

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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The Plot to Trap Jesus

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“Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’”

“But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’ When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away” (Matt. 22:15-22, NIV). Some people make it a goal to reduce taxes. Jesus did not have that as His goal. While reducing taxes is not the main focus of the stewardship passage quoted above, it is an interesting implication of Jesus’ point.

The Jewish people in Jesus’ day lived in a world of contrasts. They were God’s people, but powerful Gentiles occupied their land (the Roman government). Historically, the Jewish people had given through tithe and offering money to support their own nation and religion. Now they were required to pay tribute to a foreign government. At the time of this story, the Pharisees probably disliked Jesus more than they disliked the Romans.

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus using another contrast: Is it better to pay an evil foreign government taxes or keep the money and incur their wrath? If He chose the first option, He could be viewed a traitor by His countrymen. If He chose

the second option, He would be in trouble with the Roman government. The Pharisees asked the question as an interest in reducing taxes and saving money. Beneath that “surface” inquiry, they subtly plotted to trap Jesus.

Not surprisingly, Jesus avoided their trap with a wise answer. But there is an interesting implication of His message. Our use of money is not an end. It is a means. Money is a tool we can use to accomplish God’s will. Accumulating money, though, is not the goal of life. Accumulating money (or reducing taxes) is a tool to reach the believer’s goal of life: pleasing God and helping others know and grow like His Son. Jesus did not seem concerned that money be paid to Rome. He was concerned that God receive His due.

Should your end goal be to reduce taxes and accumulate money? No. Reducing your taxes and accumulating money is only a tool to help accomplish the goal of expanding Christ’s kingdom. You must give to God what is God’s (Matt 22:21). Get out your tax return from last year. Notice the total for charitable giving. Choose to give more this year than last year. Many churches will be having special offerings this fall to expand ministry. Missionaries can use special gifts to expand church planting. Christian schools can use funds to help educate the next generation of Christian leaders. Jesus viewed money as a tool, not a goal. Let’s think and act like Jesus.

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