

Title: God and Government

Passage: Mark 12:13-17

Introduction:

Should you as Christians obey our democratic government?

Passage: Mark 12:13-17

And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

EXPOSITION

Overview

Observation

- Opposition
- Approach
- Question
- Answer

Interpretation

Application

I. Observation

Opposition

Mark 12:13

And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.

- Pharisees and Herodians were normally enemies with each other
 - Pharisees = religious leaders advocated church over Rome
 - Herodians = advocated Roman government
- Here, united in their opposition of Jesus
 - Pharisees = Opposed Jesus because He opposed their religious leadership
 - Herodians = Opposed Jesus because He opposed their political advantages

trap

- Word usually used to hunt and trap an animal (violent pursuit)

Approach

Mark 12:14a

And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God.

- approach: false flattery and deceitful scheme against Jesus (evil intent with own agendas)

Question

Mark 12:14b

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?

Taxes to Caesar

- Tax = head tax where each person had to pay as part of Roman Empire
- Religious leaders disliked because it was a constant reminder of their oppression under Roman authorities

Acts 5:37 (Roman taxes was a source of revolts)

After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

Question presented lose-lose dilemma:

Fidelity to God vs. Fidelity to Government

- if Jesus said "pay taxes"
 - Could be charged by religious leaders for undermining Him being the Messiah as promoting government over the church.
- If Jesus said "don't pay taxes"
 - Could be arrested due to insurrection contrary to Roman law

Answer

Mark 12:15-17

But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

Test

- Jesus saw the question as a trap and test
- Same word with Mark 1 when Jesus was tested by the devil in the wilderness

Mark 1:13

And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Denarius

- Worth a day's wage for someone in Israel

"Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one.

- the religious leaders themselves possessed the Roman money

And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's."
Coin

- Denarius was blasphemous
- On one side - picture of Caesar (as a "god")
- On other side - picture of Caesar's mother with phrase referring to as "high priest"

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

- *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*
 - recognizes legitimacy of human government.
- *To God the things that are God's*
 - What is this? Everything!
 - Every human is made in God's image
 - Everything on earth created or provided by God
- Answer is not a distinction between secular or religious - God is Lord over all.

II. Interpretation

Principle:

God has ordained the government as an institution.

Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

- context: Emperor Nero was among the worst that persecuted and killed Christians (ruled for 10 years).
- Yet government was described here:
 - "what God has appointed"
 - "God's servant for your good"
 - "ministers of God"

1 Timothy 2:1-2

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

- Command: pray “for kings and all who are in high positions”

1 Peter 2:13-17

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Principle

A Christian's responsibilities include one's duty to obey government, as long as that duty does not interfere with one's duty to honor and revere God.

Exceptions

When command of government run directly contrary to commands of God.

Exodus 1:17

But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live.

Daniel 3:12

There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

Daniel 6:10

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Acts 5:27-29 (Apostles)

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

III. Application

As a Christian, you are to be a devout follower of Jesus and:

1. Acknowledge all government authority as established by God and comes from God.

Job 12:23

He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away.

Daniel 2:21a

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings

- We submit out of obedience to God
- First, revere God, then honor earthly authorities

2. Acknowledge that all government should serve the purposes of promoting good and punishing evil.

- Bad government is always better than no government (anarchy).

Proverbs 11:14a

Where there is no guidance, a people falls

3. Pledge to be good citizens living in subjection to governmental authority even pagan ones

- Commands in Bible were in context of Roman rule
- How? Engage in political process in responsible way
- Attitude should be as good citizens

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

4. Be thankful for government authorities and all the good that is done through government and pray as well as obey them.

- Obey and submit to them, even when disagree (unless it is sinful)
 - Ex: situations where in submission - we follow even when personally disagree

Ephesians 5:21

submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- Attitude of submission - a supernatural call as our human, flesh nature resists submission
- Question: Is this a Gospel issue?
 - Choose battles wisely

5. Not overestimate the role of the government.

- We should not worship a particular individual or particular party
- When over-estimate, then overly-trust the government.
- If we elevate particular individuals or political parties as above all, then leads to misplaced priorities (see Nazi Germany)
- Contrast: Your allegiance is to God alone.
 - The Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who can bring true peace and justice (not a specific leader or political party)
 - Ultimately, you are a citizen of a heavenly kingdom.
- Cannot force people to obey God's will through political means
 - In the end, heart transformation is still necessary.

James 4:1

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

- All conflicts stem from sin within.

6. Do not underestimate the role of the government.

- The government's role is to protect rights of all citizens, promote good welfare of all citizens, and make laws for believers to preach the Gospel.
- While citizens of heaven, Christians are not exempt from being citizens here on earth
 - We are not to disengage from the world.
 - We are not free from civil law

7. If our government prohibits from doing what the Bible commands or commands us to do what Bible prohibits, we should consider engaging in civil disobedience.

Key clarifications:

- The law being resisted must be unjust, immoral, and contrary to the will of God (not just inconvenient or burdensome)
- We should exhaust all legal means to change unjust laws by any means because civil disobedience is of last resort (not first)
- Any act of civil disobedience must be public (not hidden) because the intent is to change unjust laws and institutions.
- If consider civil disobedience, be willing to consider and accept penalties for breaking the law (ex: go to jail and any other repercussions)

Example: State government authorities issued recent order to not sing in public settings

- Bible does say to sing songs (Ephesians 5; Colossians 3)
- But the order doesn't target the content of singing but only act of singing based on perceived data on health risks that singing does.
- Other singing also banned such as concerts.
- But order is only temporary and will be re-visited in future.

Matthew 15:8-9

“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

- this time can be a period of reflection - what is true worship?

Romans 12:1

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

- True worship to God is really all of our lives, not just audible singing.

How speak up if disagree with a law? Do it in honorable ways

Example: Paul

Acts 25:11-12

If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

- Even when offered to be released, he continued to appeal
- He took the harder, least comfortable route so he could make a statement for the world.
- He went through the correct means to exercise his civil rights.

8. Pray for discernment on where to draw the line between what belongs to Caesars and what belongs to God and act vigilantly and responsibly so line is not crossed.

Matthew 10:16

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Quote: "The church of the New Testament did not attempt to save its existence by making a concordat with Nero or Domitian and Decius in their great persecution, or by stirring up a revolution against these tyrants, or by making an alliance with the Persian empire - but simply confessing the truth of the gospel and building up a truly confessing church whose members were prepared to die for their faith." (Martin Luther)

- The Christian has only one lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Christian has only one sword, the Word of God.

Benediction

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.