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Sermon Notes

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A Christian's Duty to God and Government

Matthew 22:15-22

Sergeant York: Gary Cooper... Sergeant York

Wild, violent young man... Alvin York came to Christ; then became a pacifist and against all forms of violence; when he was drafted into the Army during WWI, he was thrown into a crisis of faith; in the movie, this was the one verse that enabled him to serve his country and serve God at the same time:

Matthew 22:21 Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

From the beginning of church history, Christians have had an uneasy and challenging relationship with the secular government

It was Caesar's governor, Pontius Pilate, who ordered the crucifixion of the Lord, and it was Roman soldiers that nailed Jesus to the cross

BUT it was a godly Roman centurion, Cornelius, who was the first Gentile convert to Christ

The greatest apostle of them all, Paul, was both a quintessential Jew AND a Roman citizen, and Paul frequently claimed the benefits of Roman citizenship and used the transportation and commerce of the Roman empire to spread the gospel... YET it was Caesar that ordered Paul's execution

The New Testament constantly commands willing submission to the government, yet it was the government that persecuted Christians aggressively and murderously for three centuries

The empire Constantine declared himself to be a Christian in 325 A.D., but that declaration brought a wedding of church and state that was nearly RUINOUS to the health of the church and that required a massive Reformation of the church twelve centuries later

In many nations around the earth, it is the government that is the bitterest enemy of the gospel, hunting down godly pastors and killing them

AND yet, in America, there has been for over two hundred years a comfortable relationship between Christianity and secular government... many godly Christians have had a massive influence in the governmental life of our nation; Christians have as much right to vote and influence elections as any other group

Some have even gone so far as to call America a “Christian nation” because of the pervasive influence of Christianity on our nation’s government and history

But in recent history, this comfortable relationship with the secular government has begun to decay

Legalized abortion was a major step in the separation of American government from Christian values

Now, the question stands before us as it has for ages: HOW EXACTLY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN DEAL WITH SECULAR GOVERNMENT?

Sergeant York found an answer in the text we will study today... is there some truth relevant for our struggle today??

I. An Attack Plotted and Executed (vs. 15-17)

Matthew 22:15-17 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

A. The Final Week of Jesus’ Life... One Conflict After Another

B. Jesus’ Enemies Plot Against Him

Matthew 22:15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.

1. They “took counsel together”... they had to make some kind of plot
 - a. The idea is to trap him by His speech
 - b. Ordinarily people who speak constantly are vulnerable to making an occasional gaffe
 - c. In our day and age of You Tube and electronic wireless media, the offhand remarks and mistakes of politicians get replayed instantly and endlessly around the world
 - d. But in Jesus day, such comments could get you KILLED
2. Two ways to get rid of Jesus: by law or by force
3. If the Pharisees wanted to dispense with Jesus LEGALLY, He had to be made a criminal in the eyes of Rome

- a. According to Roman law, the Jewish leaders had NO AUTHORITY to put a man to death
 - b. The Romans had no interest whatsoever in Jewish religious controversies... Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was BLASPHEMY to the Jews, but the Romans wouldn't have even given it the time of day
 - c. SO Jesus had to be made a criminal in the eyes of Rome...
 - d. If Jesus was heard to be espousing rebellion against Rome, then the Romans would take care of executing Jesus themselves
 - e. HENCE the question about TAXATION...
4. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders could just attack Jesus by force, as they tried to do several times during His ministry
- a. The problem there was the PEOPLE... they all LOVED Jesus and held that He was a prophet from God
 - b. The people was the source of Jesus' protection, the Pharisees thought... a number of times it was said that they wanted to seize Jesus but they were afraid of the people
 - c. In order to strip this protection away, Jesus had to be made repulsive in the eyes of the people
 - d. HENCE the question about taxation

