

October 2020

My dear Friends in Christ,

In the text for October 18 the phrase: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22: 21) by Jesus. It is a simple phrase, but with profound meaning.

When you consider this verse you must first ask: "What is Caesar's? Of course Caesar was the government back in Jesus' day. When Jesus was making this statement He was looking at a coin issued by the Roman Empire. When we look at our money we

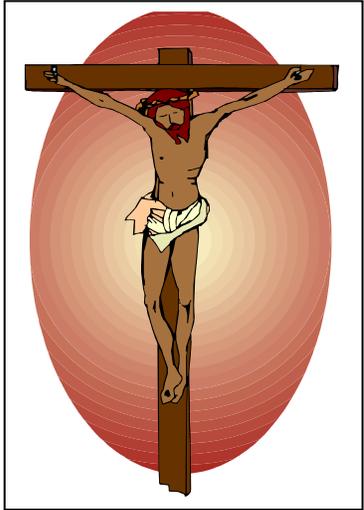


see George Washington on it. Or we see Abraham Lincoln on it. Or we see Ben Franklin on it. The images of past heroes of our country are on our money. The money belongs to and is printed by our government. So according to Jesus' statement we are to give money to the government for our taxes. Jesus had no difficulty with paying our fair share of taxes. Many will say, though that taxes are too high. But we still pay them. WE have no

choice. The IRS is more feared than God in our country. We certainly don't want the taxman after us. Taxes are paid or else we face fines or jail time. This is an example of what theologians call "law" motivation. It can be summed up with two words, "you must." Most of us understand the idea of taxes and the coercion behind taxes. We know what is required and we do it. We may not like it but we do it.

But now we must ask the next question, "What is God's?" In this day and age, it is difficult for us to see much of anything as belonging to God. If we doubt God's creative acts then it's hard to see anything as God's. But God as creator is foundational. The creator of something is the owner of that thing. The potter owns the pot he makes. Few would dispute that the artist owns the painting he paints. Or the sculptor owns the statue that he sculpts. God created all we see – the world, the universe. He even sculpted man and breathed life into him. He owns all we are and all we have by the right of creation. So we are God's, the world is God's; the universe is God's. Even the paper on which the images of George Washington and others are printed is God's.

But even though God owns all we see and all we are, He is not like the government. He doesn't have an IRS. He doesn't send the taxman after us. He doesn't use law motivation to get what He wants from people, although some misguided churches do do this. First of all, He doesn't need anything we have. He already owns it. He's just letting us use it for a time. He can get it back at any time or just wait until we are gone and take it then.



Secondly, God is more into giving than taking. It seems that governments are always looking to see how much they can get from citizens, but God is just the opposite. He is always looking to see how much He can give His children. He even gives to those not His children. And make no mistake about it God has given you and all of us more than we deserve. The perfect example of this is Jesus. The one who is speaking the line: "Give to Caesar..." is the one who shows God's giving most clearly. Paul states this when he writes: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." Jesus had everything. He had all the glory and riches of heaven; but He gave it all up to be born in a stable. He gave more too. He gave His life. He lived a perfect life, keeping all of God's commandments for us. He even went so far as to die on a cross for us. On the cross He paid for all of our sin. He gave all He had for us. He earned the vast infinite riches of forgiveness for us. You see we were and are poor miserable sinners. But now Jesus gives us of His riches of forgiveness. He gives us this in the Word and the Sacraments. Spiritual things are given in abundance. Of the material things He owns He gives us what we need. He makes us His when we are given faith.

He gives and we receive. No, He is not like the government. The government takes and we may get something back, maybe not. But God gives and gives and then makes us caretakers of what He has given. We don't own what we have been given, God does, but we care for what we have been given. And now after all He has given God asks; He doesn't demand; He doesn't take; He doesn't send the IRS agents; but He asks that we support His work in the world. Actually He gives us that privilege to help in His work in the world. Yes, He asks us to help; we are not drafted as the government drafts soldiers. He asks us to use a portion of what He gives and give it back to Him to support His work. He asks for some of our time, some of our talents and some of our treasure. He is asking each of us.

"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." But the government demands. God gives and then asks for some of what He has given. There is quite a difference.