

## A Citizen of Two Kingdoms

Christians are citizens not only of an earthly kingdom but also a heavenly one.

### I. The Dishonest Inquirers (12:13-14)

*13 And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. 14 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?"*

ZIBBC: "Judea became a Roman province in A.D. 6 and was subject to the poll tax (or head tax, distinct from the tax on property and customs on articles). The census provided the data (computed in acres and human heads) from which the Romans levied this tax. Its establishment provoked the revolt of Judas of Galilee because it placed God's own land at the service of foreigners. A 'yes' answer to Jesus' question invites the charge of turning traitor to God by endorsing Caesar's hegemony over the land. It was also an emotionally charged issue since most residents of Palestine knew someone the Romans sold into slavery, executed, or forced off their land by the whirlpool of debt from the spiraling tax burden. A 'no' answer, by contrast, invites the charge of sedition." Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 274.

### II. The Remarkable Teaching (12:15-17)

*15 But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." 17 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.*

The image of Tiberius was on one side of the denarius, proclaiming him to be "son of the divine Augustus."

Obeying earthly government is not without limits.

Bruce Shelley: "Under Emperor Decius (249–251) Caesar worship was made universal—and compulsory for every race and nation within the empire with the single exception of the Jews. On a certain day in the year every Roman citizen had to come to the Temple of Caesar and had

to burn a pinch of incense there, and say: 'Caesar is Lord.' When he had done that, he was given a certificate to guarantee that he had done so. After a man had burned his pinch of incense and had acknowledged Caesar as Lord, he could go away and worship any god he liked, so long as the worship did not affect public decency and order.

"Thus, we see that Caesar worship was primarily a test of political loyalty; it was a test of whether or not a man was a good citizen. If a man refused to carry out the ceremony of acknowledging Caesar, he was automatically branded as a traitor and a revolutionary. Exaltation of the emperor, then, created a problem for the Christians. They had not failed to pray for the emperor in their meetings, but they would not pray to him in private or in public." Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: Word Pub., 1995), 44.

What if there is a conflict?

Acts 5:27–29 (ESV):<sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them,<sup>28</sup> 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."<sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

The Christian is to obey laws of his earthly government where doing so does not require disobedience to God's laws.

Romans 13:6-7 (ESV):<sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.<sup>7</sup> 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.

1 Peter 2:13–15 (ESV):<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,<sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.<sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

The Christian is also and ultimately a citizen of the kingdom of God, and Christ is Lord over every aspect of his being.

Mark 1:14–15 (ESV):<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,<sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."