

DON'T GIVE TOO MUCH TO CAESAR

12¹³Then they send some of the Pharisees and Herodians to [Jesus], so that they might trap him with his words. 14When they came, they said to him, Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity and are not swayed by anyone; for you do not pay attention to the face of men; but rather, you teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, Why do you test me? Bring me a denarius, so that I may look at it. 16So they brought [him a coin]. Then he said to them, Whose image is this and whose superscription? They answered him, Caesar's. 17Then Jesus said to them, Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God. And they were amazed at him. (Mk. 12:13-17)

Introduction

We come now to the famous passage in the gospels where Jesus is confronted with the question, "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" The whole question is dealing with the Christian's relationship to the civil government, which in the case of the first century was a pagan government. Should the Christian defy such a government, declaring that Jesus alone is Lord, and that we recognize no authority other than His? Should the Christian acquiesce to such a government, unquestioningly complying with its every demand?

This was a hotly debated question in first century Israel as the Jews found themselves confronted with the demands of the pagan Roman government on a daily basis. This is a very pertinent question for Christian people whenever they find themselves living in a society whose government does not acknowledge the Lord God as the supreme authority and His moral law as the standard of justice for the nation.

How will Jesus answer this question?

He answers by calling for a denarius. The obverse (heads) side of this Roman coin portrayed the image of the emperor, Tiberius, and bore the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the divine Augustus." The reverse (tails) side depicted the emperor seated on a throne, wearing a diadem and clothed as a high priest, with the inscription, "PONTIFEX MAXIMUS (Highest Priest)." Clearly, here was a government that claimed divine honor for itself, a government that overstepped its bounds. What will Jesus say with regard to paying taxes to support such a government?

Jesus holds up this Roman coin and declares, *"Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God."*

We might sum up our Lord's teaching in this way: there are certain obligations that the Christian has to even the most pagan government. The Apostle Paul lists those obligations in the thirteenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God ...⁴ ... he is God's servant to do you good ... He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Rom. 13:1,4-7)

But, Jesus' response to the Pharisees and Herodians also indicates that there are definite limits to the obligations the Christian has to the civil government. Stated another way, there are definite limits to the authority of the civil government. We may summarize our Lord's teaching in this way: Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but don't give too much to Caesar. Let us now consider some things we should **not** give to Caesar.

I. Don't Let the State Teach Your Children Its Values

A contributor to the January/February, 1983, issue of the *Humanist* magazine wrote the following:

I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity. The classrooms must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new—the rotting corpse of Christianity, together with all its adjacent evils and misery, and the new faith of humanism ... (quoted in *Pulpit Helps*, December, 1995; *Pulpit Helps*, 6815 Shallowford Road, Chattanooga TN 37421))

Dr. John Goodland of the National Educational Association wrote a report for the NEA entitled, "Schooling for the Future." In that report Dr. Goodland had this to say,

Our goal is behavioral change. The majority of our youth still hold to the values of their parents and if we do not recognize this pattern, if we do not re-socialize them to accept change, our society may decay. (quoted in *Pulpit Helps*, December, 1995.) The editors of *Pulpit Helps* ask the question, "Did you realize that teachers are in the classroom to disengage children from the values of their parents?"

Under direction of Dr. Paul C. Vitz, the National Institute of Education evaluated a total of sixty representative public school textbooks. Here are their findings:

Religion, traditional family values, and conservative political and economical positions have been reliably excluded from children's textbooks. This

exclusion is particularly disturbing because it occurs in a system funded by taxpayers. In grades one through four these books [the social studies textbooks] introduce the child to U.S. society—to family life, community activities, ordinary economic transactions and some history.

None of those books contained the slightest reference to any religious activity in contemporary American life. For example, not one word hinted that any child or adult may have prayed or gone to church. The family was often mentioned in these books, but the idea that marriage is the origin and foundation of the family was never presented. The words, “marriage,” “wedding,” “husband,” “wife,” did not occur once in these books. Nowhere was it suggested that being a mother or homemaker was a worthy and important role for a woman.

