THE BASIC DUTIES TO STATE AND CHURCH

Mark 12:13-17

Key Verse: 12:17

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And they were amazed at him."

In the last passage Jesus told his people the parable of the ten­ants. Jesus did not tell them the parable of the vineyard, but told them the parable of the tenants. In this parable Jesus taught his disciples who God is and what God's happy expectation on his people is and what God demands from his people as privi­leged people. This para­ble must be the best of all parables because it in­cludes in a few sen­ten­ces all the history of Israel and the world in a poetic form. This parable is the epic of Israel as well as the world. This parable is the explana­tion of the beautiful relationship between God and his beloved chil­dren. This parable is in­deed great because it condensed world history so well. This parable looks like Webster's Dic­tion­ary condensed into several senten­ces. This parable is indeed the word of God; if it were not, this would not be possi­ble. Today's pas­sage begins when the Pharisees came to retaliate against Jesus be­cause of his parable against them. They should have repented after listening to the parable. But their pride was offended and they wanted to trap Jesus. Still, Je­sus loved them and he taught them the im­portant truth that state and church are separate.

I. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's (13-16)

When we read the New Testa­ment, the Phari­sees are recorded as the symbol of evil. Jesus rebuked them because they were hypo­crites. Once Jesus said to them, "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Mt 23:24). They were very meticu­lous in keeping the details of laws and regulations and traditions and im­posing them on other peo­ple (Lk 11:46). In this way they extorted from and bur­dened God's flock of sheep under their care. They demanded that all the details of the law and regulations and traditions be kept. So they were known as legal­ists. Legalism was their handle to squeeze God's flock of sheep under their care. Another handle by which they squeezed God's flock of sheep under their care was their hypocrisy. Jesus said about them, "Every­thing they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacter­ies wide and the tassels on their garments long..." (Mt 23:5). Their outward appearance looked dignified and gor­geous and some­what spiritual be­cause of their decorations, espe­cially their bushy beards and Jewish mous­taches. But what they did was indeed terrible. They did not care for sorrow­ful widows. They did not care for hungry or­phans. Rather, they devoured wid­ows' houses and for a show made lengthy prayers (Mk 12:40).

In actuality, the Pharisees were not that bad at the beginning. The origin of the Pharisees is shrouded in some obscurity. But it is believed that the Phari­sees were the products of the reformation led by Ezra and Nehemi­ah after the exile to Babylon. After the exile, the people of Israel were literally slaves with a slave mentality. All they wanted was to eat and to mate. But Ezra found the Scriptures and began to teach them from early morning to late night, as long as they had light to read the Scrip­tures. People responded. Among them, those who studied the law of God by memorizing the Penta­teuch and the Psalms and the twelve books of the History of Israel were recognized as the elite of his peo­ple. Later they were called the Pharisees, mean­ing "separated." At the beginning, their speech and deeds and obedi­ence to the law of God were strict and influ­ential.

Their influence had been so great that the Pharisees contributed to the organization of Judaism and the Jewish reli­gion. When they obeyed the law of God, God blessed them abundantly, and those who became the Phari­sees were known as high-class people. But gradually they lost the spirit of the law of God. They were inclined to be the intellec­tual elite of the nation more than the ser­vants of God. Later they lost interest in the work of God. They were greatly interested in politics. These reli­gious men turned out to be profes­sional politi­cians. In the sight of God they became useless and worthless. These people knew what they should do in their hearts. But they did not do it. On the other hand, Jesus did every­thing they were supposed to do. Then they began to hate Jesus. In verse 13, Herodians appear. They appear only three times in the Bible. They were under the rule of King Herod. But they collaborated with the Phari­sees in trap­ping Jesus. They were like KGB agents in the former Soviet Union. The Phari­sees' anger was burning until they were ready to do away with Jesus. But they ap­peared before Jesus as the most intellectual people. First they praised Jesus. Look at verse 14. "They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know you are a man of in­tegrity. You aren't sway­ed by men, because you pay no at­tention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Cae­sar or not?'" Their flattery was as­tounding. But Jesus did not appreciate their elo­quent speech because he knew their inner motive.

