



# THE EXHORTER

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*“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40*

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. ([prchurchofchrist.org](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

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**Matthew 22:21** *“They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.’”*

It is interesting to see how non-political Jesus was. Aside from our verse today about paying taxes and words in Peter (**1 Pet. 2:11-17**) and Romans (**Ch. 13**) about being subject to the government and praying for rulers in Timothy (**1 Tim. 2**), the New Testament is pretty quiet about politics. We certainly are not. Everyone has an opinion about government shutdown, building walls and right and left. I wonder sometimes if we have forgotten that there is an up and a down.

Our verse is revealing.

First, Jesus seemed to know whose image was on the coin. Had it been a horse, an image of a public building, that would have taken away the thrust of what He was saying. Jesus seemed to know that Caesar's image was on the coin. Had Jesus seen coins? Being God, did He just know?

Second, Jesus understood that to belong to a civilized society that different parts are necessary to make it move. One is money. Taxation is the way a government acquires the funds necessary to build roads, pay officials, and support an army. All of this takes money. Taxing people may not be a favorite subject, but it is necessary and it illustrates the connections and team concept essential to run a society smoothly. The government taxes the citizens and the citizens enjoy the benefits of what the government provides. We all like smooth roads, safe cities and quick response from police. All of those things come with a cost.

Third, Jesus recognized that some things belong to Caesar and some things belong to God. Not everything goes to God, some things go to Caesar. Once Caesar has it, the responsibility and accountability lies with him. He can waste the tax money. He can abuse the right to tax. He can promote sinful things.

Here is an interesting thought. The taxes that Jesus and the disciples paid helped pay for the Roman army that would in time execute Jesus. Rome was aggressive, excessive and indulgent when it came to taking over other lands, spending foolishly and engaging in sinful practices.

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The dead emperors were considered gods. Statues, paid through taxes, lined the city streets and temples in honor of these gods. Did Jesus know that their tax money was going for such things? Certainly. Was paying His taxes a form of supporting and promoting idolatry and loose living? No. The citizen is obligated to pay taxes. What the officials do with it is their responsibility and God will iron all of this out at the judgment. To say that Jesus funded His own execution and helped promote idolatry is to stack guilt upon the Lord that doesn't belong there.

Now, this is important. Everyone once in a while, someone will get fired up about the government paying for abortions or other offensive things and declare that he is not paying his taxes. He rebels. Sooner or later he pays. This may be after he goes to jail. Such a person misses what Jesus did here. He said to render to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar. What Caesar does with it, is his responsibility.

Fourth, Jesus understood that some things belong to God. There are things that are expected and required towards God just as we must pay our taxes. Our taxes are due. We owe them. We are obligated to pay. Likewise there are things owed to God. We must pay what we owe to God, just as we would our taxes.

Now, the question to be asked is, "What do we owe God?" What are we supposed to render to God? So often, our passage today is used to focus upon Caesar and we forget about the God-part. Just as certain things are expected by Caesar, there are certain things that God expects.

Jesus didn't give a list here. Jesus didn't identify this is Caesar's and this is God's. Not, here, but in many ways He did show us. All throughout the Gospels, Jesus was connecting us to God. His message answers our question. Consider a few thoughts here:

We owe God our hearts, will and devotion. We need to be committed to God. He expects us to worship Him as He desires. Our allegiance to God colors our faithfulness, dedication and loyalty. Half-hearted, not all the way in, hypocrisy-these are all the tell-tale signs of not giving God our all. This is why the greatest command is to love the Lord with all your mind, heart and strength.

We owe God our all because He has given the best of Heaven to save us. God has chased us down. God has put people in our lives. God has shown us His way. Over and over God has demonstrated that He has not given up on us.

The rendering difference here is that a coin could be tossed to a tax collector and your obligation to Caesar was fulfilled and completed until next tax season. With God, it's more than tossing a coin His way. It's more than showing up on a rainy Sunday because there is nothing else to do. What we owe God is reflective everyday by our choices, attitudes and words. We owe God a heart that pleases Him. We owe God a home that honors Him. We owe Him an attitude that reflects Him. Grace, forgiveness, kindness and compassion are not only what we owe God, but those are the very characteristics of God.

It's much easier to pay a tax to Caesar and be done with it and what God expects from us. God wants a lifetime of loving Him, following Him, obeying Him and trusting Him. God wants our all.

There is a hymn, "I gave My life for thee, what hast thou given to Me?" Good question.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)

