

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***“Jesus said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21).***

There is an old saying that politics make strange bedfellows. Here the Pharisees and the Herodians display a common hatred for Jesus that overshadows their sharp disagreements with each other. The Pharisees were ardent nationalists who opposed the Roman rule and despised the Herodians for their cooperation with the Roman government. They despised each other, but they did have one thing in common: their common hatred toward Jesus.

Today, we find ourselves where we have been the last four weeks. Again, we find ourselves at the temple grounds on Tuesday of Holy Week.

Tensions continue to mount between the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus. First Jesus lays on them the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32). Then Jesus lays on them the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matthew 21:33-44). And to top it all off, the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14). These religious leaders knew that Jesus was talking about them, and they did not like it. They were ticked. They wanted Jesus silenced – and for good.

So, they leave Jesus for a time to plot how to entangle Jesus in His own words. This time a new strategy. Could there be another way to silence Jesus?

You see, at this time, Jerusalem was full of pilgrims preparing for the Passover Feast, and multitudes of people are now gathering to hear Jesus preach and to heal the sick. Multitudes of people are coming to faith in Jesus by the power of the Gospel. This is further ticking off the Jewish religious authorities. They want Jesus silenced. They want Him dead. But could there be another way, so that they would not be the ones to ultimately get rid of Jesus?

Christ’s presence at the temple offered a forum for an assault. With the large crowds, the Jewish religious authorities thought this was their moment to flex their muscle by challenging Jesus and prove Him to be a fraud.

So, the Pharisees plotted by sending their disciples, along with their sworn enemy, the Herodians. You see, in times of war, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. And for the Jewish religious authorities, this was war. The Pharisees were going to find any possible way to get rid of Jesus, even if it took their enemy – the Herodians – to do so.

So, they attempt to butter up Jesus. Surely compliments can change the tenor of confrontation. Think for a moment as to why we give compliments. Why would you compliment your father or mother? You do it to show your parent that you love them and that you really appreciate everything they do for you. Why do you compliment your friends? You do it to show them that you're glad they're your friends and that they mean a lot to you.

But in debates, compliments serve a much different purpose. The compliment is being used as venom and as deadly intention.

The Herodians were a small political party among the Jews, which favored and supported the rule of the Herodian dynasty. The Herodians looked favorably upon Rome, since the Herodians ruled at the pleasure of the Caesars, the Roman emperors. So, they would be in favor with paying taxes to Caesar since the House of Herod was dependent on the Romans.

The Pharisees were the largest political party among the Jews, which favored national independence from the Romans and despised the Herodians for their cooperation with the Roman government.

But on this day, these two enemies were united.

So, these two sworn enemies come up to Jesus and greet Him with some very nice compliments saying, ***“Teacher, we know that You are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and You do not care about anyone’s opinion, for You are not swayed by appearances”*** (Matthew 22:16).

We can see ourselves in these schemers. We can easily become manipulators in order to get others to do what we want. You may compliment your boss in hopes for a raise. You can help a neighbor in need in hopes of them helping you later with your project. In this, we show our sinful nature, as we fall short of any ability to truly render love to God and love to your neighbor.

Surely, because these men are speaking such flattering words, Jesus is almost certain to consider them as friends. Surely, Jesus will speak openly and freely with them, answering any questions they would ask. Jesus knowing what is in their hearts allows them to ask their question: ***“Tell us, then, what do You think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*** (Matthew 22:17).

This debate was never about getting a wholesome desire to understand God’s Law; it was all about discrediting Jesus.

So, if Jesus tells the people to not pay taxes to Rome, the Herodians will report Him to Pontius Pilate and have Him executed for treason. But if Jesus tells the people to pay taxes to Caesar, the Pharisees will spread the word that Jesus is unpatriotic.

Jesus appears to be trapped. How can He escape this? Either way He answers, Jesus is finished: Tried for treason or as against the Jewish people.

Despite their plotting, the Pharisees and Herodians were correct about Jesus. He was a Man of integrity. He was true and teaches the way of God truthfully and doesn’t care about man’s opinion. Jesus never deviated from the standard of truth. So, when Jesus taught God’s way of salvation, His teaching was in absolute agreement with God’s revelation of the truth. Nor could Jesus be swayed by the so-called truth of men. He would never feel the urge to tailor His teaching to suit the people. Nor would Jesus be intimidated by others who might do harm to Him if His preaching ran counter to their likes and expectations.

Even if these men said the truth about Jesus, they didn’t mean it. They wanted to silence Jesus by any means necessary.

