

GIVING TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S...

MAIN IDEA: Living As Ambassadors of Christ

CONNECT - HOW DOES THIS TOPIC RELATE TO US?

Choose 1 or 2 questions to get your discussion started.

1. Why do you think politics can be such a divisive subject between Christians?
2. Have you ever had a negative experience talking politics with another follower of Jesus? If so, in the discussion, what did you learn about them? Or more importantly, what did you learn about yourself? you did not think they deserved? How did that experience make you feel?
3. Imagine a scenario where you and a brother or sister in the Lord had a disagreement over something political rooted. Now imagine Jesus walks in the room. How do you think he would react? What do you think he would say to the two of you?

ENGAGE - WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH US?

Choose 1 or 2 questions to get your discussion started.

Read the following two passages considering the idea that mercy, when driven by our biases, falls short of God's purposes and our calling.

Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

- Genesis 1:26-27

INSIGHTS TO CONSIDER

1. The Pharisees and Herodians || In the story of Jesus being confronted with the question about taxes, both authors make it a point to mention that this confrontation was generated by the teaming up of the Pharisees and Herodians. Why is this important? According to New Testament scholar Craig Keener, Pharisees were concerned with Jewish legal requirements, thus were trying to expose Jesus as disloyal to the Jewish law. Herodians hoped for a restoration of Herodian rule in Judea (which Pilate currently governed), thus they were challenged by messianic figures that threatened Herodian rule and might cause Rome to tighten its grip on the region. Therefore, what we find is that they are trying to trick Jesus into choosing between revolution or accommodation. If Jesus accommodated Roman taxation, then he would most likely lose his Jewish constituency. Conversely, if he was a zealot for Jewish law and opposed it, he could be arrested and executed for being a threat to the community's safety.

2. Images on Coins || Jewish Palestine circulated copper coins that omitted the image of the deified emperor, which was offensive to Jewish sensibilities. The strictest Jews avoided images altogether. Interestingly, Jesus' opponents have a silver denarius - which bore the emperor's image - available when he requests one. Therefore, if Jesus' questioners here are concerned about paying taxes because of their religious convictions, they obviously ought to not be carrying this coin.

1. When you take into consideration the details surrounding Jesus being confronted with the question about taxes, in what way, if any, does the impact of the story change for you?

2. Considering the Jewish stance on objecting from graven images, how does Jesus' statement about "giving back to God what is God's" take on a new and deeper meaning?

3. Considering that Jesus does not draw a divide between religion and politics, but instead, calls all those within ear shot to look beyond and deeper at the true reality of God's kingdom in their midst, how should his response inform who we are - and we're becoming - as followers of Jesus in the midst of our current cultural moment?

But there's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven! We're waiting for the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthly bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him..

- Philippians 3.20 [The Message]

And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as "temporary residents."

- 1 Peter 1.17 [See also: 2 Peter 2.11]

For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5.19-21 [NLT] ||

1. According to these scriptures, how should followers of Jesus view their earthly status, no matter where they may reside geographically?
2. In your opinion, how do these three statements connect with Jesus' own statements regarding "giving to Caesar what is Caesars" and "to God what is God's"?
3. What are the challenges that come with viewing our citizenship in heaven and not in some earthly nation? What tensions may be caused in and around us?

APPLY - HOW CAN THIS CHANGE OUR LIVES?

1. What are some practical steps you can take this week to open yourself to the presence of God in your life and to ask God for wisdom in how to navigate the political tensions and challenges we find ourselves in?
2. Take time to reflect on your own life. Are there areas in your life that need to be re-prioritized so as to reflect your true citizenship? If so, what is one step you can take this week to reach for that desire?
3. Who around you may need extra grace from you because of their political passions? How may Christ be calling you to be his ambassador to them?

ACTION STEP – HOW CAN THIS CHANGE OUR LIVES?

Identify one step that you can take to increase your awareness of the presence of God.

PRAYER

Invite everyone in the group to spend a couple minutes in silence to think about the presence of God in our lives, despite our circumstances. In what ways does this ignite your heart for more? Once again, close your time together by praying the "Serenity Prayer," by Reinhold Niebhur :

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as we would have it,*

*Trusting that You will make all things right,
If we surrender to Your will,
So that we may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

Amen.

