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## **Two Lands, Two Passports**

Mark 12:13-17

In the classic American Short story by Edward Everett Hale, "The Man without a Country," Philip Nolan life is unfolded. In the early 1900's, Nolan was an officer in the Western army under the command of Aaron Burr. Burr was plotting to overthrow the government of the United States and set up a separate nation west of the Appalations. Nolan a young impressionable, eager to please man was duped into this doomed venture. The plot was discovered and Nolan along with several other officers were court-martialed. Even throughout the trial Nolan was convinced that Burr was a hero and impertinately declared to the judge he never again wanted to see the United States flag. He lived to regret that he made such a rash vow, but the court rendered a verdict to his wishes and condemned him to be carried from one navel vessel to another for the rest of his life, never to again step on American soil, never again to see the Flag filled with stars and stripes. He was truly a man without a country.

The author told this story so well, that many thought it to be factual. Many believed there really was a man named Philip Nolan that sailed his life on the oceans never having a country. Because in the story Nolan came to regret the vow he made, Washington DC received flood of letters requesting a pardon for Philip Nolan. That story of a man without a country was fiction, but the subject this morning is not fiction. We believers are not men without a country, we are people with two countries. We are living in this world, as a citizen of America, under this government who is now in power. We are also citizens of a heavenly kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ. We hold citizenship in two countries, the temporal, earthly America) and also the Heavenly Spiritual Kingdom of God.

The conflict arise when priorities of one kingdom invade the priorities of another. Is this an issue that touches our lives? You bet and

the difficulty of our response will increase as time continues. The conflict is very real. Every day we read about this tension in our papers. In town, Pastor Rocky Shanks and his small church was ordered to cease worship in their building due to some government imposed zoning laws. What should be the Christians response? A group of 18 men in Jordan, Montana are being surrounded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In Thursday's Columbian, The Freemen declared they have made an oath to God and vowed never to leave their ranch unless their demands are met. They have stated they are answerable only to God and no earthly oppressive government will take that away. In the Reflector this week, I read an opinion column from a man in Amboy who has declared total war against Clark county for operating as an illegal entity, who deliberately breaks the Constitution of the United States by excessively taxing it's people and allowing the state religion of secular humanism to be force fed in our tax supported schools.

The tension between the Kingdom of God and Kingdom of this world is very real and touches on many areas of our lives, from building permits to speed limits to school systems and court systems. From removing government officials to removing blackberry bushes. We are citizens of a government set up by the country that we live in. We do not agree with all the policies, the beaurocracy, the taxes, the oppression, the priority of money spent, the foreign policies and domestic policies. In this room we would not all agree on the politics. Some would claim Republicans have special insight into Godly truth, and others would declare that the democrats and their policies are more in line with the biblical ideal. My question this morning is this. How are we as believers to think and respond biblically to the kingdoms we are placed in? What should be the Christians response to governments who are not leading with biblical ideals, who are pumping their own secular agenda and whose authority is repressive of the church?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark the 12th Chapter. We are now studying a section of Mark that I've labeled "Stump the Jock" In the section from 11:27 to the end of chapter 12, Jesus is pelted with tough questions by the religious authorities. The first 7 questions are asked in public, the 8th in private. The first 5 questions are asked by the religious leaders, then the climax of this section occurs when Jesus

starts asking the questions. Prior to this section, Jesus has cursed the fig tree, a symbol of Israel and their judgment due to the rejection of Him as Messiah. Jesus has entered and cleansed the temple, kicking out the money changers. He then makes no qualms about confronting the religious leaders. They would do anything to cling to their own power and authority. They have made their choice to willfully reject the claims and authority of Christ. Jesus is the expositor of real motives even when men try to fake it.

