

The Gospel According to
Luke

“Image is Everything”

Chapter 20:20-26

Introduction

There are a lot of strange images and inscriptions on a one-dollar bill. None of them causes as much argument as the unfinished pyramid with the eye in a triangle over it:

1. There are those who insist that the pyramid and the eye are cultic images that reflect the influence of Free Masonry on our early government. They cite the fact that, among the committee members who designed it, Ben Franklin at least was an avowed Mason.
2. Others insist that the images have a less sinister, more universal, meaning. For them, the Egyptian pyramid is a symbol of strength and duration; the 13 steps indicate the original number of U.S. states; and the 13 steps leading to an unfinished summit indicate the future growth of the nation. They say that the eye is the *Eye of Providence* and is a symbol of God's watchfulness over our nation.

For the sake of argument, let's say you are a Christian and you believe that the images are borrowed from the occult. The eye in the pyramid is evidence that sinister conspiracies abound which will impose a 'New World Order' on an unsuspecting populace. The Free Masons are planning the takeover themselves, or are working with European bankers and the *Illuminati*.

If that's the case... **Why are you using dollar bills on a daily basis?** Shouldn't you, on principle, refuse to use this cultic currency?

A few individuals or groups might take it that far; but, for the most part, even people who believe the most radical versions of the origins of those images still use the money they are printed upon.

It's not always easy to know where your loyalty to God draws a line you cannot cross. To help you in those times of deciding whether to obey the government or not, Jesus provided this principle: **Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**

We'll organize our thoughts about these verses around two points: #1 Render To Caesar What You Owe, and #2 Surrender To Jesus What He Owns.

#1 Render To Caesar What You Owe

I hear that the producers of the reality show, *Survivor*, are thinking of doing a *Survivor: Corcoran State Prison*. Richard Hatch, who the first \$1 million winner on *Survivor*, was indicted Thursday for failing to pay taxes on his winnings from the CBS reality show. If convicted of all counts he faces a maximum 75 years in prison.

No one likes paying taxes. Over-taxation has led to revolution against the ruling government on more than one occasion.

First century Jews hated paying taxes to their Roman oppressors; it did lead to a revolt that ultimately destroyed Jerusalem.

There were three basic types of taxes:

1. There was a land or produce tax that took one-tenth of all grain and one-fifth of all fruit (or wine).
2. There was a poll tax that was collected whenever a census was taken. It was one day's wages – a *denarius* - and was paid by everyone aged fourteen to sixty-five.
3. There was a customs tax was collected at ports and city gates as toll for goods transported. Rates were 2 to 5 percent of the value of the goods.

All the taxes together totaled over one-third of a person's income.

As a result of especially the poll tax, a movement known as the Zealots began trying to revolt against Roman rule. They considered

paying taxes to Rome an act of infidelity to God. Their terrorism is one of the factors that led to the siege and sack of Jerusalem in 70AD.

This was therefore a loaded question to ask. It seemed a no-win for Jesus:

1. If Jesus answered, *No, it is not right to pay taxes to Caesar*, He would be considered a Zealot sympathizer by the Roman government and be subject to arrest.
2. If Jesus answered, *Yes, it is right to pay taxes to Caesar*, He would be alienated from the common people.

The religious leaders wanted Jesus arrested; they would have settled for Him being alienated. Instead, Jesus blew their minds.

Luke 20:20 So they watched *Him*, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.

They wanted to seize on His words when they should have let His words grip their hearts. I often hear about people who supposedly 'know the Bible backwards and forwards,' but who are not walking with the Lord. They are spies pretending to be righteous who are not interested in the power of the Word of God to change their lives.

Luke 20:21 Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth:

This was false flattery. Someone has defined flattery as saying something to a person's face that you would never say behind their back. It's the opposite of gossip – which is saying something behind their back you would never say to their face. Say the same thing no matter who is around.

They thought they had Jesus softened-up, so they sprang their trap:

Luke 20:22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

By **lawful** they meant was it in accordance with God's Law. Even though they asked it to trap Jesus, it was a good question. God's people in every age struggle with their relationship to human government. In the case of the first century Jews, it was a severe struggle. Caesar's Rome was an oppressor; it was an occupier. Paying taxes to Caesar supported a government that held them captive. On the surface, it would seem that a revolution was called for.

Every few years there is a Zealot-type movement within Christianity. Believers and professing believers cite something from the Bible and they withdraw from some or all civil responsibilities – like paying taxes. They point out that your tax money, at least a portion of it, is spent on things that the Bible condemns. So: Is it lawful to pay taxes to the City of Hanford? Or the County of Kings? Or the State of California? or to the Federal Government? It's a question you must answer every day, as you transact business; and every year at tax-time.

Jesus was about to put this issue into an entirely higher perspective.

Luke 20:23 But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “**Why do you test Me?**”

Luke 20:24 **Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?”**
They answered and said, “Caesar's.”

There are a couple of things to notice before we get to the answer itself:

1. First, Jesus makes them answer the question for themselves. The fact that they could produce a **denarius** proved they believed it was lawful to pay taxes. They were using Roman coinage on a daily basis. If it really bothered them, on a spiritual level, they would already have refused to participate in anything connected to Caesar's Rome. By making them produce the **denarius** Jesus established that they were willing to benefit from the government even while they were critical of it. I'm not defending the Roman Empire, but there were things about it that preserved and protected life and liberty. Today, a lot of folks who sound like Zealots and advocate things like not paying taxes are really

hypocrites who do not understand their calling to be good citizens of their government.

