

# RENDER TO GOD

*Matthew 22:15-22*

As we come to our text, I want to remind you that there was no group in Israel that accepted Jesus as one of their own. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes, Scribes, and their various disciples all followed their own traditions, which were only partly based on the Law of God.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, all would have been curious as to who this newcomer might be. Any of them might have provisionally welcomed Him IF He had demonstrated loyalty to their particular point of view. It's obvious from Scripture that Jesus was loyal only to the Father and the Word of God. Because of that, He earned their hatred and opposition.

TRANSITION      Now, three years have passed since Jesus began His public ministry, and the religious groups of Israel have long since given up any hope that He would take their side. They each hated Him so much that it gave them a reason to cooperate with each other.

## SETTING THE TRAP

*Matthew 22:15-16*

**15** Then the Pharisees went and took counsel together about how they might trap Him in what He said.

**16** And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.” (**Matthew 22:15–16, 2022 LSB**)

They “took counsel together.” That phrase might sound familiar; we see it in Psalm 2:2:

**2** The kings of the earth take their stand  
And the rulers **take counsel together**

## Against Yahweh and against His Anointed ... (Psalm 2:2, 2022 LSB)

This is a fulfillment of that prophetic word.

They came up with the perfect plan. Here it is.

First, they wouldn't confront Jesus personally. Instead, they would send their disciples, their students, along with some Herodians, who were politically aligned with the Herods. Pharisees and Herodians were typically hostile to one another. If Jesus saw them together, He wouldn't suspect anything.

Second, they would coach those disciples on how to disarm Jesus with flattery. They would call Him "teacher" even though they rejected His authority. They would say, "We know that You are truthful," even though they didn't believe a word He said. They would say, "We know that You teach the way of God in truth," even though they followed only human traditions. They would say, "We know that You defer to no one," which was perhaps what most offended them about Jesus; He showed their traditions no respect. And they would say, "We know that you are partial to no one." Literally, "We know that you don't look at people's faces." That is, Jesus was unconcerned about how others perceived Him; what's more, He never spoke with the goal of winning people over. He simply spoke the Word of God in truth and love.

TRANSITION      The disciples of the Pharisees followed the plan and set the trap for Jesus. They get Him right where they want Him.

## SPRINGING THE TRAP

*Matthew 22:17*

If you close your eyes and listen carefully, you can almost hear them chuckling at their own craftiness.

17 “Therefore, tell us, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a tax to Caesar, or not?”  
(Matthew 22:17, 2022 LSB)

Boy, they’ve got Him now! They just wait for Him to shrug in defeat and admit that they’ve really finally stumped Him.

Now, why was this a dilemma? Why did they think Jesus would be trapped by this question?

The Roman Empire dominated the entire Mediterranean region, as well as Europe, and was just ten years from invading the British Isles. They required that those they conquered pay tributes and taxes. Those taxes had to be paid in Roman coins. Roman coins were stamped with the image of the emperor; on that particular day, the emperor was Tiberius Julius Augustus Caesar. So the coins used to pay taxes had his facial profile stamped on the front and the profile of a woman’s face stamped on the reverse; it was probably his mother, Livia. There was also an inscription on both sides. The front of the coin read “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of Divine Augustus.” The back of the coin read “Pontif Max,” short for Pontifex Maximus, which is Latin for “supreme high priest.” These coins were religious objects. They identified Augustus as a god and Tiberius as the supreme high priest of the Cult of the Emperor and, in fact, every Roman religion.

The First Commandment prohibited worshiping any god but Yahweh. The Second Commandment prohibited making images for religious purposes. Roman coins violated both commandments.

So here’s the dilemma. Rome demanded that taxes be paid in their coinage; faithful Jews could not do so without violating the First and Second Commandments. To the Pharisees, it was the perfect, unanswerable question. If Jesus said, “Don’t pay the tax,” He would be guilty

of crimes against the Empire, perhaps even treason. If Jesus said, “Pay the tax,” He would be encouraging Jews to violate God’s Law.

