

This is not good! Today's subject has been dubbed as inappropriate, a taboo topic. Not this time sex, but money, religion, and politics were all twisted into the repugnant subject of taxes obligated to be paid to pagan oppressors in the land where God's people yearned to dwell freely.

Think of it. What do we mean by a taxing subject? Why are taxes called taxes? Is it not because we're talking of obligations, of things burdensome, time consuming, rule oriented, unwanted, undesirable, commonly detested?

Yet, there are times political, religious and taxing pressures erupt. And we face great pain, atrocity, senseless death. That's the disturbing and terrible fallout of the past two weeks now, precipitated by the killing aggression of the group Hamas to attack and kill Israelis and more at a music concert, and thrash and kill through a kibbutz village commune, to brutally destroy life from 1200 civilian people and families.

Then comes retribution. Israel has tightened down the screws on the Palestinian Gaza Strip. Millions of people are trapped, civilians, children, families, elderly, alongside the perpetrators called Hamas. They have no way out, their water and food supplies have been shut off two weeks. Finally some twenty trucks have entered with help. Nevertheless, war is impending. Attacks by Israel to annihilate Hamas are the stated objective of the Israeli government. Pay back means destruction for destruction. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. To render the enemy incapable--dead. That's the wish, that's the goal. This is mankind at war. Trespass criss-crosses trespass. Both sides dig in ever deeper. How is an end to this possible?

In the days our Lord walked among us, the taxing presence of foreigners on Jewish soil was also at issue. Unwanted. Frustrating.

Nevertheless, Jesus of Nazareth Himself was raising the dander of Jewish leaders. He had entered Jerusalem. Palm Sunday crowds cheered His arrival. Hosanna to the Son of David!

The incumbent Jewish leaders feared this could mean Rome, the unwanted heathen power, might tighten the screws and oust them from their position. Jesus was raising too much potential fuss. It would be better for one man to die, Caiaphas would say in about three days, than for the nation to perish. Gotta trap this Son of Man, who is being called the Messiah, the Son of God! Get rid of Him!

So up comes a tactic, like a chess move, thinking Jesus would have no way out. Eliminate the threat! Set Him up to be labeled an insurrectionist. Set Him up so Jesus is exposed to be a rebel against Caesar. Get the Romans to remove His accusing truths from their ears.

That sets up the confrontation. It's been planned. Now, to execute Jesus' downfall before Rome, or before the people! Let's get Him to say the wrong thing and lose their support. He'll fail if He doesn't represent their Messianic hope to be their deliverer from Rome.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle [Jesus] 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?” (Mt.22:15-17)

How good are you at paying taxes? Would you be happy not to have to? You don't have to render your monies to the government? It is revealing to realize how much effort many spend to work hard to get every tax advantage possible, so as not to have to pay as much. Legitimate deductions and exclusions do exist! Yet, how taxing it is to put in the work, or how expensive it can be to pay someone to do it for you, to claim all you can, to avoid the tax man.

Jesus, with the answer people want to hear, could set it all aside. No, you don't have to pay the tax to Caesar! That's the answer that makes most common sense from our point of view. Get rid of the taxing obligation. Set us free!

Of course, the Jews actually had another level of distaste for the Roman thumb over them. Those coins had images! They were like idols, these man-made icons! And the Roman emperors even claimed deity. Truly, the God of Israel is One. You shall have no other gods before Me! You shall not make any graven images. . . The First Commandment from the Law of Moses was being violated! So reasoned many in their hearts and minds. No, it's not lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.

Jesus was true *beyond* their buttered-up flattery. He truly was not swayed by appearances. He knew the hearts of men. And children. And women. Young and old. He *knows* us all.

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.” (Mt.22:18-21)

Did you hear that? Our anticipated tax loophole is closed! The rationale to get off the hook of our taxing situations, our free ticket to skirt the Law, or to win some lottery – this is not the reason Jesus has come. Not to help us cheat our way around what is right and true. He speaks God's Word. His Word displays accountability for what is right, what is true, what is correct to do.

