



Luke 20:19-26

Introduction

“Render unto Caesar” is a phrase that has been absorbed into the language of our culture. We use it when discussing our obligation to government or authority. And, any time the relationship between church and state is discussed, this passage is wheeled out. But more fully, this passage is a call to discipleship and giving what is owed. Everything, including government, belongs to God.

So, in our study, we must explore the answers to two questions:

1. What are our God-given obligations to the government?
2. What are our obligations to God?

How we handle these things is a reflection of our heart towards God

Here is our Main Idea: *To honor God, we must give to the government its due and give God His due.*

What belongs to Caesar? What belongs to God?

In order to answer these questions, we need to understand the context of the passage.

Recap: Why are the Jewish Leaders so angry? (vv. 19-22)

In last week’s passage, Jesus’ authority was questioned (20:1-8). He had cleansed the Temple and restored right worship (19:45-48). The Jewish authorities were the ones who had allowed people to buy and sell in the Temple to happen on their watch, and probably benefited from it.

Jesus told a parable about wicked servants who refused the owner of the vineyard some of the produce of the garden (20:9-16). The produce is what he was due, but every time a messenger came from the owner, they threw him out or beat him. Then the owner sent his Son. There could be no closer representative of the owner. The wicked servants threw him out and killed him. Jesus said that the owner of the vineyard would destroy those wicked servants and replace them with faithful servants.

This leads directly into our passage today. What do the Jewish leaders want to do? They want to grab him and arrest him because they understand that the

parable is about them and how they have been taking from God's people for themselves. Jesus has said they will be called to account.

The Power of God's Word (v. 19)

Did the parable accomplish its purpose? It depends on the purpose God intends.

One purpose might be that they would repent. In God's kindness, the leaders are being given an opportunity to turn from being wicked servants. Instead, they are on track to do exactly what Jesus' parable said that someone would do: to kill the Son and take the vineyard for themselves. Jesus had forecasted that they would be destroyed.

So did Jesus' words accomplish their purpose? Yes. His Word always accomplishes what God sent it out to do.

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:11 ESV)

When you share the Gospel with someone, God's Word is never without effect. Sometimes it will soften a heart, and sometimes it will harden a heart. Now, that is not really what we want to hear. We would like for people's hearts to be softened every time we share the Gospel.

But God is working every time His Word is shared. Even when someone's heart is hardened, God shows that He is merciful. He repeatedly warns people, in spite of their refusals. Even if they refuse the Gospel, your speaking to them will ultimately prove God's justice, because God was more than fair. He issued warning after warning to people. Open your mouth and share the Gospel. Trust God with the results. His Word won't come back empty-handed.

QUESTION: Read John 12:37-40. How does this passage echo the idea that God's Word does not return void?

The Jewish Leaders' Intentions (v. 20)

Since the Jewish leaders haven't figured out yet how to flip the crowd on Jesus and be able to get rid of him without losing popularity, they plan to use the unpopular Romans to do their dirty work for them. They just want Jesus to say something that they can use as evidence before the Romans.

In our context, people often try to discredit His followers and how we understand Jesus. We should not always expect people to acknowledge the Gospel as wisdom. Apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the people of the world see the cross as foolishness (1 Co 1:18).

Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:17-20 that people will try to discredit us before courts and rulers. We will be persecuted, but we are here to bear witness about Jesus. Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit will speak through us, and His words don't return empty. Don't be afraid of people trying to discredit you—open your mouth and share God's Word.

QUESTION: What are some ways in which you hear people in the world trying to discredit Christians? How have you seen Christians give a faithful witness in spite of opposition?

The Jewish Leaders' Question (vv. 21-22)

The Jewish leaders ask Jesus, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" They are asking if it is in accordance with Jewish religious law to pay a personal tax to Caesar. The dilemma is this: if Jesus says "don't pay the tax," the leaders will use His words to stir up trouble for Him with Romans.¹ However, if Jesus says, "pay taxes," he will be branded a Roman sympathizer.

Jesus' Reply (vv. 23-26)

The Denarius

A denarius is a Roman coin, made of silver, which is worth a day's wages.² During this period of time, the heads side featured a picture of Tiberius Caesar, and on the tails side was a picture of Tiberius' mother Livia, pictured as a peace goddess.

