

# Lest We Should Offend Them

## An exposition of Matthew 17:24-27 with application

By Leon King

***24 And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?***

Tribute is a tax imposed by a king or other competent authority on his subjects. This is seen by studying 2 Samuel 20:24; 1 Kings 4:6; and Romans 13:6. In 2 Samuel 20:24, we see that Adoniram was over the tribute in David's reign. In 1 Kings 4:6, Adoniram was over the tribute in Solomon's reign. The "tribute money" shown to our Lord in Matthew 22:19 was the denarius, bearing Caesar's superscription. The tribute was the tax paid by every Jew to the Romans.

So, tribute is a tax imposed by a sovereign authority on his subjects. Now the question was; "Doth not your master pay tribute?"

***25 He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26 Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.***

Peter seems always quick to give an answer, so he said, Yes. Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter answered, *Of strangers*. It is clear that the reference is not to foreigners, but those who were strangers to the king's

own household - those who were not of his own family and house. Others were considered strangers.

Jesus' answer was, *then are the children free*. That is, they are free from paying custom, tribute, and taxes. What are we to make of this answer? It could mean that Jesus is speaking of himself as the king of Israel, yet that office is future in its realization. It could mean that He is showing Peter that the children of the king (himself) are free from tribute and taxes, which position the writer prefers. God's people are free from this world having been translated out of it. Our citizenship is in heaven. As he is not of this world, so we are not of this world, but He has chosen us out of the world.

***27 Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.***

*"Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them"* is a remarkable statement. God's children are free as Christ is free. Yet, we dare not offend those who are in places of power in the world by lacking to pay our tribute and custom. We want to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by our well doing. We believe that is the sense of this statement.

*Go thou to the sea; and cast an hook; and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money.* John Gill notes that the word is a "stater" as in the original text of the same value with a "sela" or "shekel" of the province; and so was just enough to pay the two half shekels for Christ and Peter. Can anyone doubt the fact that Christ has all knowledge? that He has all power? How can it be that this particular fish was first to take the hook of Peter, and how is it that he "happened" to have just enough money in his mouth to pay the tribute? How can we doubt the sovereignty of God over all His creatures?

*"And take, and give unto them for me and thee; There was enough to pay the tribute for both Christ and Peter, so the tribute demand was fully met. What was the object? Jesus directed that the tribute be paid, though they were free, lest they offend the authorities.*

## **What lessons do we learn from this portion of Scripture?**

### **1. We are obligated to the rulers over us for tribute/taxes.**

*Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way. -- Matthew 22:15-22. [See also Mark 12:13-17 and Luke 20:20-26].*

Render unto Caesar the things, which are Caesar's. Unto our appointed leaders, the Lord would have us submit to tribute.

### **2. God alone sets up powers, so when we obey powers, we obey God.**

*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do*

*that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. -- Romans 13:1-7.*

### **3. We are obliged to obey every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.**

*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. -- 2 Peter 2:11-17.*

We are duty bound to prevent offense to the powers by observing tax laws - whether income taxes, property taxes, personal property taxes, sales taxes, tolls, hunting licenses, fishing licenses, drivers' licenses, vehicle inspections, vehicle taxes and registrations, business licenses, social security taxes, luxury taxes, inheritance taxes, -- all taxes. And we are bound to obey every ordinance of man. Traffic laws, including speed limits, prudent driving, courtesy - game laws, bag limits, time observations, type of hooks,

nets, boats, guns, shells. While we may disagree with a law in its principle, there is no such thing as a "silly law" when it comes to obedience to it.

**4. There is no power, but of God. There is the fact of rule by "divine right." It does not mean the man or men in power are honest or righteous - but are probably just the opposite.**

*This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it **the basest of men.** -- Daniel 4:17.*

**5. God raises men up in places of power that His name might be declared and that He might be glorified.**

*And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: -- Daniel 2:21.*

*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. -- Romans 9:17.*

God raised up Sennacherib - then destroyed both him and his 185,000 soldiers. God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to punish Egypt, Tyre, and Israel. God raised up Cyrus - to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls. God raised up Darius the Mede, Alexander the great, and Napoleon.

God raised up Antiochus, Ptolemy, Augustus Caesar, Nero, Titus, Vespasian, and Constantine. God raised up Hitler, Mussolini, and Castro. God raised up DeGaulle, Churchill, Roosevelt, Hirohito, Tojo, Stalin, Kruschev, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin. And God raised up Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and our present morally debased government. God raised up our present

governors and mayors. Must we pay tribute and be in obedience to them? Yes - lest we, as those who name the name of Christ, offend them.

Only when a law is in direct violation of the higher law of God must we disobey. If the rulers say we cannot worship, then we must disobey and worship. If they say we cannot witness, then we must disobey and witness. If then, the leaders come to enforce the law they have made which is contrary to the plain command of God, then we must yield and submit ourselves to their pleasure. It matters not that it may cost our houses, lands, possessions, or even our lives. We must obey the LORD! In connection to this, there is an interesting article in the 1644 London Baptist Confession, which I quote:

**“LII.**

And likewise unto all men is to be given whatsoever is their due; tributes, customs, and all such lawful duties, ought willingly to be by us paid and performed, our lands, goods, and bodies, to submit to the magistrate in the Lord, and the magistrate every way to be acknowledged, revered, and obeyed, according to godliness; not because of wrath only but for conscience sake. And finally, all men so to be esteemed and regarded, as is due and appropriate for their place, age, estate, and condition.

**Rom. 13:5-7; Mat. 22:21; Titus 3; 1 Peter 3:13; 5:5; Eph. 5:21, 22; 6:1, 9”**