

June 29, 2014
Community Baptist Church
Sunday Morning Service
Patriotic
643 South Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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LIVING WITH DUAL CITIZENSHIP Matthew 22:15-22

We know missionaries who have dual citizenship. They went to the mission field as citizens of the United States, but after living in a foreign nation for a long time, they also gained citizenship in that country. Such a dual status generally does not cause a problem until there is a conflict. For example, what would happen to my friends in Australia who enjoy dual citizenship if the United States went to war with the folks from Down Under?

We who are citizens of heaven live every day in that kind of tension. We are citizens of the United States and yet this world is not our home. The longer I live, the less of a patriot I think I have become. Some might conclude that patriotism tends to wain when the nation goes to pot through bad leadership. That probably is true. But I think my patriotism is being overtaken by a growing love for God my real King.

Jonathan Edwards explained that love for country is too often nothing more than an extension of self-love. He wrote, “When private affections reach out to a considerable number, we’re ready to look on them as truly virtuous and applaud them highly. That’s what happens with a man’s love for a large party, or for a country. His private system contains only a small part even of the world of mankind (let alone of the whole universe), but there are quite a lot of individuals in it, and—given the limitedness of his mind and the narrowness of his views—they are ready to occupy his whole mental field and seem to be everything. Among the Romans, for example, love for their country was the highest virtue; yet this vaunted affection of theirs was employed for the destruction of the rest of mankind, as it were. The larger the number of individuals to which a private affection extends,

the more closely that private system will resemble the universe, and the more apt men will therefore be to mistake it for true virtue.” (Jonathan Edwards, “The Nature of True Virtue,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979, p.131.)

Christians can never forget that love for God is the chief thing. And that love generally wages war against love of self, even as it is expressed in love for country. So then we are not supposed to love our country? Jesus explained that we are supposed to live in our culture according to the instruction and desire of our eternal King who is Jesus Himself. What did He tell us to do?

The Situation (vv.15-21a).

This is the story about the religious authorities who attempted to trap Jesus (vv.15-16). For obvious reasons we will consider later, the leaders themselves did not attempt this futility. Instead, they sent their representatives. Matthew recorded, *Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his talk. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians (vv.15-16a)*. It was an intentional plot.

The Pharisees, who are mentioned here, especially hated Jesus because He continually uncovered their sin of self-centered, self-love. They made the rules about how to love God and insisted that everyone else keep the rules. In fact, they probably didn’t care much if others didn’t keep their rules because they would be satisfied altogether if they alone were granted entrance into the kingdom of heaven. It is true that the Sadducees also were not favorable toward Jesus because they feared He would tarnish their standing with the political powers that ruled over Israel. The other group Matthew mentioned were the Herodians who were more of a political group. Their name is derived from the fact that these people probably favored the rule of the Herod family over Israel. In particular, they would have been all in favor of Herod Antipas who ruled during Jesus’ ministry (4 BC – AD 39). All the other power groups named (scribes, Sanhedrin, lawyers, chief priests, elders) were generally associated with one of these political/religious parties.

Here we read that the leaders of at least two parties (Pharisees and Herodians) collaborated to send spies to entangle Jesus. Ironically, these two parties were always at great odds with each other. The Pharisees considered Herodians to be unrighteous—almost pagan. But no one would have believed the Pharisees if they themselves asked Jesus if it was right to pay taxes. The Pharisees always taught that it was wrong, but the Herodians were friends with Rome. So the Pharisees sent Herodian spies to entangle Jesus. The word *entangle* is a hunting term that means to set a snare or to entrap an unwary animal.

Luke pointed out that this whole thing was a process. *So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said (Luke 20:20a)*. These leaders had been watching Jesus, waiting for a time when they could “catch” Him, take hold of something He said. The representatives who were sent with the Pharisees’ and Herodian’s authority (*apostello*) acted like spies—hirelings who waited in the darkness for an opportunity to capture the necessary evidence. Did the people in the crowds perceive who these guys were and what they were up to?

It would have been difficult to discern what the spies were up to because they said nice things about Jesus. They 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 (v.16b)*. Obviously, they pretended to be *sincere* (Luke 20:20). They shaped their questions to sound like they really wanted to know the truth. Apparently, they truly did not believe that Jesus had often responded to Pharisees and people in general based on what they were thinking in their hearts. Their actions were tantamount to my grandson putting a patch on his eye, putting on his pirate hat, putting a hook on his left hand, and picking up his plastic sword, then saying to me, “Arrrrgh, I’m a pirate!” I assure you that I would not be fooled for one moment. Nor was the Reader of the heart’s secrets fooled into thinking that the spies from the Pharisees really wanted to know the truth.

The pretense caused them to say things they did not believe or mean. For example, these dishonest spies affirmed that Jesus Christ is true. They only pretended to be sincere when they claimed that Jesus was a man of integrity. What a stark difference we have here.

Jesus was everything they pretended to be—and more. He was always, every moment, in every thought or deed, the essence of truth.

