

# "The Games We Play"

Matthew 22:15-22

October 16, 2005

**It happened that a young boy was given two one dollar bills on Sunday morning by his mother. She was sick and unable to go with him that day so she asked him to stop at the corner store and get a little snack for himself after worship and she told him that the other dollar was for God and that he was supposed to put it in the offering plate at Sunday School.** He had never gone alone before but felt 'up to the challenge' so with the two dollar bills grasped firmly in hand he headed off for church. It was a very windy day and at one point he tripped ever so lightly - not so that he fell or got hurt but enough to surprise him causing him to relax the grip he had on the dollar bills. One slipped out of his hand and blew down the street with him after it. Before he reached it, the money came to rest by the street curb right over a grate that led to the city sewer. Then it slipped in and was gone. The boy stood there for a minute looking down into the black hole while the realization dawned that the dollar was gone for good. Then he looked up and said: "Well, God, there goes your dollar."

Think about that for a moment - is it really that easy to recognize what is ours and what is God's? Sometimes it seems as though we think that it is just that easy. We go to church on Sunday morning and it is God's time and God's stuff. We go home, play with our toys or work on our projects and it is our time - our stuff. Many countries do not make the kind of clear distinction between church and state that we do. I read recently that one of the things that we often forget when dealing with other parts of the world [and the article especially noted the middle East situation and the Islamic culture] is that they do not have such a separation - the church and the government are one and the same. It makes a difference. We can go all the way back to Jesus when we talk about the separation of church and state. When presented with a question about paying taxes, Jesus had no hesitation separating church and state. - Look at the image on the coin - if the image is that of Caesar - the government - feel free to give it to the government. But, by the same token. If the image printed on something is that of God - give it to God. - - - Remember, in the very beginning God created everything and when He created us, He did so in his very image. The image of God is imprinted on you. Think for a minute what that means.

Well, it is an interesting thought but it is not the sermon. I was more interested in some of the things going on around the actual words of this little encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees. It would be great if we had time to read back over what has been taking place. Think about the fact that this pleasant little discussion of taxes and theology comes shortly after Jesus has stormed into the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers. He has disrupted worship and the business of the church. He has refused to tell them where He gets the authority for the things He has been doing or saying. He has even told a parable which the Pharisees figured out were a condemnation of what they have been doing - even going so far as to say that tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the

kingdom of God ahead of them. One might well imagine the anger that has been seething and beginning to boil under the surface - if not openly. Certainly, it is understandable that they have to be angry enough to want to get rid of Jesus. But here they come with their happy faces on. I hope you listened to how they approached Him ..... Jesus, friend - teacher - we know that you are a good guy – we know that you are sincere. We know that you teach ‘God’s truth’. And you know something. One of the things we like best about you is that you tell it like it is. You don’t worry about what anyone might think - you just tell the truth as you see it. You are just a smart and wonderful guy ..... so tell us - - - what do you think about this tax situation? {At least that is the jest of what they were saying}.

What a silly game they play with Jesus. Of course He sees right through it. Imagine all of that sweetness and light, while seething inside - all the time angry and plotting. It reminds me of a cartoon in which a pastor installed a ‘Suggestion Box’ in his church and invited the members of the congregation to feel free to drop in any suggestion they might have. He also installed a pulley to the ceiling above the box and from it a large brick dangled. The rope attached to the brick ran around the corner to where the pastor waited for anyone who might have the audacity to come with any suggestions.

What kind of games do we play with God? I wondered how often we make a show of being warm, polite and interested when it comes to our Christianity and yet really have very little interest in His teaching and even less in giving to God that which was created in the very image of God.

It is not that the Pharisees were bad people. Nor are we. The Pharisees thought they knew the mind of God and Jesus was just plain wrong in what He was doing - they not only knew the mind of God but they believed they followed it to the letter - at least on the surface. It reminds me of a cartoon in which a pastor has been locked in battle with his church council over some issue. Obviously they had debated the issue to a dead lock with neither side willing to give in. Finally a vote was taken and the pastor has the paper ballots in front of him as he announces the vote. He says; "Well, the vote is as follows, It is Ruth, Sally, Dan, Tim, Peter, Joy, and John against the proposal - - and it is God and I for it."

We are called to render unto Caesar that which is Caesars and unto God that which bears His image. It is not easy to fully know what the will of God is for our lives - it is easy to get so caught up in our own little world that we think that God must be on our side instead of worrying about being on God’s side. We get caught up in playing games with our Christianity - giving lip service to the nice little Jesus boy but really having our own agenda for our life and not really being interested in the will of God.

What an amazing thing it is the Jesus understand and still will plaed with the Father to forgive them for the know not what they do. What an amazing gift that even seeing through us, Christ continues the journey to the cross and to salvation for His creation. I read the text and see myself - created in the image of God and invited to give my life to him. Yet, like the Pharisees, having so many of my own agenda that get in the way. But it

does not stop a God of love from forgiving and continuing to call me to follow while granting a gift of life eternal. Amazing.

AMEN