

## Strange Bedfellows

In the early eighties, I used to travel to northern Alabama. It is a lovely state with wonderful people. However I was struck at that time by a unique situation. The sale of liquor by state controlled liquor stores had only recently been legalized and there was still much discussion about it. But what really fascinated me was the description of the political process that led up to the vote. Obviously some people wanted the sale of alcohol legalized. As a result, opposing forces came together. In this case, the bootleggers and certain churches combined their efforts to resist legalization. Very different groups can come together for a common cause!

In Matthew 22:15-22, we are told of a similar situation! The Pharisees, leaders of the conquered religious nations of Israel, and the Herodians, the followers of King Herod, Roman ruler of Israel, come together to plot the downfall of Jesus. To the Pharisees, he is a trouble causer who is challenging the most fundamental beliefs. To the Romans, he is someone who is upsetting the people and, thus, could cause a revolution. So the Pharisees and the Herodians decide to confront Jesus in public with a question with no right answer. They decide to ask him "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" If Jesus says that it IS lawful to pay taxes, he is in trouble with the religious laws. And if He says that it is NOT lawful, He is committing treason. But Jesus turns the tables on them, looking at a coin and saying "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Jesus is clearly telling us to do what the government requires. Pay your taxes. Serve your country. Obey the laws of the land. BUT Jesus is also telling us to do what God requires. Give our tithe. Serve God by feeding the hungry and caring for the poor. And obey God's law's, which includes loving one another. It is a mistake to take these two instructions and equate them. All things come from God. His requirements are primary. This country is A PART of God's blessing; it is not equal to God. Jesus challenges us to see that all that we have been blessed with by God. Beautiful days and the glory of His creation. Loving families and close relationships. The opportunity to live in this great land. And, by the standards of the most of the rest of the world, incredible wealth! So, a part of "giving to God the things that are God's is each of examining our life and seeing what things come from God, seeing all the ways that God has blessed us.

And THEN, Jesus tells us to look at our blessings and give back to God. Obey God's law to love. Serve God's people. Give a tenth of your income to those in need.

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