

“Attack of the Hypocrites”

October 2, 2016

Mark 12:13-17

I. Introduction

For 3 long years, beginning with Jesus’ 1st clearing of the Temple in [John 2:13-20](#), Jesus had been causing nothing but grief for the leaders of Israel. Earlier in Jesus’ ministry in [Mark 3:6](#) we read, **“The Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”** Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem accompanied by the cheering crowds and His driving the sellers & buyers from the Court of the Gentiles on the next day were enough to drive the leaders, i.e. the Sanhedrin, over the edge—something had to be done sooner rather than later with this rabble rouser.

The leaders knew they had to move carefully. The response of the people demonstrated Jesus’ unparalleled popularity, so before they could kill Jesus, they had the job of turning the people against Jesus. As we all know, it took just a few days for the leadership to manipulate a complete reversal of the people’s attitude toward Jesus. Some of the same crowd who welcomed Jesus as Messiah at the beginning of the week would on Friday cry out, **“Crucify Him!”** ([Mark 15:12-14](#)). But that wasn’t all, to bring about Jesus’ death, the Jewish leaders needed to also persuade the Romans to execute Him. To accomplish both objectives, the Sanhedrin set 3 traps for Jesus, today’s Scripture records the first attack—“The Attack of the Hypocrites.”

II. The Attack of the Hypocrites

A. The Alliance of Enemies It all began with an alliance of enemies—**“some Pharisees and Herodians”** came to Jesus. The Pharisees were the most religious of all the Jews and they advocated the rule of religious law and conduct in one’s daily life; the Herodians were the least religious and violated all that was sacred to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were devoted to Israel; the Herodians were devoted to Rome. The Herodians supported the family of Herod as well as the Romans who gave them the authority to rule. The Pharisees considered the Herod clan to be evil usurpers of the throne of

David—Herod was an Edomite and not a Jew. The Pharisees also opposed the tax—especially the poll tax—that the Romans inflicted on Judea, and they resented the very presence of Rome in their land. Though the Pharisees despised the Herodians and the Herodians despised the Pharisees, they knew they could be useful to each other in their plot to eliminate Jesus. So a temporary alliance was established to take care of their common enemy, Jesus the so-called Christ or Messiah. Once the alliance was established we see . . .

B. The Attack by the Hypocrites This alliance used flattery to begin to get the people on their side and to set up Jesus. They began by addressing Him as “Teacher,” a term of honor reserved for respected rabbis. This must have been hard for them to say; the word must have stuck in their throats, but they didn’t stop there. They went on to praise Him for His integrity—His truthfulness. Luke 20:21 records that they said, “You teach what is right, and you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.” They didn’t believe any of this, otherwise they would not have acted so viciously against Him.

But they still weren't done with their flattery, not only did they say He was truthful, but also that He was not “swayed by men.” Their point was that Jesus was so committed to the truth that He didn’t hedge or change His message, like many politicians, based on human opinion or any negative consequences that may follow. He paid “no attention to who they are.” He “taught the way of God in accordance with the truth.” All they said was true but they still didn’t believe a word that Jesus said. On the other hand, the people listening would have been disarmed—to them it would seem like the leadership WAS on Jesus’ side and saw Jesus the same way that they did.

Thinking that they had the people and Jesus drawn into their trap of deception, the Pharisees and Herodians sprang their trap. Oozing with false sincerity and respect, they asked Him, “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” This was a loaded question. No matter how Jesus answered it, He was in trouble. They assumed that Jesus would answer, “No;” the Jews

should not pay the tax. If He openly rejected the poll tax, the Herodians would report Him to the Romans and He would be arrested for treason. If He fooled them and endorsed the tax, He would lose the support among the zealous, religious people who had just been cheering for Him—His popularity would plummet. A “Yes” answer would also throw into question whether He was really the Christ since the Messiah was expected to depose those who ruled over God’s people, i.e. the Romans.

