

Matthew 22:15-22 | “The Disciple’s Obligations to God & Government”

Preached on March 17, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles today to Matthew 22, verse 15. *[pause]*

We continue our study in the gospel of Matthew, seeing especially what it shows us about being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And today, we will look at the disciple’s obligations to God and government. *[pauseeee]*

Now this topic brings up a lot of questions for the disciple of Jesus Christ.

And really, the Jews of Jesus’ day were struggling with the same sort of questions.

Like this one...

Since God is our Lord and Master, what does that mean for our relationship to the earthly governments over us? *[pause]*

Put another way: how are we to live in a secular nation, while living as a citizen of heaven? *[pauseeee]*

Throughout church history, there have been different thoughts about the relationship between the Christian and the state. *[pauseee]*

In the past, there have been some Christians, who actually controlled a city and enforced Biblical commands upon people.

So there were some countries that had a blending of the church and the state. *[pause]*

At other times, Christians seemed to be fully antagonistic towards anything and everything that the government had its hand in. *[pauseeee]*

In recent history, talk about the relationship of the Christian and the government has really heated up.

There have been discussions about Christian nationalism, and no one can forget all of the talk about Christians and their responsibilities when it comes to voting when both candidates don’t seem godly. *[pauseeee]*

COVID caused many Christians to evaluate how they were to relate to the government, due to restrictions and mandates that were made. *[pauseeee]*

So this is not a new debate, nor is it a debate sealed in the archives of history. *[pauseeee]*

One reason for the continual debate is because sometimes there are tricky questions to be answered...

What if the authority over us is evil?

Is there a place for open resistance or rebellion?

What if the earthly authority steps outside of their lane?

What if they demand more than they should?

What about situations where the government's role and the church's role seem to overlap?

[pauseee]

These are sometimes hard questions to answer, and the Jews of Jesus' day were struggling with some of the same questions. *[pause]*

Here they were, dominated under Roman rule, yet viewing God as their true Ruler.

So they were grappling with how they were to relate to Caesar. *[pausee]*

In their minds, there seemed to be only two options, either you rebel totally against Rome, or you go all-in in allegiance to Rome, no matter what.

But Jesus shows them (and us) that there's a third option. *[pause]*

Look down at Matthew 22:15 as I begin [READING](#). *[READ 15-22]*

Before we get into the main question and answer, I want you to see what happens before it.

[pauseeee]

The Pharisees gather to plot a trap for Jesus, as they want him to entrap Him in His words.

[pause]

You see, they think that they will entrap Jesus by putting Him in a dilemma about paying taxes to Rome.

Either he goes against Rome, and they could use that against him.

Or He sides with Rome, and they could get the people stirred up against Him. *[pause]*

So they are trying to throw Him into the pressure cooker of controversy by their question concerning taxes.

Not to mention, the presence of both the Pharisees and Herodians would add to this, for they each represented one side and the other. *[pauseeeee]*

Their malice and wickedness was on full display in their evil, premeditated trap.

Jesus even calls them out in front of everyone for their hypocrisy and attempt to test Him.

You couldn't fool Him. *[pause]*

They tried to compliment Him, and make it sound like they respected Him, but Jesus saw through their flattering veneer and pointed out the ugliness hidden underneath. *[pause]*

Little did they realize who they were going up against, for they walked in confident and full of words, but would walk out marveling in silence. *[pauseeee]*

What's ironic is that their fake compliments actually spoke the truth about Jesus! *[pause]*

God uses the evil plans of the wicked against them, for Jesus *does* speak the truth, and His words *are* reliable.

He teaches the way of God truthfully, for He is God.

And He definitely doesn't care what people think, for He's going to speak what's right. *[pauseeee]*

Though they spoke with malice, their words rang true about Jesus. *[pauseeee]*

Aren't you thankful for Christ, who cannot be defeated by the evil traps set for Him?

Aren't you grateful that hypocrisy cannot fool Him?

We have a Lord, who we can trust to always be the victor, and who can see through the dark plans of the wicked. *[pauseeee]*

Our Lord is, without a doubt, true and reliable, you can trust whatever He says.