C. Strange Bedfellows: The Pharisees and Herodians

Matthew 22:16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians

- 1. The Pharisees were orchestrating this attack on Jesus...sending their young disciples
- 2. The Pharisees
 - a. Jesus' most vocal and vehement enemies
 - b. Known for their religious convictions... their adamant desire to follow the Laws of Moses
 - c. They absolutely despised the Romans and the occupying forces, the Roman Legions
 - d. Some Pharisees were even Zealots, who took their opposition to Roman occupation to the extreme of armed revolution

e. They would have absolutely repudiated paying taxes to Caesar

3. The Herodians

a. Collaborators with Rome

b. Herod a puppet king whose power was based on Rome's consent

c. Personally benefitted from the taxes paid to Caesar

d. Would have instantly reported Jesus to the Romans if he proclaimed that the Jews ought to stop paying taxes to Caesar

4. Strange bedfellows... the Pharisees and the Herodians

a. Old truth: the enemy of my enemy is my friend

b. In WWII, the US and Great Britain teamed up with the genocidal Communist dictator Josef Stalin to defeat Adolf Hitler

c. So these two groups who are ordinarily enemies get together

d. They represent OPPOSITE SIDES of the question on taxation, but they both hated Jesus and wanted Him dead

e. So they each could bear witness against Him no matter what He said

D. The Flattery

Matthew 22:16 "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are."

1. Flattery is insincere praise given for selfish reasons... it is an ancient technique

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, "Flattery is telling the other person exactly what he thinks about himself."

Aesop's Fable, "The Fox and the Crow"

A wily fox sees an ugly crow sitting up high on a branch with a piece of cheese in its beak. He persuades the crow that it has the most beautiful voice of any bird in the forest, and that he would love to hear a single song from its golden throat. Filled with pride, the crow opens its beak and begins to squawk while the precious piece of cheese drops into the open mouth of the fox. The moral of the story: DO NOT TRUST FLATTERERS

2. Scripture's warnings

Proverbs 29:5 Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.

Jesus' enemies were spreading a net for His feet

3. The flattery they used was actually TRUE... but they didn't believe it was true

- a. Jesus was a "man of integrity"... literally "true"... honest through and through, perfectly free from deception or corruption; actually Jesus was far more than they said: He wasn't just TRUE, he was TRUTH ITSELF

BUT THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE THIS!!! The Pharisees believed He was a deceiver teaching false doctrines

- b. Jesus DID "teach the way of God truthfully"... He perfectly spoke the words of His heavenly Father, and He accurately portrayed the way of God; but He was far more than this: He actually IS the WAY of GOD

BUT THEY DIDN'T BELIEVE THIS!!! The Pharisees believed He was leading the people astray

- c. Jesus truly was no respecter of persons, literally "You do not concern yourself with who someone is or what his face is doing"; Jesus is not swayed at all by public opinion

Never in all human history has any man been so committed to the truth as Jesus, and he spoke the truth to everyone, no matter who they were... that was absolutely true

Nowadays, politicians are constantly governing by opinion polls, sticking their finger in the wind to see what they should do

And so many when they get in the presence of a great man are overawed and swayed even from their settled convictions... they melt in the presence of the man

Jesus NEVER did this... for He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords... He will judge every single man and woman that has ever lived

NOW... Jesus' enemies actually DID believe this... they COUNTED on it, that Jesus would boldly speak His convictions about taxation, fearlessly telling the truth as He saw it

They were hoping to use this against Him, to snare Him in His words

- d. Now... having laid on the flattery thickly, Jesus' predators spring the trap

E. The Trap Sprung

Matthew 22:17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

F. Either Way...Jesus is STUCK

1. If Jesus had said, “No we must NOT pay taxes to Caesar,” then the Herodians would certainly report this to Herod and hence to the Romans
 - a. Jesus would instantly be arrested by Pontius Pilate
 - b. Pilate would have Him executed for fomenting rebellion
 - c. AND their problem would be solved
2. BUT if Jesus had said, “Yes, we must pay taxes to Caesar,” he would instantly alienate any patriotic Jew who looked on Gentile overlords as wicked usurpers

EITHER WAY: this question was a trap designed to get Jesus killed

3. It was a brilliant ploy... only one problem: they were playing chess with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, they were crossing intellectual swords with the mind that created and sustains the universe

II. Jesus Exposes their Hypocrisy (vs. 18)

Matthew 22:18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?"

