

# WISDOM FROM GOD

An open Bible is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat. The pages are filled with text, and several horizontal lines of text are highlighted in various colors: green, orange, red, and blue. A yellow highlighter is positioned vertically across the center of the open book, resting on the pages. The background is dark and out of focus.

a look into  
influential Bible passages and themes

Today's Scripture Reading:

# MARK 12:13-17



## MARK 12:13-17

**13** And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians to trap him in his talk. **14** And they said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" **15** But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." **16** And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." **17** Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

# MARK 12:13-17





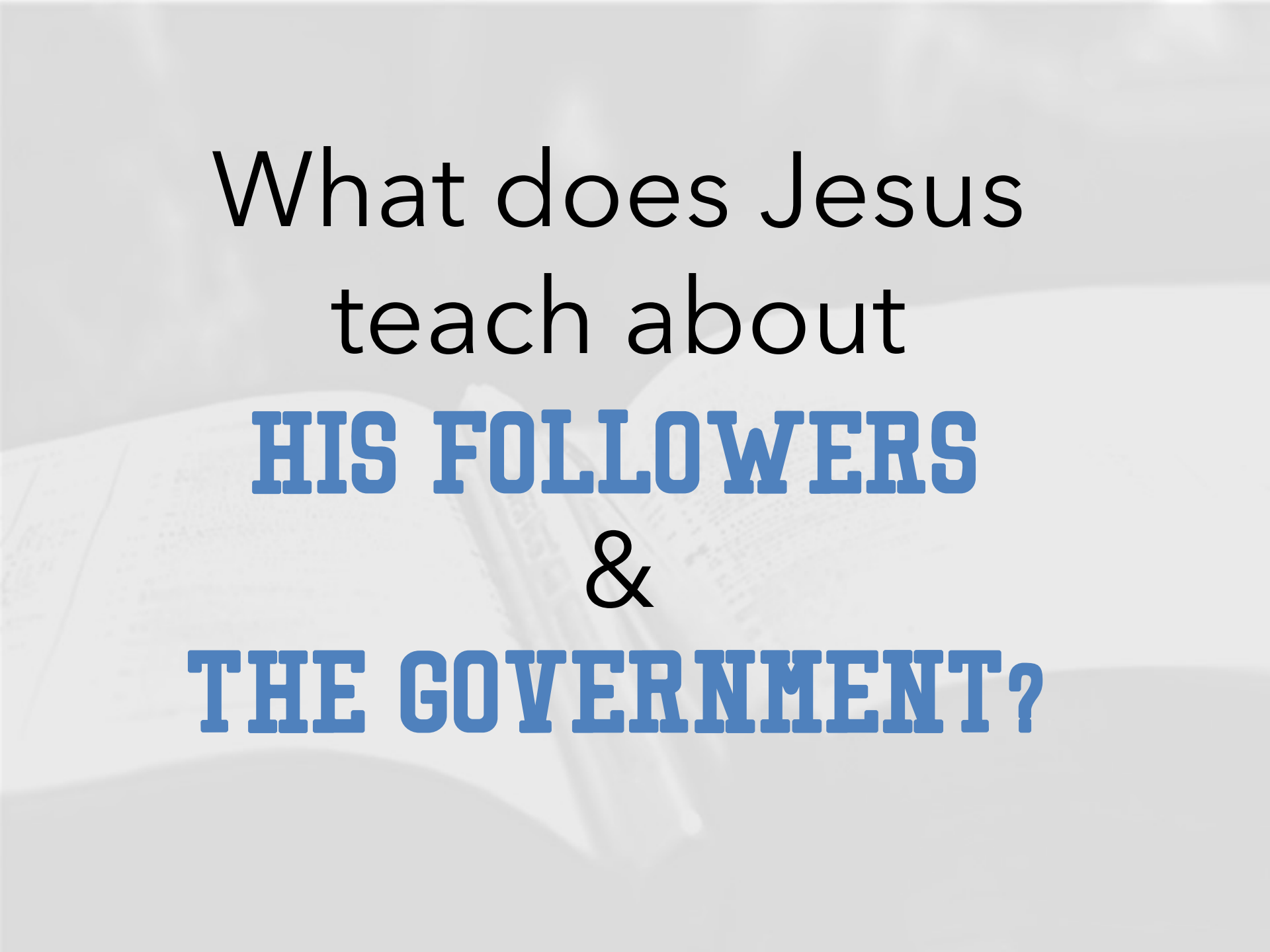
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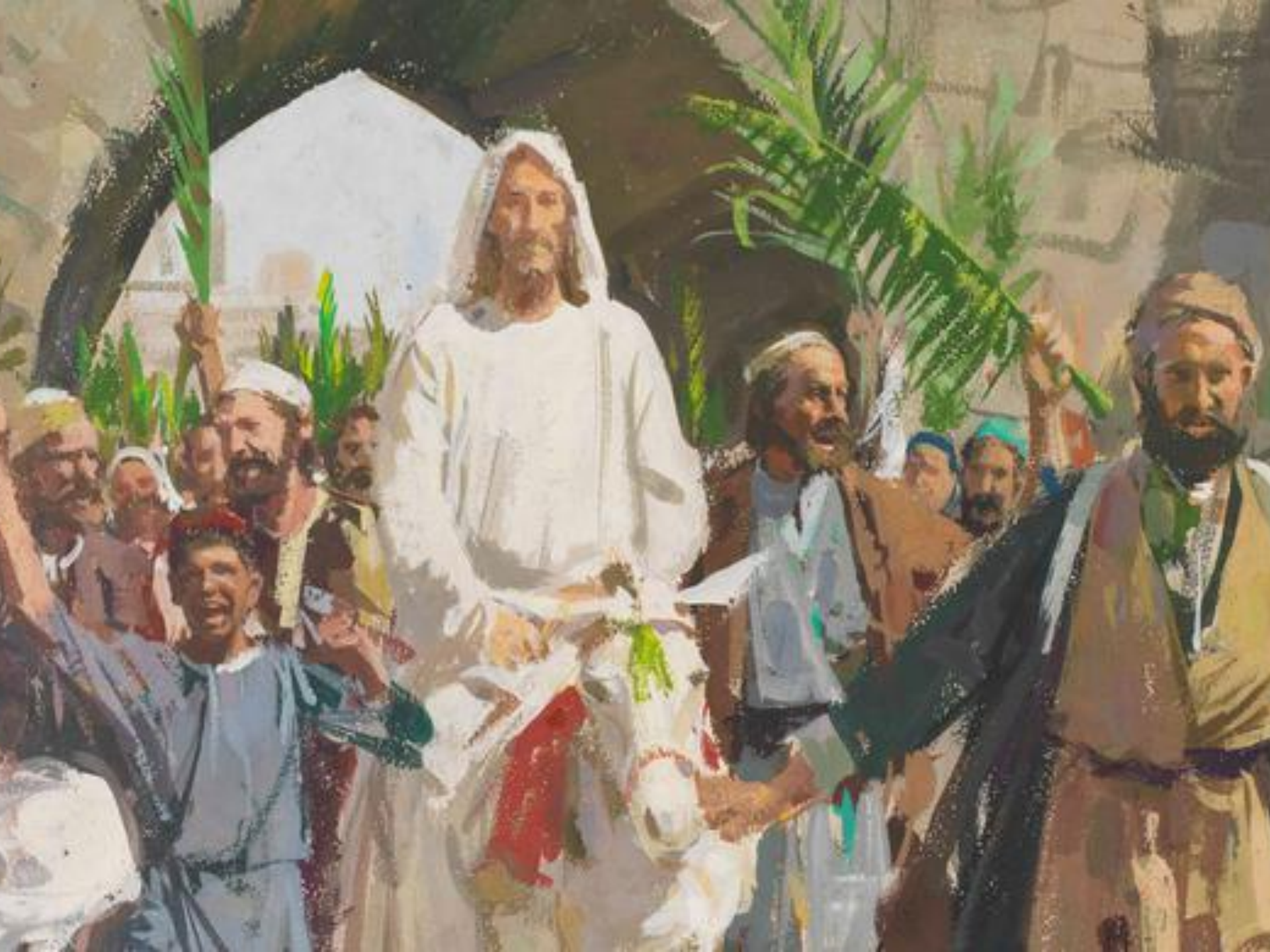