So, we are to pay the appropriate taxes? Are we saying, “Ugh! Why?” What really does it mean for you and me to render to Caesar?

An online dictionary hit on yahoo turned up: Render: provide or give (a service, help, etc.): "money serves as a reward for services rendered."

Render to Caesar. Our Caesar, the Canadian Revenue Agency, is to receive the taxes owed it. Fairly. Honestly. Let's think this through. Public, social will is carried out with this support. It has God's blessing, it has its place. To realize, it is blessing in many ways for us. Health care, roads, police protection, fire protection, order in society rather than chaos, looting, brutality.

So, just how good are we at rendering taxes? Jesus' direction here would have us do due diligence, to give the required effort. If not, CRA penalties can be exacted.

But we're only half the way through hearing Jesus' Word here. **“Render to God the things that are God's!”**

Whoa! Where is Jesus taking this world? Where is Jesus taking us?

Is He urging us to *pay God what is God's?* To serve God in the way God intends us to serve? To pay attention to God with *all our heart, soul, mind and strength?*

What is our human situation apart from God?

Even as we chafe to pay the dues and taxes exacted on us, such complete rendering to God is beyond our doing. He who then avoided the trap of the professional religious leaders also knows now the traps within our own hearts. He will also see in us that we withhold from Him our full allegiance. We do not trust our God and Lord completely. We do not represent Him faithfully in following through with our duties. We do not love Him with our core of being. Without relationship to God through faith, we neither receive forgiveness, nor experience it. We are held accountable for every backlash, every cheat, every short-fall.

Just where is Jesus taking us? Where is Jesus taking this world?

Jesus, the Lord God Himself, rendered Himself to serve us in our lost state. He subjected Himself to the highest set of rules and truth there is – purity and holiness in the face of the almighty eternal Father, whose powerful Word has made all things. And that means all people. That's you and me. Jesus rendered His life into death to atone for our short-fall that sealed the fair judgment of the performances of our lives with death and never-ending hell. As He rendered His life to His Father in your place and mine, He has restored the severed relationship that we lost. He rescued our lives upon a cursed cross. And in this He reveals God's mercy to love us back to Himself.

So, when He commands us to render to God the things that are God's, in the end, no, in His new beginning, it is His own Gospel that empowers us for this life of service before Him. The Source of our lives is God Himself. It's not from within our sullen hearts. It's His heart that has made us new!

He calls us alive! He takes our heavy burden, and gives us His easy yoke.

And to follow the Holy Scriptures, the Word Christ has totally fulfilled, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, *we are now alive in Christ:*

*Alive to render service,
to render thanksgiving,
to render praise,
to render humble offerings with trust, knowing He provides for us, even where we cannot see it!*

Redeemed, made new, we render prayers and thanksgiving to God--also for those in government who render service.

We give back what God in love has given us.
We Acknowledge Him for His Word and Works.

We render back, reflect back His judgment on us! Forgiven, free--we render this new life on to others. Yes, even when they fall short on services rendered to us!

In faith, forgiven, our hearts are made new. His love pours into our hearts and overflows.

Rendering to God what is God's grows and matures to be joy and delight, not painful obligation and distaste. The power of the Gospel is power that can even address the needs of all His people under siege of war and pain and atrocity. May God mercifully attend also to those He loves, and change their lives in the difficult challenge of now to the living hope in view of the eternity yet to come with Him, for Jesus' sake.

But what if you still don't feel you can render anything. Don't look down at yourself. Look up to Him! Hear Jesus' Word. We can ask of Him, who gives us graciously! Trust that asks of Him in faith receives. And receiving, we have His joy to give to and serve our neighbour. God's delight is ever to render salvation to us. And ever tasting His salvation, we learn faithfully and joyfully to ***“Render to God what is God's.”***