## BUT JESUS

*Matthew 22:18-21*

**18** But Jesus, knowing their wickedness, said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?” (**Matthew 22:18, 2022 LSB**)

I’ve already pointed out that Psalm 2:2 was fulfilled when these men took counsel against Yahweh and His Anointed One. Now we see the fulfillment of Psalm 33:10:

**10** Yahweh nullifies the counsel of the nations;  
He frustrates the thoughts of the peoples. (**Psalm 33:10, 2022 LSB**)

No human being will ever win a battle of wits against God.

Proverbs 21:30 says,

**30** There is no wisdom [against Yahweh], there is no discernment [against Yahweh],  
And there is no counsel against Yahweh. (**Proverbs 21:30, 2022 LSB**)

They couldn’t spring a trap on Jesus because Isaiah 11:2 had been fulfilled in Him:

**2** The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh. (**Isaiah 11:2, 2022 LSB**)

They were unable to trap Him. He knew why they had come to Him with this question. Their wickedness is on full display. And they show themselves to be hypocrites. How?

Because, of course, *they regularly paid the tax to Caesar!* Virtually everyone paid the Roman tax. The only exceptions were Caesar's family and friends. Jesus had paid it His entire adult life. The Pharisees had paid it. The Herodians had paid it.

## CAUGHT IN THEIR OWN TRAP

*Matthew 22:19-21a*

**19** “Show Me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. **20** And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” **21** They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s ...”  
(**Matthew 22:19–21, 2022 LSB**)

It's Caesar's coin, Jesus says. Give it to him.

Romans 13:1 says,

**1** Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. [Then it tells us why:] For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist have been appointed by God. (**Romans 13:1, 2022 LSB**)

All authority, period, comes from God. This is not limited to good, godly, wholesome governments (by the way, if you ever find one, let me know). It applies to every government that exists, no matter how wicked and corrupt. Tiberius was placed on the Roman throne by God's decree. George Washington served two terms as the first American president by God's decree. Donald Trump and Joe Biden both took the oath of office by God's decree. Some say, “Biden stole the election!” If he did, it was by God's decree. Beloved, the sovereign decrees of God are not just theological and theoretical; they touch on every last aspect of His creation.

Let's be clear. We have every right and responsibility as American citizens to vote. We ought to vote according to biblical, Christian principles. And we are required by our Savior to

submit to the governing authorities and even to intercede for them. Many times those governing authorities think that they have Christians at their mercy. They only have that power because God gave it to them. They cannot do anything to us that He does not decree. Not everything He decrees seems good at that moment, but all that He decrees is working out His eternal purpose and is for His eternal glory. One day every leader, from parents in the home to leaders of nations, will have to answer to their Creator for how they exercised the authority He gave them. Those who violate His holiness and commandments in their leadership face His fearsome wrath. There is no hope for them apart from Jesus Christ.

Jesus commanded them to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. What things were Caesar's? In this passage, it's money. In the end, governments have a right to money, land, and a certain loyalty from their citizens. The majority of government operations have to do with these three areas: collecting taxes, claiming territory, and keeping its people in line.

Without question, governments often overstep their bounds. But if they go too far, they tend to collapse before too long. The *worst* of the Soviet Union only lasted about 30 years; the *worst* of China about 20 years. Both nations had to embrace a certain amount of economic and cultural reforms. While both nations are still oppressive, they are nothing compared to what they once were.

TRANSITION        So the disciples of the Pharisees posed an unanswerable question to Jesus. Jesus answered the unanswerable – give Caesar the things that belong to Caesar – but He wasn't done. He had more to say to them and us.

## RENDER TO GOD

*Matthew 21:21*

“Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.” (**Matthew 22:21, 2022 LSB**)

This is the major part of Jesus' answer. This is the part that matters. Our concern should not be the little that "Caesar" can claim from us but what God can claim from us.

What things are God's?

