

## Render to God the Things That Are God's—Mark 12:13-17

### 将神的物归给神——马可福音 12:13-17

#### *Introduction and Outline*

- Scripture reading: Mark 12:13-17; Romans 13:1-7; Romans 12:1-2.  
Mark 12:13-17 (NASB 1995)  
**13** Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. **14** They \*came and \*said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? **15** Shall we pay or shall we not pay?” But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.” **16** They brought *one*. And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” And they said to Him, “Caesar’s.” **17** And Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him.
- Politics! Always a sensitive topic... How should a Christian view politics? Some principles can be found in our passage today.
- But to put it in context, tax is only a superficial issue here. The real issue behind this scene is the hypocrisy, evil, trickery, and rebelliousness of sinners, and the faithfulness, patience, truth, and wisdom of God. Ultimately, this scene is a confrontation between truth and lie, between God and the Satan, between the kingdom of light and the power of darkness.
- Outline:  
Title: Render to God the Things That Are God's –Mark 12:13-17
  1. Background
  2. The Crafty Question (vv. 13-15a)
  3. The Ultimate Answer (vv. 15b-17)

#### **Background**

- Taxation is the most sensitive political issue of that time. The Jews hate the Roman taxation system. The Jews, priding themselves for being God's people, and Rome being the evil nation filled with idolatry, consider paying taxes to Rome as giving to Satan's kingdom. There's land tax, property tax, income tax... Of all the various taxes, the most hated kind is none other than the poll tax (the Greek word for tax in v14 refers specifically to poll tax). Everyone living in Rome needs to pay the annual poll tax just to maintain their legal status.
- The reason they're so against the poll tax is because they say it symbolizes loyalty to the Roman rule. They say paying the poll tax shows loyalty and homage to the Roman emperor, as if you're giving yourself to the emperor. It's like you're committing your life to serving the Roman emperor. Such is the spiritual meaning they attributed to the poll tax. Therefore, according to the Pharisees, the poll tax is blasphemous. He who pays it is a traitor, betraying the people of God.
- There's a “Judas of Galilee” in **Acts 5:37** who started a riot with the Jews 6 A.D., refusing to pay taxes to Rome, especially the poll tax. He said if you pay the poll tax, you are a slave to Rome. He even

encouraged them in the name of God, saying if they stand up and fight for it, God will bless them and help them.

- After Judas died, the Zealots inherited his rebellious spirit and had constant conflicts with the Roman government. In 66 A.D., they started another anti-tax riot which eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. under Titus, the Roman General.
- Jesus' ministry happened right in between these two anti-tax riots. Tax was highly sensitive among the Jews of that time, something they'd die fighting for. The question in these verses was not intended as a sincere inquiry for truth, but a political bomb to blow Jesus up into pieces.

### **The Crafty Question(vv. 13-15a)**

- “some of the Pharisees and Herodians”: Pharisees are the “elites” of God's Kingdom, Herodians are servants to the Romans. These two groups are hostile enemies to each other. Their appearing together here must've been quite a phenomenon. What unites them is their common hatred of Jesus. (c.f. Mark 3:6)

【Principle】 Hatred for the truth is a strange unifying force that makes the most unlikely allies of people having nothing else in common with one another except that they all hate the truth.

【Illustration】 The New Age movement. The New Age philosophy is to unite all religions by mixing together totally unrelated religious elements, creating a very strange union. On the surface, it seems to promote worldwide unity and harmony, but the truth is Satan trying to unite all sinners together in opposition against the only true God.

- “trap Him in a statement.” They thought Jesus could only say “Do not pay tax to the Romans!” This is the standard answer of the Jews. Any Jew who wants to have a reputation of piety must be against tax. If Jesus were to give this answer, the Herodians would immediately report Him to Herod, and Rome would immediately dispatch armies to deal with Jesus.
- “Teacher, ... You are truthful and defer to no one... not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth”: An utterly shameless fake show. Not one word is sincere. They don't believe anything they say. Their purpose for using these flattery words is simply to manipulate Jesus into saying what they want him to say.

