

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Jesus' Stewardship Example

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Have you ever done something just for the “principle of the thing”? Sometimes we are called to do what is right, and no one else sees it. Other times, we are called to do what is right, and we have the opportunity to impact someone else as they see what we are doing. Jesus had such an opportunity with His disciple Peter, and He took full advantage of it.

Matthew 17:24-27 recounts a very brief and interesting situation during the life of Christ. Before proceeding to Jerusalem to face the cross, Jesus and His disciples were in Capernaum. Passover was only weeks away. A tax collector came to Peter and asked, “Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?” (v. 24, NIV) This was an offering that God had instituted through Moses in Ex. 30:15 to maintain the tabernacle and then the temple. It was to be paid by all males who were at least twenty years old. Since the tax was to be collected by Passover, tax collectors were routinely sent through the land weeks beforehand to collect the tax. The tax was two drachmas per person and was equal to about two days' wages. Even though this had been instituted through Moses, the Romans had sanctioned the tax, which meant that part of the money was being redirected to greedy individuals.

In response to the question, Peter answered, “Yes, he does” (v. 25 NIV). Jesus had not paid the tax yet, so we are not sure if Peter simply thought that He had, or if he was lying to get rid of the tax collector. “When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. ‘What do you think, Simon?’ he asked. ‘From whom do the kings of earth collect duty and taxes – from their own sons or from others?’” (v. 25 NIV). Peter answered “others.” In a dictatorial monarchy, kings never tax their own biological sons. In essence, they would be taxing themselves. Kings always taxed those outside the family.

Jesus then hinted that He was exempt from paying the tax (v. 26). Jesus had reason not to pay because He was the one for whom the temple was made. He also knew of the corruption and extortion that went on in the taxing and at the temple. But Jesus saw an opportunity to do

something for the “principle of the thing.” By paying the tax, He might see these collectors for whom He would die in the near future become open to His message. This would also be a good teaching time with Peter on Jesus' deity, on being subject to authority, and on stewardship.

Jesus told Peter to do something unusual. Peter was to go fishing! Inside the first fish would be a stater (a four-drachma coin). Peter was to take the coin and pay Jesus' tax and his own (v. 27). I'm sure most of Jesus' disciples were bald from scratching their heads at instructions such as this! As the old hymn says, Peter had to “trust and obey” to receive this blessing. Jesus organized this miracle, which spoke of His deity. Friends often paid their individual taxes together using the stater. In paying His tax with Peter's, Jesus was communicating friendship to Peter.

So what is the point?

- We are to be subject to human authority unless it violates a clear Scriptural command (Romans 13).
- We should contribute to public worship (church) even if we don't agree with some of the peripheral issues. Don't use your money as a means to communicate dissatisfaction. Jesus didn't. He gave His money to God, not to people.
- Don't just determine to use money wisely, determine to use your financial stewardship as an example for others. Jesus could have done some other miracle to get the tax money. He wanted Peter to be impacted, so he let Peter in on the miracle and the blessing. Let people see your example of stewardship in appropriate ways so that you can be a godly example to them. You will be modeling Jesus' example.

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website: bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org