**19** God Most High, Possessor of **heaven and earth** (**Genesis 14:19, 2022 LSB**)

**29** the **earth** is Yahweh's (**Exodus 9:29, 2022 LSB**)

**5** all the **earth** is Mine [says Yahweh] (**Exodus 19:5, 2022 LSB**)

**14** "Behold, to Yahweh ... belong **heaven** and the **highest heavens**, the **earth** and **all that is in it.**" (**Deuteronomy 10:14, 2022 LSB**)

**11** [**God says**] "Who has given to Me that I should repay him? **Whatever is under the whole heaven** is Mine" (**Job 41:11, 2022 LSB**)

**1** The **earth** is Yahweh's, as well as its **fullness**,  
The **world**, and **those who dwell in it.** (**Psalms 24:1, 2022 LSB**)

Everything belongs to God. He created it all, and it is His. There is nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth that does not belong to Him. Every creature He made belongs to Him. Every human being belongs to Him. Every cell in your body, every thought in your head, and every desire in your heart belongs to Him.

But there's something else to consider here.

Jesus had them produce a Roman coin. "Whose image is stamped on it?" He asks. "Whose inscription is written on it?"

Where is the image of God stamped?

**26** Then God said, “**Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness**, so that they will have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” **27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.** (Genesis 1:26–27, 2022 LSB)

The image of God is stamped on mankind. Each person is created in His image. He made mankind male and female – those are the only two genders. He stamped His image on us. So forget the coin and look at yourself. Whose image is stamped there? God’s image is stamped upon you. God’s inscription is imprinted within your heart and soul.

Romans 2:12-13 says,

**12** For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law. **13** For it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. (**Romans 2:12–13, 2022 LSB**)

God gave His Law to the Jewish people through Moses, but the rest of mankind didn’t have His Law. That raises two questions. First, how can God reasonably expect Gentiles to know and keep His Law? And second, how can He judge people according to a Law they never received?

**14** For when Gentiles who do not have the Law [**the written Law given by Moses**] naturally do the things of the Law, these, not having the Law [**given by Moses**], are a law to themselves, **15** in that they demonstrate the work of the Law **written in their hearts, their conscience** bearing witness and **their thoughts** alternately accusing or else defending them, **16** on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the



secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (**Romans 2:14–16, 2022 LSB**)

In other words, God has inscribed His moral character within us. What was clear in Adam's heart has become obscured in our hearts, but the basics of the moral law remain clear to all of us. Everyone expects children to be respectful to their parents. Everyone knows that murder is wrong, even if we have different definitions. The most sexually perverse people in the world still feel betrayed when their partners cheat on them. Everyone knows that stealing is wrong. Everyone knows that lying is wrong.

Where did that knowledge come from? God has inscribed His moral code on each human being.

So our Creator has marked us as His own by stamping us with His image and by inscribing His law within us. What should we do then? Isn't it clear? Render unto God the things that are God's. Everything, in general, belongs to Him, but especially that which He has stamped and inscribed as His own.

Jesus' answer stunned His listeners. They were amazed that He had an answer to their unanswerable question and amazed that His answer was so unanswerable. Could anyone disagree with Him? Not logically, no. But sin is not logical.

## **BRINGING IT HOME**

Jesus speaks to us today. Our Caesar has certain claims, and as long as those claims don't contradict Scripture, we are to render to Biden what is Biden's.

But our God has a far greater claim upon us. He doesn't first call for our money, skills, or possessions but for our very selves. Even in our natural birth, we are stamped with His image and inscribed with His moral Law. But more than that, Christians are being transformed to

carry a more precise image. Those whom the Father foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son so that Jesus would be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29). Our lives in Christ today are all about that transformation. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that we who behold Jesus as He is, according to the truth of the Word, “are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” Sanctification is not the process of being made better in some generic way; it is the process of being made like Jesus in every way.

My prayer today is that we would accept the work of the Spirit in our lives by investing ourselves in the Scripture so that we can see Jesus as He is. There is nothing better than cooperating with the work of the Holy Spirit. He does not need our cooperation to sanctify us. He will sanctify us whether we want Him to or not. Believe me, it's much better if we welcome His work in our lives than if we resist. Everyone resists to some degree at one time or another. It's true that sanctification usually involves some amount of pain; the pain of resistance is always greater than the pain of sanctification.