We enter into the scene today in Mark 12:13. Jesus is in the temple area, and continues his debacles with the religious leaders. V13. (READ) They (that is still the religious authorities) sent in the big guns. The Robert Shapirowitz, the dream team of Pharisees lawyers and Herodians. These were the best. They were the intellectual giants sent to trap, to destroy Jesus. Mark. 3:5 That word trap is the same one used to capture wild animals in a trap. Now a trap to be very effective must conceal the danger, the teeth, the dangerous part. The best traps present an innocent attractive lure for the intended victim. The best traps will seem quite natural, normal, calm, no reason for alarm. They must look innocent as they appear to be something they are not. The trap must offer to provide some choice morsel of need or desire to the intended victim. The evil One knows us well and has had many years of experience to trap God's chosen ones. We must we wary of the attractive lure of the traps of Satan.

The religious leaders loved praise and flattery. They loved to have others fawn over their intellect and cleverness...so they assumed a man who fancied himself as a religious leader and teacher, Jesus, would as well put aside his defenses and sit down to enjoy a tasty compliment. Here's the bait. Look at verse 14. (READ) "Teacher", a very respectful greeting coming from the dream team. "You are truthful." Do they mean that the gospel, the words that Jesus spoke were indeed true and that they too believed Him? I think they probably meant He was honest and did not change his words based on who he was talking to. "You defer to no one." You are your own authority, you do not postpone your answer to get the opinion of another,...Heh, heh, so you'll have no problem answering our question right now. "Not partial" you don't play favorites to one side or the other but you speak as you understand the truth of

God's word. Literally it says, "You do not look to the face of another" You do not watch the face to see how the other is responding to your answer. You tell it like it is. The bait was laid. Tell the truth O great teacher, don't pass the buck, answer our most honest and seeking question.

Look at the trap question, verse 14 end. Is it lawful to pay the poll tax to Caesar? or not? Do you recognize the steel in their question? Jesus certainly did, v.15. The Herodians were political allies of Rome. They were concerned that Jesus would upset their political agenda. The Pharisees were conservative religious leaders, they were concerned that Jesus would upset their religious agenda. Both recognized Jesus as a threat to their own power. If Jesus answered NO! don't pay that tribute tax to Rome, it's an oppressive government not under God's rule. Then the Herodians would say...gotcha! Jesus would quickly be shipped off to the prison as a rebellious traitor of Rome and inciter of the people. But, If Jesus said YES you are to pay that much hated tax to the controlling and oppressive government. The Pharisee would trumpet this unpopular answer to the masses and Jesus would be labeled as anti-God, anti-Israel, and obviously not the Messiah deliverer He claims to be. Looks like a catch 22. Either way Jesus was trapped. My guess is the ones who came up with the question to ask Jesus had been asked this same one before and did not like it. I'm sure that they found themselves answering the question yes or No depending on who was listening to their answer. That's why Jesus reveals their own hypocrisy in v.14 "Why are you testing me you hypocrite who pretend to be something they are not.

It looks like Jesus is nailed, the religious leaders can barely contain their excitement. It looks as if Jesus will be badly embarrassed or imprisoned. Jesus ignores their muffled chortles and asks to see a Roman coin, a Denarius. The typical days wage for a laborer. They bring him one. Now I'd like to know what a Roman denarius was doing on temple grounds, I thought he had just kicked out all the money changers. Jesus takes the coin in his hand and looks at it. It's OK to use visual aids. He asks them a question in verse 16. likeness, Eikonws and whose inscription is on the coin? Caesar's, V. 17 Render or "give back" to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

What is to be our response to an earthly government that may impose unpopular even oppressive taxes? With a leader we don't agree with, who allows moral and ethical choices we don't agree with? What government could be more oppressive in the eyes of the original Readers, then those Christians who lived in Rome. Remember that Mark was probably written to Christians in Rome under the dictatorship of Nero. Who could be more oppressive or what leader more deserving of our rebellion?