A. The Omniscience of Christ

1. It is one thing to sense flattery and hypocrisy
2. Matthew's statement about Jesus goes beyond that
3. Jesus KNOWS THEIR EVIL INTENT... He knows their hearts; the Greek word for “evil intent” implies the depravity and wickedness of their hearts

B. Hypocrisy: Actors, pretending admiration for Jesus when they really wanted to murder Him

III. Jesus Evades their Trap (vs. 19-22)

Jesus' enemies underestimated His infinite mind... it was simply impossible to trick Him or trap Him

Chess story: Dr. Emanuel Lasker was one of the greatest chess players in world history; he held the title as World Chess Champion for 27 years, the longest reign in history

He had a little hobby... he used to love going out incognito into chess clubs and cafes to play the strongest players in various towns without their ever knowing who he was... he had loads of fun doing this

One day, he came to a village where there was an old blind man who was an expert chess player... though he was blind, he was able to play the whole game in his mind and he never

lost; Emanuel Lasker sat down to play him without saying who he was... after they had been playing for a while, Dr. Lasker made a particular move; the blind man immediately lifted his head and with a smile said to his mystery opponent—"Dr. Lasker, I presume?!"

That is what it is like playing one of the greatest chess players in history incognito

Jesus' enemies were crossing intellectual swords with the mind that crafted the universe and that planned out all of human history before any of them had been born

They were no match for him... they thought they could trick Him, they thought they could trap Him and inadvertently lead Him to His death

Jesus' death could never be an accident or a trap or a trick

John 10:18 "No one takes my life from me but I lay it down freely, of my own accord"

A. An Object Lesson: "Show Me the Coin..."

Matthew 22:19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius

B. Whose Portrait, Whose Inscription?

1. On the coin was a portrait of Tiberius Caesar
2. BUT (and very offensive to the Jews) was an inscription which proclaimed the divinity of Caesar
3. It is an axiom of ancient governments: Whoever mints the money rules the country... in other words, if your portrait is on the money, you are the ruler
4. Jesus is focusing attention on the coin itself, and the ruler
5. The coin itself would have been odious to the Jews
 - a. First, it had an image, the image of a man... and not just any man, but one who claimed to be the son of the divine Augustus... literally the son of a God
 - b. This would have been a violation of the Ten Commandments' proscription against graven images... even today, some Jews in 21st century Israel will not allow themselves to be photographed for this very reason
 - c. Secondly, this coin would have on the reverse side an engraving of Tiberius Caesar sitting in priestly robes, as though he were a high priest himself
6. Jesus' enemies were only too happy to produce the coin and give the answer to Jesus' question: Whose portrait and whose inscription?

7. They assumed Jesus was about to speak His own death sentence

C. The Amazing Answer: “Render to Caesar... Render to God...”

Matthew 22:21 "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

1. Jesus changed the word the Jews used:

they asked ***“Is it lawful to GIVE the poll-tax to Caesar?”***

As though it were something added to Caesar that wasn’t really his

2. Jesus changed the word to “RENDER”... as if literally “GIVE BACK WHAT IT TRULY HIS”... it is Caesar’s by right, render it to him

3. Jesus here asserts that it is lawful to support governments, even wicked pagan idolatrous governments, with tax money... it is their due

4. Astonishing that Jesus is upholding the Roman government that in a few days will execute Him... and He knew that they would do it!!! Yet He upholds Caesar’s right to rule

5. BUT He doesn’t stop there: He extends the teaching to speak of what we owe to God

Render to God the things that are God’s

D. Jesus’ Enemies Astonished, But Unconverted

Matthew 22:22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

IV. What We Must Render to Caesar

A. The Simple Answer on Taxes: YES!

1. The question was simple, and Jesus’ answer is clear enough

^{ESV} ***Matthew 22:17 Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”***

2. Jesus’ answer: YES... give to Caesar what is Caesar’s

3. Behind Jesus’ answer was a simple doctrine:

“The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

Daniel 4:17 the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.'

