

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

50. What Do I Owe to Caesar? What Do I Owe to God?

Mark 12:13-17

REVIEW

Beginning in [Chapter 11](#) (the account of Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover in 32AD) Mark takes us through the final days leading up to the betrayal, the beating and death of Jesus on a Roman Cross, His burial and bodily resurrection from the grave. Mark devotes SIX of the sixteen chapters of his account of the life and mission of Jesus to those seven days!

From the Sunday before Passover through the week leading up to His death on the cross Jesus made the Temple Mount His ministry headquarters

[Luke 21:37-38](#) And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. ³⁸And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

On the day after His entry into Jerusalem (Monday) Jesus went on to the Temple Mount, and there in the area set apart for Gentiles to enquire about the true and living God, Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers and drove out those buying and selling. The chief priests (who were making a fortune off those who were coming to worship God) along with the scribes and the elders were outraged!

So, from that point forward the enemies of Jesus relentlessly pelted Jesus with questions — questions that challenged His authority to do the things he did and say the things He said. For that reason, Mark 12 is a chapter of questions.

They asked Him

[Mark 11:28 \(CSB\)](#) ²⁸.... “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do these things?”

In other words: *“We are THE authority around here — We say who comes and goes — WE say what can be done and what can’t be done here — on what authority did you do this?”*

Jesus crafted a very specific story to illustrate the truth about the way the religious leaders in Israel had consistently treated the people of God and the House of God as if it were theirs — and how they actually showed their resentment towards God in the way they beat and killed the messengers God had sent to them to remind them that they were supposed to serve God by taking care of His people and His House. And now — like the owner of the vineyard in the parable — God had sent His only Son and they were plotting to kill Him!

This was such a “Jesus” moment! Jesus *knew* that He was the beloved son in the parable who would be rejected and murdered by the men who were entrusted with the spiritual and moral care of the nation. Jesus wanted those men to know that He *KNEW* that they were bent on killing Him! And yet — there He was — loving them — telling them the truth — as the clock was counting down to His death on a Roman cross.

The chief priests, scribes and elders *knew he had spoken this parable against them. So they left him and went away (Mark 12:12).*

Tonight we pick up in Mark 12:13

Mark 12:13–17 (CSB) ¹³Then they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Jesus to trap him in his words. ¹⁴When 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. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” ¹⁵But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at.” ¹⁶They brought a coin. “Whose image and inscription is this?” he asked them. “Caesar’s,” they replied. ¹⁷Jesus 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.

Mark 12:13 ¹³Then

The WHEN of “Then” is after Jesus crafted that very specific parable.

Mark 12:13 (CSB) ¹³Then they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to Jesus

The Pharisees were against the Roman government. By contrast the Herodians had joined themselves to the political power of Rome — in particular the power of Rome vested in Herod.

A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark translates *Herodians* as “*the henchmen of Herod*” or “*the followers of Herod.*” ¹

The Pharisees and the Herodians were enemies. The Pharisees were ultra-conservative in their theology; they were the ultra -orthodox / ultra-religious sect in Judaism. In things spiritual and political they were the right-wingers in Judaism. The Herodians, on the other hand, were ultra-liberal in their theology. In things religious and political the Herodians were the left-wingers — spiritual and social “progressives” in Judaism.

The Pharisees hated Jesus because he was a threat to their religious agenda and influence; the Herodians hated Jesus because He was a threat to their political arrangements. Jesus brought them together! The same thing still happens in the 21st century in virtually any and every relational context: Enemies become allies because they both have a common enemy.

There was nothing honorable or noble here.

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

trap — to capture by hunting or fishing. The emphasis of this word is on the chase. These guys were in violent pursuit of prey — hoping to trap Him in a slip of the tongue and take Him down.

¹ Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993). *A handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (p. 371). New York: United Bible Societies.

