

The Character of Jesus 71
Question about Taxes
(Matthew 22:15 – 22, Mark 12:13 – 17, Luke 20:20 – 26)

- Characteristic: Keeping it simple
 - Using the Matthew account
 - (14 – 15) The Pharisees and Herodians were bitter enemies. The Pharisees sought to perform all things in the Law, although their methods became complex when trying to explain applications of items in the Law that were not very specific. The Herodians were quite willing to compromise the Law for the sake of peace with the Roman Empire, agreeing that the family of Herod were the rightful heirs to David's throne.
 - (16 – 17) Roman coinage was used for all common transactions. Jewish coinage, controlled by the High Priest, was used for Temple contributions (hence, the money changers). As a vassal state of the Empire, Israel (or, in this case, Judea, since the country had been split into several pieces after the death of Herod the Great) paid a substantial tribute annually. The people greatly resented it. Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), about 20 years earlier, had stirred up a revolt over this. It appeared that Jesus would need to alienate the people or advocate defying a Roman tax.
 - (18 – 21) Jesus refused to co-mingle the things of the kingdom of God with the things of the outside world. The concept is expanded in Romans 13:1 – 7.
 - (22) Neither side was able to object.
- Application: Keeping it simple
 - In what ways has the kingdom of God been used to avoid taxation?
 - In the US, tax exemption of church property only became federal law in 1913 when the system of non-profit corporations was established (although this was attempted in 1894, but was soon found unconstitutional) This was already the custom in all states, some states making church property tax exempt in the late 1700's. But, at least three presidents tried to reverse it, deeming it unfair to other property owners. The Supreme Court in 1924 settled the issue by declaring that such non-profits provided useful services and lowered governmental expenses.
 - Various governments have tried to tax church property but gave up the idea when the Catholic church threatened to withhold absolution from everyone in that country.
 - Unfortunately, a significant number of non-profits have little public benefit.
 - How do we maintain this separation when the government appears to be encroaching on the things of God?
 - Obama-era requirement that non-profits provide abortion services in their health plans.
 - Discrimination lawsuits against denominations that "ordain" only men and no homosexuals.
 - Recent bans on public gatherings.
 - How does Jesus' example solve these problems?
 - The kingdom of God is not about physical government.
 - Keep it simple. Find a way to obey the government and God.