

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, October 16-22 (A) - Matthew 22:15-22

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Citizenship*

Focus Question: *What does it mean for you to be a Christian citizen?*

word of life

“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Matthew 22:21 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 22:15-22

It isn’t just Jesus who had disciples. In this passage, we read about the *disciples* of the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders of the day. Their disciples were committed to studying the “correct” interpretation of the Torah and the Jewish way of life. It is these disciples who are used by the Pharisees to entrap Jesus. Oddly, they are joined by the Herodians, supporters of the Roman-endorsed Herod and the taxes.

1. *Compare and contrast the disciples of the Pharisees and Jesus.*

At first the interrogators appear sincere, flattering Jesus. Then, they question him about the law and the payment of taxes to Rome, the non-Jewish occupier of their land. Answering “yes” or “no” is bound to get Jesus into trouble with someone. Jesus is aware of the malice in their hearts.

2. *Why are the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus?*

Nevertheless, Jesus offers a classic response: “Give to rulers the things which are the rulers. Give to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus’ answer turns the tables on those who try to trap him. What is not God’s? As the Psalmist says, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything within” (Psalm 24:1). Look around. Is this not God’s world? Are not humans made in the image of God? Wherever humans go, they are God’s. This is true no matter the form of government.

God has created people to live within creation, allowing them to choose to form governments, bring good order to people, and help to provide basic needs. Sometimes these governments are ruled by emperors, councils, or the people themselves. Governments can be good or evil. A government is judged from God’s perspective and can be an expression of goodwill for humanity.

3. *How might a government bring good?*
4. *How might a government bring discord?*

When Jesus looks at the head depicted on the coin, he acknowledges the government of the day. His advice: give the Emperor his coin. Jesus knows God’s rule and throne far exceed any human ruler. Jesus sees the bigger picture, but at the same time, he recognizes the here and now. It is a practical answer. For Jesus to suggest the people not pay taxes would certainly have provoked a riot and rebellion as people tried to usurp the Roman regime.

Thus, Jesus places the question back to the interrogators. Each is to decide the boundary between God and the emperor’s reign. Jesus’ issue is not with the emperor. Instead, he sees the bigger picture, inviting people to follow God. It is God who deserves absolute allegiance.

5. *What is the main message of this passage?*
6. *What vies for your allegiance?*

word *among us*

Find a coin in your pocket or purse. Examine it. Look at both sides of the coin.

1. *Does Lincoln, Jefferson, or Washington own any of the coins?*
2. *Do you?*

Although the faces on our coins today are different, the question asked of Jesus still rings true. Do we, as disciples of Jesus, need to pay taxes? If so, are all taxes justified? Why not withhold taxes and give the same amount to the church? Is it OK to fudge on tax returns and give the government less than the law requires?

3. *Take a moment to reflect on the questions in the above paragraph.*
4. *What other questions would you raise?*

Jesus doesn't give an easy answer. It's not a clear "yes" or "no". In no way does Jesus say all taxes are right. Nor does Jesus say taxes are wrong. Likewise, Jesus does not affirm or condemn government. Instead, in a simple formula, Jesus reminds the interrogators, and us as well, to give to God what is God's – which is everything. This places any government as secondary to God's rule. Our primary allegiance is to God.

Jesus challenges us to view our government with God's eye. As disciples of Jesus, we try to be good, honest citizens who uphold laws, respecting the rights of others and working for justice for all. If taxes are not fair and balanced for all the citizens, then we, as Christians, work for change. It's not an issue of wheeling and dealing for "my" money and "my" investments. It's all God's anyway.

5. *Make a list of the top ten things the government provides for you.*
6. *What is a helpful way to view taxes?*

The dilemma of the modern-day disciples is to not get caught in the consumer cycle, forgetting Jesus in the process. It's all God's. Always has been. Always will be. We seek to be good stewards of our financial resources, generously giving for the work of God's reign. At the same time, we support our government as it works for peace and justice for all, but raise questions when it does not.

7. *Make a list of the top ten things God has given to you.*
8. *How do you respond to God's gifts given to you?*
9. *Why is it so difficult to give to God what is God's?*
10. *What is the greatest challenge in being a Christian citizen?*

Prayer

Giving God, create in us generous hearts, ones overflowing with gratitude to you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Psalm 24

last word

This week, begin each day listing
ten things in your life
for which you can give thanks to God.



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