Luke gives us insight into the depth of deceit and treachery in the hearts of the most religious men in Israel — and also reveals how they intended to use the absolute authority of the hated Roman empire to accomplish their murderous plan.

Luke 20:20 (CSB) ²⁰*They watched closely and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, so that they could catch him in what he said, to hand him over to the governor's rule and authority.*

Check out **Psalm 38:12**

Psalm 38:12 (CSB) ¹²*Those who intend to kill me set traps, and those who want to harm me threaten to destroy me; they plot treachery all day long.*

Luke tells us that the enemies of Jesus were **pretending** to be *just* or *righteous*. They were actors, pretenders. They pretended to have a serious moral dilemma and they pretended that Jesus could really help them.

They really laid it on thick.

Mark 12:14 (CSB) 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.*

They told Jesus that they knew He was

a man of integrity — *we know that you are truthful.*

an independent thinker — *don't care what anyone thinks.*

impartial in his thinking — *nor do you show partiality.*

incorruptible in his teaching — *you teach each the way of God truthfully.*

Everything they said there is true about Jesus. But they didn't believe a word of it.

QUOTE: R. Kent Hughes — *“Flattery is the reverse mirror-image of gossip. Gossip involves saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his face. Flattery is saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind his back.”*²

All of their intel-gathering and spy craft was in the hopes that they could come up with a trap question that would produce a specific outcome:

Luke 20:20 (CSB) ²⁰....*so that they could catch him in what he said, to hand him over to the governor’s rule and authority.*

On the human level you might be able to convince people that you’re someone or something you’re not. But you can’t pretend before God.

Acts 15:8 *And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us*

The phrase *knows the heart* is a single word: **kardiognōstēs**; from *kardía*, heart, and *ginōskō* — to know; knower of hearts.³

Mark 12:14 (CSB) ¹⁴.... *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”*

Jesus, we’re really righteous men — and we have an honest disagreement! We just want to get to the truth and we believe YOU can tell us the answer. We want to know if it’s just, if it’s righteous for the people of Israel, the covenant community of God, the household of faith, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to pay taxes to a foreign power?

taxes is the Greek word *kenson* — a transliteration of the Latin word *census*. It refers to an imperial Roman tax. The Jews despised it because it was a constant reminder of their subjection to pagan Rome. They believed they had Jesus hanging over the dual horns of a dilemma — and that He was going to be gashed to death on one of them. If Jesus said to pay it, the people would turn on Him as a

² Excerpt From: R. Kent Hughes. “Luke (2 volumes in 1 / ESV Edition).”

³ Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

traitor, and He would be finished. But if He said don't pay it, they could *deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor* on the grounds that Jesus was an enemy of Rome — guilty of sedition and insurrection.

EVERYONE in the temple courts was listening. The question was framed as either/or. The scribes and chief priests and the Pharisees and the Herodians were *SURE* that they had Jesus no matter which way He answered.

Mark 12:15 (CSB) ¹⁵**But knowing their hypocrisy,**

In **John's Gospel (2:25)** we're told that *Jesus knew what was in man*.

Even if a person is sharp and discerning, apart from the gift of the *word of knowledge* (1 Corinthians 12:8) they can't know what's in a person in the same way Jesus does.

Because all of us (in varying degrees) care about what others think about us flattery can cloud truth. Sometimes our enemies flatter us because they want to hurt us. Sometimes our friends flatter us because they want to be kind and helpful.

Charles Spurgeon — *"It is always best not to know, nor wish to know, what is being said about you, either by friends or foes. Those who praise us are probably as much mistaken as those who abuse us."*

Mark 12:15–17 (CSB) ¹⁵**But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at."**

denarius — was the equivalent of a day's wage.

Mark 12:16–17 (CSB) ¹⁶**They brought a coin. "Whose image and inscription is this?" he asked them. "Caesar's," they replied.**

On one side of the coin was a bust of Tiberius Caesar with the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus." For the orthodox Jew this was beyond offensive — it was blasphemy! **Every** year — **every** adult male and female in Israel had to pay tribute to Caesar just for the privilege of being alive.

