

## RENDER TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S

Mark 12:13-17

When I was kid, my mom used to bake and cook all sorts of homemade goods from scratch for us to eat. I remember at times wanting to help her out rolling out the dough and cutting it and of course, licking all the spatulas and kitchen-aid mixer attachments. It was just great! I had a good childhood on the farm. But when you make something from scratch like that like my mom often did, it's going to involve flour and one of the tools my mom would use is this old flour sifters that all of us kids loved to crank on. You crank on the handle and it agitates the flour and there's a little wire grid that the flour falls through and so by cranking on that thing we saw to it that mom had good and pure flour to work with!

Well that sifter reminds me of what it's like to develop a comprehensive biblical **worldview** as believers. A worldview is a lens or a grid by which we view the world. It's our **collection of convictions** that "sift" all of the information that is being delivered to us at any given time. Whether we realize it or not, we all have one. Our goal as Christians should be to have a **consistent** biblical worldview – consistent biblical convictions – through which to interpret the world, being able to sift through the various philosophies out there that are colliding against one another today – Christianity, Islam, secular humanism, Marxism/Leninism, cosmic humanism, postmodernism, etc (a great book to study on this would be *Understanding the Times* by David Noebel). All these worldviews out there colliding today and it's a disaster. You don't see the names used, but you see the effects and the propaganda of them.

If you've signed up to go through the Truth Project small group, I'm just excited for you because that study will really going to help you develop a basic comprehensive Christian worldview, learning to think biblically about philosophy, ethics, anthropology, science, history, sociology, labor, and the state/government. And it isn't easy developing a biblical worldview. At times it's painful because the Bible, which is our standard for faith and practice, will challenge our long-held convictions and presuppositions we've developed growing up or accepted just by being exposed to the colliding worldviews. Most of us I'd imagine have mixed worldviews and all of our worldviews could certainly be strengthened. But as believers in Christ we should want a pure and good and biblical worldview that is **true to reality** as God created it so we can sift through all the stuff out there so that we aren't taken captive by empty philosophies and because behavior follows belief.<sup>1</sup> What we believe determines the decisions we make in everyday life.

And one of the key areas of our worldview that the Gospel of Mark is leading us to today as we work our way through this gospel, is the way we think and act in relation to the **state, or human government**... you know, that part of society that is a constant blessing and at the same time, a constant irritant! We ought to know how to deal biblically about government because it is a major part of our lives and a hot-button topic in every generation. And one of the ways to resolve much of the tension over it is to study what the Bible has to say about it and develop our convictions based on what it rather than our feelings or cultural whims.

The religious leaders that Jesus has been dealing with know that government and taxes is a hot-button topic, and that's the reason they ask this question. And as Jesus is known for, He's going to bring great clarity with one statement. Verses 13-17. We'll study the passage and then study God's design for government.

*"Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial*

*to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay or shall we not pay? But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is on this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him.*

I'll just remind us as we dive in, that we are in the final week of Jesus' life and the tension is rising between Him and the false Jewish religious leaders whose minds are set on destroying Jesus somehow. In chapter 12, there are 5 question questions that they ask Jesus and today's in anything but sincere.

#### **I. THE QUESTION DESIGNED TO TRAP JESUS (VV. 13-14)**

First, we notice in **verse 13** that "*they*" sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians "*in order to trap Him.*" This "*they*" in the immediate context seems to be pointing to the chief priests, scribes, and elders from 11:27 and 12:1. Ultimately, these splintered groups and the Sadducees mentioned here comprise the **Sanhedrin**, a great religious governing body of seventy Jewish statesmen with the acting high priest as the head (Caiaphas at the time of Christ).<sup>ii</sup> For Israel, the Sanhedrin was like the parliament and supreme court for Judea.<sup>iii</sup> And just like in our nation's governing body, there were sharply opposing parties like the Pharisees and Sadducees who were usually at each other's throats but now have a **common enemy** in Christ so they send a strange alliance.

It's a joint deliberation between the Pharisees and the Herodians. The **Pharisees** we are familiar with by now in Mark. The name Pharisee means "Separatist" and they wanted complete separation from anyone unclean, especially Rome, and were obsessed with legal tendencies.<sup>iv</sup> The **Herodians**, however, were a Jewish political group that favored Rome through Herod. They delighted in Rome as a sovereign over them and didn't mind paying homage for the practical advantages it brought them, so they befriended Rome. You might recall both of these groups from Mark 3:6. When Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath in, the Pharisees it says, "*immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.*" Well, this is one of those attempts.

