Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s

Luke 20:20-26

Key Verse 25

"He said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”"

About 30 years ago, I borrowed $60.00 from someone. But I always wondered if it is the correct amount or not. Not only was I wondering how much I owe but also I am still wondering if I paid it back or not. Who do you think I should contact to get the correct information about how much I borrowed and whether I paid back or not? The person who gave me the money. He knows exactly how much I owe him. He will know whether I paid it back or not. I still don’t know whether I paid back $60.00 or not. It sounds silly. But the truth is “if I owe $60.00 I owe $60.00”.

Why a person who borrows money may not know exactly how much he owes but the person who gave the money remembers so clearly? It is our nature that we remember what we give pretty much. But we don’t remember what we receive properly. We remember how much we give to others. But we don’t remember how much we receive.

Today’s message is the continuation of the conflict between Jesus and religious leaders during the last few days of Jesus life here on earth. The religious leaders again got mad from last Sunday message which is a parable of tenants. Tenants wanted to possess the vineyard although they were only tenants. Then they ended up killing the owner’s son. The tenants wanted to receive more than to give. They even wanted to become owners. So they rejected the owner’s son. But Jesus became the cornerstone by God.

Today’s passage shows how Jesus can become a cornerstone when religious leaders reject him. They rejected him by throwing a hard question but God made him a cornerstone through his wisdom. Let us see how Jesus revealed the truth of God and overcame their rejection.

Part I. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? (v.20-22) Part II. Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.

**Part I. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? (v.20-22)**

Look at verses 20-22.

**20Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. 21So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. 22Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”**

Religious leaders wanted to catch Jesus in order to kill him. So they were looking for a chance. They sent spies and they pretended to be sincere before Jesus in order to disguise their true picture. Their another tactic is to catch the words of Jesus in his own mouth because it would be a powerful testimony before the power and authority of the governor. So they had already in mind that they wanted to turn Jesus over to the governor to kill him.

So the spies who pretend to be sincere and who wanted to catch something in what Jesus said, came to him and asked a question. **“Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. 22Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”**

Why did they say? **“Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.”?** It is because they wanted to use what he said as a testimony against him. They wanted to make sure that Jesus would say in a court “Oh, what I just said was figurative speech. I did not mean it.” In our terms they were saying, “can you tell me after you swear “I will tell nothing but the truth”? Can you tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

After laying down a environment where Jesus could not take his word back, they asked the question, “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

I am sure ‘paying taxes’ to Roman government was a huge issue to the Jewish people. Even in our days, about tax, we joke around saying, “There is taxes even in hell.”

Paying taxes to Roman government was issue because Rome was a pagan government. They were unbelievers. To the eyes of the Jews, the Romans were unclean people. Furthermore the Jews must have felt that the Romans took advantage of them as they were under Roman rule. So the Jewish people could have felt that paying taxes to Caesar could strengthen their enemy Romans, and then the Romans could have taken advantage of the Jews all the more with the taxes they paid. So they were not willing to pay taxes.

If Jesus said, “pay taxes to Caesar” they could label him as national traitor of Jewish nation. If he said, “no” they could accuse him to be trailer to Roman government. Either way Jesus could appear to be traitor either to Jewish nation or Roman government. It was a trap.

**Part II. Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.**

Look at verses 23-26.

**“23He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 24“Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied.**

**25He said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” 26They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.”**

First thing Jesus realized was their duplicity. Jesus taught his disciples to be pure like doves but shrewd like snakes. He knew what was going on in their hearts. He knew they were spies. He could see their double mind.

Then he said in verses 24-25. **24“Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. 25He said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”**

What does Jesus want to teach through his words, “**“Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”?**

Jesus revealed the truth that they owed something not only to Caesar but also to God. Jesus’ answer shocked them because of the plain truth in them. They used ‘denarius’. It means they took advantage of all the financial systems, and securities Roman government provided. But they did not want to pay taxes.

Jesus answer for their question reveals a deep seated issue of mankind. It is the desire to receive instead of giving. They raised the question about taxes but even in their question about taxes, their deep seated problem was exposed. They did not want to give but to receive.

They could not recognize the benefit they received from Caesar. But they were keenly aware of how much they paid taxes. They did not want to pay taxes. They might justify themselves not to pay taxes since Roman Empire was unbelieving pagan people and Roman Empire took advantage of them.

But Jesus revealed the truth that we need to not only pay taxes to Caesar but also paying whatever we owe to God. What does God provide and what we do enjoy from God? For one thing, God provides peace and security and order in our lives.

