

Image is Everything

Mark 12:13-17

Control. We all crave it, pursue it relentlessly, and become resentful when we lose it. We attempt to control our job, our image, our spouse, our kids, our friends, our income, our future. The truth is without the power of God, we can't even control ourselves.

The groups and individuals in Jesus' day were no exception. The religious ruling authorities were panicking. Because of Jesus, and those that followed him, their control on the Jewish people was slipping. Possibly as much as two years earlier, the Pharisees "began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." (Mark 3:6). Now this week, just days before Jesus' death, their hatred for him has intensified.

Like the ruling authorities of Jesus day, his presence in our lives can unnerve and distress us. We like to be in control. We may even resent a God that tells us to give ourselves to him. Jesus reminds us to look to God for the source of life, and the very best thing we can do is give ourselves back to the one who created us, the one who died for us, the one whose image is imprinted upon us. Jesus encourages us to take our focus off the temporary and fleeting things of this world, and focus on relinquishing control of our lives into his capable hands.

- 1) **Read vs. 13-14.** The Pharisees and Herodians are sent by the religious authorities to question Jesus. Read the beginning of vs. 14 when they are flattering Jesus. What are the various things they say about Jesus? Are these true of Jesus?
- 2) If they recognize these things in Jesus, what stops them from accepting him as one sent from God?
- 3) At times people can have good theology and understand exactly who Jesus is, yet fail to accept his teaching. What gets in people's way from accepting Jesus' teaching in a life-changing way?

- 4) What are the hindrances in your life (the Bible calls these idols) that potentially get between you and Jesus?
- 5) **Read vs. 14-15.** The imperial tax referred to here is a poll tax. In other words, it was indiscriminate, not based upon purchases, income, or property. To make it worse, in the Roman world, conquered people were to pay this tax to Caesar. It was surely a bitter reminder that they were subject to the Romans. Many believers thought this an important issue, in that Rome was an evil empire occupying God's land. Some flat out refused to pay the tax for this reason. *What are some political issues today that Christians perceive as important enough to take a stand?*
- 6) **Read vs. 16-17.** Jesus changes the conversation by contrasting the cold, dead image of Caesar on the denarius with the living eternal image of God on us. Not only does he get out of their trap, he directs their focus on eternal, kingdom matters. What are the implications for us as believers? In other words, how does the fact that we are created, redeemed, and being conformed into his image affect the way we relate with God? The way we relate with other believers? The way we relate with non-believers?
- 7) Jesus tells them (and us) to give back to God what is God's. Jesus means we are to give ourselves to God! What does that look like practically and daily? For help, see Romans 12:1 and Colossians 3:1-4. How might giving ourselves to God change our friendships? Marriage? Job? School? Neighborhood?
- 8) Look at the last sentence of the passage, "And they were amazed at him." Sadly, for the most part, the Pharisees and Herodians are unmoved after this exchange. Though they are "wowed" by Jesus, they do not recognize him as Messiah, or even as one sent from God. Talk about the danger of encountering Jesus, being amazed, and being unmoved. For help, look at James 1:22-25.
- 9) How does this manifest itself in others' lives? In your life?