

## The Things of God

Matthew 22:15-22

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, October 22, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Should Christians be paying taxes to the state?

Should Christians be paying taxes to the state especially when it does evil with our tax dollars?

The federal government claims that a compromise on the floor of the senate prevents federal dollars from being spent to fund abortions, and yet the federal government does fund organizations who perform abortions ostensibly for their non-abortion services or else it would violent the compromise that was achieved in the senate. This is to say nothing of the federal dollars that are spent outside of the country funding abortions which under one administration are funded and under another are not funded.

This last fact leads some Christians to believe that we need to get the party in office who will defund such a murderous practice that is condemned by the prophets. But in reality the fact that it can be funded and defunded with a simple change in the administration means that the American people who elect these people are not interested in keeping God's laws. They are interested in promoting their own self-interest. In fact the cry for justice in our land is often the cry of whoever perceives themselves not to be in power in the government to do things their way whether it is just or not according to God's standards. This simple proves that the American majority operates politically in a godless fashion. They do not vote with the fear of God. They vote for what will promote their own self-interest. When they are in the majority it prevails. When they are in the minority, they fail, and generally use their freedom of speech to complain about it.

So, in light of this, should Christians be paying taxes that are used to support such vile practices?

We Americans fight wars. We have fought a lot of wars. In fact it is hard for American history teachers to teach American history without it sounding like we simply moved from one war to another. In every war that we have fought we have claimed the moral high ground. We have always claimed that our wars were fought for justice and peace.

When we fought in Iraq one of the claims that was made by the administration was that we were going to bring democracy to Iraq. What was meant by that was a republic so a democracy understood as one that resembled ours and that this would bring peace and prosperity to the Arab world. Soldiers who fought in Iraq were interviewed and they confirmed that was what they were fighting for. In fact if I were a soldier, I would have to believe something on that order in order to risk my life for what I was doing. Because we Americans believe in self-esteem and I am taught to esteem myself, there had better be some grandiose reason for why I am risking my life in the military. It cannot be for simple self-defense of the nation and my neighbor. It has to be something more. So administrations make the case that the war we are fighting is for higher principles than simply the promotion of the self-interest of the nation. Some of the people believe it and off to war they go.

The problem is if the war was actually fought to end despotism and to establish democracy, why are we not invading other countries who have despots and deposing them? Why are we not establishing democracies in other countries where they are needed? What about Nicaragua or Venezuela whose people suffer from their leaders in a way that we do not? If we helped the people in Iraq for these grand reasons, why not them?

It has been stated that the last war that America fought using the moral high ground was World War II. It seemed clear who the bad guy was back then and who the good guys were. We fought against the bad guy. He killed 6 million Jews in a thing that we call the Holocaust. He was a despot and hate monger. He killed all kinds of other people who disagreed with him. He tried to control the Church. On the list goes and we use it to justify our entry and fighting of World War II and why our young men were drafted and sent off to die.

Then years later we are left with some lingering problems. One of the main problems is this: why do we talk about Hitler murdering 6 million Jews while at the same time we are silent about Stalin's murder of even more Jews. Stalin put to death all kinds of people in the Soviet Union who disagreed with him. There is way more blood on his hands than on Hitler's, but all you hear about is Hitler. Why? The answer is simple. It is because we fought against Hitler in World War II and not against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was an ally at the time and so we played up the sins of our enemy and we down played the sins of our ally to get the war won. Therefore even World War II was not about moral principles. If it were we would have turned on our ally Russia at some point and fought against them and we would have done so at a time prior to the advent of the Cold War.

Using morality to justify American wars is hypocrisy. Why did we fight World War II then? We fought it because the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The United States was committed to neutrality until that event. Once that happened the majority in American determined that are safety was at risk and that we needed to do something about it. The political reality at the time was that you cannot declare war on Japan without also declaring war on Germany and Italy as Axis powers, so that is what we did and the homeland was secured. But do not claim that some kind of moral victory was won.

In light of the American immorality when she fights her wars the question arises, should we Christians be paying our tax dollars to the American state?

God has called His Church to heal the sick. His Son heals the sick. His Son sent His apostles to heal the sick. Once the apostles established Christian congregations throughout the world the Holy Spirit gave those congregations members with gifts of healing. The vocation of the Church therefore is to heal.

It is not the vocation of the state to heal. God gave the state the power of the sword. It is a coercive power that fights battles and rights wrongs and imprisons and fines when necessary in order to preserve the public order. That is her calling.

God forbids one person or group to interfere in the vocation of another. He calls it meddling. Therefore the state is meddling in the Church's vocation when the state tries to heal people. And millions if not billions of our tax dollars are being used by the State to do something that is not its business to do!

Should we Christians be paying taxes to such an institution?

God has called the state to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. God determines what is right and what is wrong. He has written His law on the heart of man so that all men have access to it. That way even if the state is populated by unbelievers as it was when the New Testament was written and our Lord walked the earth, the State will still have access to God's standards at least for outward conduct. The States should therefore enforce Natural Law.

The State should therefore establish laws that forbid adultery and fornication. The State should establish laws that forbid pornography of all kinds and not just child pornography. The State should forbid homosexuality and leave the sodomy laws on the books. Our State does none of these thing and in fact with recent rulings from the supreme court sodomy laws are struck down and homosexuality is enshrined by them into marriage.