He's not someone who you have to wonder if they are telling the truth, for Jesus *is* the truth.¹
[pause]

He's not someone who you have to question whether He will adapt His words to the whims of the people.

No, for He is not concerned with the opinions of others.

That is, He's not going to change what He says to please people. *[pauseeee]*

Whenever you read what Jesus says in the Gospels, you can know that He spoke truth, and did not bend His words based on the presence of certain people.

Therefore, trust His words! *[pauseeee]*

So in the prelude to the question and answer of this story, we saw the Pharisees hypocrisy and wickedness, while we saw Jesus' truthfulness and righteousness.

Now let's get into the question and answer found here. *[pause]*

¹ John 14:6.

In verses 17-21, Jesus responds to their question about how to relate to Caesar, and He shows us that...

I. We have obligations to the government.

Have you ever faced a situation where you thought there were only two options, but then as you thought about it more, you happily realized that there was a third option? *[pause]*

Let me give you an example. *[pause]*

Once I was invited to a get together on a certain date.

But the problem was that I had to be somewhere later that evening, for I had a prior obligation. *[pause]*

So when I first thought about it, I thought that there were only two options...

Either I don't go and feel bad, for I would be letting that person down who invited me.

Or I go and then let down the person whose event I had already committed to. *[pause]*

Neither one seemed ideal, and I felt like I was in a dilemma, of rejecting one or the other.

But soon I realized that this dilemma was not one after all.

It was a dilemma that wasn't. *[pause]*

I discovered that I could go to the first get together for a short time, and then head off to my prior obligation.

I could do both! *[pause]*

While the two events seemed at first to be incompatible, I came to find out that they weren't. *[pause]*

The same type of thing happens here.

In the Jewish leaders mind, obligations to God and government seemed incompatible.

Since God was ruler over all, then how could they submit to Caesar, who set himself up as god? *[pause]*

To them, paying the tax was seen to be a sign of submission to Rome and therefore dishonoring to God.

Add onto that, the coin that they had to use to pay the tax had Caesar's image on it, and that felt like to them as being supportive of Caesar worship.

And so this is why they ask, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" *[pause]*

They were asking, “Is it permitted and allowed according to God or is that wrong?” *[pauseeee]*

They thought they were putting Jesus in an impossible situation, but Jesus marvelously shows that you cannot trip Him up with apparent dilemmas.

He shows that there’s not just two alternatives, but there’s a third way: a way to honor God, while also submitting to earthly government. *[pauseeee]*

He requests a coin, and asks whose image was on it.

They state that it’s Caesar’s, and He says, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” *[pause]*

What a response! *[pause]*

Here they thought that they had tied Him up in an impossible dilemma, but Jesus simply and marvelously slipped out of the ropes.

And they couldn’t help but marvel and walk away silenced. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus showed them that you can honor God and pay taxes, the two aren’t contradictory, but really, we have obligations to do *both*. *[pauseeeee]*

When Jesus says to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” that word ‘render’ is literally ‘to give back’ or ‘repay.’ *[pause]*

Basically He’s saying, “It’s Caesar’s money, give it back to him.”

It’s a way to say, “You’re using Caesar’s money, aren’t you? Then repay it.” *[pauseeee]*

He’s making the point that there are things that the government is due, for they provide certain benefits to the people...

Rome had supplied water, built roads, provided security, and other things like that for the people.

Therefore, they should be rightfully paid back for that. *[pauseeee]*

The rulers or governments should get whatever belongs to them; there are certain things that are theirs.

This doesn’t mean that everything is theirs, for there are things that are God’s, but there are things that are theirs. *[pauseeeee]*

This shows us that as Christians, we cannot have a full-on, anti-government attitude.

We are not to be anarchists. *[pause]*

Jesus is teaching us that they actually have a place, and they have certain things that belong to them, which we must give back to them.

They have a role to play, and we must submit to them in that role. *[pause]*

So if anyone ever tells you that you don't have to submit to government at all or pay taxes at all, then they are dead wrong.

Jesus clearly, unmistakably, shows us that we *must* render to the government the things that are properly theirs. *[pauseeee]*

You see, Jesus gives a very concise truth that Paul and Peter pick up on and expand later.