Furthermore, the spies claimed that Jesus Christ teaches the way of God truthfully. They said, *“Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly (Luke 20:21)*. Another way of putting it was that they told Jesus, “We know that you ‘cut it straight.’” They knew that Jesus did what He requires every preacher of His Word to do. Paul wrote to Timothy, *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15)*.

They also told Jesus that they knew that He taught the way of God based on truth (Matthew 22:16). How incredibly hypocritical that statement was. If they really believed this, they would have quickly abandoned the error of legalism! They actually believed that Jesus was twisting the truth and not even teaching the way of God. The good news is that Jesus did exactly what they claimed. He cut the truth straight and taught God’s way based on truth. Therefore, we know how we should live.

Furthermore, they admitted that Jesus Christ was not swayed by opinions and that He did not show partiality (Luke 20:21). Jesus was not a Democrat or Republican. Jesus simply told the truth and landed on the issues wherever truth landed Him.

The plan was for the religious authorities to lay a trap regarding civil responsibility (vv.17-21a). Therefore, they asked a question about taxes. They asked if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. *Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? (v.17)*. They wanted to know Jesus’ opinion, which they already acknowledged would be truth. And yet it appears that their plan was to weigh Jesus’ opinion against their own opinion. That sounds rather human. The proposition was, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or is it lawful not to pay taxes to Caesar?” The dilemma is obvious. How could there be an answer that pleased everyone.

In fact, the leaders’ plan was to force Jesus to incriminate Himself. Obviously, it was a hot issue that seemed to have no right answer. They planned for Jesus to offend the political leaders so that they would suspect Him of insurrection and (hopefully) kill Him. Luke reported they did this, *so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor (Luke 20:20b)*. They thought it was

a catch-22. Either Jesus had to offend the political leaders or offend His followers who were Jews. The tax was so offensive because it was not a matter of opinion according to Roman law. It was a tribute placed on every Jewish citizen of the empire forcing them to pay for the privilege of living and working in the empire. This outraged the Jews because it was like having to pay a tax for the privilege of living in their own land—a place where the Romans had no business being. God had promised this land to Israel—Abraham’s seed! Therefore, it was not lawful according to God’s plan (at least in the Jews’ opinion) to pay tax to Rome. God’s law was clear and all the offerings and tithes were supposed to go to the Temple for the benefit of the Jews. Surely God’s law supercedes man’s law! And surely the deceptive people thought they had Jesus cornered.

The problem was that they failed to think through their plan. They mistakenly figured this was an either/or situation. Either you paid tax to Rome or you paid your temple tithes and taxes. You can’t do both, can you? Remember that they asked this question of the Teacher who always told the truth and always taught God’s way in truth. This Man of integrity saw through all schemes and pretense. *But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? (v.18).* What they were up to was perfectly clear to Jesus. He called them what they were.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, being perfect in wisdom, demonstrated the fallacy of the spies’ proposition. He replied, *Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” (vv.19-21a).* We know that a specific coin was required to pay the poll-tax. It was a denarius which was equivalent to a common laborer’s wage for a day’s work. And whose image was inscribed on the coin? — Caesar’s. Okay, this is where the pretenders were going to trap Jesus. He had to denounce this whole practice for several reasons. At the very least, the image of Caesar showed him sitting on a throne clothed in a priest’s robe because he claimed to be deity. God’s law specifically forbade His people to make graven images of things in heaven or earth.

They had Him! Jesus was about to destroy His whole work and reputation by saying what He had to say. He had to denounce the use of that coin and the practice of paying the hated tax to the hated

Romans. Pilate was going to kill this Teacher when the Herodians, the friends of Rome, reported to him what Jesus was about to say. Only, Jesus didn’t say what they thought He would say!

The Solution (v.21b).

Jesus’ answer was simple, resolute, and marvelous. *Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* That principle remains for all who will follow God. Give to Caesar what is rightfully his. What is rightfully his? As it was in this case in Jesus’ day, taxes belong to Caesar. In fact, that was a principle the Jewish people had practiced since the day the nation was born. In the Theocracy, God required “taxes” in order to maintain the “government” over the people. Therefore, each person in the nation of Israel over the age of twenty paid a tax of ½ shekel annually. Here is what the law required: *The LORD said to Moses, “When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them. Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD’s offering. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the LORD’s offering to make atonement for your lives (Exodus 30:11-15).* The purpose of this tax was to support the temple ministry, which was also the seat of government since the prophets and priests were the leaders.

But that was in times past. Now the issue was paying taxes to Caesar. If the Jews thought it was tough when God ruled them through the temple, living under Caesar was worse. The “taxes” were increased for Jewish people in Roman times because they had obligation to the temple and obligation to the Roman government. There were certain taxes that Rome required. One was called the ground tax which amounted to 10% of the grain and 20% of the fruit and wine which the farmer paid in cash or kind. Then there was the income tax. We are quite familiar with that tax. But the Roman

citizens only paid 1% of their income. Finally there was the poll tax. That is the tax at the center of this argument. It was a day's wage paid annually for the privilege of being a Roman citizen.