What does Jesus  
teach about  
**HIS FOLLOWERS**  
&  
**THE GOVERNMENT?**

# 1. The **CONTROVERSY**

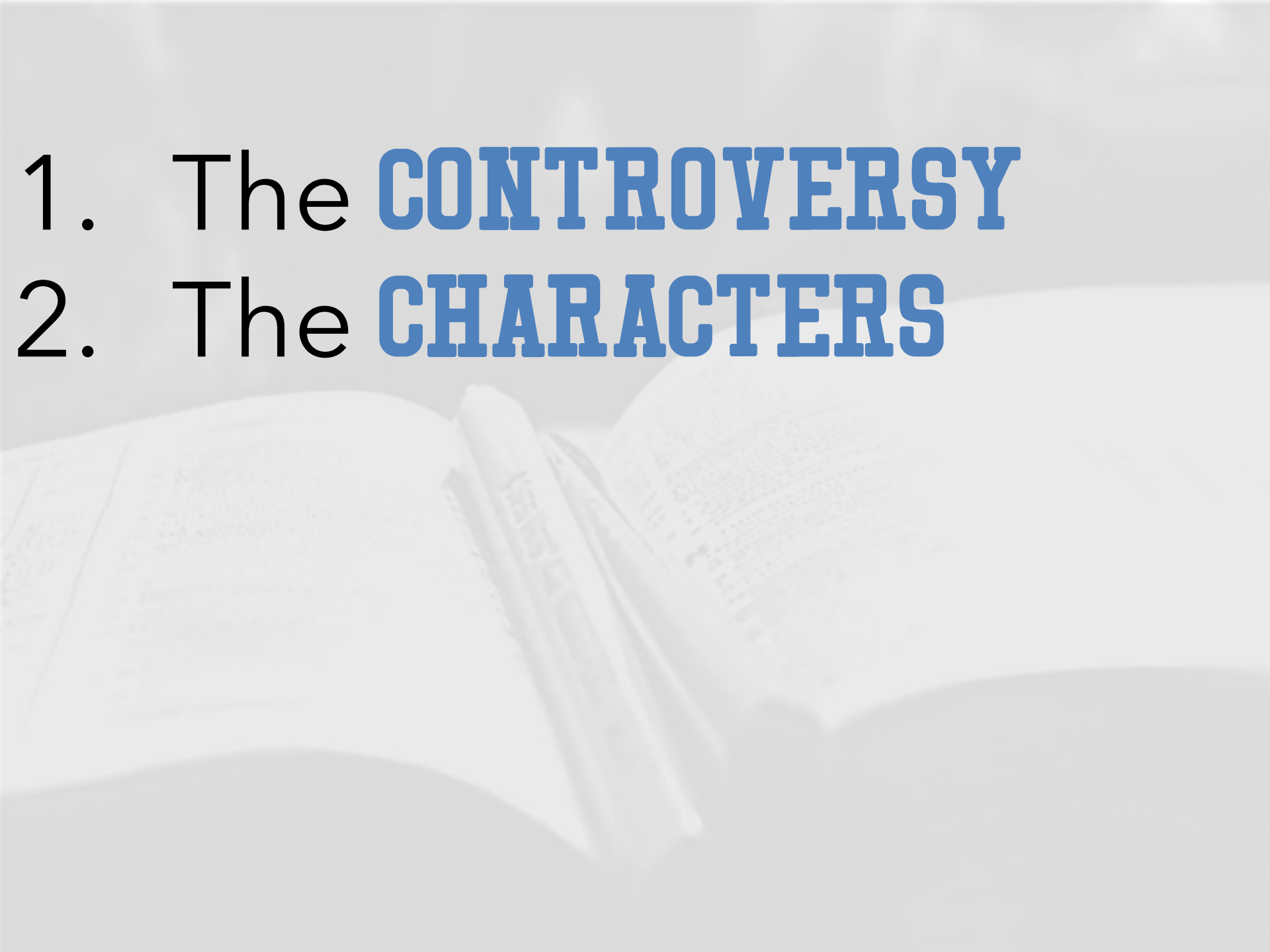




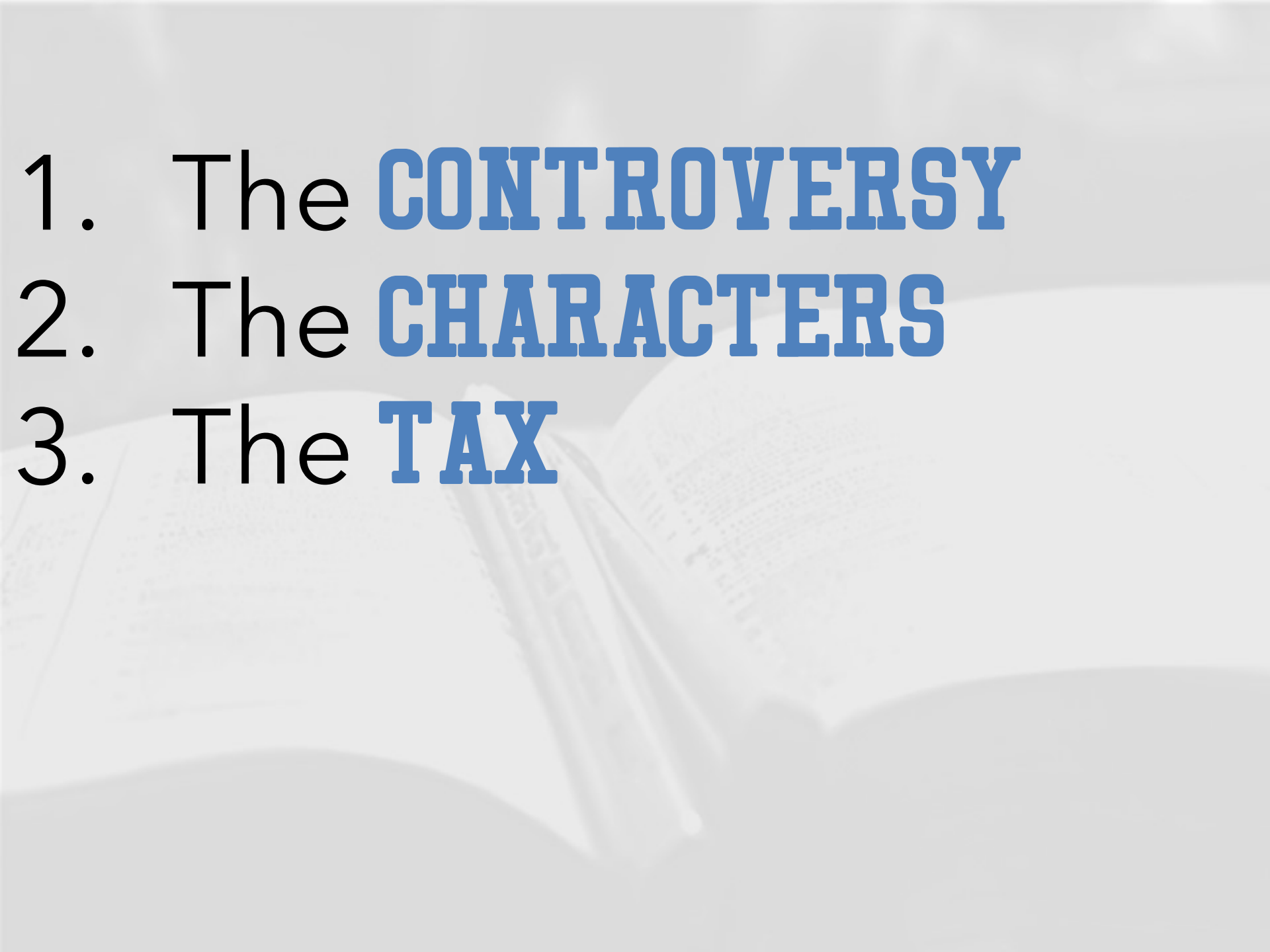






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- The background of the slide is a soft-focus photograph of an open book. A pen is lying across the pages of the book, positioned diagonally. The lighting is bright and even, creating a clean, academic atmosphere.
1. The **CONTROVERSY**
  2. The **CHARACTERS**

**13** And they sent to him some of the **Pharisees** and some of the **Herodians** to trap him in his talk. **14** And they said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" **15** But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." **16** And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." **17** Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

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- The background of the slide features a soft-focus image of an open book with a pen resting on its pages. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.
1. The **CONTROVERSY**
  2. The **CHARACTERS**
  3. The **TAX**