Just like the question last week, they're not sincere in their questioning. Mark points out that they are sent "*in order to trap Him in a statement.*" They want Jesus to appear anti-Roman and speak against Rome since Rome won't crucify Him for his theology. They will, however, crucify Him for sedition/rebellion. And if they can't get Him to speak against Rome, then He'll at least become unpopular with the people. So theologically or politically they want to put Him in a dilemma, to say something that will get Him crucified, ending His ministry, or His popularity with the people.

And in order to do that, **verse 14** shows us how they come to Him with **false flattery**. "*Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth.*" For them to get those words out had to hurt, but they did it because they're deceitful. It's a way of pressuring Jesus into being dangerously straightforward. He is the Teacher. He is truthful. He is impartial and teaches God's ways. But they don't believe that. They think He's a liar. So they're just saying what they need to say to gain ground with the people and set a high standard that He'll have to live up to in His answer. Jesus isn't intimidated though.

Verse 14 we also get to the big question: "*Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?*" And there's a couple of things to define in this question if we're going to get a good grasp of what they're asking. One is the **poll-tax**. This was a "head" tax for a census that cost one denarius. A

census is taken to number the people and find out many heads there are. Kind of like when you ask a rancher, “How many head of cattle do you run?” This is a head tax on people. How many *head* are under Roman rule?

The other term that needs defined is **lawful**. The question is not, “Are taxes legal in general?” but, “*Is it lawful according to God’s Mosaic Law?*” Remember, the context is Jewish law in Jerusalem whose ideal government is a theocracy, where God rules over the people of Israel or at least Jews ruling their own country under God. Instead, they are under Roman rule and subject to these foreigners. So the question for them really becomes, “*Is it morally and religiously permissible according to the Law of Moses to pay the poll tax? To honor Caesar as our king instead of God?*” This is why it was such a divisive issue to the Pharisees, because for them to pay this tax was tantamount to declaring oneself a subject of Rome, living on Romans soil and honoring Caesar as king – which is obviously opposed to the ideal Jewish theocratic government. So it was a massive **question of loyalty** for them and the tension in their minds was only one choice between two options. **Honor Caesar or honor God**. But as we’re going to see these two areas do have some overlap in the sovereign will of God and Jesus reframes their mindset on the question.

But to really magnify their issue of paying taxes, just look at the **denarius**. **Verse 15** Jesus said, “*show Me a denarius to look at,*” and just saying and doing that would have irked some of these Pharisees according to the stuff I was studying & I’ll show you why. A denarius was equivalent to about one day’s wages and was used to pay the poll tax. Some wouldn’t even handle it at all or even look at because Caesar was depicted as an idol on it in the **Imperial Cult**, this political cult of Rome. On it was **Tiberius Caesar** who ruled from AD 14-37. One side of the coin had his face with the inscription “TI CAESAR DIVI-AVG F AVGVSTVS” or “Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of Divine Augustus”. On the other side it read “Pontif[ex] Maxim[us]” or “High Priest” and pictured him in a robe as a high priest in that Imperial Cult. So the coinage made Caesar out to be a god to be worshiped and this was a graven image to the Jews and some Roman procurators who respected these Jewish sensitivities even allowed Jews to use coinage without a face on them.<sup>v</sup>

But you can see why the Jews especially hated taxes. They were a continual irritant because it was a continual reminder of their **captivity to the Romans and to the idolatrous worship**. Their hatred of taxes eventually led to the revolt of AD 66 by the Zealots which led to the consequential destruction of the temple in AD 70. One of the first acts in the Jewish revolt was to mint new coins. So it’s like one man said, “It is difficult to imagine Jesus saying anything that would anger the general populace more than to advocate and support paying taxes to those subjugating the people of Israel.”<sup>vi</sup> It’s difficult to imagine anything more controversial!

They thought that they had trapped Jesus in a loaded question. If Jesus says “**yes**” He loses favor with the people who despised Rome. If He says “**no**” then He is guilty of advocating rebellion against Rome and that will force Rome to take action against Him.<sup>vii</sup> And in the end, it doesn’t matter how He answers because they’re hypocrites. They’re going to lie later anyway. In Luke 23:1 they accuse Him before Pilate saying, “*We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar.*” Was that true? No. Let’s look at what He did say...

