

Render to Caesar and to God

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[0 : 00] So the IRS received a letter from a conscience-stricken taxpayer.

Dear sir, my conscience has bothered me. Here is \$175 I owe in back taxes. Then down at the bottom of the letter it said, P.S.

If my conscience still bothers me, I'll send you the rest. Taxes, taxes, taxes.

How do we feel about taxes? Yeah, I know. It's attributed to Benjamin Franklin the statement that nothing is certain but death and taxes.

And we wish it went in that order. We pay all kinds of taxes, don't we? We pay federal income tax, we pay state tax, we pay sales tax, property tax.

[1 : 04] You pay tax for just about anything that you do. If you want a license, you'll pay tax on that. If you want to use certain roads, you'll pay a toll on that. You can pay dog tax, if you're honest.

What do we get for all these taxes? Why do we pay all these taxes? Well, federal income tax, half of it goes to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

That varies year to year, but basically about half of your income tax. About 20% of it, depending on who's president, goes to defense and security. Another 20% goes to aid programs, various things.

Sales tax that you pay, that just goes into a general fund and goes wherever they want it to go. Your property taxes, they fund things like roads, maintenance, your police department, fire department, public work, public schools, parks.

These are all things we benefit from. If you use the road, you should pay for the road.

[2 : 31] Delinda knows when I drive by bicyclers on the road, I don't know if there are any bicyclers here that use the road, I like to roll down my window and say, share the road, share the tax. Hobby horse, I think bike riders should pay a license fee to use the roads if they're going to be out there.

Just a stupid little thing about me, don't worry about it. Americans, we Americans debate over taxes. How much?

What is necessary? And it gets down to the, what is the role of government? How much should we be asking them to do?

What is their role? And this is not a new debate. It's a debate since the beginning of our country.

And it's a debate that was happening in the first century as well. We see in Mark chapter 12, Jesus is asked about paying taxes.

[3 : 41] Is it right? Is it legal? And they're talking about lawful in the sense of biblically lawful. His response was so unexpected and brilliant that it astonished those who heard it.

But he also turns the tables on them. They think they have him trapped and he in fact traps them. He confronts their hypocrisy and their false ideas.

So, we remember, Jesus is in Jerusalem. He's come in on a donkey. He is in acting, intentionally acting out the prophecy of Zechariah 9 that your King Israel, your Messiah, will come to you mounted on a donkey, not a horse.

Not a horse of victory, but a donkey of peace. He comes to you not as one bringing war, but one who has won and established peace.

And then he allows the people to sing to him Psalm 118, which pray, which call him blessed. He's claiming to be King.

[5 : 06] The next day, he goes in and he clears out the temple. Casts out all the money changers. Casts out the people who are buying and selling in the temple, in the court of Gentiles.

And then he makes a pronouncement in there that this is my house, which is a house of prayer, but you, now he's pointing at the religious leaders, you have made it into a den of thieves.

He pronounces it. Done. He's not cleansing the house. He's condemning the house. It's done. We're done here.

We're done here. Jesus has shown His authority. He's been doing it all along since the beginning of the Gospel of Mark.

Where He's casting out demons with a word. No one's seen that before. They actually obey Him. He teaches with authority as if He knows what He's talking about and He has the right to be heard. [6 : 22] Their scribes don't teach like that. He actually speaks as if He is God. He actually speaks as if He Himself is the one who speaks these words they are to heed and listen to and obey.

They've seen His authority over sickness. They've seen His authority over the sea and the wind. He's claimed authority to be able to forgive sins. to change the meaning of the Sabbath. How dare He? Let alone food regulations. It's not what goes in that defiles you. What? Yes it is. No it's not. It's what comes out that defiles you. You can't just change all that. You can't say that.

So as He comes into Jerusalem we see at the end of chapter 11 they come to Him in 11.27 they came to Jerusalem and He was walking in the temple and the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him and they said to Him by what authority are you doing these things?

[7 : 35] Who gave you authority? You don't have our authority and we are the authority. Who gave you the right to come and claim that you're king? Who gave you the right to come into our temple and start moving things around and stopping temple business and proclaiming and pronouncing that we are a den of thieves?

Who gave you that right? And we saw as we looked at that passage Jesus flipped it on them. I'll answer that if you answer me a question. Where's John the Baptist's authority come from? From heaven or from earth? Trapped him. What do we say? If we say this then if we say He's from men then the people will rebel against us.

