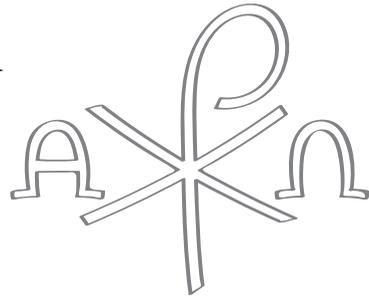


THE TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER

# TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Gerhard P. Grabenhofer



## MATTHEW 22:15-22 ESV

### Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Matthew Levi the Apostle and Evangelist to write this gospel around AD 50. We find Jesus on Tuesday of Holy Week teaching in the temple with His enemies, the Pharisees, trying to discredit Him.

<sup>15</sup> **Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.**

- St. Luke (20:19) records that after Jesus told the parable of the Wicked Tenants, “The scribes and chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that [Jesus] had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.”

<sup>16</sup> **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.**

- St. Luke (20:20) describes them as “spies who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch [Jesus] in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.”
- The Pharisees opposed Roman rule, while the Herodians were pro-Roman and sought to keep the Herods in power. Although these two groups were diametrically opposed to each other, their common hatred of Jesus brought them together against Jesus. To put it differently, here we see “church and state” united in opposition to Jesus.
- They try to sound like honest “seekers” and try to flatter Jesus to get Him off guard.

- They call Jesus “Teacher” even though they have no desire to be His disciples.

- Unless they later repented and trusted in Jesus, their “confession” will condemn them on the Last Day.

<sup>17</sup> **Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”**

- The act if they are concerned both about God’s glory and obedience to Rome.
- The Jews detested this tax because it was a constant reminder they were subjects of Rome.
- If Jesus were to have answered “Yes”, He would have made Himself an enemy of the Jewish nation and have turned many Jews against Him. If He were to have answered “No” He could be charged with treason against Rome. Perhaps Jesus’ enemies were expecting Him to say “No” (see Luke 20:20). They would later turn and twist Jesus’ words against Him (Luke 23:2).

<sup>18</sup> **But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?”**

- Jesus, the all-knowing God, sees right through them and knows their evil intent even as they disguised their trap.

<sup>19</sup> **Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius.**

- By having the coin around and using it, they implicitly recognize Roman rule.

<sup>20</sup> **And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”**

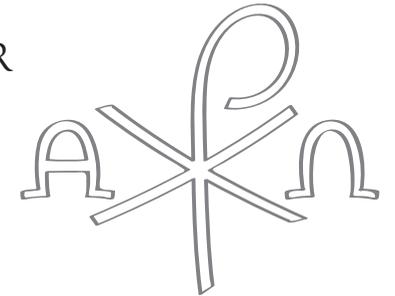
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<sup>21</sup> **They said, “Caesar’s.”**

- Against their own conscience they have to confess that it is Caesar’s coin and inscription. Thus they condemn themselves for not giving to Caesar and withholding from him what is his, as if they had a right to it (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 79, 283).
- The ruling government is there as God’s representative, sitting in God’s seat (Psalm 82:1; Romans 13:1-7).

**Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,**

- Martin Luther: “The first thing He says—‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s’—concerns subjects; the second—‘Give to God what is God’s’—is especially said to the government.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 79, 287)
- Luther: “It is rightly and honestly called ‘rebellion’ when someone refuses to give to Caesar what is his, but rather takes it away.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 79, 283)
- Luther: “[A] limit and boundary are set for sovereigns, so that they are to rule in such a way that they do not take from their subjects what is not theirs, but plan to give and do what they owe and to oversee lands and peoples in such a way that they increase and prosper.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 79, 288)

**and to God the things that are God’s.”**

- Luther: “Those who steal from God,’ as the prophet Jeremiah says, means those who do not preach God’s Word correctly, who withhold from the people the words they ought for God’s sake, to give them and instead give them different words. They rob and steal not from God in heaven above, but from the people to who God commanded that it be given.” (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 79, 283)

- God is Lord over our whole life, even the secular. We can render to the state while serving God. Conflict only arises when the state oversteps its God-given bounds. Then we obey God (Acts 4:19; 5:29)
- St. Augustine: “We are God’s money. But we are like coins that have wandered away from the treasury. What was once stamped on us has been worn down by our wandering. The One who restamps His image upon us is the One who first formed us. He Himself seeks His own coin, as Caesar sought his coin. It is in this sense that He says, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,’ to Caesar his coins, to God your very selves.” (*Tractates on John*, 40.9)
- Tertullian: “That means render the image of Caesar, which is on the coin, to Caesar, and the image of God, which is imprinted on the person, to God. You give to Caesar only money. But to God, give yourself.” (*On Idolatry*, 15)

<sup>22</sup> **When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.**

- Here is the stupidity of unbelief. Although Jesus here made human wit and wisdom into foolishness and showed—and they recognized—He had wisdom far greater and beyond them, they did not accept it or even stay around to hear what else He had to say.

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