The inscription reads "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the divine Augustus." The current Caesar actually proclaims himself to be the son of a god, as Augustus was recognized by the Roman senate as divine.³ This inscription proclaims Caesar's greatness and authority, as Tiberius rules a huge part of the world.

What Belongs to Caesar?

Jesus' answer, "render to Caesar what is Caesar's," is not as countercultural as we might expect Him to give. To render is to pay what is owed. So Jesus tells them, "Give Caesar his coin. He made it. He demands it. You owe it to him."

¹ This is an accusation that is levied at Jesus in Luke 23:2.

² See also Mt 18:28 and 20:2.

³ This is especially interesting when the one who is asking for the coin is Jesus, the actual Son of God.

Application

We don't have Caesars but human government is alive and well. The Bible teaches us that human government has a purpose. It is temporarily put in place because of sin.⁴ People don't follow the Golden Rule. They steal, they lie about one another, they murder and destroy property. Government creates enough order and restrains enough evil that God's kingdom work can be done without this world completely disintegrating.

Although some of us might like to have little to do with the government, because it can be messy. However, we don't get to withdraw completely from the world. Jesus teaches us to be salt and light (Mt 5:13-16) and our "salt" does the world no good if it always remains in the saltshaker.

Here are four ways Scripture teaches us to interact faithfully with government today:

1. We Pray

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

(1 Timothy 2:1-2 ESV)

If we want to be able to lead peaceful lives, and to do kingdom work more easily, we should pray for our governing officials. Often, we are tempted to grumble about their shortcomings, but grumbling is not a fruit of the Spirit. Instead of speaking ill of them, we should pray for them. After all, the blessing of God follows obedience to Scripture (Gen 22:18; Jas 1:25)

2. We Submit

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. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For 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, for 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

⁴ Genesis 9:5-6 sets up the need for human governance. The implication of "by man his blood shall be shed" is that mankind will need to punish murder by taking the murderer's life. I am indebted to Jonathan Leeman's work in this area. See <https://www.9marks.org/article/what-authority-has-god-given-to-governments/> and Leeman, Jonathan. 2018. *How the Nations Rage*. Thomas Nelson.

wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.
(Romans 13:1-5 ESV)

Paul teaches us that government is instituted by God, and God's command to submit to authorities is good. Therefore, even though we don't always relish the command, we obey the laws of the land in which we live.

Are there times when we should break laws? Yes, but only when they directly counter God's commands. The prophet Daniel runs into a situation in which fidelity to God and submission to government at the same time become impossible (Dan 6:1-10). The king passes an edict that his citizens can only pray to him for 30 days. Daniel prays to God instead, remaining faithful to God. He is also willing to undergo the persecution that ensues (6:16). There are also times when we must speak up and protest unjust and immoral laws (Isa 10:1-4).

These are valid exceptions, but the clear teaching of Scripture is generally submitting to the governing authorities. Augustine is quoted as saying, "Without justice, what are kingdoms but great gangs of bandits?"⁵ The world would indeed devolve into one massive street fight, apart from the restraining effect of human governance.

3. We Pay Taxes

For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay 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, honor to whom honor is owed.
(Romans 13:6-7 ESV)

Paul echoes Jesus' teaching here. Governments need money to perform their God-appointed tasks. We owe them monetary support. So, when you pay your taxes, you can do it out of obedience to God's Word.

4. We Do Good

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
(1 Peter 2:13-17 ESV)

⁵ Morris, Leon, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Peter teaches us to do good things as part of our civic duty. We cannot withdraw from our citizenship in this world just because our true citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). We should vote according to our Scripture-shaped conscience.⁶ We should be involved in the lives of others. We should be the best citizens. Justin Martyr wrote to a ruler named Antonius Pius to convince him to stop persecuting Christians. His main point: why would you attack Christians? They are your best citizens!

And more than all other men are we your helpers and allies in promoting peace, seeing that we hold this view, that it is alike impossible for the wicked, the covetous, the conspirator, and for the virtuous, to escape the notice of God, and that each man goes to everlasting punishment or salvation according to the value of his actions.

—Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ch. 12, ca. 155AD

Christians believe that God sees everything and will judge people according to their actions, so we strive to be the best citizens we can. We do good not primarily from patriotic sentiments (which can wane based on circumstances) but because we are servants of God. Even rulers who are hostile to the Christian faith should still be forced to say, “Even I don’t like what they stand for, I’m glad they live here. They make our country a better place.”

QUESTION: Which of these four applications challenges you the most? How does your attitude need to change regarding God’s good commands towards government?

What Belongs to God?

In order to understand what Jesus is saying about what belongs to God, we have to look at His use of the word “likeness” (v. 24). Do you remember how God created man in the beginning?

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:27 ESV)

The idea of an “image” was that Adam and Eve would represent God, just as a picture gives us a glimpse into what a person is like. We were created in His image and likeness to display His glory throughout all creation.

⁶ On having a clear conscience, see: Ac 24:16; 1 Tim 1:5; Heb 13:18; 1 Pe 3:16.

When Jesus asks whose likeness is on a coin and speaks about giving God His due, we cannot help but see Genesis 1 in the backdrop. He is talking about us being made in the image and likeness of God and rendering to God the image He made us in. Jesus moves from lesser to greater. We owe Caesar a piece of metal that he made into a coin, but far greater, we owe God our loyalty and the worship of our hearts.

In Genesis 3, the sin of mankind defaced God's image. If the image of God in our lives was a beautiful painting of God's goodness, then our sin was like taking a razor blade and a can of spray paint to that painting. Yet we still carried God's signature on our lives.⁷ That applies to you even if you have never trusted Christ! He wants to restore your broken life.

But to us who know Jesus, Colossians 3:10 says we are "being renewed in the image of our creator." We are in the midst of a great work of restoration, like a downtown that has fallen into disrepair and shame can be put back together and can become a place people want to visit. Or, like a mural that was damaged in a fire can be restored to its original beauty. God calls this great restoration our sanctification.

So why aren't we much more like Jesus already? Very simple: we ignore Jesus' command. We fail to render God His due. We owe God two things: our loyalty and our worship.

QUESTION: How does Genesis 1:27 help you to understand Jesus' teaching on giving to God? Do you struggle with the idea that you are obligated towards God?

1. God has a right to our loyalty

In medieval times, a vassal (servant) would swear his allegiance to his lord, and that lord would promise to care for him and his family. The word for this is in Old English is fealty. In modern English, we would call this faithfulness. The medieval lord had a right to his servant's loyalty, just as God has a right to ours.

We are disloyal to God every time we allow sin a place in our lives. When we sin, we break faith with God. Have you ever had a friend be disloyal to you? Maybe she shared personal information you had entrusted to her with others. Maybe he leveraged his relationship with you to get something he wanted. Maybe you have had the painful experience of having a spouse, or a girlfriend, or a boyfriend be unfaithful to you. This is the same thing you do to God when you choose sin and self instead of Him.

⁷ We see the image of God remaining an aspect of fallen humanity in passages such as Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9.

2. God has a right to our worship

Worship is not just singing songs. It is giving your time, effort, and energy to pursuing something wholeheartedly. One aspect of worship is *prioritization*. Things you think are more important rise to the top of your agenda, while things you think are less important fall to the bottom.

Because we were created in His image and likeness, God rightly expects that we will worship Him, not just in song but with our words, actions, and thoughts. He expects that our lives will be directed towards Him and that He will be given first priority. Remember the first of the Ten Commandments, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Ironically, even Caesar needed to give to God what was rightfully His. Being created in the image of God meant that Caesar owed God his loyalty and his worship. Every living human owes God these things.

Are you delaying something that you know God has commanded you to do? If so, you have prioritized something else. You are putting it in a place of importance and worship, because you would rather pursue it than obey the Lord.

Satan’s Strategy

Satan aims to tempt us to give ourselves to lesser things. He has done a masterful job of making the things of this world look much greater than they are. For example, have you ever seen a dog drink out of a toilet when it has a bowl of fresh, clean water just around the corner? The things of this world are as unworthy in comparison to the things God offers us as toilet water is to fresh water.

Satan has inspired a sense of FOMO (“fear of missing out”), so that we are afraid of leaving behind the things of this world, which we sadly prioritize above God.