If we say He's from heaven then Jesus will say why didn't you obey Him? They're trapped in their hypocrisy and their wickedness. Then He tells them a parable beginning of chapter 12 of Mark. Tells them the parable about the landowner that sends messenger after messenger after messenger to get the fruit of his vineyard and how to beat them and send them away and finally He sends His only beloved son and they kill Him.

[8 : 48] And Jesus tells a parable that they actually understood. Oh, that was about us. That's about us rejecting God. That's about God sending prophet after prophet and now He's sending His only beloved son and we're rejecting and we're planning to kill Him.

So He exposes them. He exposes them. Humiliates them. So they're set for battle.

And now we come in chapter 12 verse 13 where they send. Who's the they? You need to ask that question. That's going back to 11:27 where it's the chief priests, scribes, the Pharisees, the children, the religious order, the 70 elders and priests along with the authority who are the authority are now sending to try to trap Him.

They lay a snare. Highly charged issue. Taxes. Can it be any more highly charged?

You want to stir people up? Talk about taxes. Huh? Yeah. Yeah. Too much. Now, we think that.

[10 : 11] Consider, put yourself in the sandals of a first century Jew. They're not under a government like we are. They don't have a voice. They don't have a right to free speech.

If they do speak up, they will be arrested as an insurrection. Christ. This is how they're trying to trap Jesus into being one of those guys.

Come on, Jesus, speak up. So, for the Jew to pay taxes is to acknowledge that you are subservient, that you are under the foreign dominion of evil pagans.

See, the Jew, their only king is God. Who's Caesar? Well, Caesar, because he's God too. I mean, the Roman Caesar was, there was emperor worship.

He considered himself God, just like the Pharisees. The son of God, they're the son of God. So, for the Jew, come on, that can't be right that we pay to him, that we acknowledge him, that we give to him.

[11 : 28] So, come on, Messiah, rescue us here. This whole idea of taxation upon the Jews in the first century led to revolt.

In A.D. 6, it led to a revolt, which quickly was squashed by the Roman army, the most powerful army on earth. and then again in A.D. 66, it led to a revolt again that lasted three and a half years. Three and a half, where do we hear that? Three and a half. Somewhere in Revelation. Three and a half years it lasted until Rome came and leveled Jerusalem, leveled the temple in 70 A.D.

and Titus put his banner in the Holy of Holies. That's how Rome dealt with revolt. You're going to reveal?

Who will level you? Who will decimate you? So, this is so hardly charged. I just want you to get your idea that this is not kind of side issue paying taxes for them.

[12:44] This is heart and soul stuff. So, the question of taxes highlights the quarrel over civil responsibility.

It's the same question we have today. What are our responsibilities to human government? We follow God. God is our king. God is our sovereign. We don't follow man.

Our citizenship is in heaven. What about our earthly citizenship? What does that mean? What's the significance? How do we relate to that? Well, through the ages, Christians have struggled with how do you do that?

Jesus gives us the seeds of thought of how to deal with these things. How are you a citizen on earth and a citizen in heaven? What are our responsibilities to civic responsibility?

Are we just to kind of go be monks, get out of society, withdraw and rebel and be, you know, it sounds attractive, doesn't it? And there have been Christians over time that have done that.

[13:57] And yet we have Jesus saying, no, go into the world. Do not be like the world, but be in the world. You're there to be a light. Okay, so that's not, okay, we can't just totally withdraw.

So how do we do it? So we get the seeds of teaching here from Jesus that are unexpected and brilliant.

And Jesus makes it not just what is our civil responsibility, but what's our ultimate responsibility? So he says, he has two answers.

You have two responsibilities. One, render to Caesar what is Caesar's. Two, render to God what is God's. See, it's not just about how do I respond to government.

It all comes under the sovereignty of God. Jesus is legitimizing government. We think our government's messed up?

[15:00] No, our government's not. Our government's got it right, don't they? Nobody's believed that since George was president. George Washington, original George, George won. The best.

I'm a big George Washington fan. Man of integrity. Man of integrity. They struggled dead. Imagine being a first century Jew living under the Roman government. Okay? Imagine paying taxes to Caesar.

What'd Caesar do with that money? Think he did things that moral people believed in? Absolutely. Nothing's new under the sun, people. A lot of innocents were killed.

