

SERIES: The Jesus Journey

They say if you want to start an argument, bring up politics and religion;
If you want to start a really big argument, bring up both at the same time
That's exactly what Jesus walks into in our text.

TITLE: **God, Government & Christians**

TEXT: **Mark 12:13-17**

Mark 12:13 Then they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Jesus to trap him in his words.

"They"= the Sanhedrin- the religious ruling council

- Pharisees= a religious purity group
 - All Jews were supposed to stay separate from Gentiles (non Jews); they separated themselves from even other Jews
 - They wanted Herod and the Romans out of Israel
- Herodians= a political group
 - They supported Herod and the Romans, wanting to benefit from their rule

They could not be more different from each other in their ideals

Think conservatives and liberals

Jason Meyer, *"These two groups of people could not agree on anything- except that they needed to get rid of Jesus."*

Some people from different backgrounds come together because of their love for Jesus;
others come together because of their disdain for Him

Mark 12:14 When they came, they said to him, "Teacher, we know you are truthful and don't care what anyone thinks, nor do you show partiality but teach the way of God truthfully.

This is all true, but they don't really believe it. It's flattery meant to disarm

Proverbs 26:24 A hateful person disguises himself with his speech and harbors deceit within.

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

Of all the traps they tried to ensnare Jesus with, this is the most clever of them all

If He says pay taxes, they have reason to turn the people against Him.

If He says don't pay taxes, they have reason to turn Him in to Rome

Taxes- 'Kensus', the census tax imposed in A.D. 6

The Jewish people resented this because it was a reminder of Rome's dominance over them

- Acts 5:37 Judas the Galilean revolted against this very tax and was put down by Rome
- This was the tax which the zealots revolted against when Rome responded with obliterating Jerusalem and destroying the Temple in A.D. 70

Mark 12:15 But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at."

Denarius = a roman coin worth the average daily wages of a Jewish person

- On one side the image of Tiberius Caesar and the inscription:
"Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus"
- On the other side the image of Livia, mother of Tiberius, and the inscription: "High Priest"

This coin would have been considered an idolatrous violation of the Jewish Law

It's interesting that Jesus doesn't even have a denarius, He has to borrow one from them

By having the coin and using it, they were accepting the emperor's authority already

Mark 12:16-17 They brought a coin. “Whose image and inscription is this?” he asked them. “Caesar’s,” they replied. ¹⁷ Jesus told them, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.

Whose image does the coin bear? Caesar’s. Then give him what belongs to him

“Give” or “render”= *give back*

But don’t miss the greater point Jesus is making here; it’s beyond ‘pay your taxes’

The coin bears Caesar’s image it belongs to him... but who’s image do you bear?

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

We owe *some* things to the government; but we owe *all* things to God since we belong to Him

GOD & GOVERNMENT & CHRISTIANS

Jesus is no anarchist; God has ordained orderly institutions like the Church, the family and yes, the government

A helpful truth to remember: **God is not limited to working through His people**

He governs even those who don’t acknowledge Him

God rules over every ruler, and every ruler must give an account of their rule to Him

Even when speaking of foreign and evil kings, God calls them His servants

- Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon:

Jeremiah 27:5-6a “By my great strength and outstretched arm, I made the earth, and the people, and animals on the face of the earth. I give it to anyone I please. ⁶ So now I have placed all these lands under the authority of **my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon**.”

Jeremiah 43:9-10 “Pick up some large stones and set them in the mortar of the brick pavement that is at the opening of Pharaoh’s palace at Tahpanhes. Do this in the sight of the Judean men ¹⁰ and tell them, ‘This is what the Lord of Armies, the God of Israel, says: I will send for **my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon**, and I will place his throne on these stones that I have embedded, and he will pitch his pavilion over them.

- Cyrus of Persia:

Isaiah 44:24, 28 This is what the Lord, your Redeemer who formed you from the womb, says: I am the Lord, who made everything; who stretched out the heavens by myself; who alone spread out the earth;... who says to **Cyrus, “My shepherd**, he will fulfill all my pleasure” and says to Jerusalem, “She will be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Its foundation will be laid.”

Isaiah 45:1 The Lord says this to **Cyrus, his anointed**, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and disarm kings, to open doors before him, and even city gates will not be shut:

- The King of Assyria:

Isaiah 10:5-6 Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger— the staff in their hands is my wrath.

⁶ **I will send him** against a godless nation; **I will command him to go** against a people destined for my rage, to take spoils, to plunder, and to trample them down like clay in the streets.