The fifth grade U.S. history textbooks include modest coverage of religion in Colonial America and all the early Southwest missions; however, the treatment of the past 100 years was so devoid of reference to religion as to give the impression that it has ceased to exist in America. The report also notes that the sixth grade textbooks dealing with religion and culture in world history displayed a consistent bias against Christianity. The report states, “In several books, Mohammed’s life gets much more coverage than Jesus.” (*Pulpit Helps*, December, 1995)

Back in the early days of the twentieth century, Dr. A. A. Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary, made this observation:

I am as sure as I am of Christ’s reign that a comprehensive and centralized system of national education, separate from religion, as is now commonly proposed, will prove to be the most appalling enginery [i.e.; means] for the propagation of anti-Christian and atheistic unbelief, and of anti-social nihilistic ethics, individual, social and political, which this sin-rent world has ever seen. (quoted in *Pulpit Helps*, December, 1995)

The first “Don’t” is that we must not allow the State to inculcate our children with its values. Moses set forth the mandate for the covenant community of God’s people with regard to the education of their children in the following terms:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut. 6:6-7)

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

II. Don't Let the State Claim Your Children as Its Own

The March 27, 1994, edition of *The Sheboygan Press*, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, carried a front page story with the following headlines: "EPIC: For Parents, this program may be monumental—parents learn how to operate their children properly."

The opening paragraph of the story reads as follows:

You have to get a license to drive a car. But the only thing you have to do to be a parent is—well, you know. To be a good driver you can read the owner's manual, study the rules of the road and join AAA Motor Club. But children don't come with a manual, and the rules for raising them are ambiguous. And there is no AAA Parents' Club. But there is EPIC, Effective Parenting Information for Children, a series of six workshops for children of elementary school age.

The closing paragraph of the article related how the parents who participated in the program received an "EPIC Certificate of Appreciation." Upon receiving his certificate, one father remarked, "I'm going to hang this on my refrigerator. And when my son asks, 'How can you do this?' [i.e.; discipline him] I'm going to point to it. It's probably the closest thing to a parenting license available." There is the seedling of a frightening concept: having parents licensed by the State upon completion of a State-approved parenting course.

William Penn, the founder of the colony of Pennsylvania, wrote: "He that begets thee, owns thee; and has a natural right over thee ... Next to God, thy parents; next to them, the Magistrate" (quoted from, *Who Owns the Children?* Blair Adams and Joel Stein, p. 309.) Penn was expounding the biblical order of authority: first God, then the parents, and then the State.

But in contrast to that view, there is the view of the eighteenth-century French philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

I join myself, body, goods, will and all my powers, to the ... Nation, granting her ownership of me, of myself and all who depend on me. (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his *Ideal Constitution*, quoted in *Who Owns the Children?* p. xiii)

Those who control a people's opinions control its actions; and such control is established by treating citizens from infancy as children of the State, trained to consider themselves only in their relationship to the Body of the State: For being nothing except by [the State], they will be nothing except for it. It will have all they have and will be all they are. [Jean-Jacques Rousseau, quoted in *Who Owns the Children?* p. xiii]

Rousseau practiced what he preached, or else developed his doctrine to excuse his abominable practice:

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was an unhappy, self-pitying, and exceptionally self-centered man ... His greatest cruelty was towards his own children. He had five, by his long-suffering mistress, Therese Levasseur, whom he refused to marry. As each child was born, it was promptly deposited, unnamed—we do not even know the sex of any of them—at the Paris orphanage, the *Hospital des Enfants-Trouves*. Owing to the huge numbers of abandoned infants with which the orphanage had to cope, conditions within it, as Rousseau knew, were appalling. Two-thirds of the children died in the first year. Only fourteen in every one hundred survived to the age of seven, and of these five grew to maturity, most of them to become beggars. Rousseau was thus condemning his five children to death or at best to a life of vagabondage.

When Rousseau's conduct was exposed, he defended himself, using different and ingenious arguments. These arguments, brazenly concealing the guilt he must surely have felt, hardened into a theory about the upbringing of children. This was expressed in his book *Emile*, and then broadened into the general theory of government in which Rousseau laid the theoretical foundations of the totalitarian State [through a compulsory State education system].

