

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 24) – October 22, 2023

“Then [Jesus] said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’”

– Matthew 22:21 –

The Pharisees and Herodians approach Jesus with a question to try to trap him: “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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (vv.16–17). They begin with flattery as though they’re trying to butter up Jesus. They’d hoped that Jesus would be impressed, but he sees right through their false praise.

This question puts Jesus in a conundrum. If Jesus says that taxes should indeed be paid, then they could accuse him of denying God’s sovereignty over Israel. This would cause friction with the Jewish people. On the other hand, if Jesus says that should not be paid, then he’s going to have problems with Rome. So what to do?

Jesus’ response is wise and shows that he is in control. He saw through the Pharisees’ and Herodian’s hypocrisy, and he scolded them for it. Jesus doesn’t shy away from the fact that the government makes requests of us that are both reasonable and legitimate. Martin Luther viewed civil government as God’s instrument to maintain peace and order in the world. We are responsible to God, but we must also obey government in civil matters.

The coin had Caesar’s image on it. It belonged to Caesar. So, what about God? What do we give to God? What bears God’s image? Friends, we do. We have the image of God imprinted upon us. We belong to God, not to Caesar or any other government official. In fact, we don’t even belong to ourselves!

We are created in the image of our God, and we belong to him. So then, what do we render to God? What do we give to the Almighty, our Creator? We are called to give of ourselves, our time, and our possessions. These are signs of God’s gracious love and what he has first given to us. We are called to give to God *because* we bear God’s image. Are we shining God’s image into the lives of others and in our interactions with others?

May God guide us and direct us to be all that he created us to be: sons and daughters in his image.