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1. The **CONTROVERSY**
2. The **CHARACTERS**
3. The **TAX**
4. The **TRAP**





IF **YES** → Jesus is alienated as a fraud

IF **YES** → Jesus is alienated as a fraud

IF **NO** → Jesus is crushed by Rome as a rebel

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**PRINCIPLE #1:** All governments are established and ordered by God



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**ISAIAH 10 → GOD USES ASSYRIA TO JUDGE ISRAEL**

**ISAIAH 45 → GOD REFERS TO CYRUS, A KING  
SUBJUGATING THE JEWISH PEOPLE, AS "HIS ANOINTED"**

**JEREMIAH 29 → GOD COMMANDS HIS PEOPLE TO "SEEK  
THE WELFARE" OF BABYLONIAN CITY IN WHICH THEY ARE  
BEING HELD CAPTIVE**

## **ROMANS 13:1-7**

**1** Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. **2** Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, **4** for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

## **ROMANS 13:1-7**

<sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

# **1 PETER 2:13-17**

**13** Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, **14** or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. **16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.



**PRINCIPLE #1:** All governments are established and ordered by God

**PRINCIPLE #2:** All governments are influenced and polluted by Satan

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## **LUKE 4:1-2, 5-8**

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry...<sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,<sup>6</sup> and said to him, **"To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will."** <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

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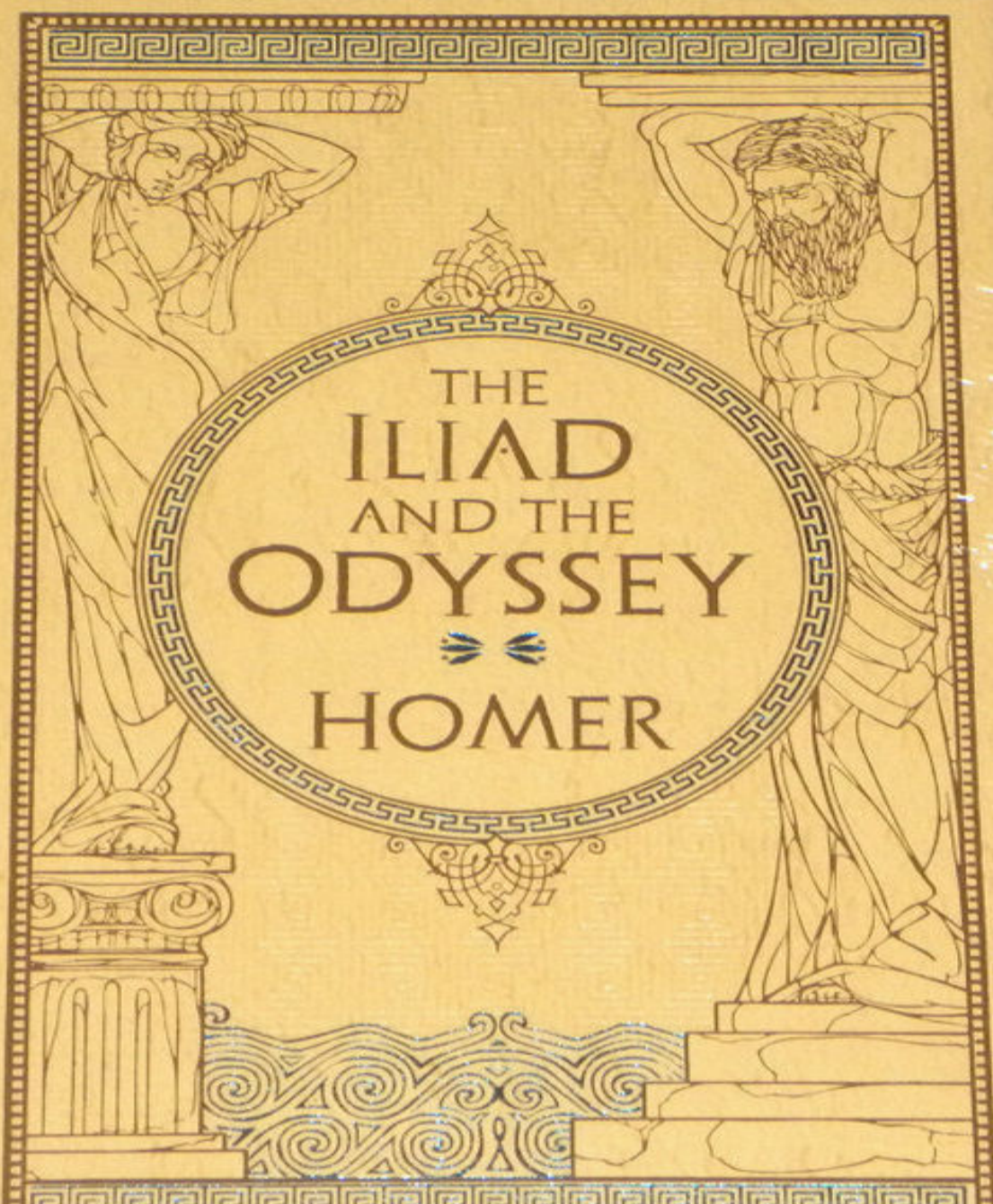


