.

What happened to that insurrection in 66 A.D.? It was smashed in 70 A.D. when the Romans came and obliterated Jerusalem. So the coming of the Romans in 70 A.D. was not just an arbitrary act on their part out of nowhere, it was to quell an insurrection that had begun with animosity toward Roman taxation. The Jews from the time the Romans showed up believed the taxation by Rome was treason against the only king and that's the true God.

The Pharisees then are positive that Jesus is going to say, "No, don't pay tax to a false religion, to a false God." Why? Because He would see that His idolatry, that's how they saw it, because His popularity was at stake. And if all of a sudden He said, "Oh no, go ahead and pay to Rome," He would begin to lose His popularity. And furthermore, if He said "No, don't pay tax to Rome," the Herodians are right there and they're going to see that as another of Judas of Galilee starting another insurrection, only this guy's got hundreds of thousands of people, we're going to have to take Him, arrest Him and kill Him or we're going to have another revolution on our hands.

So they expect a no answer. And that's why the Herodians are there. Go immediately to Herod, immediately more importantly to Pontius Pilate. Anybody who wanted to be the Messiah would have to say, "No, don't pay tax." So we see the hypocrites, they say whatever they need to say. They have no real honest desire for the truth and they make these very awkward alliances for the sake of attacking the truth.

Verse 15 turns the story away from them, thankfully, to our Lord. "But He knowing their hypocrisy because He knew everything," John 2:25, "No one needed to tell Him what was in the heart of a man, He knew what was in the heart of a man." "Knowing their hypocrisy," Luke 20:23 puts it this way, "He detected their trickery." Matthew 22:18, "He perceived their wickedness. And Mark acknowledges that, he knew they were hypocrites. "So He said to them, 'Why are you testing Me?'" You're not looking for answers. This isn't a pursuit of the truth. There's no honesty here. And this again goes back to the point that I just made that false religion isn't really looking for the truth, it's not looking for the truth. It's coming after you to trap you for its own benefits. Why are you testing Me? Why are you trapping Me? Why are you putting Me in jeopardy, the verb means. "Bring Me a denarius to look at." That, by the way, is an important little statement cause the Jews didn't carry that coin. It wasn't going to be the pocket of a Pharisee, shouldn't be. Wouldn't be in the pocket of a Jew. It's a Roman coin used between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D., six hundred year period, minted in silver by Rome's emperors. Only emperors had the power and authority to mint coins in silver and gold. And all such coins minted by the emperor bore the sacred image of the emperor engraved on one side and some other identifying description...inscription on the other side. So they wouldn't have had a denarius, that one-day wage coin. So they had to find one.

They brought one, they found one. The Jews carried shekels and copper coins with no images on them. But they found one and they couldn't have found it fast enough. They went through that crowd, get that coin out. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" Everybody knew and, boy, they answered fast. "They said to Him, 'Caesar's,'" it would have gone, "Caesar's, Caesar's Caesar's, Caesar's,"(fading away), all the way to the back of the crowd.

And by the way, let's just assume it was minted by Tiberius Caesar. On the front of the coin it would have said, "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus." Augustus was a god, Tiberius was the son of god. If you flipped the coin over, it would have a picture of Livia, the mother of Tiberius, and it would be inscribed "Pontifex Maximus," a title the Pope now wears...a pagan title, by the way. Augustus had minted coins in 17 B.C. He had identified himself as God. Tiberius designated himself as the son of the divine and as the high priest, Pontifex Maximus. So these coins, in the minds of the Jews, were little idols. They were idols. They were graven images and it violated Exodus the second command, "You'll have no graven images." They saw them as little idols. They wouldn't carry them. They wouldn't use them. They would pay the Roman tax in the equivalency in their own Hebrew coinage.

