

Two Citizenships (Matthew 22:15-22)

Jesus as shown us what is Caesar's. But he leaves us to ask ourselves, "What is God's?" The answer, of course, is everything. Everything we have belongs to God, and how we choose to give, save, and invest our time and money demonstrates where our loyalties lie. If you give me your checkbook and calendar, I will know where your loyalties lie.

All of creation is God's human systems of exchange and government merely borrows a tiny piece. While political leaders' images are stamped on currency, Genesis 1:26 says that God's image is stamped on every human being. Each of us belongs to God. Each of us must ask ourselves how we return ourselves and our lives back to our source.

Jesus' teachings ask us to think about how we allocate our resources and how we deploy power and status. These practical calculations are affected when we

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understand all of our lives as belonging to God—and all of creation as a gift God shares with humanity. Regardless of who rules the empire, our responsibility is to invest all we have in loving God and loving our neighbors. We invest resources in pursuit of the dignity of all humans made in the image of God; we give fearlessly in the knowledge of our own belonging to God. Whether we choose to spend money with businesses that share our values, to share our own homes and belongings with our communities, or to offer our time in ministry, we can find creative ways to multiply what we've been given. We honor our Creator by using our resources creatively and generously. We have the opportunity to give to God what is God's—everything—with gratitude and joy.

Our reading today is the second challenge or attack by the leaders against Christ. The words “laid plans” in verse 15 indicate that the ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, held an official meeting. They plotted

how they might deal with this man who was claiming to be

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the Messiah. They feared Christ, for he was gathering the loyalty of the people so strongly around himself.

Their plot was to ask him a question about a person's citizenship. The questions was supposed to "trap him in his words;" that is, it was supposed to be impossible for Christ to answer without discrediting himself either with the people or with the Roman authorities.

If he discredited himself with the people, they would react and desert him; if he discredited himself with the Romans, they would arrest him.

Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God himself; therefore, he saw through their plot. Christ used the occasion to teach the truth about citizenship, a truth which was both astounding and earth-shaking to the people of that day—earth shaking because the Jews

believed that the loyalty of a citizen belonged only to God, and the rest of the world believed that loyalty belonged to the ruling monarch of their territory.

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Christ astounded the world of his day by declaring there was an earthly, physical citizenship to which some things are to be given; and there was a spiritual, heavenly citizenship to which some things are to be given.

There were **two** false concepts of citizenship that are seen in the Pharisees and Herodians. However, it must be remembered, that the world did not know the concepts were false until this experience.

The **first** false concept is that religion is supreme. This is seen in the view of the Pharisees. They believed strongly in the heavenly world, so much so they believed that all obedience and loyalty were due God and God alone. In fact, all things on earth were due God. The state and all other power and authority were to be subject to religious rule.

Therefore, they were strongly against paying taxes to a foreign king. Such was an infringement upon God's right.

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The **second** false concept is that the state is supreme. This is seen in the view of the Herodians.

Picture the scene and how strange it was. The Pharisees held that religion was dominant over government, and despised Roman authority and taxation. The Herodians held that government was dominant over religion; consequently, they would agree that taxes must be paid to Caesar rather than to God. The Herodians and the Pharisees were bitter enemies. To find them together was strange indeed, but their hatred of Jesus brought them together against One whom they considered a common enemy.

The world's concept of citizenship is still the same as it was in Jesus' day, despite his teaching. The vast

majority of the world would be humanists and secularists, that is, worldly-minded citizens and unbelieving politicians. They would hold that the state is supreme. On the other hand, there would be some who would hold that religion is supreme and is to

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dominate the state. However, the position of religious supremacy is very difficult to practice in an educated and industrialized society. To a large degree, it can be held only theoretically.

There are **three** sins that are committed by those who hold false concepts of citizenship. The **first** of those sins that are common to the false concepts of citizenship is selfish ambition, which often leads to compromises and intrigue. Nothing could have been more surprising than to see the Pharisees and Herodians working together. They stood diametrically opposed to one another. The Pharisees thought the Herodians no better than the heathen doomed for hell, yet they were working with

the Herodians against Christ. What was it that brought them together? Selfish ambition. They feared the loss of their position, influence, power, wealth, and security. A man who lives to this world will become a bedfellow with almost anyone to protect his security. The degree or strange appearance of the compromise will seldomly matter.

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The depth of the sin in selfish ambition is also seen here. The primary plotters were religious leaders; and they were not only willing to plot evil, they were trying to cause a man, Christ himself, to be put to death. Just how evil government and religion can be in their ambition is clearly seen in this passage.

The **second** sin that is common to the false concept of citizenship is deception which usually leads to flattery and destruction. The deception is seen in **two** facts. **First**, the deception is seen in that the Pharisees themselves did not go to Christ. They sent “their disciples along with the Herodians.” With the Pharisees’ disciples going to Christ, they were

hoping that Christ would think the question was a legitimate question of a student, never suspecting a plot to entrap him. The **second** fact of deception, is seen in the words of flattery which were used in approaching Jesus: "Teacher...We know you are a man of integrity...And that you teach the way of God in

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accordance with the truth...You aren't swayed by men...because you pay no attention to who they are."

The **third** sin that is common to the false concept of citizenship is closed-mindedness and obstinate unbelief which leads to rejection of the truth and self-condemnation. The question asked of Christ was simple: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" The Pharisees, sincere Jewish religionists, would shout, "No." The Herodians and those securing position and wealth by Roman rule would say, "Yes."

The truth about citizenship is that a man has two citizenships. A man is a citizen of this world; that is clearly evident. Therefore, he owes to the earthly powers what belongs to them. But a man is also a citizen of heaven, of the spiritual world; therefore, he owes to God what belongs to Him.

Christ revealed a very important truth to all men. They are beings of God as well as of this world, spiritual as well as physical beings. Therefore, they are

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responsible to live as citizens of God as well as citizens of this world.

So, what are the **lessons** we can learn from this Scripture reading from Matthew?

This Scripture reading from Matthew offers several important lessons about civic duty and spiritual integrity. In response to the question about paying

taxes to Caesar, Jesus emphasizes that one should “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s,” highlighting the importance of respecting government authority while also recognizing divine authority. This passage underscores the need for individuals to acknowledge their responsibilities to God. This includes not just financial contributions but also living a life that honors God in all aspects. Jesus’ clever response to the Pharisees illustrates the

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importance of wisdom when face with difficult situations or challenges. It serves as a reminder to navigate complex situations with integrity and clarity.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Our loving God, we thank you for protecting us in our daily lives by providing an ordered and peaceful

existence. Help us to obey and respect the governing authorities. But above all, lead us to honor and obey you, our Lord, and to serve you with that you have given us. We ask this in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.