

2026-05-31

What Belongs to God?

Mark 12:13-17

Jesus is on trial. No, He has not been arrested yet. No, He has not committed a crime. The Jewish religious leaders were asking questions in order to trap Jesus in His words. These religious leaders wanted the Jewish people to turn against Jesus and hate Him as they did. Or, in this case, to get Jesus to make a statement against Rome so that He would be arrested and tried for treason. These religious leaders thought they had the perfect question. *“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”* These religious leaders did not go themselves to ask Jesus this question. They sent their disciples (Matthew 22:16) **along with some Herodians**. They may have sent this group because these leaders could see a riot breaking out because of Jesus’ answer.

In their minds there were only two possible answers. If Jesus answered, ‘Yes,’ the people could become very violent quickly. The temple was filled with people, people with very strong opinions about the Roman occupation of Israel. Most Jews hated that they were required to pay taxes to a pagan government. The way it was done was against their religion. All Jews had to pay the tax with a Roman coin which had the image of Caesar on it sitting on his throne with the words ‘God and High Priest.’ A Jew having this coin in their possession and using it breaks the commandments *“You shall have no other gods before Me”* (Deuteronomy 5:7) and *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image”* (5:8). Hearing Jesus tell the crowd they had to pay this tax could be the beginning of a very violent day and they did not want to be in the midst of a riot. If Jesus answered, ‘No,’ the wrath of Rome could be brought on Jesus when the Herodians accused Him of treason. With either answer, being in the presence of Jesus would be the worst place to be.

When these disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians came to Jesus they were slick with their words. Before they asked Jesus the question, they told Jesus, *“Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth”* (Mark 12:14). Now, this is true, but this was not spoken with honor and respect towards Jesus. It was spoken in hatred towards Jesus, hoping His own truth would trap Him. How do we know? The scripture tells us in the next verse. *“But He, knowing their hypocrisy”* (12:15). It was apparent to Jesus exactly what they were trying to do. It seems Jesus paused a moment to survey and understand His predicament. Maybe if we were there, we might see the temple guards placed in strategic positions ready to manage the rioting crowd. These disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians pushed Jesus for an answer as they shouted, *“Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?”* They demanded an answer!

Jesus flipped the whole situation around. He responded to their demands, “*Why do you test Me?*” I would be careful testing God. The Israelites tested God 10 times. They did not believe God at all, even with all He did and they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:20-23). Gideon asked God if he could test Him concerning the fleece. God accepted the test, so as to give Gideon assurance of His command (Judges 6:39). After the test, Gideon was faithful and obedient to God. **Is it right for God to test us?** Yes, it is! We do not need to test God, because God is truth. He never lies (Numbers 23:19). People? **God needs to test us** so that we see who we really are (Ecclesiastes 3:18). **God tests everyone** because our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). We can even deceive ourselves by saying one thing and doing something else (James 1:22).

God tested Job. Job said, “*He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food*” (23:10-12). Job understood the importance of God testing him. God tests us. No one does everything right. Sometimes He tests us through loss and hardship, sometimes through abundance, sometimes with just enough. May He find each one of us faithful and purify us as pure as gold. Be careful though, if you test God. He will surprise you as Jesus did these men who put Jesus to the test.

Jesus asked for a denarius. That was the Roman silver coin Jews were required to use to pay their tax or tribute to Rome. In His lifetime, no doubt, Jesus had to use one of these coins to pay His tax to Rome. We do not hear Him complaining or questioning or protesting this tax. He just paid it. Now, Jesus takes the coin and asked, “*Whose image and inscription is this?*” (Mark 12:16). It is interesting that Jesus called attention to the image and the inscription just in case anyone doubted Jesus and how He responded. The people all knew the image and the inscription. It did not say, “In God we trust.” It proclaimed Caesar as god. The people responded accurately. The image and inscription were Caesar’s.

“*And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’*” (Mark 12:17). Jesus saw life and money differently than people did and still do. Jesus saw that we are all **a citizen of this world**, under some form of government and answerable to that government. He also recognized that we are also **a citizen of the spiritual realm**, answerable to God. I do not think that most people in the world held this view. They probably saw life and money as something belonging to them that others were trying to take away. What is Jesus teaching here? First, **all governments need money to function**. Since

we are citizens of this world under the government of our country, we are to give back to the government what they require (Romans 13:1-7).

Second, we are to give back to God the things that are God's. I know that you can answer this question correctly. **What belongs to God?** Of course, everything belongs to God. As a citizen of the spiritual realm, we will all be judged by God (Hebrews 9:27). Of course, you know this too. We know and talk about God judging our actions. He makes a judgment about what we say and what we do (Matthew 12:35-37). What we tend to miss is that **God will judge us in how we manage the money He has given to us.** The money we have is not our money. The money Sally and I have is not ours. It all belongs to God. We are managers of that money. We will answer to God concerning our actions especially our actions with money.

In Matthew's description of the judgment of all people (25:31-46), God separated the sheep from the goats by their actions. When you look at the actions, **they are all money related.** *"For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me"* (25:35-36). Food costs money. Providing water today costs money. Taking in a person costs money. Clothing a person costs money. Visiting the sick and those in prison for the gospel costs money because when you visit them you are bringing food and supplies to them, which costs money. It is not just about what you give to your local church or what you send to various organizations. It is how you live your life and use what God has blessed you with to help and influence others for the kingdom of God.

Jesus tells us that we are to give back to God what belongs to God. (Mark 12:17). What belongs to God? You do! In a few moments we will be partaking of the Lord's supper together. We will be remembering what God has done for us. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"* (John 3:16). Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2). He paid our debt. He bought us with His blood (1 Corinthians 6:20). We are not our own. We belong to Jesus. We are to give ourselves to Jesus. *"He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again"* (2 Corinthians 5:15). Whatever we do, wherever we go, we live for Jesus. Because He has made our day great, having forgiven our sins, we can be kind and encouraging to others, making their day better. We are responsible to our government to pay the right amount of taxes. We are also answerable to God in every area of our lives, including what we do with our money.

Questions to ask yourself: God sees and knows everything about our lives. Have you given your life to God by trusting in Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

How pleased is God with you in how you manage the life He has given you?
How pleased is God with you in how you manage the money He has blessed you with?
How does God want you to change?
What are you going to do to change?

Actions to take: Repent of your sins. Ask God for help, wisdom and direction.
Make a plan to be the person God wants you to be. Work at it daily.

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Our mission statement: **Spread the gospel of Jesus Christ;**
Teach believers to worship God; Foster growth in the Christian faith

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