We're highlighting sanctity of life this next month, right? Our walk to life. We want to honor God and only we want to honor God's moral principles of right to life.

[16:13] Not in the first century. Public funded. Okay? Nothing new. They were more barbaric. I mean, we're barbaric today too.

So what are our responsibilities? So two responsibilities. First of all, give back to government what belongs to it. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's. Give to government what belongs to it.

So I want you to see three things here. First of all, who's asking the question? Secondly, what is the issue they're bringing up about taxes? And then thirdly, how does Jesus answer this question?

So first of all, who's asking the question? We see in verse 13, they sent to him some of the Pharisees and Herodians. So the Pharisees and Herodians are coming, but they're sent. They're an official delegation.

They're commissioned by the Sanhedrin, by the they way back from chapter 11. The scribes and the high priests and the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, the 70-seat Supreme Court of Israel.

[17:25] They are sending him. Now this is an awkward alliance. Pharisees and Herodians, religious leaders and politicians. You can imagine they're all huddled in the Sanhedrin doing what they can do with this Jesus.

What are we going to do with it well? And then you imagine that they're debating among themselves. Well, the Herodians are like, well, we need to, you know, support government. We need to go do this. We need to go be politically active.

And then you have the Pharisees over there going, God is king. They send the two enemies with a common enemy who is Jesus.

They send the Pharisees who are the religious fundamentalists of the time, who are the Biblicists, who are the ones who say, what does God's word say? Let's follow God's law, the Torah.

Now, there's good things about the Pharisees. The problem with the Pharisees is they go beyond, don't they? It's not just what the law says, but what we say.

[18 : 34] What we say are the traditions. What we say are the rules to guard the rules. And their focus, as Jesus points out to them over and over again, isn't just obedience, it's outward obedience.

Excuse me. It's external instead of internal. It's not from the heart, it's just got to go through the motions. You got to check your list. You got to do that external righteousness. That's a fundamentalist kind of thing.

Not all fundamentalists, by the way. Christian fundamentalists are like that. But that is a tendency. And then the Herodians, who are these people, the supporters of Herod, who, you know, wasn't even a Jewish king.

He's a puppet king of Rome. He was from Esau. He's an Edomite. So, you know. So these two groups come and seek to trap him, to catch him in an unguarded comment.

Perhaps they could get him to make a statement before he's thought it through. Perhaps they can force him into a compromise because the question is, is it right to pay taxes or not to Rome, to Caesar, an evil, Gentile government?

[19 : 53] Is it right? Is it lawful? Is it a responsibility of the Jew under the Torah? So what's Jesus going to say? Yes or no?

It's like when you're in court and you're testifying and they say, oh, you can only say yes or no. I've always wanted to be in that situation because I've already sworn that I will tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

And if I say no, that won't be the whole truth. So I've always wanted to be in that situation. Yes or no? Well, sorry, Your Honor, I can't answer that because yes or no would be not the full truth.

Anyway, so they're trying to back Jesus into this yes or no because if he says yes, it's right to pay taxes, then the Jews will be against him. If he says yes or no, don't pay taxes, then he's got the Romans coming to arrest him.

So he's trapped, right? Well, how does Jesus answer questions? with a question. You never do that.

[20 : 54] You just, you don't get yes or no out of Jesus. Not that simple. He's going to turn it back on you. So they ask this question, is it right or wrong to pay taxes?

So what's the issue? And by the way, notice in verse 14 the false flattery. They came to him, and this is very ironic, they came to him and said, teacher, we know that you're true.

Oh, we know that you don't care about anyone's opinion. Buttering him up for you're not swayed by appearances but truly teach the way of God. What's ironic is that is who Jesus is.

He does teach the way of God. He doesn't care what your opinion is. He will tell you the truth. Doesn't mean he doesn't care. He's not swayed by that.

He's like, oh, got to spin it for the crowd. He's not that kind of guy. So it's ironic, they're actually telling the truth about him but they don't have any meaning, they don't mean it. They think he's going to cave.

[22 : 08] So the question is about the poll tax. It's paid, it is a tax to be paid with the denarius which is Latin which is the Roman silver coin.

You cannot pay it with a Jewish coin. You have to pay it with Rome's coin. Rome will not accept the shekel. Give me a denarii.

Real money. You know, the one that we circled. Take out your wallet or your purse and show me what money you pay with. Whose image is on it.

whose name is on it. One dollar bill has got George on it. I like George. So here's the issue.