**DANIEL** → THE “PRINCE OF PERSIA”

**JOHN** → JESUS REFERS TO SATAN AS THE “RULER OF THIS WORLD” AND USES THE GREEK WORD *ARCHE* [COMMONLY REFERRED TO REGIONAL POLITICAL LEADER]

**2 CORINTHIANS** → PAUL DESCRIBES SATAN AS AND “THE GOD OF THIS AGE”

**REVELATION** → JOHN DESCRIBES ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD AS A MONSTROUS BEAST CONTROLLED BY SATAN, CONSTANTLY OPPOSING GOD



THE  
ILIAD  
AND THE  
ODYSSEY  
HOMER

# Three Principles of **CHRISTIAN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE**:



# Three Principles of Christian Civil Disobedience:

1. An **Ultimate Allegiance** to the Laws of God



# Three Principles of Christian Civil Disobedience:

1. An **Ultimate Allegiance** to the Laws of God
2. A Commitment to **Non-Violence**



# Three Principles of Christian Civil Disobedience:

1. An **Ultimate Allegiance** to the Laws of God
2. A Commitment to **Non-Violence**
3. An **Acceptance** of the Consequences



PRINCIPLE #1: All governments are established and ordered by God

PRINCIPLE #2: All governments are influenced and polluted by Satan

**PRINCIPLE #3:** No government should ever be confused or conflated with the Kingdom of God



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## **GENESIS 12:1-3**

**1** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, **and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**

## **LUKE 17:20-21**

**20** Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, **21** nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

*“When the world wants to change things—like we said before—they send in the tanks. But the citizens of God’s Kingdom, those he has chosen, are agents of transformation by way of sacrifice, peacemaking, humility, and love. God uses the simpler things of this world to humble the proud and powerful.”*

**> Martyn Lloyd-Jones**

# **MISTAKE #1:**

When the Church “**Theologizes**” Politics





**ACA  
IS HERE  
TO STAY**



**MISTAKE #1:**

When the Church “**Theologizes**” Politics

**MISTAKE #2:**

When the Church “**Wields the Sword**” of the State

## **2 CHRONICLES 7:14**

<sup>4</sup> if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.





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## **MARK 13:44**

<sup>44</sup> The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.





## I. INTRODUCTION | WHAT DOES JESUS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE STATE?

I don't need to tell you why today's subject is important. I don't need to use an example, or mention an article, or tell a story, because more than likely you've already lived too many examples in your own life, and you've read too many articles, and you've hear too many stories. Today, without question, American Christianity is confounded, tainted—whatever you want to call it—by politics. The church is stumbling around in the dark, and she has the stubbed toes to prove it.

Does Christianity have a vision for the state? Does the Bible have anything to say on this subject? Or, as some have criticized, is American Christianity so heavenly minded it is of no earthly good?<sup>1</sup>

Marx and Freud condemned Christianity as a pacifying “opiate for the people.” Communists feared its revolutionary implications. Some empires found Christianity to be treasonous, while others used Christians as dupes to achieve their own goals. In the name of Christ, some Christians justified violent crusades and inquisitions, while others—*also* in the name of Christ—retreated from society into monasteries and Amish communities.

