

Matthew 22:15-22 – You Are Not Your Own

We like to live our lives by mottos. “I’m my own man.” “My body belongs to me and I can do with it whatever I want.” These mottos are popular today and they proclaim the ultimate individualism. They imply a self-autonomy that requires nothing from others and zero responsibility to anyone else and they’re false. No matter how many times we repeat them, they’ll never be true. You’re not self-sufficient; you do have responsibilities to others; you’re not your own man, and your body doesn’t belong to you. You belong to God, just as taxes belong to the government.

Jesus speaks these truths in response to the Pharisees’ trap question. The Pharisees wanted to catch Jesus in His words, so they came up with a question that no matter how Jesus answered it, it would enrage somebody, and we all know no topic is more enraging than taxes.

The Pharisees sent their disciples to Jesus, along with some Herodians. The Herodians were supporters of King Herod and His family who ruled the region of Israel for Rome, and because of this, they were considered traitors. But even though they were disliked, the Pharisees saw a use for them in trapping Jesus. So, these two groups came together and asked Jesus: **“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”** No matter how Jesus answered this, He’d anger one group and be in the wrong. If He said, “No, it’s not lawful to pay taxes to Caesar because he claims to be a god,” then the Herodians would be angered and Jesus could be charged with inciting an uprising. But if He said, “Yes, it is lawful to pay taxes,” then the Israelites would be upset and the Pharisees could say Jesus endorsed idolatry and the Romans. Jesus’ enemies must have thought they had Jesus in between a rock and a hard place.

But Jesus knew what they were up to. He could see into their hearts and He knew their hypocrisy. But instead of copping out and answering with an “I don’t know,” like the Pharisees had done, He answered: **“Show me the coin for the tax” ... “Whose likeness and inscription is [on it]?”**

The coin bore Caesar’s face, so Jesus answered: **“Therefore render to Caesar the things of Caesar, and to God the things that are God’s.”** The image on the coin pointed to its owner.

Money is issued by the government, whether it’s the empire of Rome or the United States of America and government is instituted by God. Since government mints money, it has a right to govern financial concerns. As citizens we have the responsibility to pay taxes because through these funds the government does the work it’s supposed to do. Our money bears the image of our government: past presidents and monuments, and therefore we render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s. The image points to the owner. This is true for our money, and it’s true for you, because you bear not the image of yourself, but the image of Christ.

In the beginning God created us in His image. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, bore God’s image. But this was lost when they sinned when they ate of the fruit trying to be like God. They already bore His image, but they wanted to be gods themselves, and so do we.

We continue in this sin. We’d rather be our own man. We don’t want to bear the image of God, we want to be god. Just like Caesar, we declare ourselves divine. We’re our own little gods; doing what we want when we want; deciding good and evil for ourselves, even if it goes against God’s Word. But this sinful taking of God’s place doesn’t give us the freedom we think it does. Instead it enslaves us to sin and death. We lost God’s image and now we bear the image of sin and death.

But God wouldn’t let this be for you. He sent His Son, God in the flesh, to pay the tax your sin owes. Jesus died on the cross, paying the price for your sin, redeeming you, buying you back from sin and death, and because of this, you belong to God.

Luther says in his explanation of the 2nd Article of the Apostles’ Creed: *[Christ] has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live*

under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

You've been redeemed by Christ's blood. Baptized into His death and resurrection, you wear the robe of His righteousness and bear His image, the mark of the cross on your forehead and on your heart, marking you as one redeemed by Him. When God looks at you, He sees His Son, and because He bought you with His sacrificial death, you render to God the things that are God's; you render yourself to Him.

If money belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, you belong to God because you bear Christ's. So with faith in your Savior, you render your life to God who gave you life and who redeemed you from sin.

This means you live the life God calls you to. This is a life of faith: a life of repentance and confession; a life of listening to His Word and receiving His forgiveness; a life of worship and praise. Instead of loving yourself, setting yourself up as your own god, you love God, and others.

In Luther's Small Catechism, there is a section most of us have never looked at called the Table of Duties, where we find Scripture passages that encourage us in our vocation as citizens, as husbands and wives, parents and children. We don't live alone, isolated from others. God has given us families, neighbors, and fellow citizens. He's given us His Church, brothers and sisters in Christ, and we have responsibilities to all of them. With faith, bearing the image of our Lord, we're little Christ's to them, loving them and serving them: by taking care of spouse and children; by lending a helpful hand to our neighbors in need; by paying taxes to support the work of government for the welfare of our fellow citizens; and by encouraging one another in the faith through prayers and our confession as we worship together.

Redeemed by Christ's blood, you're not your own man. Your body doesn't belong to you. You belong to Christ; He's your Lord. Baptized, you're freed from selfish desires and isolation, you're given the image of Christ. You live in the community of believers and you have responsibilities to them, and to God. With faith you live the life of love you're called to rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.