## II. **THE FREEING RESPONSE OF JESUS (VV. 15-17)**

In contrast to this question being a trap, it actually turns out to be quite freeing for them and us because God’s Word is freeing. It’s freeing to know what God expects of us. Your conscience is

free from questioning and your direction is clear and certain. **Firm convictions based on God's Word brings freedom.** That's why you want to study the Word. It helps keep us from getting entangled in the hollow and empty philosophies out there. You start knowing what to support or what not too.

Anyway, Jesus says to toss Him a coin. It jokingly reminds me of Tom Cruise saying, "Show me the money!" Anyway, He asks, "*Whose likeness and inscription is this?*" *They said to Him, "Caesar's."* And Jesus said to them, "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" You know, if there was a mic-drop back in the day, it would been right here... Boom! Jesus drops the mic and flips the coin back to them! It's a mind-blowing answer. Caesar wants his coin back made in his image? Give his coin back. But you belong to God who is your real Provider and in whose image you're made. Give yourself to Him!

So Jesus really recognizes, as does the rest of the NT, **a duty in both directions while acknowledging ultimate allegiance and worship is to God alone.** It's not exactly a pro-Caesar statement, but Caesar does have a respective place in society. He reframes their worldview on gov't.

**Government Worldview Lesson #1 – Caesar (or we would say, government) and God are not equals. Ultimate allegiance and worship belongs to God alone.**

So He doesn't compromise theologically or politically because...

**Government Worldview Lesson #2 – Duties toward God and Caesar are not necessarily distinct but at times can be united under God's will.**

And don't throw tomatoes or rocks until I'm done, okay? God created human government and establishes it and because of that, we are to obey the government when (here's the condition) it doesn't require us to violate His moral standards. So you really just have to stay balanced here. When the government violates God's moral laws, we obey God and not the gov't.

**Government Worldview Lesson #3 – Resistance is sometimes necessary. (1 Pet. 2:19-23)**

Fear God more than the king. When obeying God means disobeying the king, entrust yourself to God who judges righteously. In an extreme case, think about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Christians living under Hitler. They divested themselves of Hitler's socialist nationalism regime and pledged allegiance to Christ and the cross alone. Live or die, they would not forsake Christ. Just because something's legal, like killing Jews in Nazi Germany or babies today, doesn't make it moral.

And we should remember resistance is sometimes necessary because our culture has forgotten God. And therefore, the "morals" of our legislation are evolving and they have been for over 100 years. Whereas once, our nation practiced law on the firm basis of the **law of nature** (Sir Edward Coke, 1552-1634) and by the **law of Scripture** (Blackstone, 1723-1780), and that "*No human laws should be suffered to contradict these*" we exchanged truth (biblical morals & reality) for an evolutionary lie and began to teach that law evolves.<sup>viii</sup> If humans are evolving, cultural laws should be too, right? That's the rationale and logic. By the late 1800's, law was already evolving (Langdell, 1879) along with evolutionary theory and without God, there's no basis for moral standards.

Under the not only post-Christian but post-reality legislation we are facing now in the United States, there may be times where you and I will, like Daniel and his friends, have to say, "*Sorry Nebuchadnezzar, we can't bow down to your idol.*" Like the apostles, when told to stop preaching,

will have to say, *“Sorry king, but we must obey God rather than men.”* Like Moses’ parents and the midwives, we will say, *“Sorry Pharaoh, we won’t okay killing babies made in God’s image.”* That’s what Mark’s original audience faced. Give to Nero what is Nero’s but remember your allegiance is ultimately to God and you are not of this world. You’ve been crucified to it.

However, when the government doesn’t come into **direct conflict** with us morally, then in that case, to obey Caesar is to obey God because as much as it pains us to say it, God has established human government and I’ll try to show you why in a balanced way this morning. One of the things I don’t want you to hear is that God approves of everything that the government does – that’s not what I’m saying. Government is messy. It’s made up of flawed individuals who are depraved in their sin. There’s a spiritual, unseen dimension taking place as well. If you’ve been studying the book of Daniel with us, you know that Satan and fallen angels seek to influence the affairs of nations. And then on top of that, God is examining and taking note of nations and judging them based on their acceptance of or rejection of Him and His standards (Gen. 15:16; Rom. 1:24-32).