B. The Benefits of Caesar in Jesus' Day

1. The Romans conquest of the Mediterranean world brought with it some advantages
2. They united that part of the world in a *Pax Romana*... a "Roman peace"
3. This meant that, as long as the country accepted Roman rule, its inhabitants could live out their whole lives in peace, free from war
4. The Romans were excellent at long-term stability, and used the local leaders and regional kings to keep that peace; they allowed freedom of religion, and guaranteed a semblance of justice for its people
5. They opened up commerce and built roads that aided prosperity for many
6. As with any reasonable government, they protected its people from rampant crime, anarchy, armed mobs roaming the streets... they brought stability and order and a daily peace to life

C. The Benefits of Government Today

Romans 13:4 The ruler is God's servant to do you good...

Romans 13:6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.

God's servants in government do you good

- Promote peace and public order
- Establish and uphold a system of justice
- Punish evildoers
- Protect people from military threats
- Promote health and prosperity by roads, infrastructure common to all

Illus. Anarchy in Somalia

From 1991 to 2006 there has been no permanent national government in Somalia... armed bands of military gangs under competing warlords roam the streets enforcing their wills on common people; there are no national laws governing commerce; there was in short NO GOVERNMENT... so, there were NO TAXES

The level of daily violence in Somalia has been called "catastrophic"; a statistic in 2000 stated that on 21% of the population had access to safe drinking water; there is no such

thing as safe travel in the country; at any moment, armed gangs can assault travelers and rob or murder them; 10% infant mortality rate; 25% die by age five; adult literacy declined from 24% in 1989 to 17% in 2001

To understand the benefits of government just look at Somalia or Haiti and you will see

D. We Owe More than Taxes: Romans 13, 1 Peter 2, 1 Timothy 2

1. Honor

1 Peter 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

2. Obedience

Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

1 Peter 2:13-14 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

3. Wise Participation

- a. Nine times in Acts, the Apostle Paul is referred to as a citizen of Rome; If this were a defiled or wicked thing, Paul would never have mentioned it
- b. It is a privilege to be a citizen of an earthly country, and with that citizenship comes responsibilities
- c. The Biblical principle of wise stewardship compels us as Christians to participate: example VOTING and JURY DUTY
- d. Key example: Daniel

Daniel 6:3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Daniel was able to use his position as a wise counselor to affect government policies:

Daniel 4:27 Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

4. Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1-2 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

5. Concern for Salvation

a. Paul goes on to talk about salvation (of kings is implied)

1 Timothy 2:1-4 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

E. The Limits of Our Obedience: Acts 4

1. When Caesar commands something contrary to the will of God, a Christian is compelled to disobey

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.

2. BUT a Christian should still do this with a respectful attitude... like Daniel in the lion's den:

Daniel 6:21-22 Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king."

