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Should Christians pay taxes and obey Secular Governments?

(2019)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Should Christians Pay Taxes and Obey Secular Governments?

Topics.

- Paying taxes.
 - The denarius a most amazing coin.
 - Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.
 - Pay taxes to the authorities for they are ministers of God.
 - Owe no man anything.
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Introduction

Should Christians pay taxes and obey secular governments? Especially since there are certain nations in our world whose rulers live their life totally contrary to the morals and laws of God and others who lie, deceive and oppress their people and others who are cruel and ruthless.

The aim of this study is to answer these two questions.

Paying taxes

- **Matthew 22:15-21:** The Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his talk. ¹⁶And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "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. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Jesus is fully aware that the Pharisees spies were full of malice and hypocrisy and were asking this question not because they really wanted to know the answer, but foolishly believing they could trap him by their wisdom. It is glorious to notice every time the prideful religious leaders attempted to trap Jesus in conversation, he turned the entire conversation back onto them and they were always left standing dumbfounded and without an answer.

The denarius a most amazing coin

On the denarius coin Caesar's name is spelled out entirely to the right of his head with the following letters CAESARAVGVSTVS and to the left of his head the following Latin abbreviations all run together DIVIMPPATERPATRIAE which means:

- DIV: Divine.
- IMP: Imperator (a Roman Emperor and absolute ruler).
- PATER PATRIAE: Father of his country.

On the reverse side is the figures of two Caesar's and above and around the figures are the Latin abbreviations VGVSPONCOSTRPGER which mean:

- AVG: Augustus.
- PON: Pontifex Maximus (religious ruler or Highest Priest).
- COS: Consulship.
- TRP: Tribunica Potestate (Tribune power civil head of the state).

Below the images is the word CAESARES the Latin for Caesars. From this coin alone one can discern that the Roman Emperor was an absolute monarch head of both state and religion. A great deal of literature was included on the small face of the denarius. Lengthy lettering is around the image of Domitian who reigned from AD 81-96 (he probably exiled John to Patmos). The lettering proceeds below the image clockwise around the coin is as follows:

- IMP:Imperator (a Roman Emperor and absolute ruler).
- CAES: Caesar (the title of king not his name).
- DOMIT: Domitian (his given name) (Praenomen).
- AUG: Augustus (most distinctive title).
- GERM: Germanicus or German (a hereditary title).
- PM: Pontifex maximus (head of the empire's religion).
- TRP: Tribunica potestate (supreme civil head, representative of the people).

On the reverse side: is the image of Mars, god of war, holding a spear and a shield. When the nation was at peace, he was pictured carrying an olive branch, but not in the days of Domitian. Around the image of Mars reading left to right are the words:

- IMP: Imperator (a Roman Emperor and absolute ruler).
- XX11: means date of 90 AD.
- COS XV1: 16TH consulship (about 90 AD).
- CENS PER: Censor Perpetuus (another title of the chief of state granted for lifetime, hence perpetual).

Seldom does one see so much said in so little space, but since there were no newspapers in those days and Roman emperors knew people read the legends on the coins, they went to great trouble to change them sometimes once a year. The government placed as much information on its money as they could so the denarius not only served as a medium of exchange, but also to disseminate information and propaganda for the emperor especially information that glorified the emperor. The denarius was a silver coin and the most common Roman coin during the days of the apostles. Roman army pay was a denarius a day which means at the time of the apostles a day's wages was one denarius (Matt 20:2, 10). Paul gave two days wages plus to take care of the Samaritan (Luke 10:35). Jesus and the disciples had two-hundred days wages (John 6:1-21). Mary anointed Jesus with oil worth three-hundred days wages (John 12:3-5). Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty-days wages (Matt 26:15) and in the last days a quart of wheat will cost one day's wages (Rev. 6:5-6). Since the denarius very clearly has Caesars face and name on it and not God's it is obvious to all that the things that are Caesar's refers to money since the entire money system belonged to the Roman Emperors not God, but

money is not the only thing that belonged to Caesar all the laws that Rome had established also belonged to Caesar. Jesus is very brilliantly using denarius to say that even as Christians we should still pay taxes to the worldly authorities and obey the laws of their governments. But Jesus is not implying with the words "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" that we should be paying a ten-percent tax or tithe of all our wages to God as some today teach.

