

When Did You Stop Cheating on Your Taxes?

20 Pentecost A – Oct 17/18, 2020

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Matthew 22:15-22

15The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. 16So they sent their disciples to Jesus, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” 18But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” 21They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then Jesus said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” 22When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

This is the 2nd of 5 controversy stories in this final (5th) section of Matthew’s gospel before the Passion. During the final week of his life Jesus has entered Jerusalem, overturned the tables of the moneychangers, engaged the crowds with his teachings and moved openly to engaging the religious leaders who are offended, confused and frustrated with who and how Jesus is presenting himself and his ideas. He is upsetting to the ideas, traditions, rituals and authority they hold dear. He questions and refocuses their centering and understandings. He captures the crowd’s attention and opens their hearts and minds to new insights to this Dominion of Heaven and living as Children of God. As the tensions increase, the topics become more intensely controversial and personal. The entrapment that the leaders are attempting is a clear form of passive aggressive conflict....their question here is not motivated by curiosity it is motivated by a sense of power and a desire to attack. Herodians are a Jewish sect that wanted (like Pharisees) Jewish political independence but unlike the Pharisees who wanted a theocracy [religious], Herodians worked with the Romans and wanted a member of Herod’s household to rule [secular]). Both groups are against Jesus along with the Sadducees who tended to be more religiously literal, politically minded, and aristocratic.

“Hypocrites” literally means one of little understanding or in Greek, “Play actors.”

Recall a time when someone was trying to ‘bait’ you, deceive you into thinking they

were actually interested or curious but in reality, were just trying to manipulate you. How did you respond? Were you reactionary or did you slow things down and “catch” what they were doing and choose to respond differently? Jesus is responding here fully aware of their deceitfulness. What is necessary to stay aware of these types of conversations coming at you?

I. Steps to navigating a response:

- a. Be aware of who people are as they talk with you – their perspective, how they reason, how they present ideas, are they generally negative/positive or thoughtful.....
- b. Listen, TRULY slow down and LISTEN to what is being said. Figuratively put your EMOTIONS in a jar and put them on a shelf – noting how strong, intense and what kind they are.
- c. Think about what may truly be the underlying motivation for the question/ Is it curiosity or is it something else.
- d. Consider what they are trying to get you to do and consciously decide if you want to “deliberately fall” into one of the traps. **If not, then design a response that moves you to where you want the topic to go.** In Jesus case this meant recognizing the “either/or” setup his opponents were offering and responding by acknowledging the current political system and requirements as well as acknowledging the presence and role of God in life. Common setups (Types of Ethical Arguments) are:
 - i. Either/Or Forced choices
 - ii. Assumed authority about all kinds of topics, no reference to real authority. See it my way.....and there’s no other way.
 - iii. Bullying – pure expression of power
 - iv. Exhibitionism – expression of perspective not a conversation
 - v. Target Du jour – target of the day or convenience
 - vi. Actively passive influence thru relationship – “trust me, cousin”
 - vii. Red Herring/Smoke Screen/Potemkin Village – False Front
 - viii. Gaslighting – causes you to question reality/facts/sanity
 - ix. Factual distortion/Alternate reality/Altered States
 - x. Sophisticated Temper tantrum

- xi. Martyring – trying to manipulate your emotions to sympathize
- xii. Assuming partnership/agreement/cooperation – like sales calls

e. Consciously Decide your response based on your values/thinking/beliefs/goals/priorities so that you honor the role of God and your response to whatever the other topic is.....then you will find the path of faithfulness.