

## Matthew 22:15-22

“*Render to Caesar,*” says Jesus. But what if Caesar is a bully? What if Caesar goes after conservative groups so that they have a greater tax burden than the rest? What if Caesar wastes the tax money we pay him? What if we simply do not like Caesar?

Tiberius was Caesar back when Jesus spoke these words. If we had the choice between our present government and Tiberius, trust me, we would choose our present government. Caesar is not perfect. Nonetheless we are not relieved of our duties simply because Caesar is a sinner like us. Jesus did not qualify His words. He did not say, “*Render to Caesar if you agree with him.*” “*Render to Caesar if he is fair and just.*” No, Jesus says, “*Render to Caesar that which is Caesar’s.*”

So we do. But not because Jesus says to. We render to Caesar because it’s the law. And those who break the law are punished. If we do not render to Caesar next April 15th, we will receive a harsh letter in the mail. And if we ignore that letter, we will find ourselves in jail. “*Render to Caesar*” does not flow from the Gospel; it flows out of the Law.

But imagine for a moment that it did flow from the Gospel. If “*Render to Caesar*” was a Gospel invitation and not a command of Law, would you? Would you pay your taxes next year even if you were not obligated to?

Be honest. We’re not that charitable. When we send our checks to the IRS, we do not put little smiley faces on them. Nor do we put a pink heart on the calendar square for April 15th. None of us renders to Caesar because we want to. We have better places to put our money. We render to Caesar because we have to.

What about this “*Rendering to God*” bit? What’s that all about? It appears that Christians are burdened with double taxation. We render to Caesar and then we render to God. Non-Christians don’t have to. They render to Caesar like us, but they don’t give God a tithe. They don’t give up their time for Him; their sweat and labor. But we Christians do. And isn’t it true that we tend to lump Caesar and God together? We do not like rendering to Caesar, and we’re not all that crazy about rendering to God either. We just don’t like rendering. We’d rather keep our money. We’d rather do what we want with our time.

Does “*Render to God,*” like “*Render to Caesar,*” flow out of the Law? Sometimes we think it does. We look upon our tithes and offerings as an obligation more than a privilege. We put in our time serving, but complain about those who don’t. We feel burdened, as though serving within the congregation is a sacrifice, one we’d rather not make, except then we’d feel guilty.

“*Render to God the things that are God’s.*” Here’s where the atheist has the advantage. Since he denies that there is a God, nothing is God’s, and so he gets to keep everything--except what he renders to Caesar. But does the atheist really have the advantage? What I means is, what exactly does God want from us? What are we obligated to render to Him?

To answer this question, we first need to understand that “*Render to God*” does not flow out of the Law; it flows from the Gospel. Look at the One who spoke these words. Why did He come? What did Jesus want from people? Did He want their worship and praise? Did He want their money? Did He want their time?

“*Come to Me all you who labor,*” He once said...“*Cast your cares upon (Me).*” Jesus did not come to be served; He came to serve...to give His life. When He walked the road to the cross, there were not dozens of followers pulling carts of His possessions behind Him filled with money and treasures that people had rendered to Him. He walked to the cross with nothing.

Had He failed? In the game of life, he who ends up with the most money wins. Jesus walked to His death without so much as a penny to His name. “*Render to God that which is God’s.*” Unless we’re missing something, it seems that God does not want us to render anything to Him. If He did, Jesus would have walked to the cross a very rich man. And He wouldn’t have even walked to the cross to begin with.

We are missing one thing. Jesus did want one thing from people. Only one, and it’s the reason why He came; the reason He went to the cross. Jesus came to take upon Himself the sin of the world. It’s the one thing He took to the cross. He was loaded down with sin. And not just those “slip-ups” we all make. Every sin, from the least (in our eyes) to the greatest. He took violence against women and children. He took murder, even mass murder. He took every sexual sin from lust to all manner of perversion. He took slander and lies. He took pride and selfishness. Every sin was laid upon Jesus. No one was left out. He died for all; for everyone who is a sinner. And this includes you and me.

We understand nothing about God when we look at God apart from the cross of Jesus. But the reverse is also true. We clearly see who God is when we look at the cross. Anyone who hears the words, “*Render to God that which is God’s,*” without fixing his eyes on Jesus, will see these words as coming out of the Law, and he will miss their meaning entirely. This is why history shows people in all parts of the globe offering sacrifices to God--fruits, animals, even human victims. They rendered to God in the hopes that God would bless them and not punish them.

Friends, God rendered His Son to you. He gave Jesus to you, offering Him up as the Sacrifice for your sin. With His cross before our eyes, we hear His words, “*Render to God*” as kind words of invitation. All He wants from you is your sin. He doesn’t want your money, or your time, or your sweat. These things you will freely give Him, not because you have to, but because you want to when you clearly see Him dying for you on the cross.

Render your sins to God because we render to God that which is God’s. And Jesus claimed your sin as His own. It’s not your sin; it’s His. You can’t have your sin anymore. You cannot live in sin. You can’t go on living with sin and guilt burdening you. Your sins are not yours anymore. Jesus claimed them. “*Render to God that which is God’s.*” These are sweet words of mercy. God forgives you. He forgives your sin. He washes you clean of all your sin in the waters of your baptism.

*“Render to Caesar.”* We do that on April 15th. *“Render to God.”* We do that now at the altar. As you come forward this morning for Holy Communion, you come up to *“Render to God that which is God’s.”* You come up to give Jesus the one thing He wants from you. Your anger in your heart. Your pride. Your selfishness. Your lies against your neighbor. Your careless words you spoke last week. Your lust and your greed. All your sins. You come forward now to *“Render to God that which is God’s,”* and God renders His forgiveness to you, and you go home today in peace and joy. Amen.