



A plot, an
ancient coin
and a timeless
answer
to one of
the most basic
questions
every person
has to face.

Authentic denarius of Tiberius Caesar dated 29 A.D. used by
courtesy of Rare Coin Company of America, Inc., Chicago—
—photo by Joe McKenzie.

THE CLUE TO YOU

by CHARLES C. RYRIE

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It's my life! I'm going to do my own thing.

Not suicide. I don't think I have the right. . . .

My body is mine. Nobody can tell me I have to have this baby.

Do you have sole rights to the life that you call yours? Or are there prior claims?

It may seem surprising that the Lord Jesus Christ should have dealt with such a vital issue almost incidentally in reply to a pitfall question. And yet I think He did.

The exchange is a familiar part of the gospel record. A group of adversaries, Pharisees' disciples and Herodians, had carefully set a trap. They sprang it with a question: "Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:17).

The issue involved much more than the hateful duty of paying taxes to a foreign power. "Thou mayest not set a foreigner over thee," said the Jewish law in Deuteronomy 17:15, and Caesar was a Gentile. If the Lord had answered, "Yes, tribute to Caesar is within the law," He would have been saying in effect, "The law is broken and it is all right

not to follow that command." On the other hand had He said, "Paying Caesar taxes is unlawful," He would have uttered treason.

Of course He did neither. Instead He said, "Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny" (Matt. 22:19).

This was no ordinary penny. In fact the verb used in this passage implies that they had to send for one of these coins, the special *denarius* used in paying tribute. This would have been logical because the coins in use for everyday business in Judea bore no image. Jewish law forbade making a "graven image" and the Jews would have revolted rather than use coins like the tribute money.

There were several reasons. The *denarius* used for taxes not only bore the emperor's image, it also acclaimed him God. "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus," the inscription read on the image side. The other side bore the image of the emperor's mother and was inscribed, "pontif maxim" or "high priest."

Here were three things very irksome to a Jew: two images, a Gentile ruler claiming to be God and another claim that the same emperor

was high priest. Jesus' question, therefore, must have been like salt in the wounds of His Jewish critics, "Whose is this image and superscription?" (v. 20).

"Caesar's," they replied as briefly as they could.

Jesus' answer followed. "Render [give or pay back] therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (v. 21).

THE BASIC POINT He makes is perfectly clear. If you use money stamped with the insignia of a government issuing it, if you share in the benefits and privileges which it provides, then you obligate yourself to meet the demands that government chooses to make on those within its jurisdiction.

Whenever you use money, whether you like it or not, you are saying, "I acknowledge the right of this government and accept my part in what it does." If you don't want to acknowledge tax obligation, don't use any money, don't look to policemen and firemen for protection, don't accept the benefits of traffic lights or drivers' licenses or anything linked with government. (*cont. on page 100*)

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There were many things about the Roman government that Jesus didn't like, but He paid the poll tax (Matt. 17:27). He did not speak to the question of whether the Jews ought to try to gain independence from Rome. He did not discuss the virtues of patriotism or even of resisting a dictatorship as Rome was. He was a very radical religious revolutionary, but He was not a political one. Here He simply says, "Give Caesar his due. Pay."

This statement, "Give Caesar what is Caesar's; give God what is God's," is often used to point out a distinction between the secular and the sacred, between government and God. And there is a distinction here. But I think there is also a relationship. Though the Lord doesn't say so here, I think you could understand this to mean, "Give Caesar what is Caesar's because in doing so you are obeying God. Your obedience to government is a reflection of your obedience to God."

I think there is another very important association here, however. I rather think the Lord is making a

connection between the image of Caesar on the coin and the image of God which is stamped on you. I think the Lord is saying, "You have a duty to God and you ought to recognize it. You ought also to recognize that God's image is stamped on you and that thereby you have an obligation to Him."

One might put it this way: The Jews were subjects. The image of their monarch was stamped upon this coin. What did they owe Caesar? The tax. We are men; as members of the human race we bear the stamp of the image of God. What, then, do we owe God? Ourselves.

Now what is the image of God? Let's look at Genesis 1 and see what we can discover. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, and in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." (Gen. 1:26, 27).

Notice that in this verse the image of God is linked with man's dominion, his ability to rule, his sovereignty. God is a ruler and man made in the image of God is also given a delegated authority on earth. Our wills demonstrate our sovereignty, our authority.

Every time you say, "I will," you are reflecting the fact that you are made in the image of God. This ability to will and then to act is something to be cherished and used for God's glory. Without it you would be a robot. But God is not a robot and man created in His image is not a robot either.

Look at Genesis 2:20 and you get another hint of what was involved. "And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field. . . ." This demonstrates an intelligence which was certainly not acquired. Adam didn't go to school to learn what to do. This was apparently an intelligence with which he was created.

