



Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

Setting: Israel, circa 30 AD. It was the week before the Crucifixion... and things were heating up between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Tensions are high, there, now; they were then, as well. The occupation by the Romans had been an ongoing offense to the conquered Jews for generations, and the salt in their open wound was the taxation imposed on them by Rome, by force. In Jerusalem, it was April 15th...

"Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap (Jesus) in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, 'Whose



portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then he said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away." (Matthew 22:15-22)

There is nothing closer to a man's heart than his wallet. There is nothing that evokes an emotional reaction greater than shelling-out taxes to a government that is not your friend. It's hard enough when a citizen feels that his leaders were hand-picked, and their policies align with the electorate's preferences. When there is any misalignment (*call it a drop in "public approval"*), finding a moral exit from tax obligation becomes a hopeful search.

Caesar's Rome was a harsh enterprise for people who weren't part of their elite citizenry. If there was ever a time when a moral/religious exception to sending the check would be granted, it was in Jesus' day. *What would God say to avoiding the tax man?*

Jesus' answer: "Pay up," to put it bluntly. "And, while you're at it, don't forget your obligation to be current with God, as well." Don't short change the government... and, don't short change God.

A big week for Americans; we all have an action demanded of us, as citizens, on Thursday. *What do we do about Caesar?*

God's tax counsel still stands: no funny business. No offshore shenanigans. No shell game sleight-of-hand. Compute your portion of the state and national tax burden, and send it in - with, or without a smile. Do it every April.

Don't miss the second part of his response, either: every time you receive a dollar, give God His dime. If Caesar took 50¢ out before you got it, make the dime your next move. *Why?*

In this economy, no one wins by getting behind on their tax obligations: *write the tax check*. And, in this economy, you need powerful alliances more than ever before: *write the tithe check*.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,' says the Lord Almighty. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:10-12)

I'm writing three checks this week: one to President Obama, one to Governor Schwarzenegger, and one to God. *For an obedient Christian, there are no options...*

Bob Shank

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