“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” can be applied to all our aspects of our life. In our relationship with God and ourselves, do we remember how much we receive? Or do we remember how much we give? We remember how much we give to God and boast about it all the time in our hearts. But do we remember how much we receive from God. Probably not. Or at least as much as we should.

Our prayer shows how much we focus on what we receive rather than what we give. Is there anyone whose prayer time of thanksgiving is greater than the time of asking? Our prayer shows that we focus on asking. We focus on receiving rather than giving.

What about our relationship with our neighbors? Do we remember how much we give? Or do we remember how much we receive? We remember clearly how much we give, but we don’t remember now much we receive. Then we complain. But Jesus said “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

**Romans 13:1-7** teaches us why the Jewish people needed pay taxes.

**“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. 6This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. 7Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”**

God’s command is to give to everyone what we owe including taxes, revenue, respect, and honor.

God made it very clear that we should give back to everyone whom we owe. But usually we may not think about ‘respect’ and ‘honor’ because they are invisible quality.

But God’s command is clear that we need to give to everyone what we owe including invisible respect and honor.

Jesus’ words “**“Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”** reminds the Jewish religious leaders of the truth that they owed something to God. What did they owe to God?

Fundamentally, their own lives, their own talents, and their own money, and their everything, and indeed there is God’s portion and they needed to give back to what is God’s.

That is why the Lord used the word ‘robbing’ when he talked about offerings in Malachi.

**Malachi 3:8** reads,

**8“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings.”**

Among all other things that we received from God, arguably the most precious thing that we received from God is ‘his unfailing love.’ His unfailing love is well described in **Romans 5:8**

“**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”**

What does it mean ‘while we were still sinners’? It means while we were still ungrateful and while we were still rebellious and against him, and while we were still mocking him and insulting him, and despising him. He did not die when we acknowledge him. His love was demonstrated because he loved us when we were most unlovable.

We received God’s unfailing love. We received the love of God expressed in the cross of Jesus. And we need to give back to what is God’s. How can we give back to his unfailing love? By loving God and loving our neighbors.

Jesus clearly said, “Whatever you did to one of these little ones of mine you did it for me.”

What did the religious leaders miss? They had tons of biblical knowledge because they are the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. What do they miss? Love of God.

This is what Jesus said to Jewish religious leaders in **John 5:39-42.**

**39You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, 40yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41“I do not accept glory from human beings, 42but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.**

The Jewish religious leaders had knowledge but they did not have the love of God in their hearts. Then their knowledge was only used to kill Jesus. They claimed ‘we know God better than you.’ “You deserve to die.” They had knowledge but they did not have love. That was their tragedy.

God’s unfailing love is the foundation of how we can trust God always. “To rust God always” means “to trust God in good times and bad times.”

In life, we can be very fearful. One of my brothers told me, “If I don’t have anything to worry, I make one and worry.” Like him we can worry and we can become very fearful.

But all fear is spiritual in nature because it boils down to one question. “Can God be trusted for our future”? Again I say, “Can God be trusted for our future?” What is your answer? ‘Yes.’

One day one person had to face his huge trouble in his life. So he became very fearful and worried so much. He wanted to escape the situation as much as possible. When he was in deep trouble, the Lord spoke to him, “I am your shepherd. Be still and know that I am your God.” That person experienced God’s unfailing love at the time of trouble. The love of God calmed the soul of the person.

His story clearly shows that we can rely on the love of God at the time of trouble because his love is unfailing love.

Jesus said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, to God what is God’s”. What is God’s? His unfailing love. Our human love fails. See so many people promise of unfailing love in their wedding and divorce. But God’s love never fails because his love for us is unfailing love.

Therefore I believe we should give back to what is God’s, his unfailing love. How can we do so? By loving him and loving our neighbors with his love we receive. To give back to God what is God’s is not burdensome because his love enables us to love him and love our brothers and sisters.

The Lord knows what we want is ‘unfailing love’. So he gave it to us.

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Now **1 John 3:16** says, “**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”**

This is how we can give back to God what is God’s.

Finally Look at verse 26.

**26They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.**

They rejected Jesus. But God made Jesus the cornerstone through his wisdom.

In conclusion, we know how much we give to God and others. But we don’t know how much we receive from God and others. Especially we don’t know how much unfailing love of God we receive. Now we know it. So it is for our great joy and pleasure that we give back to God what is God’s: his unfailing love.

One word: Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s