2. Second, in the ancient world it was believed that coins actually belonged to the person whose image and inscription was stamped upon it. In other words, the Jews would not have thought of the **denarius** as belonging to them. It belonged to Caesar. Let's say you go to Adventure Park. I haven't been there in a while, but they probably still use tokens. The tokens are only good while you are on their property; but, while you are there, you can use them to your enjoyment. It's not a great example – because in the case of the Jews, being oppressed and occupied by Rome was no amusement park! But it is a good example of what they would think about the coinage. A **denarius** was a token that belonged to Caesar and was necessary to enjoy or endure life in Roman occupied Palestine.

Having established that they all had and used Caesar's tokens, Jesus said,

Luke 20:25 ... “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”

Wasn't that easy? Doesn't that make perfect sense? The coins and currency they used **already belonged to Caesar**; and even as an oppressed and occupied people, they benefited from Roman government. They should therefore **render... to Caesar** – which means *to pay what is due*.

Jesus wasn't just talking about taxes. He used the word, **things**. He took it to the higher level of your *responsibilities, roles, and rights* as a citizen of heaven living as a citizen of an earthly government.

God's people on earth hold a dual citizenship. You are, first and foremost, a citizen of heaven. But you are also a citizen of some country on earth.

4As a citizen of heaven, you have a responsibility to respect and obey your government:

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,

1 Peter 2:14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the* praise of those who do good.

1 Peter 2:15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men -

1 Peter 2:16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

4As a citizen of heaven, you have a role to play in affecting your government:

1 Timothy 2:1 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men,

1 Timothy 2:2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

4As a citizen of heaven, you have rights to claim within your government:

1. When the apostle Paul was falsely arrested and put in jail in the city of Philippi, he claimed his rights as a citizen of Rome.
2. Later, when he was again arrested, he appealed his case to Caesar, and was transported to Rome for trial.

I'd only point out that, in both cases, Paul only used his rights as a citizen of Rome to further the testimony of Jesus. He didn't demand his rights for himself, but used them to help others hear about the Lord.

Jesus didn't make God and government equal. The way His answer reads, it puts Caesar in his place as subordinate to God's ultimate authority. When obedience to God conflicts with obedience to government, then we go with God – no matter the cost or conflict.

Throughout the centuries, Christians have agreed on three situations in which you must obey God and disobey government:

1. You must disobey the government when asked to violate a command of God.
2. You must disobey the government when asked to perform an immoral or unethical act.

3. You must disobey the government when to obey would go against your own biblically trained conscience.

The real issue here is where to draw the line. For example: Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore refused to move a Ten Commandments monument from the State's Supreme Court building. He was removed from his position. We applaud him. But there are many Christians who follow the government's restrictions and *do not* display the Ten Commandments on public property. There are many Christians who follow the government's restrictions and *do not* start the day with prayer. Are they wrong? It could be you – **Are you wrong?**

My answer to resolving the issue of when to disobey is two-fold:

1. First: Christians are called to a profound level of obedience to government. They ought to be the very best citizens of every country, county, and city. You should be extreme in your law-abiding behavior.
2. Second: Study the life and learn from the examples in the Book of Daniel. Daniel was taken prisoner - first by the Babylonian Empire, then the Medo-Persian Empire. In both instances he rose through the ranks to high positions of government. He worked directly for two of the meanest tyrants in human history – Nebuchadnezzar and Darius. In both kingdoms, Daniel and his companions practiced a profound obedience to government; and, in both kingdoms, they faced decisions in which they had to obey God and disobey the government. When and how they disobeyed are your model.

[Luke 20:26](#) But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.

Whenever unbelievers really listen to Jesus, their questions are answered and their arguments are silenced. **It is so important to simply give them the Word of God.**

I want to return for a moment to Jesus' question about the denarius, **Whose image and inscription does it have?** The denarius was a small silver coin. One side bore the image of Caesar and the

inscription, *Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus*. The coin belonged to Caesar because it bore his image and inscription. It illustrates a great spiritual truth: You and I, if we are Christians, **belong to God and therefore ought to bear His image and His inscription!**

#2 Surrender To Jesus What He Owns

Christians are sometimes described as people who were slaves, but were purchased out from slavery and set free. The biblical word for it is *redeemed*. If you are redeemed, you belong to Jesus. You are set free to serve Him as your new Master. Thus, Jesus owns you; and I, for one, am glad He holds title to my life!

If Jesus owns you, and you belong to Him, you ought to bear His image and His inscription.

How do we bear God's image? There are many ways to answer the question. I think the one that makes most sense to me is to realize that day-by-day God is working in your life to change you to become more-and-more like Jesus. You see this taught in several verses:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service*.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

God begins changing you at the moment of your conversion to Jesus. He promises to continue changing you throughout your life, to be like Jesus, until you go home to heaven to be with the Lord and your change is complete.

All God asks from you is your co-operation.

How do we bear God's inscription? There are many ways to answer that question as well. One that comes to mind is the verse in Second Corinthians that says,

2 Corinthians 3:2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men;

2 Corinthians 3:3 clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart.

You are a **living epistle**; everyone around you is reading about God and Jesus whenever they see or hear you. They read about two things: the *promise of righteousness* through Jesus Christ, and the *power of a relationship* with Jesus Christ:

1. The promise of righteousness is how to get right and how to stay right with God.
2. The power of a relationship is seen in your everyday life as you encounter various situations with the help of the Lord.

Render to your government what you **owe**... **Surrender** to God, because you are **owned**.