Intelligence then, I would suggest, is part of the image of God in which you are created. Every time you say, "I know" or "I think," you demonstrate that you are created in the image of God. Something has been stamped on you, like Caesar's picture was stamped on the coin.

And then notice in the act of creation in Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Life itself is certainly part of the image of God. God is alive, and when He created man in His image, He had to create a living creature. So your sovereignty, your will, your knowledge, your brains, your intelligence and your life itself are evidences that you have been created in the image of God.

Every time you breathe, walk or think you reflect the fact that you have been stamped with the image of God. And that gives you a very high position. Man is an exalted creature, the climax, the ultimate in God's creative activities, because he alone was created in His image.

Man has corrupted this to be sure, but the stamp of God's ownership is still there. "And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years" we read in Genesis 5:3, "and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image." And that son had will, intelligence and life. These evidences had been corrupted and defaced, but they had not been erased.

It is not true to say that there is no remnant of the image of God in man today. James says not to curse another man because men were made in the likeness of God (Jas. 3:9, 10). Even the unredeemed person deserves respect because there is still something of the image of God in him.

Our wills are corrupted, but we still have wills. Our minds are corrupted, but they can still think wonderful thoughts and devise spectacular achievements. Don't forget the Lord Himself said that the children of this world, the unsaved are often wiser than the children of light (Luke 16:8).

Now, what is the Lord saying to these people with the tribute money and to me and to you today? He's saying, "Think about your relationships with government. But that's not the most important thing. The

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most important thing is, are you rendering or paying back to God what is rightfully His?"

I am His and you are His as shown by the stamp of will and intelligence and life. But when you and I were saved, we became His in still another sense: that of redemption. And yet that will that is in us can say, "Lord, I know I ought to serve you, but I won't;" that intelligence which is in us can say, "Lord, it's the logical and right thing to do to serve you, but I won't;" and if they do, our lives go their own ways instead of God's way.

Lay over against that the appeal of Romans 12:1, 2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

You have been created in His image and redeemed by His grace, but perhaps you are still going your own way. If so, give Caesar what is Caesar's; give God what is God's.

Suppose I have a pencil here with the name of the owner on it. It doesn't belong to me, it belongs to someone else. It says so; the name is stamped right on the side.

What shall I do? I'll give it back. But suppose I were to snap this pencil into three or four pieces and give one of them back? Wouldn't that be nonsensical? It belonged to the owner, all of it.

How very illogical and wrong it is likewise for one to say to God, "This part of my life is mine, and that's yours. You can have my problems, but if You don't mind, I'll keep the good things." How stupid it is to say, "Lord, You can have the decisions I can't make, but the ones I can work out I'll continue to make if You don't mind." That's just as senseless, illogical and crazy as breaking the pencil and saying, "Here, you take a part; I'll keep a part."

Paying God what is due Him is not a matter of giving Him what I want to give Him and holding on to what I want to hold on to. It's a matter of giving Him everything, because I, in my totality of being, belong to Him. I can't keep my mind back and say, "Lord, You can have me from the neck down, but I'll think my own thoughts." When I

pay back God what is due God, it's everything.

DEDICATION OF LIFE is not weeding a garden; it is not pulling up this sin today and that sin tomorrow and the other sin next year and another one the year after that. It's not breaking the pencil piece by piece and giving it to God until, if you live long enough, He may have the whole thing.

Dedication is saying, "Here, Lord. Here's the whole package! Here I am, totally, completely, unreservedly. Here is the good; here is the bad; here are the desires; here are the fears; here is the known; here is the unknown. Here I am."

Or to change the illustration, dedication of life is like returning the contents of a borrowed notebook containing a friend's sermon outlines. I return the notebook to him. Then tomorrow in rummaging through my Bible, I find one of his sermon outlines. I had forgotten it, or didn't know it was there. What should I do? Pray, "Oh, Lord, what shall I do with this sermon outline? Shall I give it to him, or shall I not? Please help me make this decision. Blah, blah, blah?"

I don't have to pray about it or even think about it. Where does it belong? Along with those other pages. And if the next day or a year from now I find another piece, where does it belong? The same place. "Here, take them, quickly" I tell the owner, "they belong to you. I don't want them."

That's really what the dedicated life is like. At some point you say "Lord, here's the package: everything I know about." And tomorrow, or next week, or next year when something else comes to light, you don't debate it, you don't even pray about it, you don't even worry about it. You say "Well, of course, Lord, I gave You the notebook once. I should give You everything else that belongs there." And so you give that to Him.

It ought to be automatic, every time something else comes up. But some times it isn't. Sometimes we do debate, we do hold on, but it isn't logical; it isn't reasonable, it isn't right.

Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar? It surely is. Give Caesar, what is his. But it is more important to pay back to God what is His. For you belong to Him. END

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