Render to Caesar

(by Kevin Heaton)

Tax Day comes every year. Some folks celebrate their returns. Others, however, are disappointed by what they will have to give up. And the rest are in between, not having been helped much or affected much, and could really care less. But April 15th is a yearly reminder that we are under the authority of a government. And when we get to thinking of our government, there are things like taxes that can frustrate us and cause us to let others know how we feel about it.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: how are we, as Christians, followers of Christ, to react towards the government? The following is no opinion of man, no ideology of someone siding with their favorite politics, etc. The following are the words of God.

On a certain occasion, some spies of the Jewish leaders came to Jesus to see if they could get Him to say something treasonous whereby they could have Him arrested. So Luke tells us that they ***"asked Him, 'Teacher, we know that You speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?'"*** (**Luke 20:21-22**). Jesus, knowing their craftiness, answered them this way: ***"'Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?' They said, 'Caesar's.' He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'"*** (**Luke 20:24-25**). Luke then tells us that they marveled and became silent.

Did the people like paying taxes? Did they like all the laws of their government? Were their governing officials righteous, upstanding people? I highly doubt any of it. But notice Jesus' simple response to the people: ***"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."***

Next, look at what Paul the apostle of Jesus told the Christians in Rome about how they were to look at the government. ***"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law"*** (**Romans 13:1-8**). He tells us that we are to be submissive to the governing authorities because they have been appointed by God.

Finally, notice what Peter instructed his fellow brothers in Christ to do: ***"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor"*** (**1 Peter 2:13-17**). We are to submit ourselves to the government for the LORD's sake. We are to give honor to such. Do you think they agreed with all the taxes, laws, and ways the government operated? No. Was Peter only referring to those in the government who were righteous, upstanding people? No. Nevertheless, Peter tells us that our responsibility as Christians is to submit and give honor.

I think Peter's instruction to servants also applies to our attitude towards the government when he writes: ***"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls"*** (**1 Peter 2:18-25**).

Does this mean that we have to like and agree with everything our government does? Of course not. And we of course also have to note that we are not to submit to anything the government may tell us to do that would be sinful. But here's what God expects of us: even if we don't like the government or agree with it, we **MUST** keep our speech clean and respectful, our actions pure and holy, and be humble and submissive as our Lord and Savior has taught us to be. Instead of disrespecting others and allowing ourselves to be negatively affected by the government, here is how we should be acting:

***"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation"*** (**1 Peter 2:11-12**).

***"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time"*** (**1 Timothy 2:1-6**).