

RENDER TO GOD

In the twelfth chapter of the gospel of Mark we read of Jesus encountering a series of confrontations and challenges from the religious leaders. These challenges, of course, were issued with the intent of trapping Jesus in His words so they might find cause to condemn Him. Each one of these challenges, instead, afforded Jesus the opportunity correct misunderstandings and teach valuable kingdom principles.

One such challenge coming from the Pharisees and the Herodians involved the payment of taxes. After much empty flattery, the question was posed to Jesus, "*Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?*" (Mark 12:14e-15a). The question was designed to put Jesus in a difficult position. If Jesus said it was unlawful to pay taxes, the Herodians would have accused Him of opposing Caesar. If, however, He said they must pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees could whip up the anger of the Jews who felt oppressed by Rome against Him.

Jesus used this opportunity to teach a far more significant lesson. He asked for a Roman coin and then asked them, "*Whose image and inscription is this?*" (Mark 12:16). They answered, "*Caesar's.*" Jesus then answered in such a way that neither group could fault Him: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Mark 12:17).

Because Caesar's image was on the coin, the money ultimately belonged to Caesar. Jesus thus affirmed their obligation to pay taxes to the civil government, of which Caesar was head. More important, however, is the fact that God's image is imprinted on human beings (Gen. 1:27). Jesus did not point this out explicitly, but His use of Caesar's image on the Roman coin would make this point for Him. The fact that we bear God's image means we ultimately belong to God. Rendering to God what is God's means giving self wholly over to God.

A later encounter in Mark 12 sums up what God expects us to render to Him. "*And you shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,*" and, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Mark 12:30-31). When we strive to live our lives by these commandments, we render to God what is God's.

Yes, we should pay our taxes and thus "*render to Caesar*," however, more importantly, we should render self to God, the One in Whose image we are made.

Tim Butler