

JESUS CHRIST, TAX CONSULTANT

Jesus is clearly King of the Hill as he fields a curve ball from the Jewish leaders, this time on the question of tax.

Try a curly question for starters:

1. When does “tax efficiency” become “tax evasion”?

Read Luke 20:19-26, where Jesus receives some unknowns, sent by their masters with the thought of flattering the Lord into self-incrimination. Recall the background given in the message on Sunday.

2. What was at stake in the question of this particular tax and in the particularities of the denarius?

Jesus’ answer shows that there is no ***necessary*** conflict between secular government and the claims of God on those who belong to Him. To make this claim would have seemed bold and perplexing to the first Jewish listeners: no wonder they were “amazed”! Although there are many situations where the demands made by government ***do*** run counter to God’s, the starting point is a positive one: government is a good thing, and taxation is legitimate in principle. The New Testament develops Jesus’ positive teaching in two places; both fit reasonably well with ideas about government and citizenship circulating in the Hellenistic world of the day.

Read Romans 13:1-7.

3. According to this passage, why pay tax – and more generally, comply with governmental expectation?
4. Consider, and talk openly about, your own practices. To what extent are you guided by moral considerations (right vs. wrong) as opposed to shame-based ones (what can I get away with unnoticed?)

Read 1 Peter 2:12-16.

5. According to this passage, why should we submit to the “authorities”?
6. To what extent are your practices a positive witness to those around?

The early church learned soon enough how the emperor’s demands could conflict with the demands of Jesus. But they understood what they were ***really*** up against. Read Ephesians 6:12.

7. Where in the world around can you trace the influence of “principalities and powers”?

The public servant Daniel and his associates – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – are our go-tos for how to act when the conflict comes. The stories of the golden statue (Daniel 3), of the lion’s den (Daniel 6), and of the choice to avoid “defiling” food (Daniel 1) demonstrate the integrity, courage, discretion and prayerfulness of these exemplars.

8. Where in your own life do you face a demand to do what you know is not right? Pray for one another, for integrity, courage, discretion and wisdom; and ask the Lord to work on your behalf.