Since Jesus claimed to be God, He must have seen this as blasphemy. He must have seen Augustus and Tiberius as blasphemers of the rankest kind. And He certainly did. He must have the same conviction we do that this is a blasphemous, idolatrous, pagan culture and we should have nothing to do with this culture, we shouldn't be giving them anything. It was expected then that Jesus would on the spot denounce the coinage and thereby denounce Caesar himself. Call him a blasphemer, say the Law of God forbids paying any tribute to him and that would be it. The Herodians would take that message so fast to the Roman authority, Pilate. Pilate would have troops in His face. He would be arrested and no sooner was He arrested the people would lose trust in Him because He didn't overthrow the Romans, they captured Him. The Romans would take Him and execute Him for fear of the revolution that might occur if He was ever set loose. That was the plan. Certainly the Roman emperor can't be recognized as God, nor as the High Priest and therefore it can't be lawful to give money to a pagan nation.

Well they never imagined Jesus' response and its profundity should not be lost in its simplicity.

“Jesus said to them...verse 17... ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.’” That is a far-reaching statement, folks. That is a far-reaching statement. Jesus says, “Pay the tax, pay the tax. Render, give back, you owe it, it’s a debt, it belongs to him.”

How did that happen? Because Scripture teaches us that government is an institution of God, right? Government is an institution of God. This is so crystal-clear in the New Testament as to be absolutely unmistakable. In the thirteenth chapter of Romans, verse 1, “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. There is no authority except from God and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves for rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, you’ll have praise from the same for it, authority, government, is a minister of God. Be in subjection. For because of this...verse 6...you also pay taxes. Render to all what is due them, tax to whom tax is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor. Pay your taxes. First Timothy 2:1, “I urge that entreaties and prayers and petitions and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all men, for kings and for all in authority so that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness.” We’re called to submit ourselves and even to pray for the authorities that are over us.

Peter puts it this way, 1 Peter 2:13, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or governors as sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise of those who do right, for such is the will of God.” Honor the king. God has ordained civil authority. That is a common grace, folks, isn’t it? That’s a common grace. Civil authority is a common grace. There’s no such thing as a sacral society. There was a sacral society, the theocratic kingdom of Israel where God was the ruler. Theocracy, God is the ruler. There was one sacral society, it has been obliterated by the judgment of God. There will be in the future another sacral society where God will be the King and that will be the reign of Jesus Christ in His Millennial Kingdom on earth. In between there is no such thing as a sacral society. There is a separation between the people of God spiritual, and the civil authorities. Civil authority, civil law is a common grace for the well-being of men, like crops, like water, food, all the common graces. The rain falls on the just and the unjust, that’s the idea of common grace.

We should be thankful for government, that’s how you got here today because there’s a government. And you all drove on the right hand of the street and you drove on a street. Civil government has a role to play. That’s why you can live healthy in your house and you’re not sitting in a sea of sewage. That’s a common grace. And we live, in a sense, at the pinnacle of common grace’s development in the sense of civil comforts provided for us by government. We don’t...I don’t expect my government to act in a Christian way. They have nothing to do with the church. There’s no such thing as a Christian government, no such thing as a Christian nation, never has been, never will be until Christ establishes a worldwide theocratic Kingdom.

All I expect out of my government is that I can get here when I want to get here, and not get shot in the process and that the water comes when I turn the faucet on. That’s all part of common grace. What did Caesar do for Israel? Build bridges, aqueducts, brought in water, provided protection, provided a military presence, increased the benefits of life, gave peace, the *Pax Romana* kept the whole world of that time around the Mediterranean at peace. There were benefits provided by that and in the purposes and plan of God, as a judgment as well as having benevolent elements of it, the Romans were there. Part of that was judgment on an unfaithful nation, but there was benevolence with that.

Payment of a tax to an earthly government, even to idolatrous, blasphemous, pagan people who are about to kill Jesus is still the right thing to do. Give it to them. Pay the tax. But they're going to kill Jesus? Pay the tax. Caesar has a sphere. By God's design he has a sphere. And not to pay him is to rob.

Now I want to hasten to put a footnote. Don't pay anymore than you have to. Don't get carried away. Don't say, "Oh, take more, take..." No. Jesus affirms the role of government to collect taxes for its support because it is God's ordained means for man's protection...man's protection and benefit, well being.