For they show us that earthly governments have been appointed by God to have a role to play. *[pause]*

Peter says that human authorities are sent by God.²

Paul says that governing authorities “have been instituted by God.”³

And even Jesus says to Pilate: “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above.”⁴ *[pauseeee]*

A proper respect for and submission to government comes from someone who understands that God rules over and is in control of all things. *[pause]*

It comes from a person who knows “that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will,” and that “he removes kings and sets up kings.”⁵ *[pauseeee]*

A confident trust in God's sovereignty leads us to not fear, nor sinfully resist the governing authorities.

For God has determined to use earthly governments in the world, and we would do well to trust His appointment of them. *[pauseeeee]*

Scripture teaches us that governments are servants and ministers of God,⁶ appointed by Him, and we dare not resist what God appoints!

If you rebel against a government who is doing what it should do, you are rebelling against God Himself. *[pauseeee]*

Governments have been set up by God, but for what purpose?

² 1 Peter 2:14.

³ Romans 13:1.

⁴ John 19:11.

⁵ Daniel 4:17, 2:21.

⁶ Paul calls them these things in Romans 13:4 and 13:6.

As Peter says, they are “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.”⁷ *[pause]*

Paul agrees, telling us that they are for our good, for they are “an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”⁸ *[pause]*

And as Paul goes further on, he tells us, “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.”⁹ *[pause]*

Sounds a lot like what Jesus said, right? *[pause]*

They are appointed by God for a purpose, therefore, we should pay them taxes, which is their due. *[pause]*

Those things are theirs; it is what they are owed.

So render unto the governing authorities what is theirs, Christian. *[pauseeee]*

You see, a proper respect and submission to government actually comes from obedience to God. *[pause]*

While the Jews thought that obedience to God meant rebelling *against* Caesar, Jesus showed them that obedience to God meant submitting in some ways *to* Caesar. *[pause]*

Submission to the government in its role *is* a part of submission to God.

And it doesn’t matter if we think they are “worthy” or not, for just think of how bad the Roman Empire was. *[pauseeee]*

Now I know that naturally leads you to think, “What about this? What about that?” *[pause]*

I know that it gets tricky sometimes, especially when the government does some evil things or pushes an evil agenda.

But let’s not neglect or ignore the basic truth and disposition that we should have to the government: one of submission and respect, giving them what is their due. *[pauseeee]*

So we have certain obligations to government, but we also see that Jesus shows us that...

II. We have obligations to God.

If Jesus would have just left it as, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” the Pharisees would have pounced on Him for being only pro-Rome.

⁷ 1 Peter 2:14.

⁸ Romans 13:4.

⁹ Romans 13:6-7.

But He doesn't leave it there.

He adds, "and to God the things that are God's." *[pauseeee]*

When you put these two statements together, they powerfully show us something.

In one way, they show us that government has a *limited* role. *[pause]*

Think about it this way: what are the things that are Caesar's, and what are the things that are God's?

Well the government deserves taxes and submission in some regards, due to its provision of benefits and appointed role, but that's really it. *[pause]*

But what belongs to God?

Well what would every Jew inherently understand, and what do we know that belongs to God? *Everything! [pause]*

The coin of that day may have had Caesar's image on it, but what has God's image on it? Every one of us! *[pause]*

Everything belongs to God: all that we are and all that we have belongs to Him!

Even the governing authorities are under the Lord, and this is why if the governing authorities try to get us to sin or prevent us from doing what's right, then we should disobey them. *[pauseeee]*

Peter, the same Peter who wrote about submitting to governing authorities, also said in Acts 5, "We must obey God rather than men," when commanded not to teach about Christ.¹⁰ *[pauseeee]*

The government has limited authority over us, and is owed only certain things. *[pause]*

We should pay our taxes, we should submit to their laws when they don't go against Scripture or prevent us from obeying God.

But it's limited to what God wants and how He has set things up.

He is our true, ultimate Master, who we are to obey without question, and no other authority must hinder us from obedience to Him. *[pauseeee]*

As Christians, we must remember God's authority structure.

He is at the top, and all other authorities get their authority derived from Him, and should be in submission to Him.

¹⁰ Acts 5:29.