Let’s look back at the Jewish leaders at the beginning of our passage. They loved and prioritized two things. First, they loved their reputation and position. But they also desired something which could be considered noble: they loved their nation. They wanted their nation to remain free, as we see here:

If we let him [Jesus] go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.
(John 11:48 ESV)

So what happens when the things they prioritize are threatened? They become angry enough to plot revenge. And interestingly, the person who seems to threaten these things most is Jesus. Jesus always threatens priorities that rise above Himself. So they vent their rage at Jesus, who is the source of real freedom.

How do people become so deceived? Our sights are set too low. We drink from the toilet bowl. These Jewish leaders want to be free from Rome, but even if they were free from Rome, they would still be slaves of sin (Jn 8:34; Ro 6:20; 2 Pet 2:19). Jesus is willing to give them full freedom, if they give to God what is rightly His.

Instead, they are willing to go to war against the eternal One in order to try to hold on to what is temporary.

QUESTION: What is one way in which your sights are set too low instead of valuing the things God offers?

Rob asked the question last week, “what small things have captured your heart and that you find it difficult to surrender?” It is often the small things that hold us captive so effectively. When you resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit as He calls you to surrender, you are going to war with the eternal One in order to hold on to what is temporary. Jesus said earlier in Luke’s Gospel:

Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

(Luke 17:33 ESV)

Here are some ways you could lose your life in order to keep it:

- Give up some of your free time to have an unsaved neighbor over.
- Give up a comforting (but distracting) habit in order to gain a consistent quiet time.
- Let go of that little bit of extra spending cash so you can give faithfully to the church.
- Give up some items on your bucket list so that you can sacrificially care for a loved one.
- Wake up a few minutes early to spend time praying for others.

Sure, it costs you to let go of something of temporary value but you stand to gain something of eternal value. Don’t be afraid of missing out on the things in this world. God has greater things in mind for you than you know

QUESTION: What is one way you need to “lose your life” in order to gain something God is offering you?

God’s Promise of Lasting Satisfaction

Look what Jesus promises us to drink when we give our loyalty and our worship to Him:

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
(John 4:13-14 ESV)

Jesus says we will be fully satisfied, but part of receiving that living water involves drinking from it instead of drinking from other water sources.

The psalmist says the same thing in a different way:

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
(Psalm 16:11 ESV)

I'd love to go to Scotland one more time with my wife, where we spent our honeymoon. But if we don't get a chance to go because we are spending our lives in some other way for our King, we will not miss out on anything. Look at all that God promises us in this passage. He promises us His presence. He promises us fullness of joy—that means pure joy, without sin or selfishness attached. He promises us pleasures forevermore. This means that there are things to come that will put to shame what we have already seen and experienced!

There is better music eternally in God than what you have heard in this world. There is more beautiful scenery eternally in God than what you have seen. There is deeper rest eternally in God than what you have experienced.⁸

QUESTION: Do you struggle to believe that the things that God offers are greater than the things you have seen and experienced in this life?

Don't be fooled by Satan's FOMO strategy. Give God what is due Him and experience His promise of lasting satisfaction. He is gracious and kind to offer you something wonderful that you could never buy.

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
(Isaiah 55:1 ESV)

Here is the good news: Jesus paid the price for all the ways in which you have been disloyal and worshipped lesser things. And, He loved you before you came to this realization.

⁸ This line of thinking recalls one of Tim Keller's sermons when he asks the question, "Don't you think there are mountains in God?" He is making a comparison between the temporal and the eternal, and reminding us that all beauty that we see in this world has its source and its ultimate end in God.

The Satisfaction of the Gospel

Jesus Christ came to this world to deal with your sin. He gave His life on a Roman cross, and rose from the dead three days later to give you life with God, which is more valuable than anything this world can offer.

If you have never given to God what is God's, today you can experience the lasting Joy of knowing Him.

Fire Yourself: You have been choosing lesser things (toilet water) for a long time. Quit following your own leadership.

Ask for Forgiveness: Admit you have given your loyalty and worship to lesser things. This is sin against God.

Follow Jesus: He will guide you to real life, living water.

QUESTION: How do you most clearly see the Gospel in this passage?