So Jesus says whose image is on it and what's the engraving on it? What does it say on it? So take it out. So there's a little bit of hypocrisy here in the sense that can you produce one?

[23 : 10] They actually have one. Here Jesus. And what's amazing about that is the fact that, okay, what it says on there, the coin that they have says, Tiberius, Caesar Augustus, divine son of Augustus, divine son of Augustus, son of God.

Now, for the Jews, burning issues about given images and false gods, it's not just paying the tax, it's the symbol of the thing.

That's a great image. to possess it means you're with it, you're accommodating, you're compromising to it, so Jesus exposes their hypocrisy.

Oh yeah, we got one. Yeah, yeah. What's on there? It's a graven image. What does it say on there? That there's another God.

Huh. Interesting, fellas. You happen to have one, huh? That's interesting. Jesus didn't have one. He asked them for one.

[24 : 37] So is it right? So let's give them some benefit here, because they are asking an important question. Is it right? Are we participating in emperor worship?

Are we acknowledging something by paying the tax? Are we saying when we pay taxes that we agree with everything that the government does? They're asking. Because hey, sure there's things we benefit from we pay taxes for.

That makes absolute sense. Sure we're paying for roads, we're paying for sewer systems, we're paying for all kinds of things that are, yeah, we need those things. We need a defense.

The first tax in America was about supporting a constitutional army. People want defense but they don't want to pay for it. Right?

1776. Or four. Fascinating reading by the way. So see, here's the spirit of this question.

[25 : 49] And the issue is, are we supporting evil by paying taxes? Because there are things that the government does that we consider absolutely evil. Something's absolutely wrong.

Poor judgment. No matter where you're politically aligned, there's still certain things that we would all say, oh, no. Or that's too far.

Okay, we're not going to get into all that, but understand? So how does Jesus answer it? Well, he exposes their hypocrisy right off the bat. Verse 15.

Knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, why do you put me to the test? I know what you're doing, guys. You're so obvious. And then he says, bring me a denarius.

And what he's doing is confronting their false assumption. Their assumption is these two things are mutually exclusive. God and government are mutually exclusive. They're opposites.

[26 : 57] God is king. No one else can be king. They're assuming that you can't have both. That you cannot be a true follower of God and still be...

I feel that way about taxes number two. So can they go together?

And Jesus is addressing that. Yes, they can. Yes, they can. In fact, it's not just permissible.

It's actually an obligation that you have. It's a responsibility that you have. It's not just, okay, yeah, you gotta do that, you gotta compromise.

No, you have an obligation, you have a duty to give to Caesar. Because the word there is, it's translated render, literally means give back.

[28 : 03] Give back what is owed. Give back what belongs to them. The coin, okay, the simple picture of it, coin, yeah, it's got his image on it, it's got his name on it, give it to him.

It's his. Give it to him. He has a right to it. He's exposing that. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.

And what Jesus is teaching the basis of is that human government works under God's sovereignty. It's not opposite of God's sovereignty. It's under his sovereignty.

It doesn't mean that everything the government does is right or good or godly by any means. That's never been true.

Even God's kings, huh? Even God's kings, even the top of the line David, to whom every other king was measured, even our best, best, best effort, our best man, and he was the best man, is a complete failure, is corrupted himself, huh?

[29 : 24] Uses his power to do what? Have an affair, kill her husband, and lie, and cover it up, and bring shame upon God and his family?

That's our best. You're not going to find anybody better, except one, Jesus. So, his answer, Jesus' answer is not just that is it permissible to pay the tax, is it lawful?

It's not just lawful, it's right. It's your duty, it's your responsibility, it's your obligation. God has established human governments, there's a reason they exist, there are benefits to them.

Rome established law and order, Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. There was safety to travel, you could travel.

Rome, in fact, built roads, they're famous for the roads they built. You can go back to Israel and still see some of the, they've preserved some of the roads. They're way better than anything we make.

[30 : 35] They have drainage system, they have a sewer system that goes underneath them. We always think, well, you go to Israel, you're walking on dirty roads and all that. No, you're walking on

these really brilliantly engineered and designed roads with sewer systems.

Very clean. Why? Because, well, if Caesar ever comes to town, he don't do dirty roads. So when the king comes, he wants a clear path.