But even with all of this mess in government, know God is still in control. That God and Caesar, though distinct, can be **united by the higher principle of accomplishing the will of God.**<sup>ix</sup> God is sovereign over this messy area of government and originally designed it to be a blessing that accomplishes His will – to serve as a check and balance on evil. There is a **divine intention for government** that I want to show you. God has given us **3 institutions** as part of His design to maintain order in this world, which the failure to embrace brings about chaos: **family, Church and state/government.**

And if you want to know how chaotic the world can be without gov’t, just think “global flood”. Before the flood there was no government to maintain order and evil was so out of control that God flooded the world, sparing only Noah and his family. After it, in the new world with a fresh start, one of the first things God says is you will institute **capital punishment** from now on. *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God He made man. As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.”* The authority for man to carry out God’s righteous justice on an evil, murderous man was a new thing designed to keep a man from hindering God’s creative manmade to be fruitful and multiply. That’s **the origin of government.** It was established to keep humanity from tearing itself apart.

Now in the New Testament, the divine intent still stands. That’s evident from several passages – Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17. The key one we’ve glance at on occasion is Romans 13:1-7, (everyone’s favorite): *“Every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a servant of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Pay to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; respect to whom respect; honor to whom honor.”*

**Notice who all is involved here:** God, man (citizen) and government (rulers/kings).

**Notice some key design words:** Submission & authority, established by God & servant of God or sword-bearer or avenger on evil. Those are government worldview terms.

**Notice the order of rank:** Who submits to who? Who is in authority over who?

- **God has authority over rulers.** (Prov. 16:9-10; Prov. 21:1; Dan. 2:21; Rom. 9:17; Deut. 17:16-20)(Ps. 22:28; 2 Chr. 20:6; Job 12:23; Is. 14:24-27; Lk. 20:25; Acts 17:24-26).
- **The citizen is subject to God and the ruler.** (Ex. 22:28; Rom. 13:1; Tit. 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17)

**Notice the 2 main purposes you should cement in your mind:** They create order by...

1. **Punishing evil.** (bring wrath as sword-bearer on the one who practices evil)
2. **Condoning good.** (be a minister of God for good)

That's the sphere, or role, that government is to play in society. So it's critical for a government to know good from evil. But it has to have a **basis** for calling something good or evil. What is the ultimate basis? It's God. But without God, again, there's no moral standards.

Just the other day when Florida representative Gregory Steube reminded the House that they shouldn't accept the "Equality" Act bill because it redefines sexual identities as designed by God at birth. He actually quoted from one of Tony Evan's Commentaries that said, "Whenever a nation's laws no longer reflect the standards of God, that nation is in rebellion against Him and will inevitably bear the consequences." And the response from N. Y. rep. Jerrold Nadler was, "Mr. Steube, what any religious tradition ascribes as God's will is no concern of this Congress."

Nadler's statement encapsulates where our culture is right now and because of it, we know that the divine intent of gov't and main purpose of gov't has been lost. And that's a scary deal because it starts to condone evil and punish good. It replaces God with its own set of morals. The king begins to operate as if he is the law-creator and law-giver rather than God. This is when government can become a terrible beast and we can end up suffering unjustly (1 Pet. 2:19-20). And remember that that finds favor with God when you do what is right but suffer for it. It's Christlike. But Habakkuk described the standard-less Babylonians as, "*They are dreaded and feared; their justice and authority originate with themselves.*" But when the king forgets God and assumes he is the ultimate authority, his respective sphere begins to assume authority over other spheres (i.e. 2 Chron. 26; 1 Sam. 8). It starts to absorb them. It grows in power. We could call this the rise of the State.

There's a lot of people looking for answers today, turning to big government because **when you don't look to God as your Provider, you'll inevitably look somewhere else.** Remember, from the OT, the Israelites wanted a king like the rest of the nations instead of God as their King, and God told them the king would get involved in other spheres he wasn't supposed too (Family, labor, education). The State becomes a Socialist Nanny State. So as a result of the state rising and assuming authority over spheres it is supposed to be protecting instead, it replaces them. Through the welfare system, the State has begun competing with the family. Through public schools, it decides what they learn, sometimes rewriting history. And when they have an aggressive agenda, the socialist-communist-Marxist will control everything from the cradle to the grave and start cancelling out all who dissent – like the Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the other pastors and courageous

individuals who refused to preach what Hitler called “Positive Christianity” – Christianity that he said was acceptable as long as it didn’t disturb peoples’ moral feelings. The aggressive socialist-communist-Marxism state that rises in the name of secular freedom and tolerance cannot have God in its legislation but because at the core, it replaces God.

But there’s also such a corruption in the big government that the world is now looking to global government. And prophetically that’s setting the stage for the Anti-Christ who will rule and display himself as the “savior” and “god” of the world and anyone who doesn’t worship him is cancelled.