Jesus rebuked them. Look at verses 15b,16. "But Jesus knew their hypocri­sy. 'Why are you trying to trap me?' he asked. 'Bring me a de­nari­us and let me look at it.' They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?'" Here we must learn that we should not degenerate from sincere Christians to politi­cians. If we do so, we damage genuine Christians great­ly. Among early Christians, there was no politi­cal pow­er struggle. But when God blessed his church, the leaders of his church became only interested in power struggles. When the Roman Pope Greg­ory VII rose to power he excommunicated King Henry IV of Ger­many. In order to restore his rela­tionship with the pope, King Henry visit­ed him and begged pardon, standing in the snow with bare feet for three days. As we know well, John Bunyan was under the oppres­sion of the Anglican Church. He was imprisoned and suf­fered in prison for more than 10 years simply because he taught the Bible to other people. Here we learn that spiri­tual lead­ers who are the servants of God should overcome the desire to be­come political rulers.

II. Give to God what is God's (17)

At that time, Jews were colonial people under Roman rule. Colo­nial peo­ple were supposed to pay taxes to the ruling empire. But the Jews were reluctant to pay taxes to Rome, claiming that God was their only king. In fact, their state­ment is not a religious matter. It was to trap Je­sus. When the Phari­sees came to Jesus, they came with the Her­odi­ans, the collaborators with Rome. This is the evidence that they were not really sincere in their state­ments. It was their trap to catch Jesus. They pretended to be God's people. They reasoned, since God was their king, they need not recog­nize Caesar as their king. And they should not pay taxes to Cae­sar. But their real problem was that they did­n't want to pay taxes, so they made reasonable ex­cuses.

Usually fallen man wants to get something. Fallen man's mental­i­ty is, "What do I get out of it?" If fallen men cannot get something from someone or from somewhere, they are very unhappy. Fallen men never want to give some­thing to others. There was a mother who gave every­thing to her son and prayed for him every day. She said, "My son is get­ting worse. He complains endless­ly." The more he was loved the more he complained. His problem was that he did not know God who gave his one and only Son that whoev­er believes in him shall not per­ish but have eter­nal life (Jn 3:16). This son did not know Jesus who became a ran­som sacrifice to give his life for many (Mk 10:45). The son nev­er gave any­thing to his mother, but only received some­thing from his mother. As a result he was spoiled beyond recov­ery.

Here the Pharisees' error was that they did not know how to give some­thing to others. They did not know they should pay taxes to the Roman Empire. There are many things to learn. But we must learn how to give some­thing to others. As the citizen of a nation, one must know how to render his basic duties, such as educational duty, army duty and the duty of paying taxes. Time maga­zine reported that at present, 60% of public aid recipi­ents are children of unmarried mothers. One moth­er had six chil­dren, so the gov­ernment must give public aid mon­ey for sev­en people every month. This is not a small problem. The serious pro­blem is not giving them money; the most serious problem is that the mothers of chil­dren who are public aid recipi­ents are mostly high school dropouts. They refused to receive job train­ing. Their prob­lem is that they do not know how to give something or how to contrib­ute them­selves to their families or to this nation. The Phar­isees' men­tality was exactly like those of public aid recipients. The Pharisees damaged their weak nation and caused the endless suffering to his suffering people.

Whether we want to study or not, as the citizens of a nation, we must not be high school dropouts. We must study hard and we must all be valedic­torians at the graduation ceremonies. This seems to be a small matter. But it is a great contribution to this country. More funda­mentally, it is a contribution to oneself.