【Analysis】 First, saying this can win the trust of the crowd. The crowd is respectful of Jesus, for they believe Jesus was sent by God to teach the truth (Mark 8:27-28). Saying this can bring them closer to the crowd and win their trust so they would believe their question is innocent. As if they had no evil intention and just wanted to know the truth, like the diligent students asking questions to learn. Second, these words are meant to pressure Jesus so He can't compromise on the “truth” that Jews shouldn't pay tax, even in front of the Herodians.

【Response】 Doesn't all this devising make you sick? Hypocrites can say anything in blatant defiance against their own conscience just to get what they want. Do not be a hypocrite. Say what you mean. Do not use trickery.

**【Spiritual Insight】** When are we tempted to use trickery? When we're **under the control of our desire**, even desire to “glorify God”, and we need **other people's cooperation** to fulfill our desire, that's when we're most easily **tempted to say untrue things against our conscience**. We use **all kinds of flattery, insinuation, exaggeration, and manipulation to affect their emotion and judgment** so they may cooperate with us to fulfill your desire.

**Psalm 12:3** “May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things;”

**Proverbs 26:23**: “*Like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross, Are burning lips and a wicked heart.”

**Ephesians 4:15**: “but speaking the truth in love”

### **The Ultimate Answer (vv. 15b-17)**

- “Why are you testing Me”: Jesus outright exposes their hypocrisy—you're trying to trap me! Their flattery didn't work at all. Jesus didn't even buy it.
- “Bring Me a denarius to look at”: Jesus wants to teach an object lesson. No one knows what his next step would be.

Denarius was a silver coin, the fixed value for the poll tax. Archaeologists found denarius in Jesus' time having a head image of the Roman emperor with an inscription that says, “Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus, the son of the Devine Augustus”. The back of the coin has the word “the great priest” inscribed. Caesar wanted all the citizens to regard him as the great priest, even God's son. This is an obvious offense to the Jews. A “devout” Jew would never touch such a filthy “idol”.

- “Whose likeness and inscription is this”: This is the key issue. Caesar's image is a detestable idol, so the Jews must not pay tax. They must've thought Jesus set themselves up, so they answered confidently, “Caesar's!”
- “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”: This simple statement must've stunned everyone. Jesus left them no ground for attack. Clenched fists suddenly went loose, as if they had punched in the air. A seemingly unsolvable impasse was thus easily resolved.

#### **Marvel at the wisdom of Jesus!**

The implication of this simple yet profound statement goes far beyond politics. The principle here concerns the whole Christian worldview.

**【Interpretation】** The first half basically means, “Pay your tax!” “Render” means to give back to the owner, implying the coin belongs to Caesar in the first place. Even though the Roman government has no fear of God whatsoever, even though the emperor is a blasphemous immoral idol-worshipper, even though he doesn't rule the country according to God's will, you still have the responsibility to pay your tax!

**【Objection】** “But they will abuse their power?” “Pay your tax!” “But they're even going to kill Jesus?” “Pay your tax!” They will answer to God for what they have done, and you will answer to God for what you have done.

【Interpretation】 Far more important is the second half. What are the things that are God's? The coin has Caesar's image; what has God's image? God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:27). Everyone has God's image. Everyone belongs to God and is obligated to render themselves wholly to God. We are His in the first place. Such is the basic responsibility of everyone.

【Key Issue】 Far more important than paying tax is to worship God with our whole being—to know God's glory, to live out God's glory, and to render all glory back to God. This is the key issue that the Pharisees completely ignored.

【Application Discussion】 Is there anything that does not belong to God? Is the coin no longer God's simply because it has Caesar's image on it?

**Haggai 2:8:** 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts.

**Psalm 24:1** "The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, The world, and those who dwell in it.'

**Romans 11:36** "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. "

But the way by which Christians render all things to God includes *submission to the order of authority that God has established in this world*—This is the real principle behind this verse!

**Romans 13:1** "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."

This is why the new Testament is emphatic about submission in all kinds of relationships—**children submit to their parents; wife submits to her husband; servants submit to their master; citizens submit to the government**—All these orders of authority are established by *God* in this world by *His perfect wisdom. The mark of a true Christian is submission, not rebelliousness.*

【Conclusion】 At the end of the day, the tax issue is a **worldview issue**. It is to **know your humble place** in this world, **to have a humble trust** in God's perfect wisdom in all things, and **to fulfill your humble responsibilities** both to man and to God.