

In the Image of God Matthew 22:15-22

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago a woman wrote to a Christian publication to tell about a miraculous lesson her family experienced. During one of their family Bible reading times, they ran across the verse,

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him" (Romans 12:20 RSV).

She writes: Ours sons, ages 7 and 10 at the time, were especially puzzled. "Why should you feed your enemy?" they wondered. My husband and I wondered too. The only answer my husband John could think of to give the boys was, "We're supposed to because God says so." It never occurred to us that we would soon learn why.

Day after day John Jr. came home from school complaining about a classmate who sat behind him in 5th grade. "Bob keeps jabbing me when the teacher isn't looking. One of these days, when we're out on the playground, I'm going to jab him back."

I was ready to go down to the school and jab Bob myself. Obviously, the boy was a brat. And why wasn't the teacher doing a better job with her kids? I'd better give her an oral jab, too, at the same time!"

I was still fuming when his 7-year-old brother spoke up: "Maybe he should feed his enemy instead of jabbing him." The rest of us were startled. None of us was sure about this "enemy" business. It didn't seem that an enemy would be in the 5th grade. An enemy was someone who was way off... well, somewhere.

We all looked at my husband. Since he was the head of the family, he should come up with the solution. But the only answer he could offer was the same one he had given before: "I guess we should because God said so."

"Well," I asked my son, "do you know what Bob likes to eat? If you're going to feed him, you may as well get something he likes." "Jellybeans," he almost shouted, "Bob just loves jelly beans."

So, we bought a bag of jellybeans for him to take to school the next day, and decided that the next time Bob jabbed John Jr., John was simply to turn around and deposit the bag on his "enemy's" desk. We would see whether this enemy feeding worked.

The next afternoon, the boys rushed home from the school bus and John Jr. called ahead, "It worked, Mom! It worked." I wanted the details: "What did Bob do? What did he say?"

"He was so surprised he didn't say anything - he just took the jellybeans. But he didn't jab me the rest of the day!" In time, John Jr. and Bob became the best of friends - all because of a little bag of Jellybeans.

She concludes: Both of our sons subsequently became missionaries. Their way of showing friendship with any "enemies" of the faith was to invite those same people into their homes to share food with them around their own tables.

Isn't it interesting how enemies can come together? This lady's story was one of redemption.

- The story in today's text is just the opposite of that. The Pharisees and Herodians were most certainly enemies. But a common foe – Jesus – brought them together.

The Pharisees opposed the Roman poll tax for several reasons:

- They didn't like the idea of paying taxes to a foreign power.
- Since Caesar was revered as a god, they felt that paying taxes was blasphemy.

Since the Herodians were loyal to King Herod. Hence their name. And because Herod was permitted to stay in power by Caesar, the Herodians were in favor of the tax. They supported anything that would keep them in power.

In general, the Jewish people had no special love for the tax. Who likes to pay taxes? For the Jews, it was just another reminder that they were not free.

It is easy to see why the Pharisees and Herodians chose the poll tax as the bait for their trap. No matter what position Jesus took, someone would be mad.

Jesus immediately saw through their scheme. He knew that their real purpose was not to get an answer to a question, but to try to trap Him. They were hypocrites.

- On this basis alone, He could have refused to answer them.
- But He knew the people around Him would not understand.
- Here was an opportunity for Him to silence His enemies and, at the same time, teach the people an important spiritual truth.

Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. (Matthew 22:21)

In this simple, but profound reply, Jesus taught several important truths.

TRUTH #1: CHRISTIANS MUST HONOR AND OBEY RULERS

The text reads:

Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's... (Matthew 22:21)

This is a regular theme of the Scriptures. Romans 13. 1 Peter 2:13-17. 1 Timothy 2:1-

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. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is

rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. (Roman 13:1-2)

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.... Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13-17)

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

Honoring those in authority does not require agreement on their policies, but it does have a significant impact on how we speak and think about them. And as 1 Timothy indicates, it involves praying for them.

The "penny" (or denarius) had the image of Caesar Tiberius on it, so Jesus said it belonged to him.

TRUTH #2: CHRISTIANS MUST HONOR AND OBEY GOD.

The simple statement of Jesus continues. Not only do we give to Caesar what belongs to him, we also:

Give ... to God what is God's. (Matthew 22:21)

Christians have a dual citizenship. I am a citizen of this country, but the Scriptures teach that my primary citizenship is in heaven:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:20)

If you talk about that citizenship around some people, they will roll their eyes and think you are being a bit too spiritual. But being a citizen of heaven means that you look at the things of earth from a heavenly point of view. Colossians 3:2 says:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

Dwight L. Moody used to scold Christians for being...

"so heavenly minded they were no earthly good." (Dwight L. Moody)

That exhortation still needs to be heeded. But it is equally true that some who profess Christ have become so earthly minded they are no heavenly good.

The Christian who gives to God the things that are God's makes his/her decisions on the basis of eternal values and not the passing fads of society.

- Lot chose the well-watered plain of Jordan because his values were worldly, and ultimately he lost everything.
- Moses refused the pleasures and treasures of Egypt because he had something infinitely more wonderful to live for.

Ultimately, though, it comes down to the third truth in this passage.

TRUTH #3: WE BEAR GOD'S IMAGE AND WE OWE GOD EVERYTHING

It is captured in the question Jesus uses to first respond to those who were trying to trap Him:

“Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” (Matthew 22:20)

Caesar's image was on the coin. God's image is on you:

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Sin has marred that image, but through Jesus Christ, it can be restored:

Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

A young boy who was given an assignment in his elementary school art class. He was asked to draw a picture of something that was valuable to him. He thought and thought and thought about all things he valued ... and then an idea came.

During art class time that day, he continued to work on the drawing with great care. He wanted it to be perfect.

The art teacher came to him and asked, "Billy, what are you drawing?"

Billy looked at his teacher and with a big smile and the sound of great joy in his voice he declared, "I'm drawing a picture of God."

The art teacher looked at him and said, "But, Billy, no one knows what God looks like."

With great pride Billy held up his picture and said, "They will now!"

When I was born, my grandmother bought for me a proof set of the coins with the year of my birth. I checked recently, and it is worth exactly 91 cents. On it I can see the images of President Kennedy, President Washington, President Roosevelt, President Jefferson and President Lincoln. These coins bear their images. I never met any of these men, but I have a good idea what they look like.

I bear the image of God. And so do you. When people look at us, do they get a good idea of what God looks like?

Amen