

What Is Caesar's?

By Susan Vogt

At times it is difficult to know what belongs to the realm of religion and what belongs in the civic realm. When the Pharisees tried to entrap Jesus on political issues, however, he replied, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22: 21). This activity will help you probe how to apply this in today's civic arena.

For

Adult / Couple

Season

Summer



Needed

Coin or paper money. (If you have poor eyes you may need a magnifying glass.)

Prepare in Advance

- If you are not already familiar with unbiased political reporting, becoming an informed citizen is part of discerning the right thing to do. Check out FactCheck <http://www.factcheck.org> and Politifact <http://www.politifact.com>

Activity Plan

1. Start with a prayer.

Almighty God, whose power transcends the political boundaries of our planet, help me to be wise, as Jesus was, in recognizing when to stand up for what is right, and when the issue is rather people of good will differing on strategy. Give me the wisdom to know when compromise may be the way to build a better world. Amen.

2. Slowly read Matthew 22:15-22 (see next page).
3. Look at your coin or paper money for one minute. Look at both sides and everything that is symbolized or written on it. Think about how this money reflects your work and your ability to pay for things you need. (Even if you don't work for money, your time is worth money.)
4. Questions to ask yourself and discuss:
 - Has anyone ever tried to trap me in a political argument? Have I ever tried to use Scripture to convince another person that I was right?
 - How do I view taxes?
 - As a necessary evil. If I don't pay them, I'll be fined or go to jail.
 - As a way to pay for public needs such as police, fire departments, roads, parks.
 - As a way to take care of the elderly, poor, and vulnerable in our society.
 - Which political issues of our day are properly the domain of government (You may not agree with the government's position but it is their right to make laws for the common good.)
 - Which political issues also relate to my faith and morals? i.e. Do not kill, Do not lie or steal, Do not commit adultery, Feed the hungry, Clothe the naked, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you...
 - Do any civic laws conflict with your faith?

These are thorny and complex things to ponder. Don't just listen to those who agree with you but listen to all sides of the political debates. Check the facts. Then pray some more.

Paying Taxes to Caesar

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.