And I think Satan despises the United States government more than any other because it has been established according to biblical principles more than any other and it’s difficult for him to gain ground here. Our founding fathers knew first hand what a big and awful beast government could become so they designed it in such a way that no single man could rule over it. Isaiah 33:22 says, “For the Lord is our **judge**, the Lord is our **lawgiver**, the Lord is our **king**; he will save us.” These are **3 offices of God**. And the founding fathers took these and said no man should ever have all three of these because if he does then and he doesn’t know good from evil, he’ll turn into a beast. So this is why they separated the powers of judge, lawgiver and king – and we have 3 branches of government called the **Judicial branch, the Legislative branch, and Executive branch**. You see, they just came out of a British government where the king acted as God. They didn’t want that to happen again. They wanted separation of Church and state in the sense that the state doesn’t control the Church, but not so far that the state loses it’s moral standards and focus as God’s servant for good. They understood that a country couldn’t stand and be free if it didn’t remain moral and religious. Our founding fathers understood that belief in God is necessary for freedom to survive.<sup>x</sup>

In conclusion, let’s come back to Jesus’ words, “*Render to God the things that are God’s.*”

**Concluding Application: Give to God what is God’s – yourself.**

In a day when many of us are concerned about our country today and want to have an impact on it and see **spiritual climate** change, it starts with **individual responsibility** and our personal response to God. Jesus said that the denarius was made in Caesar’s image. But you and I? We’re made in God’s image. Genesis 1:28, “*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.*” And now the question is, “Do you give God what is God’s? Do you give to Him yourself?” Your eyes? Your hands? Your feet? Your relationships? Your time? That’s how you change our nation one individual, one family, one community, at a time through personal responses to the Lord.

If there is any hope for this culture, it’s going to take **Christians who are consistently committed and surrendered to the lordship of Christ**. As one man said, “**The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness.** But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians.”<sup>xi</sup> I think you understand what he means. He means be genuine Christians who live out their faith no matter the cost. Christians whose allegiance is to God alone. We may not win someone over with argument and logic, but there is something about your surrendered life with its certainty and completeness that will powerfully preach to them. It preaches a winsome credibility to the gospel.

This “Politically Correct Cancel Culture” doesn’t need more Christians who are afraid to say something and stand up for what they believe in. It needs to see Christians who will stand for truth no matter what – even if it means being cancelled from their jobs; even if it means as a college student, not graduating because you disagree or hold different views; even if it means losing our tax-free status as a Church because we won’t perform gay weddings and we firmly and lovingly believe that marriage is between one man and one

woman and anything else results in chaos. So be courageous and confess to the truth in love. Confess the cross. In his book **“When a Nation Forgets God”** Erwin Lutzer said it is doubtful we will win back the spiritual climate of our culture in America without a revival of what we used to call the “layman” – that is every believer – *“living authentically for Christ in their vocations, among their neighbors and in positions of influence. We cannot look to a man or even a movement as much as to the common person who is committed to Christ and living for Him.”*

**Here are some practical ways to get you started:**

- **Make sure your relationship with the Lord is real and genuine and your number one priority.** You are a man of prayer and the Word of God and applying it.
- **Pray** for your leaders (1 Tim. 2:2) so that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives. That’s acceptable to God who desires all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
- **Support organizations that defend religious freedom** like Alliance Defending Freedom and the National Religious Broadcasters in Washington. They deserve our prayers, respect and support.
- **Vote** for those whose values are most compatible with Christianity. **Get involved** to make your voice heard in ways that you can as we did here on Tuesday night.
- **Educate your children** (Deut. 6:4-9). As parents, take responsibility for education of your children, especially in the things of God and Christian worldview.
- **Trust God** no matter what. There’s no guarantees we’ll win culture back and it certainly won’t happen overnight. But know that when Jesus comes back, you will see the ultimate victory.
- **Praise God** because we have freedom today that the Church overall in any generation has seldom experienced. Enjoy it! Praise God for it!

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<sup>i</sup> David Noebel, *Understanding the Times* (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Press, 2006), 3.

<sup>ii</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 1127.

<sup>iii</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 2* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 314.

<sup>iv</sup> Unger, 997.

<sup>v</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Jewish Messianic Perspective, Volume 3* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 266.

<sup>vi</sup> Robert Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 544.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid*, 542.

<sup>viii</sup> The Truth Project.

<sup>ix</sup> William L. Lane, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), 425.

<sup>x</sup> Erwin Lutzer, *When a Nation Forgets God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 66.

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid*, 132.