Jesus tells the people to give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. They owed taxes to the Roman government for the benefit of being under Caesar's rule as a Roman Province. We as believers must recognize the right and authority of the government that is in power, under the current rules and laws in power. Even if it be in power by a leader that thinks he is God. The inscription on the denarius on the back read Pontifus Maximus, Chief Priest. On the front it probably read Tiberius Caesar, Son of Augustus. Behind His throne in Rome the Words were inscribed "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" John in the Book of Revelation went after that sucker with a vengeance. Here was a dictator that believed he was God. An oppressive government that in the time of Nero was violently opposed. How are we to respond as believers?

First, we must avoid Blind Nationalism. In Roman 13 we read that God has placed kings and authorities in their position of power, yet, to take that to extreme and say. I stand by my government whether it's right or wrong...would usher us into the Hitler's third Reich. If more Christians had stood up and opposed Hitless, pro Aryan, anti-Semitic unbiblical philosophy, World War 11 may never have happened. We must not give those in power a carte Blanche authority but run their choices through the truth in the word of God.

Second, As a believer some may be tempted to Civic Apathy. One with this view would so stress the heavenly citizenship and virtually deny ones earthly citizenship. They would not vote or salute the flag, serve in the armed forces. Or maybe a lesser form of civic indifference. These people would pay their taxes and support the fire and police and serve in the military when called but not involve themselves in any political process to right the evils that exist. They would violate ! Peter 2 that

calls believers to "honor the king" and in I Tim 2 "to pray, and give thanks for kings and all those in authority.

How are we to respond to a government in tension with our priorities? Acts 5:29 there will be times when we must "obey God rather than men." The kingdom of God takes precedence over the kings of this world. We can see examples in the bible when earthly kingdoms come in conflict with God's laws. In every case in the Bible, the earthly authority prohibited or demanded something contrary to God's laws. Remember in the Bible where three young men Shadrack, Meshak and Abednego were commanded to bow to a golden image of Nebuchnezzar. They refused, but they willingly endured the consequences rather than compromise their relationship with Yahweh. Daniel refused to stop praying to God, in the face of an edict not to pray to anyone but the king, and endured the consequences of the lions den. If you wish to object to a practice of this government, do not think you are exempt from the punishment just because it's for religious reasons. Civil disobedience may be necessary at times but those who break the laws of this land must accept the punishment without complaint. This applies to people who block and harass entrance to pro-death clinics and then protest police arrests. Civil disobedience is not the only option in democratic governments for changing bad laws.

We as believers are to **respect** the authority in power, due to the office the person holds, not necessarily his character. I Pet 2 "honor the King" We are to **support** the government. Services of roads and protection, and order must be paid for. We are not to withhold part of our taxes even if that government's priorities are not in line with God's biblical ideals. I'm sure the Christians of Rome did not want to support the event's happening at the Roman coliseum, just like I do not appreciate paying for the slaughter of unborn children. Jesus says we are to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.

But what of the expanding government that is increasing in its intrusion into our ministries? Robin said when they put the first addition on this church they didn't even need a permit. Now, we may be limited on the number of classrooms we can create from existing space due to regulations. Churches must limit the number of worshippers because of parking restrictions. We are required to spend money on fire

systems and doors that could be used much better other places. How are we as believers to respond?

Francis Shaeffer wrote his Christian Manifesto urging Christians to rebel against any government when any office commands that which is contrary to the word of God. With this thinking it implies all civil law must be based on the Bible or at least not go against it. What is the place of government?

First, even oppressive governments have God ordained authority, even Nero's government from Roman's 13:1 (READ)

Second, The legitimate government is the one currently in power. Sometimes in those third world countries that may be difficult to tell who is in power.

Third, there is no conditional clause, "obey, and submit to the govt., if they are just or if they use the tax money for moral causes.

OK, so when is it justified to disobey the government?