- Every Ruler:

Proverbs 21:1 A king’s heart is like channeled water in the Lord’s hand: He directs it wherever he chooses.

If then, God rules over every ruler, and every ruler must give an account of their rule to Him, it means 2 things:

Human government is:

- **Legitimate, even though it may not always please us, because it is still placed over us by God**

I can hear the objections already, and I understand, but ponder this:

- Jesus spoke these words in Mark about a government that in less than a week will crucify Him
John 19:10-11a So Pilate said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Don’t you know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you?” ¹¹“You would have no authority over me at all,” Jesus answered him, “if it hadn’t been given you from above...”
- Paul, writing to the church in Rome, at a time when Nero was the emperor (a vile and wicked man who many considered to be insane; who murdered his mother and his son; who persecuted Christians):
Romans 13:1-2 Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. ²So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God’s command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves...

IOW- submit not only because of fear of what they might do if you don’t, but as an act of submission to God

- **Limited, since it is subject to God who has placed a limited sphere on it, to practice & enforce justice**

What authority has God ordained to the sphere of government?

Primarily, to punish criminal behavior and to encourage good behavior

Romans 13:3-4 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. ⁴For it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.

God authorized the government to do certain things, but not everything.

No one has absolute authority except Jesus (Matt. 28:18)

As long as our responsibilities to the reigning government do not interfere with our obligations to honor and worship God, Christians are to fulfill those responsibilities.

“What if the government goes beyond what God appointed them to do?”

Our primary obligation is to God- Peter & John found themselves in this predicament-

Acts 4:19-20 So they called for them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹Peter and John answered them, “Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; ²⁰for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

If the government overreaches their sphere of divine authority, they have no divine permission...

but it does not mean they do not have power to wield.

If there is a cause worth disobeying, we must make sure we stand strong because there may be consequences, even if not just

With all that in mind, that human governments are legitimate yet limited, and that they sometimes (often) go rogue, let’s look at some practical takeaways-

(credit where credit is due- I’ve adapted and altered some of this from Daniel Akin)

- **We must acknowledge that all governmental authority is established by God**

Romans 13:5 Therefore, you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience.

- **We endeavor to be outstanding citizens who strive for the good of the land**

Jeremiah 29:7 Pursue the well-being of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive. Think: Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in Egypt

- **We must do all in our power to engage in the political process.**

If allowed to vote, we must bring our Christian convictions into the public square

Proverbs 14:34 Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

- **We must obey the government we are under but worship God who is over all**

1 Peter 2:13-17 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. ¹⁶Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves. ¹⁷Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Christians ought to be upstanding citizens even within corrupt earthy governments, because our true citizenship is in heaven- that's the motivating factor

- **We must pray for the ruling authorities more than we complain about them**

1 Timothy 2:1-3 First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ²for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good, and it pleases God our Savior

- **We must pay taxes because it is not only our civic duty, but our Christian ethic to do so**

Romans 13:6-7 And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. ⁷Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor.

- **We will engage in civil disobedience only when government prohibits or contradicts what the Bible commands, and when other legal means have been exhausted, and must be willing to accept the penalty for such actions**

Acts 5:28-29 "Didn't we strictly order you not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

²⁹Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than people."

I think David Platt said it well, *"We humbly yet conditionally submit to the government in our nation; We ultimately and unconditionally belong to the God over all nations"*

Psalms 24:1 The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord

We submit humbly yet conditionally to the governmental authorities, but we surrender unconditionally to the Lord

2 Questions to ponder on:

How can we better humbly yet conditionally be submitting to the government as an act of worship to God?

Be honest in your taxes?

Be praying for our elected officials

Where might we need to take a firmer stance against governmental unrighteousness?

Speak out about what the school system is teaching your kids

Write letters to your senators

CALL UP WORSHIP TEAM

We owe everything to God, but we are not saved by what we give to God, but by what He give to us

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The coin bore Caesars image, but you bear your Creators image and likeness

He deserves your allegiance, your obedience, your worship and your very self

BULPEN-

Think about this, God planned that the Savior would come, and the Church would be birthed, under the sphere of government of Rome, which was a time when:

- Roman roads connected all the known world
- Roman rule united most of the people and nations under Pax Romana

Daniel 4:32c ...the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms, and he gives them to anyone he wants.

1 Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Romans 13:7 'Pay'= same word as Mark 12:17 'give'