So, how does Jesus escape this trap? He doesn’t. Jesus, aware of their malice, says, ***“Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?”*** (Matthew 22:18). And to their astonishment, Jesus says, ***“Show Me the coin for the tax”*** (Matthew 22:18-19).

Their plot appears to be working. So, they complied by producing a denarius. Jesus asks them, ***“Who’s likeness and inscription is this?”*** (Matthew 22:20) At once, they reply, ***“Caesar’s”*** (Matthew 22:21).

Little did they know that they who had set the trap for Jesus had fallen into a trap themselves.

At once they admitted that the coins, they and all the Jews were using every day had the emperor's image and title imprinted on them. They had also admitted that they were legally a part of the Roman Empire and were rightfully under the jurisdiction of Caesar. Then Jesus said to them, ***“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's”*** (Matthew 22:21). With those words, Jesus is saying, *“You are all subjects of Rome. It follows that you owe to the Roman government all the obligations of its subjects.”*

The Pharisees wanted to isolate the question to only paying taxes, but now Jesus is compelling them to consider paying taxes as only one item among many when it comes to obedience to the Roman government – a government that God, in His good providence, has made them subjects.

When they heard this, they marveled at Jesus' words and left Him and went away. But even if it sounds like Jesus won this debate, His words here would be used as one of the two accusations against Him, which ultimately would lead Him to His death on the cross three days later on Good Friday. Jesus would be accused of rebellion against the Roman government – and He would be accused of blasphemy against God for claiming to be able to forgive sins, claiming to be the Son of God, and claiming to be God Himself.

From today's words from Jesus, we get the Christian doctrine known as the Two Kingdoms, also known as the Two Realms, which God has placed every one of His followers. Christians live in both the secular realm and the spiritual realm. The secular realm is the temporal government: Federal, State, County, City. The spiritual realm is the Church. These two realms have different purposes: the secular realm's purpose is for the wellbeing and protection of people; the spiritual realm is for the spiritual wellbeing and eternal life of the people.

These two realms are never to mix. But so often, they do, and when they do mix, it ends with disastrous results: confusion, distress of conscience, suffering, heartache, and general spiritual decline.

So, if the secular realm forces the Church to change its doctrines, it is placing itself as the authority, and is stealing the seat of God. Examples of this are the definition of marriage, the definition of man and woman, or forcing churches to include abortion coverage in church healthcare plans. The secular realm has no authority to tell anyone, Christian or non-Christian, what to believe. This is purely a matter between God and the Christian.

Conversely, whenever a Church has lost sight of its spiritual mission and has reached into the domain of the State, foolishly attempting to achieve spiritual goals through earthly means, such as legislation to “make this a more Christian country” or legislation to “promote social justice,” the Church has stepped into the domain of the State. The Church cannot legislate morality. The Church is the Church and cannot step into the role of the State. Only harm for the State and for the Church is the outcome.

Martin Luther, who coined the terms “Two Kingdoms” and “Two Realms,” believed that there is a rational authority and a Biblical authority. In the secular realm, you argue reason. In the spiritual realm, you argue Biblical authority. When reason is operating properly, reason is always in accord with the Ten Commandments.

To His opponents, Jesus shows them the denarius with Caesar’s likeness and inscription. He does this to show them and us that the duty of every citizen is to keep the Fourth Commandment by honoring the ruling authorities in paying taxes. Jesus could have condemned the Roman government, but He didn’t. He didn’t place any limits on paying taxes to the government – such as funding abortions. Jesus said to honor your authorities by giving them what you owe them. This is rendering to Caesar what is Caesar’s.

But what does it mean to “*render to God the things that are God’s*”? Well, for one, respect for the government. Two, the government and Church should not mix. But most importantly, it is to do God the Father’s will. This means to repent and believe the preaching of John the Baptist, especially concerning the One who came to fulfill all righteousness. This means that you, the tenant farmers, will care faithfully for the Owner’s vineyard by acknowledging that the vineyard and its fruit belong to God and to His Son, the rightful heir of all things. This means that you honor the King by accepting His invitation to the wedding banquet and paying homage to His Son – this heavenly feast which is both now and forever.

To give God what is God’s is to bow before Him – *all on earth and all in heaven* – since everything belongs to God. To give God what is God’s is to repent of your sins and to follow His Son in trusting obedience, since Jesus has paid your debt of sin by His suffering and death on the cross for you. He has destroyed sin’s power over you. He rose from the dead to prove that your sins are forgiven – and all by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**