1. When it does not allow worship of God Ex.5:1 Egypt "Let my people go!"
2. When it commands people to kill innocent people or God's people. Egypt killing Hebrew babies, China commanding the killing baby girls. Elijah and prophets'
3. When it commands believers to worship idols or pray to a man. Daniel
4. When the government forbids us from propagating the gospel. Acts the early church apostles thrown in prison for preaching.

We as believers are always to obey the government when it takes its rightful place under God, but not when it takes the place of God. Governments and laws can permit evil, but cannot command it. They can allow its citizens to worship idols, but cannot insist they worship idols.

We cannot disobey the government just because it puts limits on our religious freedom. All laws limit freedom. They draw the line between the beginning of my freedom and the end of yours. Speed limits restrict my freedom, zoning ordinances, parking regs. limit the freedom a church has. But we should refuse to comply if the government mandates teaching or practices that are contrary to Scriptures. For example we

should refuse to kill a human life in abortion even if our government commands it to be done, but we should not withhold taxes from a government that allows abortion. We should work within the system to legally change the law. Commanding Christian to abort and allowing non-believers to abort are two different things. Commanding worship of idols is oppressive, but laws permitting others to worship idols is not oppressive.

Jesus said it well in his answer. Give Back to the government the things that are due to the government. but Jesus didn't stop there. We are to give back to God the things that are due back to God.

Caesar's likeness was inscribed on that coin. Jesus looks at the coin and then asks the people, Who's likeness is inscribed? Caesar's. It represented the authority of their earthly king. It had been permanently etched in the coin. It was so obvious who's likeness was on that coin that the crowd easily said, Yep, that's Caesar's image. Gen 1:27 "We are made in the image of God!" We all our His image bearer's The fact that we have a moral conscience creativity, and can think and reason separates us from the other animals of God's creation we are made in God's image. How much more so we who are believers and have been stamped by the seal of the Holy Spirit? When Jesus looks at you at me, what does He see? When Jesus picks up our talents and resources and gifts who's likeness does He see etched into our lives? Is it easy for others to see the likeness of God in our lives? Can others around us easily tell who's we are who we belong to. Can they see that our ultimate allegiance to with another kingdom, a heavenly kingdom. What are you holding back from God that you know is rightfully his and he us due from you? Are you holding back from God entrance and control over your thoughts? Does He not have the rights over your possessions? Does He not have the rights over your time? Your talents? God have placed his image on us. We are minted by God. Therefore we are his..maybe God wants you to give him your pride and desire to look good in this world as well as His kingdom. Recognize your priority is to God. Do not be tempted to "speak your answer based on the face or reaction you think the person your talking to. Don't be a counterfeit hypocrite like those religious authorities. Give the government what is rightfully theirs not any more. Give God what is rightfully He, not any less.



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## **Living in Two Worlds**

Mark 12:13-17

Open: What is it about paying your taxes that just burns you up? Why?

1. What was the trap that the Herodians and Pharisee were setting for Jesus? What was the attractive bait? Why do these two groups make strange partners? What drove them to work together? How was Jesus a threat to each group?

2. What if Jesus had said No to their question? What would have happened if He'd said Yes? How long do you think their partnership lasted after Jesus gave His answer?

3. Reflect: If it is the coin of taxes that we give back to Caesar, what are we to give to God? What keeps us from giving to the government that what is rightfully theirs?

4. What are we saying when we fail to pay our taxes or cheat on them? What are we saying about God? Rom 13:1-4. When is it right to willfully disobey the government? Are you more tempted to go along with whatever the government wants or fight against the laws? Apathetic toward politics or violent objector? Is there an issue that God wants you to be moving against in our land?

5. What keeps us from giving to God what is rightfully His? What are some ways you see "God's image" stamped in the lives of Christians brothers and sisters that you know? Is that stamp more easily seen in some more than others? How can you this next week show your allegiance, reveal God's likeness in your lives to others around you? Work? home? neighborhood? so that when they look at you they say...man that must be God in you because I see His fingerprints all over you.