In order to justify his inhuman act of handing over his children to the State, in the shape of the official orphanage, Rousseau was led to argue that the State ought to be responsible for all children, if society was to be improved; for education was the key to any social and moral advance. That being so, it was the concern of the State. The State must form the minds of all, and not just as children—as it had done with his own in the orphanage—but as citizens. The State, by a systematic process of cultural engineering, would inculcate virtue in all. The State was the father, the *patrie*, and all its citizens were the children of the paternal orphanage. This is what Rousseau meant by patriotism, and it explains a remark by Dr. Johnson that has puzzled many but that cut straight through Rousseau's sophistries—"Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel!" (the historian Paul Johnson, quoted in *Who Owns the Children?* p.307)

Whereas William Penn upheld the biblical model (first God, then the parents, and then the State), Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced (or re-introduced) the model in which the State is supreme and is the possessor of all its citizens from their infancy to their death. Programs like EPIC (whether intentionally or unintentionally) serve the cause of the anti-Christian view vigorously espoused by Rousseau and implemented by the totalitarian States of modern times. By way of example, in Nazi Germany loyal citizens of the State would present their infant children for Nazi baptism, a quasi-religious rite in which the new born

was dedicated to the State (*Hitler's Cross*, Erwin Lutzer, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 109.)

Here is the second "Don't," we must not allow the State to claim our children as its own. We must be conscious of and faithful to the biblical truth:

Sons are a heritage from Jehovah, children a reward from him. (Psl. 127:3)

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Mk. 10:13-14); the kingdom of God is the inheritance of covenant children, an inheritance they must claim for themselves by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

III. Don't Let the State Silence Your Christian Witness

In 1980 the United States Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a Kentucky law requiring that the Ten Commandments be posted in public school classrooms. When the day came for the offending commandments to be taken down, the few protesters who were present quickly and quietly dispersed when threatened with court action.

What happened in America was in striking contrast to the outcome of a similar event that would happen four years later almost half-way around the world; it took place in the little town of Garwolin, Poland, in March of 1984:

The government of Polish Prime Minister Jaruzelski had ordered crucifixes removed from classroom walls, just as they had been banned in factories, hospitals, and other public institutions. Catholic bishops attacked the ban that had stirred waves of anger and resentment all across Poland. Ultimately the government relented, insisting that the law remain on the books, but agreeing not to press for removal of the crucifixes, particularly in the schoolrooms. But one zealous Communist school administrator in Garwolin decided that the law was the law. So one evening he had seven large crucifixes removed from the lecture halls where they had hung since the school's founding in the nineteen twenties. Days later, a group of parents entered the school and hung more crosses. The administrator promptly had these taken down as well. The next day two-thirds of the school's six hundred students staged a sit-in. When heavily armed riot police arrived, the students were forced into the streets. Then they marched, crucifixes held high, to a nearby church where they were joined by twenty-five hundred other students from nearby schools for a morning of prayer in support of the protest. Soldiers surrounded the church. But the pictures taken from inside the church of students holding crosses high above their heads flashed around the world. So did the words of the priest who delivered the message to the

weeping congregation that morning, "There is no Poland without the cross."
(Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, pp. 202-208)

Charles Colson notes, "What a repressive government could not force upon Poland was quietly accepted in an indifferent West." In so writing he was referring to the relatively passive acceptance of the removal of the Ten Commandments from the school wall in Kentucky four years earlier.

Here is the third "Don't," we must not allow the State to silence our Christian witness:

Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, he said. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood. ²⁹Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than men! (Acts 5:27-29)

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. ³¹After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:29-31)

They overcame him [i.e.; the devil] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives [going even] so far as death. (Rev. 12:11)

Conclusion

"Give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God"—such is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ on the subject of the Christian and our relationship to the governing authorities.

There are certain obligations—such as those enumerated in Romans 13--that we as Christians have to even the most pagan governments. But there are also definite limits to those obligations to the authority of the civil government, among those limits are such as the following: 1) We may not allow the State to teach our children its values; 2) We may not allow the State to claim our children as its own; and 3) We may not allow the State to silence our Christian witness.