And if you always keep God's authority structure in mind, it will help you greatly when questions arise. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus says that we must render to God what is God's. *[pause]*

The tax given to Caesar was small, for it was just one denarius a year, but what's to be given to God is our all. *[pauseeee]*

Some of us in this room may actually be better at rendering to the government what is the government's, than to God what is God's!

Yet what is Jesus telling us?

Everything must be given back to God in worship and obedience.

All that we are and have should be laid back at His feet, for it is ultimately His! *[pause]*

Our whole lives are to be living sacrifices to the Lord.¹¹ *[pauseeee]*

Do you give back to God the things that belong to Him?

Do you lay them at His feet, and say, "Lord, these are Your's."? *[pauseee]*

How do you think about your money and possessions?

Do you think they are yours to use, or do you remember that you must give them back to God? *[pause]*

We give back to the Lord in giving to the church, but on top of that, we give back to God by using our resources for Him.

We submit everything we have to Him, and say, "Lord, I want to use these how You deem best." *[pause]*

Certainly some of that means that He wants us to use our resources to pay our bills and provide for our families.

But that's not the only thing we do, for He wants us to use our resources for His kingdom and His glory. *[pauseeee]*

We are not to just spend it on ourselves needlessly or for mere fun and entertainment.

Rather, we say, "Lord, who can I bless with this money today?"

"Lord, how can I use this house, this nice dinner table, this backyard, this car to help, serve, or reach others?" *[pauseeee]*

¹¹ A reference to Romans 12:1.

By using your money and possessions on your desires and wants alone is to hold back from God what is truly His.

How dare we do that!

He gave it all to us in the first place! *[pauseeee]*

What about your gifts and time?

Is that given back to God, too? *[pause]*

God has given you certain gifts to be used in the church, are you rendering them to God by using them?

Is your time given back to God or hoarded for yourself? *[pause]*

We must remember that all we are and all we have are truly the things of God that must be given back to Him.

They are not ours to hoard or stockpile, nor are they ours to waste or consume on ourselves. *[pauseeee]*

We give back our lives as a living sacrifice to our Lord and Master, who has lovingly and graciously sent His only Son to die for us, in order that we may be forgiven and given eternal life.

We were bought with a price, and we have been ransomed with the precious blood of Christ!¹²

We are His, and that means that all that we have is His! *[pauseeee]*

When you look at your finances, you should be continually reflecting upon, “Does my budget reflect a knowledge that it is all God’s and should be used in ways that reflect that?” *[pause]*

As you look around your house, do you look at it with a lens that says, “God owns this...God owns that.”? *[pause]*

As you consider your time this week, does it align with what God would have you to do? *[pauseeee]*

We have an obligation to God.

Our obligation is to give back our lives to Him in worship and service. *[pause]*

Is your whole life (every area, every aspect) given back to the Lord?

It is His and it is due Him, but do you remember that? *[pauseeee]*

¹² A combination of 1 Corinthians 6:20 & 1 Peter 1:18-19.

Jesus teaches us that...

Disciples of Jesus are obligated to submit to earthly government in some ways, but to God in all ways.

Yes, we have obligations to the government.

We should pay our taxes and obey their laws, when they aren't against God.

But our obligation to God is to give Him our lives. *[pauseee]*

So how have you been doing with submitting and giving to the authorities set up by God in your life?

Let's follow Christ's word, not our own wants and thoughts when it comes to these things. *[pauseee]*

This is hard sometimes, isn't it?

It comes more naturally to be rebels against authority, for we want to be in charge and do our own thing. *[pauseee]*

So what's the way forward?

Remember that the Lord is Lord, and that means He's *your* Lord. *[pause]*

Since He calls us to do this, then we must give to the government what is theirs, and we must give back to God what is His.

And He owns everything, so we must submit it all back to Him. *[pause]*

But we can also do this by reflecting upon the *grace* of our Lord. *[pause]*

He sent Jesus to take our place on the Cross and to die, but then to rise again in power.

He gave His very life for us in death, so how could we not give our lives back to Him in service? *[pause]*

When you truly dwell upon the grace of Christ...

...Then the obligations that He calls us to, become less about mere obligations, and more about ways to worship and serve our gracious, sovereign Lord, who loves us and gave His life for us.