Man must know how to give something to God. In actuality, God lacks noth­ing. And we have nothing to give to God. But we have some­thing to give to God. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." We can­not give God a Big Mac. But we can give God our hearts. Deu­teronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Why do we have to love God whole­heartedly? It is because it is the secret of re­taining God's bless­ing. Sup­pose we do not love God wholeheartedly: We become economic animals or party animal men. If we do not love God with all our hearts, we grad­ually lose God's image in us. Then we are filled with sinful desires. Those who are ruled by sinful desires cannot study well or grow in the image of God. There is a stu­dent who did not finish undergraduate cour­ses, though he attend­ed college for the last nine years. It is because he is ruled and over­ruled by the mar­riage desire. He has no idea to sit down and study.

We must give to God what is God's. Another meaning of giving some­thing to God is to believe in the promises of God. When we study the Bible, we come to know that the Bible is a combination of the Old Testament and the New Tes­tament. "Testament" means "promise." The Bible is the book of the promises of God. For example, God promised Abraham in Genesis 12:2,3 that he will bless him and he will make him a blessing for all people of all nations. At that time everybody was ungodly. Abraham one person was a godly man. When God gave his promises to Abra­ham who was 75 years old, it sounded ridiculous. Especially God wanted to bless all people of all na­tions through him. God's promise was too big to believe. But now we can see that God kept his promise faith­fully and we are one of Abraham's descen­dants. Who would be the great­est except Abraham, the ancestor of faith, who be­lieved God's promise absolutely. Many people name their precious sons after his name. Abra­ham Lincoln is one of them. There are many promises of God which say that God blesses those who love him (Ro 8:28). But to believe the prom­ises of God is not easy. There is a young man who studies the Bible dili­gently. He wants to be a mis­sionary to North Korea some­day. But he has not even one prom­ise of God in his heart.

How can we learn to give something to God? First of all we must grasp the key point of the Bible. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever be­lieves in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Christianity begins with the word "give." God gave his one and only Son. This is the foun­dation of Christiani­ty. This is the beginning of Christianity and the end of Christianity. Paul grasped the key point of the Bible and said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ac 20:35). Paul wanted to know Christ. He knew Jesus more and more. Finally he said, "It is more blessed to give than to re­ceive." To give something to God should be our lifestyle. If we don't have any­thing to give to others, we can give a cup of cold water or heart-mov­ing Bible verses.

There was a young man who never learned how to give. So when he had something to eat, he ate all by himself. He became like a polar bear at the age of 19. Once, someone asked him, "What do you want?" He said, "I have a great marriage problem." When he did not learn how to give to others and when he had to study hard, he became a slave of mar­riage desire at the age of 19. His Bible teacher bought this young man lunch more than 100 times. But he did not say, "thank you," even one time. His Bible teacher real­ized that he should learn how to thank God and others, so he told him a story. "There is a young man. He has studied the Bible with his Bible teacher for the last three years. His Bible teacher bought him lunch more than 100 times. But he never bought his Bible teacher lunch even one time." Then the young man was very much sur­prised, "Who was it?" "That's you." At that time, he realized that he had studied the Bible in order to get lunch from his Bible teacher. He repent­ed and bought a din­ner for his fian­cee. That was the first time he bought something for others.

There was a young man who never spoke at meal time. Even though he ate every day with others, he never said even a few words. It was because he had no interest in others, but had inter­est only in eating. So his Bible tea­cher gave a prayer topic for him to say a few words while eating with others. To give to God what is God's is to know the mind of God. There are many Christians who do many things. But there are few Chris­tians who know the mind of God. God's heart's desire is to save all men, missing no one, through his Son Je­sus Christ. This is the reason we pray to raise 10,000 Bible teach­ers and spread them all over the world. To engage in one-to-one Bible study is our giving to God what is God's.

These days there are many people who know how to get some­thing from others and no more. They are not smart people. In fact, they are nothing but economic animals or party animal men. They cannot please God. May God bless us to learn the heart of Jesus, that he gave his life as a ransom for many. May God bless us to learn to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.