But that wasn't all. These Jews who lived under Roman oversight were also subject to various other taxes. These other taxes are the areas in which the infamous tax collectors cheated the people. Among these was a duty tax of 2.5% to 12.5 % on everything that was imported or exported. Then there were tolls people paid to travel main roads, cross bridges, or enter harbors and certain markets. There was a sales tax and a tax on pack animals, carts, axles and wheels. Does any of this sound familiar to us? As government in Rome grew larger and larger, so did the taxes until the culture imploded.

So why were the Jews complaining? It appears that we pay more taxes than they did! Maybe as Christians we ought to rebel! Maybe not. God still teaches that we are to pay taxes in order to support legitimate government oversight. *For the same reason 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” (Romans 13:6-7).*

Surely we do not agree with what the government does with our taxes any more than the Jews in Jesus' day agreed with what Rome did with their tax money. God does not put the individual in charge of this decision—He simply requires us to pay. That is a very difficult act of submission for people who are strongly independent. We need to stop and consider that we are from stock that fought off the most powerful nation in the world in order to gain freedom. That desire for freedom burns deep within our souls. But sometimes we forget that government by representation and majority rules is almost never the kind of government God has established throughout history. Therefore, it is better for us to quietly obey God and give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar.

Tax isn't the only thing we owe Caesar. We also owe our government leaders duty. One of the most difficult duties for Jewish people in Jesus' day was to refrain from insurrections and riots. Jerusalem was so famous for protests that a garrison of Roman soldiers was stationed there. We who name the name of Christ can't mount insurrections because God teaches that the government

authorities which He ordains deserve our honor and respect. Therefore, when the leaders make rules, we are supposed to obey them. That is why we serve on jury duty even though it is inconvenient. That is why we vote even though we don't care much for the candidates. We serve in the military if drafted out of duty to country. You get a drivers' license and pay for insurance on your vehicle out of duty. Maybe you even recycle because your local government says you must. We don't do these things because we like to, but because we give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

A third thing owed to Caesar is respect. Respect is built on fear. We show respect to government leaders because we fear the authority. Is that really so? It should be according to Paul who wrote, *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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 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, 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. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience (Romans 13:1-5).*

This is a good principle of basic fear. Fearing that the government might punish you is sufficient motivation to submit to its laws. And someone will retort, "You're telling this to sons of patriots who fought for freedom from tyranny?" Actually, I'm just reading the operator's manual our Creator gave to us. He always has good reasons for what He requires of us. In this case, we submit to governing authorities because we are to maintain a good testimony of respecting the institution God ordains. Peter taught, *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people (1 Peter 2:13-15).* We, the people of God, need to be the first

to set the example of giving to Caesar what is Caesar's. But let's be careful to realize as we do that everything is not Caesar's.

Jesus also taught that we must give to God what is rightfully His. Everything belongs to God. So how do we make that work? The key is to love God supremely. Proper love toward Him expresses God's ownership of all we have. That thought is found in the story about Jesus' reply to the lawyer. *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:35-37).* This story is built on the reality that love is willing sacrifice. Therefore, the right sacrifice involves our entire heart, soul, mind. In love, we commit every desire, decision, plan, purpose, goal, and, therefore, every possession and accomplishment to Him. Since God is our Creator, it is only fitting that everything belongs to Him.

But wait! If everything belongs to God, what about me? What is there in life for me if I commit everything to God? One of the most difficult lessons to learn, and a lesson about which we must constantly remind ourselves, is that life is not about me. A good citizen lives with a desire to please God first and to serve others second. And what makes that choice so difficult is that we live in an environment where everyone thinks life is about himself. Your peers will gladly accept your sacrifice, never thank you for it, and then demand more. This is why we need confidence in giving everything to God because it is His. God who owns everything instructs us to give some of His things to the government.

But what if the government wants something that belongs to God? While we give to Caesar all that is Caesar's and give to God all that is God's, we must exercise faithfulness when there is conflict. Sometimes the rulers step over their God-given boundaries and demand something they should not demand. In those rare cases, we must follow the faithful testimony of the apostles when rulers told them to stop preaching about Jesus. *But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge" (Acts 4:19).* The authorities told the apostles a second time to cut it out, and *Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).*

Silence (response) (v.22).

The wonderful conclusion of the story is that the hypocrites were not able to catch the King. *And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said but marveling at his answer they became silent (Luke 20:26).* Silence is a good indication that truth has triumphed. Mere men cannot trip up God in an argument. The only right response to God is to marvel. Indeed, we are as amazed about God's instruction regarding our relationship to government as those people were.

Things turned out as they did because the King would not be caught until He wanted to be caught. He came to lay down His life. No one was going to overpower the Creator. As a result, the hypocrites walked away marveling. *When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away (v.22).* That was a good result. Even unsaved people marvel when Christ's standard is demonstrated. This is how we are supposed to let our good works speak for God's glory.

The best citizens of a nation are not progressives or conservatives, Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, or even Dixiecrats. The best citizens of any nation are the people who love God, fear Him, and follow His rules regarding our relationship to His ordained leaders.