He wants a road that's smooth and level. Does that sound familiar? John the Baptist was the one preparing the road, right? Making it low. Okay. Rome dealt with criminals.

Severely. So, so listen to what Paul says in Romans 13 about our responsibility, our civil responsibility to government. He says, Romans 13, 1, let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God.

And those that exist have been instituted, appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed. And those who resist will incur judgment.

[31 : 56] for rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good, for your benefit.

God has established government for your benefit. God has For if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. In other words, you know this is right.

For because of this, you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God.

That's the third time he's talked about. They're the servant of God. They're the servant of God.

They're the minister of God. Attending to this very thing. Pay, that's the same word Jesus uses, pay, in other words, give back to all what is owed, what you are in debt for, what is your duty, what is your obligation?

[33 : 16] Taxes to whom taxes is owed, revenue or tolls, another kind of tax, to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed, and a king and authority is one to whom honor is owed, whether you respect them or not.

The purpose of God for government, governments are appointed by God, to serve him in restraining evil, in restraining evil.

They keep law and order. Are they perfect? No. Do we agree with every way they do that? No. But in general, they are servants of God in restraining evil in the world.

Okay? They serve God. God. So Jesus says, first of all, our first responsibility is not just that it's right to pay taxes, it's our responsibility, it's our duty, it's our obligation to give back to the servant of God.

God. But Jesus isn't done. He's answered their question, but he's going to go beyond that because it's not just a question about what's my responsibility to that authority, what's my responsibility to the king of kings, to the lord of lords, to the one who has all authority over all rule and dominion and authority.

[34 : 47] That's the bigger question. What's my responsibility to him? So Jesus says, not only give back to Caesar, not only give to government what belongs to them, but give to God what belongs to him.

So I want us to note three things here. First of all, there's an addition that Jesus adds to his answer. Secondly, there's an accountability. There's things that we give back.

And then there's an application. So notice that he enlarges the answer here. Verse 17. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

In other words, there's a higher ultimate authority. There's a distinction between human government and God's sovereignty. So he's not just saying, yeah, you obey the civil governments and that's how God works in the world.

It's part of how God works in the world. But he's still over that. All we have to do is read the history of the world. We'll see that God puts governments up, sets them up, takes them down.

[36 : 05] It's another one up, takes it down. You got Israel, you got Babylon, you got Assyria, you got Persia, you got Greece, you got Rome.

Nobody lasts. How long is America going to last? I don't know. Okay? There is a time limit that only God knows to every government.

all you have to do is read history. So they will be accountable. Every government will be accountable. He even said that to Pilate.

Pilate's trying to say, I'm not accountable, I'm washing my hands, this isn't you and it's not my decision. And Jesus goes, yeah, the crowd's going to pay a price, but so are you. You're still accountable for the choice you're making right here.

governments, kings, authorities are accountable. So, and what this also means by Jesus putting the two together, complimenting, is that paying taxes does not mean that you agree about everything about the government.

[37 : 17] Paying taxes does not mean that you're aligned with the government in every way. It doesn't mean you support the idolatry of the government, or the injustices of the government, the evil of the government, or the poor judgment of the government.

And it means that ultimately the government is accountable to God. So, what does it mean? He says, render to God what is God's, to give back to God the things that are God's. Jesus leaves that undefined. He just kind of lets it hang there.

Render to Caesar what is his, well obviously, well that's the tax. What is it to God? What is God's? He just leaves that question out there for them to ponder.

What is God? What belongs to God? Hmm. Hmm. Well, not my income because I earned that, right? Right?

[38 : 30] Well, I earned that income because what? I have the ability from God to do that work. I have health and strength and energy and wisdom or whatever to do that job.

Okay, so I can see where that income might need to, some of that go back to him. Let's see, I'm living and breathing. Yeah, okay. Family.

Oh yeah, gifts of God. Okay, what belongs to God? How do you get out? It all points back to him somewhere.

It doesn't mean that you haven't earned your living or been responsible or worked hard doesn't mean that, but your ability to do that comes from God. And that open door for that job is coming from God.

So yeah, gosh, man, that's a tough question. That's everything. I had the opportunity this week to speak to an unbeliever and just ask them, because we were talking about a moral issue, so I just kind of said, where are you at with that?

[39 : 44] Where are you at with, you know, how do you think about moral issues? You know, do you believe that there is a God? I just kind of asked him outright. Well, yeah, I believe there's a possibility of God.

