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What Belongs To God?
Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.

16 *So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.*

17 *Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"*

18 *But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?*

19 *Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.*

20 *Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?"*

21 *They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."*

22 *When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.*

These Pharisees and Herodians just wanted to ***trap Jesus***.

They weren't expecting anything profound.

They knew that whether he said yes or no to their question he was in trouble.

This coin, this ***denarius*** that they are looking at, has the image of Caesar on it, and the word for ***god***. It was a declaration that Caesar was god.

The Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus it ***lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?*** Jews were paying taxes to the Roman empire—to the government that occupied them.

Well if Jesus said ***yes*** he would be going against the Jews who thought that it was just plain wrong to be paying to this emperor who kept the majority of people living in poverty...

The Pharisees also opposed paying taxes because they were required to use that coin with the image of a divine Caesar—a violation of the 1st and 2nd commandments against worshipping other gods and having graven images.

If Jesus said ***no***, he would be going against Rome.

The *Pharisees* hoped Jesus would *support* paying taxes to Caesar so he could be seen as a Roman sympathizer, and violator of God's law.

The *Herodians* hoped that Jesus would *oppose* the tax, so he could be accused of sedition or treason.

The only reason these two groups were coming together was to get Jesus into trouble.

Instead Jesus gave a *confounding and astounding answer*.

Let me see that coin—whose image is on it?

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

In other words, yes you have a citizen responsibility here....

But ultimately your *allegiance is higher*.

What if the same is true for us?

Sure, we have citizen responsibilities.

There are some things in this world to which we owe some allegiance.

But Jesus spins that question on its head when he says,

Render to God the things that are God's.

Yikes! What does He mean?

What belongs to God?

Caesar had a coin with his face on it.

So Jesus said, give it to him.

But how do we give to God?

Well, what is it that *bears God's image*?

It's not a coin.

It's us.

All human beings bear the image of God.

According to Genesis 1:26—we are made in the image of God.

You and I. Every single one of us, bears the image of God.

I wonder, *do we live that way?*

As if we are made in the image of God?

And do we realize that since we bear God's image,
We belong to God, we are not our own?

Render to God, the things that are God's.

How do we do that?

Isn't EVERYTHING God's?

All of us, and all of creation?

How do we give all that, back to God?

What if we thought about it this way:

Who and What is ***first*** in your life?

What are your top 3 priorities in life?

And as you think of them, Is ***God first***?

If not, how could God become the first priority for you?

Render to God the things that are God's.

Which is basically ***everything***.

So doesn't that mean we need ***God to be our top priority***?

The first thing in our lives?

And what does that say about our ***identity***?

If we bear the image of God—

does that mean we are ***FIRST and foremost children*** of God?

So, what if, before we are husbands, wives, sons or daughters,

before we are Republican, Democrat or Independent,

before we are Americans or Owassoans, we are ***Christian***?

What if we are followers of Jesus Christ first?

This is important because we often try to make parts of our lives

separate from our faith, don't we?

Even though, as Christians, we can't really do that.

We try.

We often feel like our ***money***

and our politics

and our relationships are our own,

But Jesus seems to be saying, no---

our whole lives, everything about us,

it's really not ours at all---*it's all God's!*

Wow.

Think about that for a minute.

Our *whole* lives belong to God!

Jesus is asking us to give *every aspect* of our lives to God!

That's a tall order, isn't it?

We'd prefer to keep some parts separate, right?

But what if Jesus is right?

(I'm thinking yes.)

What if everything is God's?

That would include every *relationship* we have.

Jesus boiled down all our relationships into *two*:

Love *God* with all your heart, soul, and mind;

And love your *neighbor* as yourself.

Do we allow our faith to guide *every relationship* we have?

But it would also mean those areas of life that we try to keep *separate*,

Like a separation of church and state,

Like our public and private life.

Like our allegiances to those things that are important to us,

Jesus seems to be saying, *even that is subject to God.*

It belongs to God.

And our allegiance belongs to God—*First.*

When Jesus answered those Pharisees and Herodians the way he did,

they knew what he was saying was not just clever, it was *profound, and difficult.*

They knew the *scriptures*, they knew that everything belongs to God.

So when Jesus says render to God the things that are God's,

They would understand, just as we do today, that

It's not easy.

It means we have to examine things like:

Our *wallets, our calendars, our relationships, even our bodies*

And see if God comes first.

We may have to *wrestle* with our allegiances, is it God--first?

It's not always easy to put God first, right?

Sometimes it's complicated!

But what would it mean for our faith in God to *inform everything* we do?
 Would that be a clear cut path of how to live, act, or vote,? No.
 But it would be a *person to follow* as you live, and act, right?

What if rendering it God the things that are God's,
 means *using our faith in Christ, to make all of our decisions?*

To make this practical, what if we asked ourselves some *simple questions*:
 Like, Does my faith help me conduct *business*?
 What is the guiding principle for my decisions at *work*?
 And what about how I act at *school*?

When I am dealing with people in the *community*,
 Do I consider what *Jesus would do*,
 or simply do what is easier? Or cheaper? Or simpler?

It's hard because if you're like me, you might
 make some decisions based on what seems *to make sense*,
 Not necessarily what *Jesus would do*.

So, what if our faith informed every area of our lives?
What if we could give everything to God, (since it all belongs to God)?

Most of you know I made an attempt to get out of here a couple weeks ago,
 because I was hurting, and about to be sick...
 and I didn't quite make it to the bathroom,
 instead it was to the hospital for a couple days to get some help for my stomach.
 No fun.

But while I was there I was reminded of *who I am*.
I belong to God.
 God wants me to take care of myself a bit better because I belong to God.

