

Sometimes politics brings about some strange alliances. In the reading this morning, we have the Pharisees and the Herodians coming together. And these guys – *well that'd be a bit like the Greens and Clive Palmer agreeing on mining policy*– they just stand for completely different values... But they formed an alliance against Jesus (they hated Jesus so much, that this was the one thing they were willing to ‘bury the hatchet’ over)..., and the issue they tried to catch Him on was taxation (Paying tax – now that’s something that’s dear to all of our hearts, isn’t it?).

A man anonymously sent \$500 cash to the ATO with a note saying: “My conscience has been troubling me and I haven’t been able to sleep so here’s \$500 I owe you. If I find I still can’t sleep, I’ll send the rest”.ⁱ

But these guys tried to catch Jesus out on taxation.

They buttered Him up, and said “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances... So tell us what **you** think”, and then they threw the curve-ball

¹⁷ Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” ...

Now, that was a tricky question and it put Jesus in a very difficult situation. He was really left with a lose/lose dilemma. You see, the Herodians were for King Herod and they were for the Herod Dynasty – they were basically supporters of Caesar (Herod was a puppet king, with Rome

pulling the strings)... and so if Jesus said “No – don’t pay taxes to Caesar”, they would’ve dobbed Him in, and He probably would’ve been arrested and maybe even executed, for treasonous activities.

But the Pharisees were dead **against** paying taxes to Caesar. And if Jesus had said “Yes – it is right to pay taxes to Caesar”, well they would’ve spread that news far and wide. And of course it would’ve made Jesus very unpopular with the people, because they hated paying tax – especially tax to the Romans....

Let’s be really clear what was going on here – these guys hated Jesus so much, that they put their differences aside, to try and catch Him out... And they thought they’d put Him in a lose/lose situation – “Gottcha”...

But Jesus saw right through it, and the truth and the wisdom of God that Jesus spoke that day, is still 100% relevant for us today.

“Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, **“Whose likeness and inscription is this?”** ²¹ They said, “Caesar’s.”

Alright, just like we have the head of our state (Queen Elizabeth II) on our coins, they had the Roman emperor on their coins. But it was a bit different for them. You see, Queen Elizabeth doesn’t expect us to look at her image on the coin, and to say “Ahh, Queen Elizabeth – a god – I worship you” ...

Their coins were used as a way to promote worship of the emperor. Caesar claimed to be a god. And you can see on the picture here, one side named Caesar Augustus, and the other side named him as divine (god).

And it was deeply offensive to Jews, to bring this pagan worship coin into the Holy city of Jerusalem...

And yet there it was – right there in their possession, and that's why Jesus called them hypocrites.

"Whose likeness and inscription is this?" Jesus asked
It's Caesar's....

"Therefore give (or give back) to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and to God the things that belong to God."

One of the principles of Discipleship, is to give what you owe.

If you have financial debts outstanding – don't hold it back – pay up. If you owe the government money – don't hold it back – don't try and avoid it – pay up.

But what do we owe God? Caesar's image was on the coin – give what money you owe to Caesar.

Where is God's image????

God has impressed His indelible image, on you... You can't rub it out – He's made you in His image.

God created humanity – male and female – in His image. You and I are created in the image of God, so what do I owe God? I owe God myself.

Give to God, what is owed to God:

- Give Him your life
- Give Him your heart
- Give to God, your talents
- Give to God, your time
- Give to God, honour, respect, worship,
- Give to God, your family
- Give to God, your dreams
- Your hopes, ambitions, and achievements
- Surrender your will to God
- Your money, your possessions, your intellect, your life

Give to God, all that you are.....

And part of our giving to God, all that we are, is submitting to God by being good citizens on earth. You cannot, at the same time, submit to God, and defy God-given authority.

When Jesus said “**give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**”, He wasn't telling us to compartmentalise these 2 areas of our lives...

I think what He was saying, is “Give to God every area of your life, and part of this ‘surrender to God’, includes being a

good citizen, which means we should not begrudge having to pay tax.

God has appointed those who govern. You mightn't **like** our government, but in His wisdom, the government we have, is the government God has put there. And if our government provides us with roads, education, defence, hospitals... - well it's right for us to pay taxes.

And I know most of us think we have to pay too much tax.

I heard the tax system is getting simplified this year. Apparently there are only going to be 4 lines on the tax return:

- 1. What was your income last year?*
- 2. What were your deductible expenses?*
- 3. How much do you have left?*
- 4. Send it in....ⁱⁱ*

And that's the way many of us think about the taxation system...

But I'm going to say something pretty radical to you today...

God loves a cheerful giver. And I believe this extends to the way we pay our taxes.

Some people will do anything to avoid paying tax... And in a year where they've made a good profit, they spend exorbitant amounts of money, on deductible items they don't really need, just to minimise the tax they pay...

And sometimes, it's the richest who pay the least tax....
Where's the justice in that???

We all want the government to provide us with services, but none of us want to pay for it...

I get that – I'm the same. And the government gives us allowable deductions and allowable tax concessions (and that's fair enough)... But as soon as I begin to avoid tax, or cheat on my tax, that's wrong... And I'd even take that further. If I begin making major life decisions, **primarily** based around ways of minimising the tax I pay, well I think I've lost my priorities...

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul said this:
Romans 13 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ 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, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this

you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.⁷ 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, honour to whom honour is owed.

Have you ever considered that when you cheat on your tax, you cheat God.

Our allegiance, is always to God. And provided our government doesn't require us to behave in a way that is immoral, or contrary to God's commandments, part of our honouring God, is to honour the authorities that He has put in place.

Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's. Give back to God what is God's. Give your whole self to God, and part of that, and part of that is being a good citizen – yes, even paying taxes...

Now, I expect we'll get a few questions today:

ⁱ 1001 more Humorous Illustrations for public speaking, Michael Hodgin. No.901

ⁱⁱ 1001 Humorous Illustrations for public speaking, Michael Hodgin. No.902