



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion
55 – But Really, What about Taxes?!?

Announcements:

1/23 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship
- Question 6

1/25 @7:00 -

Prayer

1/26 @6:30 -

Grace Group

1/29 @8:30 -

Sunday School

ICE BREAKER: Finish this sentence: Taxes are _____ .

READ: Matthew 17:24-27

On Sunday, I noted that the tax at the center of the passage we just read is what was called the temple tax. It was a tax on Jewish men that was supposed to pay for the upkeep and maintenance of the Temple in Jerusalem. In other words, this is a *religious* tax, and not a *civil* tax. In modern thinking it is less like what is due April 15th and more like what we give every Sunday. However many people approach this passage as if Jesus is teaching us about the Christians relationship with the IRS. But if that were true we might be led to some crazy conclusions like, don't worry about putting aside your tax money, when the IRS comes knocking Jesus will supernaturally provide for you! (please note: that is **NOT** the lesson of this story) But what, then, is the Bible's teaching on our relationship with the civil government, and what can be expected/required of us? To get there we will have to go to some other passages. (please note, my goal is not to be political, rather to help us see how to approach Scripture on any topic that may be like this)

READ: Matthew 22:15-21

This is probably the most famous in all the verses of the bible that deal with taxes. The question is simple: Is it right that we have to pay taxes? But the answer that Jesus gives is far from simple. I have heard arguments over what Jesus really means here that are all over the map. Some say this means that we do have to pay taxes, I mean, give to Caesar what is Caesar's after all. Some argue that this passage is stating that we actually shouldn't because all things are God's after all. So what is the truth? Well, we will get to this passage later in Matthew, but here is the short answer. You can't start by assuming this is all about taxes. Jesus is responding to a group that is "plotting" to "entangle" him. In other words, their goal is not to get a real answer, but to trap Jesus. Because of this he answers in a way that is a bit of an enigma, and gives us a *principle* rather than a rule. What Jesus highlights with this teaching is that there are two kingdoms, and ultimately he cares much more about the kingdom of heaven. If you are so obsessed with the things of the earth, you will not see the kingdom of heaven. Really it is a rebuke, you are so concerned over this early coin that you (hypocrites!) can't see heaven is standing in front of you. So the principle: *Keep your eyes on God, and what he would have you do.*

DISCUSS: Why is this principle more important than a detailed answer on: should you pay taxes? How can it lead us to better answers to the question?

So if the principle is "do what God would have you do", what would God have you do vis-a-vis paying taxes? Here Paul is most helpful.

READ: Romans 13:1-7

To answer our question, "should Christians pay taxes", Paul says the answer very clearly, Yes. "Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed" (Romans 13:7). But just like with Jesus' teaching Paul gives us this thought along with a *principle*. And this one is a bit more nuanced. The first thought is God is sovereign, he ultimately rules, so if he places someone in power, to disrespect and disobey them is tantamount to disobeying God (if we think of the context to the church in Rome this means even an evil Ceaser!). So in "rendering to God what is God's" we also follow the laws of the land. In other words, yes, we pay taxes, but we also give honor and respect, we show love and care. We live such that we "Owe no one anything, except to love each other" (Romans 13:8). Here is where the passage from Matthew *can* be about paying taxes. Jesus tells Matthew there not to give offense. In other words, make no barrier to sharing the hope and love of the Gospel. If that means paying your taxes, then you should do so with a (and here is the REAL challenge!) cheerful heart.

DISCUSS: How can paying taxes be about the Gospel? How can we have this sort of Gospel centered mind about other topics?