What about you?
Do you care for yourself, as if you belong to God?

You know what else I learned there,
 while having nurses and techs coming in and out of my room all night?

I was reminded that *following Jesus is how we live, full time*.
Definitely not just certain times and places.

I was blessed to be able to pray for a couple different people,
who came in to take blood and vitals,
and also asked for prayers because they heard I was a pastor.
That was a gift to do that for them, as they were tending to me.

But, you know, we are *all* Christians.
If someone hears that you are a Christian,
shouldn't they feel like they could come and talk to you,
receive compassion and prayer from you?
Because you belong to God!

The people of this church were truly the body of Christ to me when I was sick
here, in the hospital, and at home, praying, cooking, listening, and comforting.
Because we are *all* Christians.

All the time.

Giving of our lives to God.

That's what it means to follow Jesus.
It means *we are people who give it all to God*.
Our time, talent, money, resources, even our bodies.

The question is, are we willing to give it all?
Are we willing to make Jesus a *part of everything* we *do* and everything we *are*?
Or, are we like the Pharisees and Herodians,
just talking the talk of faith, but not walking the walk?

Presbyterian pastor John Ortberg writes about the importance of truly *following Jesus*, not just *admiring* him.

Many people did and do *admire* Jesus.
They appreciate who he is and what he does—

But *admiring* is not the same as *following* Jesus.
Many admire, few follow.
The question is, which will we be?
Admirers or followers?
Admirers give their admiration to God.

Followers give to God what is God's.

Ortberg tells the story of *Charles Blondin*, who in 1859, came to the United States from overseas and was fascinated, obsessed, with Niagara Falls, and crossing it on a tightrope. He actually strung a hemp cord 1100 feet across and 160 feet above Niagara Falls, and he said he was going to cross from one side to the other.

He was a *showman*. A crowd of 100,000 people gathered to watch Charles Blondin walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls inch by inch, step by step. Can you imagine the drama? It was life or death, with no safety net. He crossed all the way over. Tons of people, of course, were taking pictures, so he did it again. He even crossed over with a camera and took a picture of the crowd while they were taking pictures of him.

Then he was really showing off. He went one time blindfolded, another time he took a *chair* with him. He went back another time and fixed an *omelet*. He went another time and took a *wheelbarrow*. The crowd went crazy.

He turned to the crowd and asked them, "Do you believe I can do this?" Of course, they all believed. Then he asked them, "Now, who will *get into the wheelbarrow*?" It got real quiet.

Isn't that a little like us *and Jesus*?

Many admire.

But few really want to join him, especially when he invites with words like, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me.*"

In other words, *get in the wheelbarrow*.

Will we do that?

Have we really devoted ourselves to *following* Jesus?

Or do we just *admire* him?

Because if we follow Him,

you know what goes into the wheelbarrow? *Our sin. Our guilt.*

Jesus says...put it all in the wheelbarrow....

And I will die on the cross for you.

And I will take you to the other side,

where you could never get by your own good deeds.

I will pay your debt, when you confess and repent.

And I will wipe the slate clean when you put your past, your sin, and your guilt in my wheelbarrow.

Because that's when we really *trust in Christ*,
When we can put it all in the wheelbarrow, and let him have it.

*When we trust Jesus, we can give to God, what belongs to God.
Which is everything.*

Ortberg also says that trusting Christ is a lot like *using GPS* in your car.

He talks about how several years ago he and his wife Nancy were at the car rental counter, and the man said, "Along with this car, if you want, you can also get a guidance system." You plug it in and punch in your destination. It is amazing. A voice will tell you how to get to wherever it is you are going.

"Do you want to add this to the car?"

My immediate response he says, was, "*No*. That is going to cost something.

I don't need that.

I can find where I'm going without that."

Anybody want to guess what his wife said? "*Get the box.*"

So they got the box.

There was a voice coming out of the box.

It was a *British* voice, because people who have a British accent always sound smarter, right?

It was a *woman's* voice, because, well ... same thing.

But of course, we all know how his story goes.

He gets the box, he listens to the voice, until he is sure that voice doesn't know where they are going. So he *turns it off*.

And gets *lost*.

Very lost.

What happens next?

Same thing that happens whenever you decide to ignore your GPS and get lost... it comes back saying—*recalculating*.

Make a *U-Turn* at the next junction, or something to that effect.

The GPS doesn't say,
*"I told you so, you idiot." "You think I'm going to help you now?
 You rejected me. There is no way. You just find your way home by yourself."*
 No, it simply says "Recalculating route.
 When safe to do so, execute a U-turn." (adapted from John Ortberg, The Worlds Greatest Talk:
 Choices. Preachingtoday.com)

God asks for something very similar:
 Our complete *trust*.
 Jesus asks us to *follow Him*,
 Which means giving everything to God.
 And what happens when we don't?
 Jesus comes back with the opportunity to *recalculate---AKA grace*
 And *repent—make a U-turn* and keep on going!

Giving to God what is God's isn't easy.
 We are often tempted to *separate our lives* into compartments,
 giving only that Sunday morning piece of our hearts to God.
 We are tempted to put a lot of *things and people before* God.
 We are tempted to just *admire* Jesus.

But Jesus says *give it all---*your time, your talent, your money.
 Give it all to God—your job, your family, your body.
Surrender it.
Let go of control.
Use it in service to Christ.
 Because all of it belongs to God.

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel:
 The one who has lived and died for us to take away our sin
 is always ready to give us another chance.
 To help us give EVERYTHING to God.
 To recalculate our route, and guide us forward.
 Because we are made in the *image* of God,
 And we *belong to God*.
 Amen.