3. Ultimate example of required civil disobedience: the Mark of the Beast

Revelation 13:16-17 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, ¹⁷ so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Revelation 14 makes it plain that to receive the mark of the beast means that person is NOT a Christian, and will spend eternity in hell

God is COMMANDING His people to DISOBEY that order

V. What We Must Render to God

A. Love God Above All Else

Matthew 22:37-38 "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

1. Render to God the utmost devotion and love and effort you have in your life
2. This is a command no one can perfectly obey
3. This is why we need a Savior!!! Jesus DID love God for us

B. Render to God WORSHIP Above All Else

Matthew 4:10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Concerning Caesar himself, Jesus' warning was severe:

The "things that are Caesar's" do NOT include worship as a deity

Kings should remember that they are not gods... and they should give to God the glory for their reign and their position, and remember that God will hold them accountable for their actions

In Acts 12, when King Herod accepted worship as DEITY, God immediately struck him down and killed him

Warning, then, to kings and all those in authority: God will judge your pride and arrogance if you take His place

So, I believe "***Render to God the things that are God's***" is a HUGE duty for us as created beings

"Render" means "give back as rightful due"

Psalm 29:1-2 Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

... GIVE BACK acknowledges:

Romans 11:36 from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

C. From Him, through Him, to Him are ALL THINGS

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

D. Pay Taxes and Serve Government as an Acts of Worship to God

Romans 13:1-2 there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted

The corollary: He who submits properly is SUBMITTING TO GOD

E. Recognize that God is In Charge of Government AND World Events

In other words, RENDER TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GODS = acknowledge that God rules over every single area of your life, and that proper relationship to human government flows from a heart relationship to Jesus Christ

So, we “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” only as a SUBSET of “Rendering to God the things that are God’s”... if we serve human government as an end in itself, we are IDOLATORS... like bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue or praying only to Darius the Mede

BUT if like Daniel, we serve Nebuchadnezzar and Darius gladly as far as we are able as a PORTION of the service we are offering to God, we are really fulfilling BOTH sides of Jesus’ perfect command

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and render to God the things that are God’s”

Thus...

- We should pay taxes as an act of worship to the God who gave us government
- We should serve jury duty as an act of worship to God who gave us the right to participate in the judicial process
- We should vote as an act of worship to God who gave us representative government

Some of us may be called on to serve secular government in higher ways... but only do so if you can ***Render to God the things that are God’s*** as you serve government

If your service as a military man or a judge or a representative or a President causes you to compromise and to violate your conscience, then STOP... but if like Daniel you can serve Caesar while you serve God above all things, then do so to the glory of God

AND to our Christian brothers and sisters who live in Communist China or Vietnam, submit to every command the government gives AS FAR AS YOU ARE ABLE... but continue to serve Christ and His Kingdom FIRST above all

1. So honor GOD by honoring the King
2. Obey GOD by obeying the King

3. Please GOD by praying for the King

4. Serve GOD by serving the King

F. Acknowledge that God has the right to rule the world as He sees fit

The big issue: the Jews were angrily unwilling to accept God's righteous sentence of judgment for their sins

They clung to God's promise to Abraham that the Promised Land was theirs

In the time of Jeremiah, they viciously abused the prophet for saying that God was sending the Gentiles (Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians) to punish them; false prophets said "Peace, peace" when there would be no peace; when Nebuchadnezzar came anyway, and partially destroyed Judah and Jerusalem, and deported SOME of them and took SOME of the vessels away, the false prophets said God would BREAK the yoke of the King of Babylon in two years and send them all back with God's sweet blessing; Jeremiah said, "No, it'll be seventy years" and they punished him again severely. Bottom line, the Jews stubbornly resisted the message that God was punishing them for their sins

Now when Jesus comes centuries later and they ask Him about paying taxes to the most recent Gentile emperor—the Roman Caesar—behind the question was a powerful and prideful nationalism that refused to acknowledge any sin and that assumed that God would (and should) soon crush Caesar and restore the Promised Land to the Jews

When Jesus said "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's", He was saying "Understand that Caesar wouldn't even be here if the Jews had obeyed the Laws of Moses, but if you accept the punishment and settle down under Gentile dominion, you will find peace and prosperity in submitting to God's judgments

1 Peter 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Overweening nation pride is a sin!!! The greatest loyalty of our lives should be to God's Kingdom... that is our true and final home

G. Look forward to a future perfect government:

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.