Under these circumstance should Christians being paying taxes to the State?

The answer of your Lord is, "Yes."

Yes, you should pay your taxes. In fact it is a sin not to pay your taxes. Those in government, even if they are unbelievers and even if they are doing it wrong, give their full time to governing. They should be rewarded for their efforts. Even though the state gets a lot of things wrong, our government is still punishing those who commit murder, those who rape, those who steal, those who lie, those who cheat. And in spite of the fact that many of the wars that we have fought are not for the heroic reasons that we say we have fought them, they were in the interest and safety of the American people and so when the state fought those wars it was protecting her citizens from harm and helping the enemies of America to keep the Fifth Commandment.

Our Lord puts it more succinctly, "Show me the dollar that used to pay the tax? Whose likeness and whose inscription is this?" And nowadays we would say, "Washington's." Then He replies to us, "Then render unto Washington, the things that are Washington's and to God the things that are God's."

It would be nice to Amen in the sermon and stop right here, but our Lord has raised a problem. Ok. So we are supposed to pay taxes to Washington and to Springfield by the way, and our Lord has given a truly clever answer the Herodians and Pharisees who were the first people to ask Him this question, but in His answer the Lord raises a new issue besides taxes and money, He talks about the things of God. What are the things of God?

It seems obvious that the things of God are not taxes. If the things of God are not taxes what are they? Scripture teaches us that God reigns in the State so technically we are doing the things of God when we fill out our 1040s, write out our checks, and mail them in, or if you are like me to prevent a personal meltdown and a voluptuous breaking of the Second Commandment, you have an accountant do it.

But that is not what our Lord is talking about here. Here He distinguishes between the things of Caesar and the things of God, or in our own context He distinguishes between the things of government and the things of God. Ok, so we pay our taxes, but what are these things of God which we are supposed to render to God?

Well, like I said last Sunday it is important not to read the Bible in snippets. The things of God that we and the Pharisees and the Herodians and every other human being are supposed to render to God are the same thing as the fruit of the vineyard that the tenants of the vineyard are supposed to render to the owner of the vineyard. The fruit of the vineyard is exactly what John the Baptist told the Pharisees it was back at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel. It is the fruit of repentance. Repentance is what is to be rendered to God.

This explains why the Pharisees hated Jesus so much on account of this conversation. It explains why Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all three include an account of this conversation which took place during Holy Week. This is Tuesday in Holy Week before our Lord is crucified on Friday. The reason Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all three record this is because it is an added explanation of why the Pharisees hated Jesus so much. They thought they could trap Him into saying that we should not pay taxes to the government because of its corruption and in the ancient world gross idolatry. Instead He turned the tables on them and for the third or fourth time in the space of two days pointed out to them that they are still not rendering to God the things that are Gods.

They persisted in their self-righteousness. And in their self-righteousness, they put themselves into a position where they could never admit that they had done anything wrong. They always had an explanation or excuse for their behavior. They always had some fancy explanation from the Scriptures on

why they were doing was ok even if such explanation contravened the plain meaning of the Scriptures. They used their traditions to say that their violation of the Law of God was ok. They made exceptions to the rules of God when it suited them. They made a big show about how they kept the easier parts of the Law hoping that everyone would pay attention to the easy parts that they were keeping and not to the hard parts which they were not keeping.

When someone is self righteous in this fashion, they will never admit anything wrong that they have done. They will never confess anything. They will not agree with God ever that what they have done is wrong or that how they have been is wrong. And because they will never confess these things, they will never render to God the things that are God's and they stand condemned because of it.

Dear people of God, beware of Phariseeism. It creeps into a person's thinking so easily. Beware of it. Beware of the attitude of the heart that takes delight in the sins of others because it makes your own sins seem not so bad. Beware of the attitude that keeps track of the good things that you have done but ignores the selfish motives for why you have done them. Beware of the attitude that explains its sins or excuses its sins sometimes even using the holy words of Sacred Scripture to justify your violation of them. Beware of the faithless attitude that does not trust in its Lord Jesus Christ for righteousness before God and so seeks to establish a righteousness of its own that is by works of Law and not by faith. Beware of trying to justify yourself by your good deeds. It is easy to say, "Well, we are Lutheran and we Lutherans do not do that." What matters is in whom our hearts trust and if it is not Jesus we have no alternative but to justify ourselves on the basis of our own righteousness, but if we do that, then we, like the Pharisees will never render unto God the things that are God's and no amount of tax fidelity will save us. We wind up straining out gnats and swallowing camels.

When our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Repent!" He meant that all of the life of the Christian should be one of repentance. In fact this first thesis of Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses indicates that even our modern English translations have it a little wrong when they translate the opening words of our Lord's public ministry as, "Repent!" What He in fact says is, "Be penitent."

And no one can make us penitent but Christ alone. The good tree cannot bear bad fruit and the bad tree cannot bear good fruit. That being the case the only way to become a good tree and bear good fruit, the fruit of the confession of sins and rendering unto God the things that are God's is if Jesus is the One who gives life to the dead.

And He is such a one. He rose from the dead Himself. And we are dead. We must admit that we are dead. We are dead before Him and there is not decision that we can make, no choice that we can choose, not work that we can do to render anything to Him. And in making that admission before the One who raises the dead, we are rendering unto God the things that are God's.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.