It could only be paid with that coin bearing Caesar's image and inscription. The fact that they had to pay that tax with THAT coin really irked them!

But think about it — At least half of the men asking this question believed that Jesus should die because *he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18)*. Yet these same men lived by way of the currency of Caesar. They traveled Roman roads. They traded on Roman routes. And, here, they had a Roman denarius with that inscription handy.

With one of the greatest soundbites in human history Jesus dismantled the dilemma!

Adam Clarke (British theologian and biblical scholar 1762 –1832) — *“This answer is full of consummate wisdom. It establishes the limits, regulates the rights, and distinguishes the jurisdiction of the two empires of heaven and earth.”*

Mark 12:17 (CSB) ¹⁷Jesus told them, **“Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,**

Give — is a specific word found only here in Mark that means ‘give back,’ ‘return,’ ‘pay,’ ‘render.’

Give back — *Return* — *Pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,*

Let’s drop the word “Caesar” into our 21st century lives: “Caesar” provides roads and highways for us to drive on; signal lights and street lights; police to enforce laws and protect us from law breakers; fire fighters and first responders; volunteer armed forces to defend us. We have an obligation to give back to “Caesar” for those services.

And we can’t miss this — Jesus said that the citizens of heaven were to recognize the demands of human government — even when it was controlled by a man who thought he was God.

Daniel Akin — *By His reply Jesus acknowledges the legitimacy of human government. He is no anarchist. God has ordained the family, the church, and*

*human government. It has the right to levy taxes, and we have the responsibility to pay. It has the right to make laws, and we have the responsibility to obey.*⁴

As right now citizens of heaven we're to obey human authorities for the Lord's sake. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul and Peter reaffirm and expand on this amazing statement of Jesus — even though they lived when the godless, lunatic Nero (AD 54–68) was emperor.

Romans 13:1–2 (ESV) ¹*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* ²*Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*

1 Timothy 2:1–2 (ESV) ¹*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

1 Peter 2:17 (ESV) ¹⁷*Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

But when obedience to human government conflicts with obeying God, we can and must resist the demands of human government. We can't obey human government when it demands us to violate a command of God. We see this lived out early in the history of the Christianity. In Acts 4 and 5 the authorities arrested Peter and John for proclaiming the Gospel. They were brought before the Sanhedrin (the 70 most powerful men in Israel). They were ordered to never teach or preach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17–20).

Acts 5:28-29 *“We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.”*²⁹ *But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.*

As soon as they were released, they went out and began to preach the Gospel and were arrested again.

⁴ Dr. Daniel L. Akin. Exalting Jesus in Mark

Our call to preach the gospel transcends the restrictions of government. When human government starts claiming ground in our lives that belongs to God, we're to obey God. We can never violate a command of God in order to comply with human government. But apart from such conflicts — Christians are actually obeying God when our obedience to human government is careful and prayerful.

To the pain of His enemies— Jesus puts Caesar in his proper place and there was nothing they could do about it.

But then Jesus puts God in His place — the place of total and absolute ownership!

and to God the things that are God's."

The coin belonged to Caesar because it bore his image. We belong to God because we bear his image!

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Caesar wants something completely different from us than God wants. We give the coin to Caesar, but we give our life to God because He has stamped His image on our lives.

IMAGO DEI — The Image of God in man! There is so much in that. We spent an entire evening — the 4th night in our CREDO series — just scratching the surface of what it means for man to be made in the image of God.

Of all the things that exist in the universe, humans are the only thing created in the image and likeness of God. In creation we were minted, if-you-would. His image stamped upon us

We have MORAL LIKENESS to God. We have the ability to make decisions that have an impact on others around us and the environment and ourselves. We are built for and desire community; not just for survival — because we are made in

the image of the Triune God — Father, Son and Spirit living in perfect, ceaseless, loving unity.

