

Word One Bible Study

Render to Caesar

Text: Matthew 22:15-22 the Twenty-first Sunday After Pentecost, Lectionary Series A

Objective

Participants will:

1. Understand that Jesus was calling out the Pharisees, who didn't recognize Him as King.
2. Learn to honor God through an understanding of citizenship in both kingdoms, the civil and the heavenly.

Materials Needed

Bible

Group Guidelines

Divide class into groups of four to six. Have each group select as leaders the person who has traveled to the most states. The leader's purpose is to keep the group moving through the Bible study and to encourage the participation of all members.

Building Community

1. Taxes are generally no fun. If you have ever had a job and seen your first paycheck, perhaps you experienced a bit of shock at the deductions taken to cover your taxes.
2. As a group discuss what the taxes that we pay as a part of this country go to fund and how they might be necessary to maintain good order.
3. Why do people, maybe ourselves included, often struggle with the idea of paying taxes?

Looking at God's Word

1. Have a volunteer from the class read Matthew 22:15-22. The Pharisees were attempting to trap Jesus. Have someone explain in their own words the nature of the trap that was set by them.

The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus into either rejecting the earthly authority of Rome, allowing them to convict him of treason, or rejecting the sovereignty of God by putting Rome above Him.

2. Why does Jesus point to the inscription on the coin in His response to the trap question posed by the Pharisees?

The coins minted by Rome for paying this tax had the image of Tiberius Ceasar and identifies him as "son of the divine Augustus." By having these coins that claim Ceasar is God, they are violating their own laws against having something with the inscription of someone falsely claiming to be God. Jesus is pointing out their sin and hypocrisy in mixing up what is of God and what is earthly.

3. When Jesus makes a two kingdom's distinction in His answer saying, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." What larger point was He making?

Jesus is pointing out our sin when we put earthly authorities above God. God himself has established human rulers and government that it is right to follow, including doing our civic duties and paying taxes. However, God's gift of life, faith, and salvation and following Him is most important.

4. As followers, disciples, of Christ, we are called to participate in both the spiritual and the earthly kingdom. We have obligations in both. The Pharisees were attempting to pit the obligations of one kingdom against the other, but Jesus would have none of it.
5. While our participation in each of the two kingdoms might look different, in the end we serve God in both. Why is this as important to keep in mind as it is to not confuse the two kingdoms in the first place?

Reinforcing What Has Been Learned

1. God is the creator of all that exists. Within this world, God has established both the spiritual and earthly kingdoms. We are subject to spiritual and earthly authorities in their respective kingdoms. Ultimately, we look to God as the king and creator of all things. The Pharisees didn't see Jesus as the one true King.
2. Being a part of God's spiritual kingdom does not negate our responsibilities in His earthly kingdom and to the earthly rulers that God has placed in positions of authority, whether they follow the Lord as believers or not.
3. A part of our discipleship is honoring God in both kingdoms, respecting the authorities of both.
4. As a group discuss the practical implications that this respect for authority in both kingdoms has in our daily lives. Be as concrete as possible for both kingdoms. Have students consider what responsibilities our vocation of citizen might have including voting, paying taxes, following laws, etc.

Closing

Have a volunteer from the class pray on behalf of the class. Challenge students to be mindful of the two kingdoms during the coming week and report back the various ways they noticed each kingdom impacting their lives the next time your group meets.