No, that's not what I asked you. I said, do you believe that God exists? Well, yeah. He said, yes, because he considered himself a very logical, rational person.

He said, well, if you're a logical, rational person, you cannot dismiss that there is evidence of God. It's too overwhelming. It's much harder to be an atheist. It's much harder.

You've got a lot of explaining to do, Lucy. You know, it's like, what are you thinking? Let's just avoid that and just look at this.

Still doesn't answer the question. So, he admitted that. I said, so then if you, then if you admit that there, I'm not saying you believe in God, but you believe there is a God.

[40 : 43] So, if you know there's a God, then you have to know that you're accountable to him. Do you, do you, do you know that? Do you feel the ping of conscience? He says, oh, I don't, I don't, I don't get pings.

He says, okay, sorry for the word. Do you know in your conscience deep down that you're accountable to him? Yeah, and I try to live good and do that and, okay, good.

Do you know that, what you know about him, does that not tell you that you're also, that you owe him something more than just doing good and, that you actually owe him thanks?

Do you ever give him thanks? Romans 1 talks about, you know, how God has made himself known, everybody knows and there's total evidence, God's put it within them and out here where we look at the world and go, gee, yeah, that just happened.

But, but then that those who are, those great thinkers suppress the truth, right, and they try to explain away God and they don't acknowledge him and they don't give him thanks. thanks.

[42 : 00] So don't you think if there is a God that he deserves thanks, don't you think he deserves maybe an hour a week where you hear what he has to say and give thanks to him?

I mean, that's an unbelief. Don't you think that he deserves that? Very minimal? Well, yeah. Hey, so, so anyway, then I challenged him to read the book of Mark and come back and talk to me,

which he already wants to do.

It's interesting. So application, so everyone owes God. What about the Christian? Has he given Christians a little bit more than, I mean, he gives unbelievers a lot.

He gives them rain, he gives them seasons, he gives them ability to work and breathe and ability to progress and grow and have loving relationships and all those kind of things.

He has, he's so gracious. He doesn't have to do anything. He doesn't owe anybody anything.

Although we live in a society that thinks that everything's owed to them. For the believer, he's not just their creator, he's their redeemer.

[43 : 19] He's bought them. You have been bought with a price. You are not your own. You realize that? He didn't just pay for your sins, he bought you.

You belong to him. You used to belong to someone else. You never were your own, by the way. Didn't know that.

Or someone else was pulling strings on you. You've been set free from that. now you belong to him.

He's bought you, he's delivered you, he's forgiven you.

He's given you a new life, a new heart, a new identity. He's given you a new family, a new gift, a new purpose and meaning in life. He's given you a promise of inheritance. As we sang this morning, he's given you the promised Holy Spirit, himself, who will never leave or abandon you, who will help and encourage you and strengthen you and confront you and comfort you.

So let me clarify something. What do we owe to God? So give back to God what belongs to him.

[44 : 28] So we owe him. Okay, let me clarify something about as Christians, we do not walk according to debt. We do not walk according to owing God.

Yes, I owe him everything, but that's not my motivation. If I try to function from that motivation, from that perspective, a debtor's ethics, that I got to do all this because I owe God, that doesn't work.

Because we got all this baggage, we can't do that. Besides, I owe him everything, and I'm not going to be able to give him everything.

I'm going to want to, I'm going to do as much as I can. Huh? And as the Lord helps me, I'll be able to do more and more. So let me clarify, we do not walk according to debt.

Our motivation to give God back everything is gratitude, is a new heart. It's because I want to deep down, that's not because I have to.

[45 : 41] I don't function well from have to. Do you function well from have to? When your parents said you have to take out the trash, what was your response? I'd love to.

Right? Right? Clean your room. Yeah! I was there.

I didn't want to. And they said you have to. I said, uh-uh. Well, yeah, but I don't want to. Right? Stop pushing on me.

Yeah, you're ruining my life. You're not the boss of me. Yes, you are. So, so, so understand, okay?

So we can get in that kind of messed up thing with God.

Okay? And that's not how we function. It's not about have to. I get to. I have a privilege to. He's my father. It's not my master. He's my father.

[46 : 39] He's also my master, but he wants to relate to me as father. He wants me to relate to him as his child, not as his servant, though I want to serve him, though he owns me.

