

Series: Book of Mark
Sermon title: Christians & Government
Scripture: Mark 12:13-17
Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church
May 20, 2018
S.C. Brown, Pastor

Well, I didn't plan this in any way...but it is tax time in Hong Kong and I just happen to be at the passage in Mark where Jesus is talking about **TAXES**.

We finished most of the book of Mark but we are going back and hitting some passages that we missed in between where we left off and Easter.

The main question that we will address today is a question that Christians have been thinking through for 2000 years.

Should I, as a Christian....as a follower of Jesus... obey the government?

More specifically, **Should I as a follower of Jesus, pay taxes to the government?**

Let's pray.

The Romans had a way to bring everyone they conquered under submission.

It was the *Poll Tax*.

The Jews hated this tax, just like any country in history that has been taken over by someone else and made to pay a tax.

The Jews hated it for other reasons as well. The coins of the Romans, which they used to pay their taxes, was idolatrous to Jews.

On one side of the coin it had a picture of the current Emperor of Rome, who happened to be Tiberius. Around his image it had the words in Latin, *“Ti Caesar Divi Aug F Augustus”*, which stood for, *“Tiberius Caesar the divine son of Augustus.”*

So, imagine you are a Jew and you have to carry around in your pocket this coin with the face of the Emperor that says he is God.

On the back side of the coin was the picture of a woman, likely Livia, the mother of Tiberius and around her picture were the words in Latin, *‘Pontif Maxim’*, which means...*‘High Priest’*.

Put yourself in the shoes of a 1st century Jew. The land has been taken over by the Romans. They are pagan. You have to pay tax to them. Their money you must use to buy things has idolatrous images on it.

The Jews hated this so much that the Bible mentions in Acts 5:37 and the Jewish historian Josephus gives more details...that in 6 A.D., a revolutionary and zealot named **Judas of Galilee** led a revolt against Rome over the tax census.

That's the context.

So, into this situation the Jewish leaders choose this hottest of hot topics to try and trap Jesus into saying something they can pin on him.

It seems like a 'no fail plan'. It's a 'no win situation' for Jesus. No matter which way he answers, they've got him!

Let's read verses 13 & 14.

13 And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.

14 And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"

There's the key question to try and trap him.

Jesus knows that they're coming to him and saying all kinds of flattering things just to get him. What they say is just trash talk.

They truly hate him and want to get rid of him and he sees right through it.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we pay?

Jesus responds in verses 15-17,

15 But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." 17 Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.
Give to God the things that are God's.

Sounds simple enough. What does he mean?

One key word is in verse 16. It's the word **'image'** or **'likeness'**.

Does that word remind you of any other passages of scripture?

"Whose image or whose likeness is on this coin; this Denarius? Whose stamp is this? Whose imprint is this?"

"Caesar's image", they say.

Jesus responds by saying, “*Give to Caesar his things.*”
“*Whatever belongs to Ceasar, give it to him. Let him have his coin.*”

In this statement, and we will see in other parts of the New Testament, Jesus makes a clear pronouncement that Christians are to not only pay their taxes to the government but submit to the state.

So, let’s divide this text into 2 points.

- I. Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.**
 - II. Give to God the things that are God’s.**
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I. “GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR’S.”

If we dig into the Bible, we see that it is a truly Christian teaching that we, as citizens of whatever country we find ourselves in.....are to obey the government and pay our taxes.

Look in your Bibles at **Romans 13:1-7**, where Paul gives some real insight to this.

1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have

no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Need we be reminded, first of all, that Paul is writing to Christians in Rome.

It was not to holy...Christian...governments...or governments who loved followers of Jesus....that he is writing this to.

So, it's applicable to us all, no matter where we live.

Notice that he makes a few statements that are foundational.

1. God is the true authority and gives authority to governments and Christians are to submit to them. Verse 1.
2. Government is God's servant. It is mentioned 3 times here in verses 4 and 6.
3. Christians have a clear command to pay taxes to the government. Verses 6 & 7 are crystal clear.

So, if we interpret the Bible with the Bible....if we test Jesus' words to see if this is what he really means, then the 1st century Apostle Paul is consistent with what Jesus says.

Peter says something very similar in **1 Peter 2:13-17**

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, 14 or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 16 Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

“Honor the emperor? Really, Peter??? You must have changed! Early on in the book of Acts, this doesn't sound like you!”

You remember in **Acts 3**, Peter and John were going up to the temple to pray and they met a man begging. Peter said to him, **“I don't have any silver or gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”**

And the guy is healed and then Peter starts preaching. In Chapter 4 the high priest and all of the leaders of

Israel gather together and are pretty upset about what they've done. And after a long discussion, they said to Peter and John, "Do not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus anymore."

Do you remember what Peter and John said?

They said, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Acts 4:19-20

And later on, after they didn't stop, they were arrested. And brought before the council again and the authorities said to them, "We told you to stop and you haven't listened but have filled Jerusalem with this teaching."

And Peter and the apostles said in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men."

Hmmm! So, which is it?

Seems Peter and the Bible contradict themselves.

Illustration: Let's say at your job, you have a direct supervisor who specifically tells you NOT to turn in your reports a certain way. So, you patiently and humbly submit. A week later, the CEO of the company and you happen to have a discussion and you ask his opinion about how the reports are supposed to be done. He says something opposite of your direct supervisor. Which one's word do you submit to?

Why would you obey the CEO over the direct supervisor?

Because...even though the direct supervisor has authority over you....the direct supervisor is under the authority of the CEO.

There's a created hierarchy. God is number one. Governments are under God. Governments are the servant of God. We must '**submit**' to **governments as long as we can**. But God's laws supersede the laws of government.

We have many examples in the Bible....think...Moses' mother and the basket....Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel and Peter and John.

Submitting is different than Obeying.

Another example is that....In God's created design and according to the Bible, a wife is to submit to her husband. But submitting is not the same as obeying. A wife is to obey God but submit to her husband.

So,....number 1...We are to **submit to the government. We are to 'give to Caesar, that which is Caesar's.... as long as we can**. And submitting means we pay our taxes. That much is clear from Jesus and the apostle Paul.

II. GIVE TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S."

Here's a simple question:

What are we to give to God?

If we are to 'give to God' the things that are God's...then what are the things that belong to God?

The Roman denarius had the likeness of Caesar on it. Jesus said, "Whose image is this?"

Whose image is on you?

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

So, give to God the things that are God's!
Give what? Answer.....**EVERYTHING YOU HAVE.**

That's why they marveled at Jesus' answer!
We should marvel and ponder his answer.

We are made in the image of God.

We have his imprint on us.

And yet....all have sinned and rebelled and shook our finger at our maker and said, "You will not rule over me." "You won't tell me how to live." "You won't tell me what to do with my money." It's mine. All mine."

Ultimately, submitting to the government and paying our taxes and paying our tithe and how we live and where we live and where we work and how we work is all about LORDSHIP.

Christian, **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** says,
"¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

It's ultimately not about paying your taxes.

It's about giving to God the things that are God's!

Not paying your taxes is a heart issue. It's called **greed**.

If you don't pay your taxes or give to your church, it's because you love money and don't want to obey God.

You holding anything back? Clutching it tight in your hands?

Some of you today need to give your life to Jesus.
Give up on your life. Give up your life to Jesus.

He'll forgive your sin and rebellion and give you a new heart and transform you.

Believe today what the Bible says about him.

That he died for your sin.

That he rose from the dead and is alive.

And that he gives eternal life to those who trust him.