I remember being in a church in which the minister was teaching this verse and telling his congregation that they if they expect to be blessed, they should be rendering ten-percent of their wages to God (meaning to him and his church). One member asked, "Should we tithe on our gross income or our net income?" to which he answered, "That depends whether you want gross blessings or net blessings." This is a total distorting of what Jesus is teaching and a clear example of a man using the Scriptures for his own selfish gain.

The things that are Gods are the teachings of Jesus and his disciples and tithing is not included in any of their teachings. The things that are God's are the fruits of the Spirit (i.e., humbleness, love, compassion, kindness, mercy, grace forgiveness and such like things), doing good to others, helping the poor when able and worship and praise. The principal Jesus is teaching from Denarius coin is to obey the authorities and laws of the country and give to God the reverence honour and worship due to Him by doing-good and showing mercy grace and love to others this is what it means to render unto God the things that are Gods.

NOTE: I am not saying that it is not a good thing to financially give from a free heart and willing to a ministry, but simply that it is wrong for any minister to use this verse and any other verse of Scripture to manipulate faithful brothers and sisters into giving from guilt and fear by cleverly twisting and distorting Scriptures. For further information concerning tithing, see the title:

- Tithing (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Since there are lying and deceitful rulers and corrupt governments the call to obey secular rulers and their governments has justifiably caused much confusion for a multitude of very understandable and good reasons. Hopefully the following section will help clarify some of the confusion and answer some of the questions.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities

- **Romans 13:1-5:** Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.
- Remember this is a letter Paul is writing to the Christian brothers in Rome.

The Christian religion was designed to extend throughout the world establishing a Kingdom amongst other kingdoms. Christians profess supreme allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ he is their Lawgiver, their Sovereign and their Judge therefore Paul addresses the question, "What kind' of allegiance are they to render to earthly authorities?" especially considering that the kingdoms of the world were then 'pagan' kingdoms

which had been generally founded in conquest, blood and oppression. Many of the kings were not only unprincipled men, but were morally polluted in their private lives and oppressive in their public administration thus Paul is addressing the question, "Should Christians acknowledge the laws of such kingdoms and of such authorities?" Many of the early Christians were composed of Jewish converts who had long been under Roman authority and oppression which was founded in a system of idolatry, thus the difficult question, "How far should they submit, if at all, to heathen authorities?" The circumstances for the Gentile converts was not much different since they would naturally look with abhorrence on the system of idolatry which they had forsaken and regard it as opposed to God, but since pagan religion was interwoven with the civil institutions and authorities there also existed danger that they might denounce the rulers of government altogether and be regarded as opposed to the laws of the land.

Naturally when the laws interfered with the rights of conscience; when they commanded the worship of idols or any moral wrong then it is right for Christians to 'resist' the laws and take a stand, but where is the line to be drawn, the word be 'subject' denotes that kind of submission which soldiers render to their officers it implies a willingness to occupy our proper place, to yield to the authority of those over us, but it does not designate the 'specific extent' of the submission, but rather presents it as a general principal which would be to obey in all things which are not contrary to the Law of God. It is most certain that the authorities Paul had in mind are the Roman rulers since he is writing to brothers and sister in Rome, but by extension the principal he is teaching extends to all generations. The reason Paul says Christians should be subject to the authorities over them is that governing rulers have received their appointment from God and therefore since Christians are to be subject to God they should honour God by honouring the system of government which he has instituted for mankind even if rulers had secured it, not according to justice, but by oppression. This is because once a ruling government is established, how it was established is not the concern of a Christian since it is not their duty to seek to overturn it for without government there could be no society, no security, no private property; all would be confusion and anarchy and all nations would soon be in extreme Chaos.