C. The Answer of the Master As God, Jesus “knew what was in man” (John 2:25), He understood their hypocrisy and said, “Why are you trying to trap me?” He understood that they hadn’t come looking for an answer to an honest question, they were trying to set Him up so that the people would turn on Him and the Roman government would arrest Him.

But Jesus turned the tables on them when “he asked, ‘Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’” It may have taken them some time to find one, since many Jews refused to carry them. A denarius was a silver coin minted under the authority of the emperor and equal to a day’s wages for a Roman soldier or a common Jewish laborer (Matthew 20:2). The poll tax was paid by a silver denarius. On one side of the denarius was the image of the current emperor, Tiberius, with the inscription, “*Tiberius Caesar, August Son of the Divine Augustus.*” On the reverse side would be an image of him setting on a throne in priestly robes and the words “*Chief Priest.*” Since the Jews considered such images idolatry and a violation of the 2nd commandment, most would not carry them.

Eventually, they located a coin and brought it to Jesus. “He asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.” But instead of denouncing the coin and the false god Caesar and declaring that the true God forbids paying tribute to him, Jesus said, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

Caesar’s coins belonged to him. The strength of Roman’s military provided peace, security, and protection. The roads they built and the shipping networks they maintained allowed the flow of goods that added to everyone’s well being. It was just and fair for them to expect the services they

provided to be paid for by those who benefitted from them. Caesar had his sphere and not to pay him his due was to rob him.

Scripture teaches that government is an institution of God—turn to [Romans 13:1-7](#). Peter wrote about this, too—turn to [1 Peter 2:13-17](#). Submitting to the government also involves praying for those in positions of authority—Paul wrote to Timothy in [1 Timothy 2:1-2](#), “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” The only time government may be legitimately disobeyed is when it commands something contrary to the law of God, or forbids something commanded by it—as Peter said in [Acts 5:29](#), “We must obey God rather than human beings!”

But Jesus didn’t stop with Caesar—of greater importance than giving Caesar his due is to give “to God what is God’s.” The Jewish leaders resisted giving Caesar what was due him, but far worse was their refusal to give God what was due Him, beginning with honoring His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ ([John 5:23](#)). All people owe God obedience beginning with the greatest commandment of His Law, as [Mark 12:30](#) says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

The Sanhedrin’s initial attempt to trap Jesus failed miserably instead, “they were amazed at him.” Although His answer was simple and profound, they had no intention of changing anything they did regarding Caesar or God and [Luke 20:26](#) records that they went away silently—defeated once again.

III. Conclusion

Jesus looked on taxes as the citizen’s debt to the government for the services performed. Today those services would include things like fire and police protection, national defense, the salaries of the officials who manage the affairs of the nation and the state, special programs for the poor and

underprivileged, etc. The individual Christian citizen might disagree with the way all his tax money is used, and he can express himself with his voice and his vote, but he must accept the fact that God has established human government for our good. As [Philippians 3:20](#) says, we as Christians hold citizenship in heaven, but that does not exempt us from being exemplary citizens on earth. Even if we cannot respect the people in office, we must respect the office.

We still owe Caesar what bears his image and name, i.e. money. Similarly, we owe God what bears God's image and name. Since we are all created in the image of God ([Genesis 1:26](#)) and bear His name as children of God, we owe Him our whole selves. As we just read from [Mark 12:30](#), we owe God love from all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Basically, we owe God everything—all we are and have; our time, our talents, our treasures.

So here's the challenge for the day: do you render to Caesar what is due him? But, more importantly, is God sovereign in your life? Does He have your total obedience—or do you pick and choose?" In the Letter to the Church in Laodicea in [Revelation 3:15-16](#), Jesus said, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth." Everyone must decide as [Joshua 24:15](#) says, "But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." What is your choice? Just remember Jesus said in [Luke 11:23](#), "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." You must choose—choose wisely.

