

Caesar or God?

There are some quips or sayings that people attribute to the Bible, but aren't. "God helps those who help themselves" is one example. Others have a scriptural basis but have been taken so out of context as to have no meaning (except for the purpose of the user, of course) "An eye for an eye" is an example. There is another, and I've heard it used in reference to the pandemic. The quip is, **"Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."**

But is it scriptural? In this case, it is. You find in Matthew 22:21. Is it being used correctly? That requires a longer answer, and we have to look at that verse in its context in order to hear what Jesus is saying to us. Here's the entire lesson.

The Question about Paying Taxes

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹ They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, **"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."** [emphasis added] ²² When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

--Matthew 22: 15-22 (NRSV)

I'll mention four talking points to help you frame your own interpretation of verse 21 as it relates to our response to government guidelines and restrictions during this pandemic as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Look at the intent of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were in an alliance with the political party called the Herodians. (Such an alliance sounds eerily similar to some Christian caucuses today.) Their alliance stems from a deep hatred of Roman governance. Matthew is crystal clear on the intent of the Pharisees—to entrap Jesus—and, to make matters worse, their words to Jesus drip of false sincerity. They have no concern for the religious welfare of the average Jew of their day; instead, their concern was only for their themselves. Jesus immediately saw through their hypocrisy and turns the question back on them.

Notice the false *either/or* proposition of the Pharisees. Here's the trap they set for Jesus. If Jesus advocated paying the taxes, he would lose the support of independence-minded Jews and be painted as a supporter of hated Rome. If on the other hand he supported non-payment of taxes, he could be painted as a traitor to Rome by the Pharisees (therein lies the hypocrisy) and be turned over to them. Problem solved, or so they thought. Their proposition, however, was skewed because of 1) their evil and self-centered intent (above) and 2) it is focused on politics and power, not faith in God. They could not see that serving God and doing one's civic duty, or exhibiting civic virtue, is not an either/or proposition, but rather a both/and argument.

Worship of our God does not require a church building. This talking point is not in the Matthew 22 lesson, but it needs to be included for our social context. Since it is the Holy Spirit that unifies us as a community of faith, our worship is not restricted when we are advised to not gather in order to stop the spread of COVID-19. God's Spirit, which Christ gave us on the holy day of Pentecost, is not limited to the physical confines of brick and mortar. When not in our church building, as is now the case, our worship of God has simply changed forms.

Here's a quick example which ties those talking points together. When Christians in a mega-church in Tulsa stand shoulder to shoulder without face coverings during a worship service this past week, that is cause for concern beyond the spread of coronavirus. In their blatant disregard for health guidance, they are rejecting any notion of being responsible citizens of their geographical community (thus disregarding the protection their local government seeks to give them through that guidance) and (here's where it gets really sticky) failing to show Christian love to each other and their community. They have in fact put themselves in the same position as the Pharisees in Matthew 22, and that's not a good place to be.

Yours in Christ our Lord,

Pastor Tom



Just a reminder that since the church will be closed until further notice, we will not be decorating the church on Saturday the 28th. Please join us online every Sunday at 10:00 am for our weekly worship. Blessings!!

Thank you to all that donated to our Tarsney Lake Thanksgiving Mission 2020. We were able to share a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner with 5 families at Tarsney, originally we had 8 families in need but with the Covid changes we had 2 families that were going to be with families and 1 that has moved with family in Southern Missouri. Since we had already committed to the 8 meals I called Mason School and was able to find homes for the remaining 3 meals. The school was very grateful to be able to help 3 families that they knew were in need of assistance this Thanksgiving. Please keep our families that are struggling in your prayers and thanks for your kindness, love and grace to our Thanksgiving Mission 2020.



On Going: Les Case, Wade Davis, Roger Grable, Richard Fuerst, Winnie Fuerst, Harvey Geary, Michael Hatfield, Linda Koleiny, Shane Miley, Nancy Rowe

Depression and Mental Health: Robby Sherrod

Strength and Healing: Gene Crist, Graves family, Mike McMillin, Kirk Morehead and family, DJ Petty, Dennis Rogers, Andrew White, Luke, Emma, Leih

Missions: Kenyan G-Marc Project, Chics for Chicks, Hillcrest Transitional Housing, Harvester's Food Bank, Lazarus Ministries, Tarsney Lake Families, Congregation de Mellier, Heart and Soul Children's Learning Center

Please contact the office to update or add prayer requests

Dear members and friends of LLCUMC,

One of the ideas that I picked up in a new pastor orientation sponsored by our UMC conference in May was to have group sessions in which you have an opportunity to share your hopes, dreams, and visions for our congregation with me directly. Concerns about the pandemic amongst other initiatives and issues have put this idea off until now--over four months since my arrival. I call them **listening sessions** and not focus groups intentionally. As your new pastor, and especially during this pandemic, I want to be the one listening--not talking--so that I can understand our congregational culture better. If and when I do talk, it will be to ask questions in order to seek clarification and understanding. A member of our church's PPRC will actually facilitate/lead the discussion. These sessions are also a way for me to get to know you personally. For that reason, I'm limiting the number of participants in each session to 12--a manageable number for an online meeting, allowing me to see everyone on my laptop screen (those of you who have done Zoom meetings for work know what I'm saying).

There will be **six sessions** from which you can choose the one that best fits your schedule. The schedule is:

- * Monday, Nov. 30, at 7:00 pm
- * Monday, Dec. 7, at 7:00 pm
- * Wednesday, Dec. 9, at 7:00 pm
- * Wednesday, Dec. 2, at 7:00 pm
- * Wednesday, Dec. 16, at 7:00 pm
- * Monday, Dec. 14, at 7:00 pm

All the listening sessions will be via Zoom, so I would encourage you to get with a friend or fellow church member who has a computer so that you can participate. That is also the reason I need to know which session you would like to "attend." **Please reply to this email** so that I can send you a personal invitation with information about how to log in and participate. This is not my preferred way to hold these listening sessions; I'd rather do it in person, but the continued spread of the coronavirus in our immediate area makes that option impossible (same reason we have had to go totally virtual with our Sunday morning worship services).

Please remember to give me a quick reply to sign up, and thank you in advance for considering being one of the 60 who share your heart as we strive to find ways to make disciples for Jesus Christ in a society and culture that fights us every step of the way.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Tom

December 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
29 Online Services 10:00 am	30	1	2	3	4	5
6 Online Services 10:00 am	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 Online Services 10:00 am	14	15	16	17	18	19
20 Online Services 10:00 am	21	22	23	24 <i>Christmas Eve</i>	25 <i>Merry</i> <i>Christmas</i>	26
27 Online Services 10:00 am	28	29	30	31		