In all nations of the earth there is a constitution (a plan by which a particular country or state is governed) and this constitution is less or more calculated to promote the interests of the community. The civil authority agrees to govern according to that constitution and in this way there is an agreement and consent between the ruling government and those they are governing, but what if the ruler is an immoral man should Christians submit to his rule? If he is ruling according to the constitution nothing can justify rebellion against his authority no-matter how irregular he maybe in his own private life; he may disgrace himself by an improper conduct, but if he is ruling according to the law and makes no attempt to change the constitution nor break the agreement between him and the people there is no legal ground of opposition to his civil authority and every act against him would be considered rebellion and unlawful.

No personal misconduct in the ruler, no immorality in his own life, while he governs according to law, can justify either rebellion against him or contempt of his authority since he is accountable only to the people for his political conduct, for his private life and moral conduct he is accountable to his own conscience and to God. Nevertheless, opposition to a ruler can be justified when there are overt attempts on his part to change the constitution or to rule contrary to law. When the ruler acts in this way he dissolves the agreement between him and his people and therefore his authority is no longer binding because it then becomes illegal since he is acting contrary to the laws of that constitution according to which on being raised to the supreme power he promised to govern. His conduct and actions that are contrary to the law justifies opposition to his government, but a wise person will wait for the right time and find a legal way to bring about change according to law.

Conclusion to submitting to authorities

Paul is stating a general principle i.e., submit to authorities who are appointed to keep the law and administer justice otherwise you will come under their wrath. The entire focus is on authorities who are appointed to bring the wrongdoer to justice and thereby protect the innocent (meaning they have been appointed for the good of the people not their harm) (v4).

Pay taxes to the authorities for they are ministers of God

- **Romans 13:6-7:** For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed.

The words, "For this same reason" link back to the previous verses, in which Paul told Christian to do the right thing so that they don't bring the wrath of the governing ruler upon themselves and also for the sake of their own conscience (v4-5) i.e., they will have a clear conscience knowing they have acted according to God's will and mental peace knowing they have obeyed the laws of the ruling government.

NOTE: the phrase 'God's ministers' does not refer to ministers of religion, but the civil officers in all departments of the state, it implies they are working for the good of the people and motivated by a sense of improving the community.

Pay taxes to the authorities

The Romans made all conquered provinces pay 'tribute' (taxes) no doubt many Christians wondered if it was right to support such a ruling government by paying taxes. With all civil governments comes considerable expense in providing for the growth, safety and defence of the community, thus it is only reasonable that those within the community pay a moderate taxation by which the expenses of the state may be covered and the various officers, whether civil or military who are employed for the service of the public be adequately paid.

All this is just and right since the system of civil government is ordained by God, but it should be noted that there is no insinuation in Paul's words that infer an extravagant and oppressive taxation should be paid for the support of unprincipled and unnecessary wars; or the pensioning of corrupt or useless men rather the taxes are to be paid for the support of those who are God's ministers (i.e., the necessary civil officers, from the king downwards), nevertheless if taxes are unjust and oppressive like other evils they are to be submitted to until a remedy can be found in a lawful and proper way.

Owe no man anything

Paul is saying that no Christian should be in debt to any one in anyway, we should give honour, respect and credit to those who deserve it whether they are of our faith or not. The words, "Pay revenue to whom revenue is owed" (v7) show that Paul understands that some Christians are going to have debts and loans that require regular payments. Therefore the words "Owe no man anything" in regards to finances in this context does not mean never borrow from a bank to buy a house because as long as a person is able to make the required payments they are paying what they

owe since they are meeting the terms the financial contract requires (obviously it is far better not to borrow, but we do not live in an ideal world) nevertheless we should never borrow beyond what we can comfortably afford.

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