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## "Render Unto Caesar"

by Matthew Christians

based on Matthew 22:15-22  
23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
October 19, 2008

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's"* (v.21). That's the answer Jesus gives to the Pharisees one day when they came calling... when they came to Jesus trying to trick Jesus and turn the crowds against Him. St. Matthew narrates the story for us. *"Tell us, [Jesus], what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus [was] aware of their malice [and] said, 'Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax.'" (vv.17-19). "Let me see what you use to pay the tax," he said. When they brought out the coin and showed it to Jesus, He asked them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (v.20). Whose face is stamped into the precious metal? "They answered, 'Caesar's'" (v.21). To which Jesus answers the title of this morning's sermon: *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."**

There's several things that we can learn from Jesus' teaching here: the most basic of which is this: all people, whether believers in the LORD God or unbelievers, all people should give to the state that which is asked of them. God works for our good by establishing for us a government. Just as God has established that the family as the place where children are to be educated, disciplined, and trained for life by father and mother, so has God established the government that is in place over us.

As much as you may dislike government or the particular holders of office in government, government —no matter how good or bad it is— is ordained by God. It is His

necessary way to preserve humanity. Without the law and order and, to a large degree, the protection afforded by the state, we sinful people would soon destroy ourselves. Can you imagine the anarchy that would follow as person sought to have his own way in everything? Jesus tells us to honor and support our government and our leaders because they are ordained by God for our good. *"Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."*

Which is all well and good... but Jesus doesn't end there. You didn't think I'd spend a whole sermon telling you to honor and obey the government, did you? No, Jesus' answer to the Pharisees was a two-part answer. And it's the second part that we really need to figure out. It has great importance for our Christian life: But let's go on to the second part of Jesus' answer - the part that follows the business about Caesar. *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,"* Jesus says, *"and [render] to God the things that are God's."*

Now I know that some of you are already rolling your eyes. You're thinking to yourself, "well, I knew it was coming. Here's the place where the pastor is going to make a pitch for increasing my offerings and tell me to get busy and start volunteering some of my time in the church." And while that IS always a good thing to be reminded of, I don't think that's what Jesus is talking about.

No, Jesus is not making a pitch for you to increase your offerings and your service to the church. Not even close. When Jesus says *"[render] to God the things that are God's,"* He's actually teaching them (and us) that the things of God are NOT primarily your time and money.

Think about the context of what made Jesus say this. Remember that Jesus had been asked about paying taxes. He had his opponents produce a coin and Jesus pointed out that the coin bore the image (the likeness) and the inscription of Caesar. Because it bore the image and inscription of Caesar, it should be given to Caesar.

But what are the things of God that bear His image, likeness, and inscription? The coins in your pocket do not bear God's image. The money in your wallet or purse does not have the likeness of the LORD on it. Neither the hours in your day nor the days in your life are inscribed with image of Christ. No, neither time nor possessions are primarily the things of God that Jesus is speaking about. So what are *"the things that are God's"*? What are the

"things of God" which bear the image, likeness, and inscription of the LORD God Almighty.

Let me read a couple verses from the very first chapter of the very first book of the Bible: *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:26-27). It's people. It's you and I, all mankind which was made in the image and likeness of God.

But here's where it gets tricky. Because even though God created people in his image, when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden... at the Fall into sin, our first parents lost that image of God. From the first child on, the children of Adam were born (not in God's image, but in) Adam's image— an image and likeness which is sinful and unclean.

But (did you know?), as Christians, all is not lost. As Christians, we are again able to bear the image of God... not because of who we are, but because of what God has done for us and given to us.

Do you know that line from the great hymn "Lift High the Cross"? It goes like this: "All newborn soldiers of the Crucified / Bear on their brows the seal of Him Who died!" We were born in *"the image of the man of dust,"* yet by the grace of Christ, we also *"bear the image of the Heavenly Man"* (I Cor. 15:49). That's the great picture, for example, we see in the very last book of the Bible. It's in Revelation where we're given this vision of the saints in the kingdom of heaven. It's a picture of all the people of God standing around the throne of God, all those who have chosen by God (I Thess. 1:5). And every single one of them is described as having the name of Jesus and the name of the Father *"written on their foreheads"* (Rev. 14:1). Jesus puts His name right on you, for you are His.

You who have been baptized in God's name are His. You are *"the things that are God's."* Not only did God create you, but God —by Jesus' sin-atonement and victorious resurrection, God— has redeemed you and your fallen image. He has provided an accomplished salvation in which He desires you to be His own once again.

By the grace of God, because of His mercy... because of His love... you and I, we

bear the image and the inscription of God. What a blessed truth this is, one for which we thank and praise God! That Jesus Christ lived and died and rose again to call you out of sin, to call you out of death and damnation to be His own child, to bear His own name, and to live with Him forever in Paradise.

And so? *"Render to God the things that are God's"*? What Jesus is saying is, as important as money and time given to the Church may be... what He really is your life. The proper response to Jesus dying and rising for you, the proper response to God calling you through the water and the Word of Baptism, is to recognize the truth of First Corinthians six, that *"you are not your own, [that] you were bought with a price"* (vv.19b–20).

This means... enough with living only for yourself, caring only about yourself and your loved ones. God has redeemed you and redeemed you for a purpose. Remember that *"by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Eph. 2:8–9a). St. Paul says it well in Ephesians when he reminds us that *"For we are [God's] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"* (v.10).

In your work and in your play, in your public moments and in your private ones, let your life be a life of service to your creator and your redeemer.

Again, you and I are *"the things that are God's."* By His grace, mercy, and love, you bear the image and the inscription of God. Therefore, when Jesus says to render unto God the things of God, He is making talking to you— about you. So how about it? How will you *"render to God the things that are God's"*? It's a question which ought to occupy your mind every single day that you awaken from sleep... every morning that you awaken to the truth that Christ has risen from the dead for you. How will you respond to the fact that you are belong to Him and that whether you live or whether you die, that you belong to Him" (Rom. 14:8)? *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."* In Jesus' name, Amen.

The peace of God —which surpasses understanding—  
guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

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