We also have NON-MORAL LIKENESS to God. We can reason — think — learn. We are immortal (not eternal). We have a spiritual dimension. We have the ability to create. We have the ability to appreciate beauty and aesthetics.

ALL of these come from the doctrine of IMAGO DEI. Being made in the image and likeness of God is what defines what it is to be human. Because of that — it may be fitting to die for your country — but only God is worth living for.

Unlike a coin — when God stamped us with His image, He gave us a will. In **Genesis 3** man exercised his will against the will of God. Even after the fall all humans still bear the image of God (Genesis 9:6). But because of sin — fallen man does not and cannot image God well.

Sin does not make us LESS than human — but it does make us FALLEN and LOST humans in need of a Savior. God desired to restore us to the reason we were made. That is why He sent Jesus into the world. That is why Jesus was in Jerusalem during the week of Passover in 32 AD — to give His life in order to rescue us from the thing that distorts and destroys the image of God in us. The Gospel tells us that when we believe with our heart on the Lord Jesus we are redeemed — and we are born again — we're RE-MINTED! We are sealed — stamped by the Holy Spirit. He is at work conforming us to the image of Jesus.

The Image of God in creation. The Image of God in redemption. THAT is why Jesus said — Taxes to Caesar, lives to God!

and to God the things that are God's

What belongs to God? Praise, Worship, Faith, Love, Obedience. DAILY we owe God EVERYTHING that we are and everything that we could ever hope to be. You and I owe to God a debt of love that we can NOT repay

***2 Corinthians 5:14–15 (NLT)** Either way, Christ's love controls us. Since we believe that Christ died for all, we also believe that we have all died to our old life. ¹⁵ He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer*

live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them.

Romans 6:13 *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*

Psalm 116:12–13; 17 *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? ¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,.... ¹⁷ I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.*

Romans 12:1 *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

Jesus is our great and amazing and perfect example of rendering to God the things that are God's. Jesus RENDERED to His Father what HE didn't owe! JESUS rendered to God what WE owed but could NEVER pay! JESUS died in our place — paid the debt for EVERY sin of EVERY sinner — so we could be redeemed, reconciled and RE-MINTED!

You and I owe everything we are — everything we do — everything we could ever hope to become and have to God. The more we know and experience Him and the depth of His redeeming love we find it our greatest joy to RENDER all of it to God!

Mark 12:17 (CSB) And they were utterly amazed at him.

With all of that in mind — what are some Biblical commitments we can make as dual citizens? (Adapted from Daniel Akin's commentary on the Gospel of Mark)

I will be a good citizen who lives in subjection to the governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17). If allowed, I'll engage in the political process and bring my biblical, Christian convictions to the ballot box. And I will serve my nation, knowing it will never be perfect like my heavenly kingdom, but still wanting its health and blessing.

I will remember the borderless kingdom of God. Joseph served Egypt. Daniel served Babylon. And Jesus served all of humanity. So, my ultimate hope in Christ and my ultimate allegiance is to Jesus and His kingdom.

I will obey the governmental authorities, but my worship is reserved for God alone. And I will go to God in prayer for the government, praying for those in authority, especially that they would allow the church to peacefully pursue its mission (1 Timothy 2:1-5).

I will acknowledge that governmental authority comes from God (Romans 13:1-6, Genesis 9:1-6). Though imperfect, it is one of God's ways of controlling unchecked wickedness in the heart of man.

I will pay the taxes the government asks of me (though I will judiciously steward all my resources well and pay no more than required).

And when the government tells me to behave in a way contrary to my biblical convictions, I will resist, do what the Bible commands, and deal with the consequences of breaking the law. The law being resisted must be unjust and immoral, clearly contrary to the will of God, and not just inconvenient or burdensome. This might take wisdom and tact, but I believe it can be done.