

Honor  
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Matthew 22:15-22, 34-40

Ronald Reagan famously said, *“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: ‘I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help.’”* Mark Twain reportedly wrote, *“No man’s life, liberty, or property are safe while the legislature is in session.”* — Margaret Thatcher said, *“The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.”* Question: In general, what does the Bible say about the government? How are Christ-followers to respond correctly to human authorities?

The Point: We might be surprised that someone asked Jesus about the topic of government. Our Bible does contain guidelines for how God’s people should interact with human institutions including government, but this incident and Jesus’ reply is not a lesson in civics. Instead, Jesus revealed this truth: When we love and honor God first, He will empower us to love others well and give proper respect to human authorities.

The conflict between the establishment and Jesus continued. Verse 15 sets the stage:

**(NLT) — 15** Then the Pharisees met together to plot how to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. **16** They sent some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to meet with him. “Teacher,” they said, “we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don’t play favorites. **17** Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

- Usually, the Pharisees and supporters of Herod were opponents. The Pharisees hated Rome’s rule and the Herodians had caved into it. They joined forces to attempt to trap Jesus with this question: *“Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”*
- It seemed like a no-win situation. If Jesus said yes, He would appear to support Rome and endorse Caesar’s claim to divine authority, losing credibility with the Jewish people. If He said no, He could be accused of rebellion against Caesar and be arrested by the Roman authorities.
- They tried to trap Jesus with a question about allegiance to government and He answered by revealing where our ultimate allegiance belongs.

**18** But Jesus knew their evil motives. “You hypocrites!” he said. “Why are you trying to trap me? **19** Here, show me the coin used for the tax.” When they handed him a Roman coin, **20** he asked, “Whose picture and title are stamped on it?” **21** “Caesar’s,” they replied. “Well, then,” he said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.” **22** His reply amazed them, and they went away.

- This is one of most brilliant replies in history. *“Caesar’s coin has his image; give it back to him. You are made in God’s image; surrender everything you are to Him.”*

- Warren Wiersbe summarized Jesus' point: Christ-followers must honor and obey earthly rulers, but we must honor and obey God above all.
- Wiersbe concludes: *"The relationship between religion and government is personal and individual. It is right for the people of God to serve in government (remember Daniel and Joseph). But it is wrong for government to control the church, or for the church to control government."*
- Scripture teaches that certain human institutions have been put in place by God.
- The real issue is to whom should we give HONOR? I did a search of scripture.
- What other institutions and people does scripture instruct us to honor?
  - Governing Authorities – Honor, submit, pay taxes, pray for leaders (Rom.13:1; 1 Pt. 2:17)
  - Parents – Honor, obey, respect (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1–2)
  - Church Leaders – Respect, follow, esteem (Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim.5:17)
  - Employers/Work – Respect, integrity, diligence (Col. 3:22; 1 Tim. 6:1)
  - Spouse – Love, honor, respect (1 Pt. 3:7; Eph. 5:33)
  - All People – Dignity, humility, honor (Rom.12:10; 1 Pt. 2:17)
- To honor and love others well our first priority must be honoring and loving God.
- Jump down to verse 34 and another question for Jesus:

**34** But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. **35** One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: **36** "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?" **37** Jesus replied, " 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **40** The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

- Jesus quoted Old Testament truth (Deut 6:5. Lev 19:18) to make a New Covenant point: Everything God requires can be summed up in loving Him and loving others. The Scribes and Pharisees had complicated God's commands rules and traditions, but Jesus boiled them down to those two.
- If you've studied the Ten Commandments, you know some are 'vertical' and some are 'horizontal.' What does that mean?
- Commands 1-4 are "vertical" - focused on our relationship with God
  - No other gods
  - No idols
  - Do not misuse God's name
  - Remember the Sabbath
- Commands 5-10 are "horizontal" - focused on our relationships with others
  - Honor father and mother
  - Do not murder
  - Do not commit adultery
  - Do not steal
  - Do not bear false witness
  - Do not covet

- Commands 1–4: Love God. Commands 5–10: Love people.
- We should use scripture to interpret scripture. Turn to Romans 13.
- The first seven verses of Romans 13 do speak about submitting to governing authorities; not rebelling against authority; paying taxes; and giving respect and honor to those in authority. But look at where Paul went in verse 8:

**Romans 13:8–10 (NLT)** — **8** Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law. **9** For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.

- Paul reinforced what Jesus said: When we love and honor others, we fulfill God’s law. God deserves our worship – people made in His image deserve our respect.
- A brief sidebar. Our lesson writers skipped over verses 23-33 because they are not about honor. I hate to skip verses so here are the “Cliff’s Notes”:
- In those verses the Sadducees (religious leaders who didn’t believe in the resurrection) tried to trip Jesus up on that topic. Jesus’ reply? The resurrection is real—but it is not a replay of earthly life. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Those who have trusted Christ will live with Him forever.
- So, back to our topic of honor. How do we apply Jesus’ teaching on loving and honoring God first, so we can love and honor others well?
- Last week Paul Hahn made the point that keeping God’s commandments flows from our love for Him. That extends to loving others as well. Instead of seeing commandment-keeping as negative and hard to do, we should look back at what Paul wrote in Romans 13:10, “Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law.
- The Life Application Study Bible ties that together: *“Jesus said that if we truly love God and our neighbor, we will naturally keep the commandments. This is looking at God’s law positively. Rather than worrying about all we should not do, we should concentrate on all we can do to show our love for God and others.”<sup>ii</sup>*
- Specific to loving God and quoting Wiersbe again: *“To love God is not to ‘have good feelings about Him,’ for true love involves the will as well as the heart. Where there is love, there will be service and obedience.”<sup>iii</sup>*

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The Bible teaches how God’s people should interact with human institutions including government.
- It also teaches how to give honor and respect where they are deserved.
- Peter summed up Jesus’ truth from this passage in **1 Peter 2:17 (NLT)** “Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.”
- You might be thinking: *“That’s well and good in Sunday School but I have very little respect for government these days. Or, I have irritable neighbors I tend to avoid. Perhaps, I have a boss who is an overbearing jerk! I love Jesus, but man it’s hard to give honor and respect much less love to some people.”*
- Chuck Swindoll spoke to that: *“The Bible’s message is . . . to turn your attention toward the only One who is worthy of ultimate love and adoration and worship.*

*And once that . . . begins to take shape, it's amazing what it does to our relationship with others. We find it easier to love others when we love God.*<sup>iv</sup>

- Jesus made it very simple. If we will make loving and honoring Him our greatest priority, He will empower us to love and honor others as well. Let's do that!

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<sup>i</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 80). Victor Books.

<sup>ii</sup> Tyndale. NKJV Life Application Study Bible, Second Edition (Function). Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 81). Victor Books.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://cdn.iflmedia.com/pdf/broadcast/2021.09.29-notes.pdf>