Okay? Does that make sense? I don't want us to mess up how we do this. So, notice how Paul, you know, we owe him everything, our life, our gifts, our time.

Priorities of a Christian are about God first and his church. This is my family. Right? He's reoriented my whole life that this is now my family.

So, now how Paul, I want you to note how Paul in Romans 12 urges Christians to respond to God's mercies. So, for 11 chapters in Romans, Paul has said, God's done this, God's done this, God's done this, he's done this, and this, and this, all these mercies toward you, he's done all these things.

11 chapters full of mercy, mercy, mercy. Chapter 12, he gets to, therefore, respond like this.

Because all that he's given you now, I urge you to do this.

[47 : 48] So, here's how he goes. And it's fascinating what two things he picks out as the most important priorities in responding to God's mercy. First of all, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies, because of all those mercies, to present your bodies as living sacrifice.

Wow, okay, you might as well start right there. To present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your, now my translation has spiritual worship.

Actually, the translation should be your reasonable worship. It's your logical worship. The actual, the Greek word is not spiritual, it's logikon. We got our word logic from that word. It's logical. It makes sense when you stack it up. What's my reasonable response? Well, yeah, I owe him everything.

Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Now, watch where he goes from here.

[48 : 56] So, our first responsibility, present our bodies as living sacrifice to God. then he says, for by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.

Don't be entitled, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

There's more things that he's giving. He's given you a measure of faith. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

What are his first two priorities in responding to the mercies of God? One, living sacrifice to him. Two, plug in to one another.

Because that's who you are. That's who you are. You're not just walking with God, you're walking with God's people. And he's designed it that way.

[50 : 07] This is your new family. This is your new everything. And then he gives you the practical outworking of that. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.

God's even given us a gift to function within the body. Render to God's. What is God's? Okay, everything. I am a living sacrifice to him.

What else is God's? He's given you a family. He's given you a church. He's given you an assembly. And he's given you a gift to function within it so you have something to give to that body.

It's not something you got to come up with. It's not something, okay, yeah, we can serve God with all of our different natural abilities. Great. Right?

But he gives you a special gifting. A measure of something. And then he outlines them. He names seven of them.

[51 : 11] If your gift is prophecy, in other words, just proclaiming the truth, kind of speaking boldly, then do it in the proportion of your faith. If service, if your gift is, I just want to serve, I just want to do hands-on stuff for people and to help people, then do it.

The one who teaches, teach. The one who exhorts, comforts, encourages, the person that has that gift to come alongside somebody else when they're down or when they're up and bring them down, do it.

Do it. the one who contributes, generosity. The one who gives, just want to give. The one who leads, with zeal.

The one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. surrender to God what belongs to Him.

Where do I start? Well, just your relationship to Him. Lord, I owe you everything. I surrender to you. directly.

[52 : 36] We sang some wonderful songs this morning that talked about that. We're singing to the Holy Spirit to teach us and mold us and help us to obey Him.

We have that wonderful Holy Spirit teacher who that's His ministry to us to help us do that. And then to serve the body of Christ with the gift.

that God has given you for that purpose. We live in a culture, I've been reminded lately, we live in a culture that does not think first in terms of responsibility.

We live in a culture that first thoughts are entitlement. What is owed to me? And it's a very worldly and earthly and selfish perspective.

It's a worldview view that we're paying for. But we as Christians, we can complain about all we want, but we as Christians are called to live completely differently than that.

[53 : 54] We're called to live counter cultural. We're called to live, deny self, take up our cross and fall at hand. We're called to render responsibility.

So be responsible in your civic responsibilities. Serve your community. Some of you are called to serve your community.

Some of you work in the community. Some of you work hard in the community. community. That's great. Render.

And render to God. That's the bigger question. Part of rendering to God is rendering to community. But render to God ultimately which governs everything else.

What belongs to Him? Let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Jesus who boldly speaks to us about highly charged issues.

[54 : 59] He's not afraid to address the issues that commonly divide us and distract us. And so thank You Father.

We know this isn't the last word about how we function in terms of government. We know that there are times when You call us to obey You rather than man.

We recognize that. But Father, we recognize too that You have established governments. You've established local authorities for our good, for our benefit.

And so help us to be wise and discerning. Help us to be Father, those who serve, not just who give, who not just want to be given to.

My Father, help us most of all to think through, to consider for ourselves what it means to give back to You. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Thank you.