You say, "Well what about if the government asks you to do something that God forbids you to do?" Then you do what God wants you to do. That's Acts 5:29, "Obey God rather than men." If...if the government says "Don't do this," and God says, "Do it," then you do what God says you should do and take the consequences. And that happens. It's called persecution, sometimes ends up in martyrdom. But since the end of the theocratic Kingdom of Israel and until the establishment of the future theocratic kingdom of Christ, there is no sacral society, the church is not to take over civil government. That is one of the reasons I cannot tolerate post-millennialism, this crazy notion that the church is somehow supposed to take over the governments of the world, either by war, civil disobedience, liberation, theology, political power. No...no, that's a completely different entity, government...pay your tax. They don't have to be consistent with your Bible. Pay your tax. That's an institution that God has ordained.

So render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But here's the real important statement. "And to God the things that are God's." That was the issue with the Pharisees, wasn't it? They were making a big stink about having to give Caesar what Caesar wanted and they were completely disregarding, giving God what God wanted. You owe God. This is far greater.

Do you remember Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 4? Looked out over his kingdom of Babylon, he was the greatest ruler on the planet. Look at the kingdom I have made to the glory of my name....Bang! God hit him on the spot, turned him into a raving maniac. He left his palace, went out into the field and lived for seven years like a beast till his hair grew so long it layered his whole body so that he looked like he was covered with feathers. And his fingernails grew like bird's claws and he ate grass. This was the greatest man on the planet and this was for seven years and then one day God gave him back his senses and he said, "I knew that the Most-High reigns in heaven and He gives kingdoms to those whom He wills." And I think you're going to meet him in heaven, clipped and shorn.

But the big issue here is not to pay your taxes. The big issue is to give God what you owe God. What did they owe God? Jesus had said so many times to them, it's recorded in John, "If you honor Me, you honor My Father." If you honor Me, you honor My Father. If you don't honor Me, you don't honor My Father. The Father had said at His baptism and again, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him." Listen with believing ears and a believing heart.

What do you owe God? I'll tell you what you owe God, you owe Him the same thing those Pharisees owed Him. You don't owe Him hypocrisy. You don't owe Him phony religion. What do you owe God? This, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." You owe Him that,

He's worthy of that and He commands it. You owe Him this, to listen to His Son, to love His Son and to honor His Son and to believe in His Son and to embrace His Son as your only hope and your only Savior, the very Son that He is the one who put on the cross to bear the punishment for your sins. They were being forced to give their money to Rome, and they hated it. But it didn't seem that even Jesus could make them want to give what they owed God, their own souls.

The coin belongs to Caesar, He says. But you...you belong to God. The coin has Caesar's image. You bear God's image. Give the coin to Caesar, but you belong to God.

Well, the trap collapsed. At the end of verse 17 it says, "And they were amazed at Him." So simple and yet so profound. Luke says they were silent. Matthew says they marveled and left. Not for very long. They'll be back tonight at six. Another group, the Sadducees.

Now, I just want to show you the last little part of the story. Turn to Luke 23:1...Luke 23:1. In this case, it's not just the Pharisees and the Herodians, it's the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, everybody, the whole Sanhedrin comes. The whole council of elders, you see them identified back in verse 66, "Then the whole body...chapter 23 verse 1...got up and brought Him before Pilate." They brought Him to Pilate and they began to accuse Him...and listen to what they said. "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar."

Whoa! An absolute outright lie. If flattery doesn't work, then they lie and saying that He Himself is Christ the King. They had to turn Him in to a threat to Rome, so they lied. That's what hatred does. That's what hypocrisy does. Nothing more ugly than that.

You say, "Boy, I would never do that. I would never do that." Well, one final word for you, Matthew 12:30, "He that is not with Me is against Me." Take your side.

Father, again we're refreshed, in one sense, and stunned by the potency of these moments that we spend with Jesus in these dramatic settings. How alive the Scripture comes to us. The bottom line for us today is we owe You everything, pay your taxes. That's the image of Caesar. Give yourselves to God because you bear His image. How clear is that? He made man in His own image and we're obligated to give ourselves to Him. I pray, Lord, that that will be done by those who have not yet done that, that today those who have held back might understand that while they may not have wanted to stand with such blatant lying hypocrites, they're either for you or against you. May this be a day when Your Holy Spirit opens the heart and those who bear Your image will give You what they owe, and that is their lives. We know that this is a work that only You can do. We pray that You would do it for Your glory. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).