In our own nation, political pundits, think tanks, and talk shows spend hundreds of hours and millions of dollars prognosticating about the “evangelical” vote. Older Christians lament the dramatic social change over the past half-century (it is now more socially acceptable to divorce your spouse than to pray in school), while Younger Christians grow increasingly frustrated with the politics of their parents' generation. Cynical Christians have in many cases given up government altogether, certain no change for good will ever occur. And Non-Christians...well, most of the time I cringe at what they think about the church and politics.

So, what does Jesus have to say about all of this? How should a Christian think about his or her relationship to earthly governments? That is the subject of today's sermon.

## II. THE ENCOUNTER | 12:13-15

We begin in the Gospel of Mark. While our text is brief, its subject matter is deep and wide. If we hope to grasp the truth of Jesus' words, we must begin by understanding the passage's context. We'll start by examining both Mark 11 and the beginning of Mark 12.

### A. The Controversy

In Mark 11, Jesus arrives at Jerusalem—with thousands of other Jewish pilgrims—to participate in Passover. He enters the city on Sunday, riding a donkey, and is celebrated as the long-lost heir to David's long-lost kingdom (**11:9**). On Monday, Jesus cleanses the temple of money changers and vendors. “Is it not written,” he laments, ‘my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a den of thieves!’” (**11:17**). The people were astonished.

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark Dever, “Jesus Paid Taxes” recorded September 19, 2010. Capitol Hill Baptist Church. I relied heavily on his sermon in preparing for this message; it is used and paraphrased at various points throughout.

The local religious leadership—known as the Sanhedrin—begin to scheme ways to destroy Jesus (11:18). They feared his ministry would inflame a city that had become a political and theological tinderbox. By Tuesday, the Sanhedrin confront Jesus head-on and demand Jesus provide his theological credentials. They imply he lacks the authority to do the things he has done and teach the things he has taught (11:27-28).

Jesus, in the tradition of Jewish rabbis, responds with his a question of his own (11:29-30). He traps the chief priests between theological and political pressure points, and they cannot answer him. What begins as an effort to undermine Jesus ends in the Sanhedrin's public humiliation.

Jesus then adds insult to injury by teaching the Parable of the Tenants (12:1-11), a parable which clearly implies that although he—God's son—had arrived to reassert God's claim over his people, he would be rejected and tragically killed. This parable infuriated the Sanhedrin; they knew Jesus had spoken it against them (12:12). But they could not act against Jesus because they feared the people rising in his defense (12:12). So, they retreated, schemed, acquired new allies, and sprung a much more subtle trap designed to separate Jesus from the protection of the people.

## B. The Characters

Here, we reach today's passage:

**Mark 12:13-17:** <sup>13</sup>And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians to trap him in his talk. <sup>14</sup>And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" <sup>15</sup>But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." <sup>16</sup>And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

Notice who the Sanhedrin send to trap Jesus: the **PHARISEES** and the **HERODIANS**.

- **The Pharisees** were a sect of devout ethnic Jews, knowledgeable in the Torah and all the practices of the Jewish faith. Due to their religious convictions, the Pharisees rejected the rule of Rome and they hoped to restore the independent, theocratic kingdom of David.
- And while little is known about **the Herodians**, scholars have inferred they were a sect of Pro-Roman Jews, politically allied with Herod, the Roman-appointed king of Judea.

These two groups of people did *nothing* together. They were political and theological *enemies*. The Pharisees were deeply opposed to Rome, while the Herodians were as pro-Rome as any Jew. Yet here, the government collaborators and the religious rebels are working together to undermine Jesus' ministry. Why? Because Jesus was a threat to the religious and political order of the day.

### C. The Tax

The question posed by the Herodians and Pharisees is genius. Taxes were a bitter subject for the Jewish people, though not for the reasons you might think. While the Jews did pay many taxes to Rome—local taxes, temple taxes, taxes to Herod—their anger stemmed more from what those taxes *represented*. And the head tax, the one mentioned here, was the worst of all.

For over 500 years, the Jews had been a conquered people, subject to the rule of empire after empire. That *political* reality had profound *theological* implications. In that era, when one nation conquered another, that said as much about the conquering nation's *religious* supremacy as it did their *military* supremacy. Battles on the field were believed to be representations of battles between the nations' gods. So, as a group of people routinely conquered, and as the only nation to claim their God was the only real and true God, the Jews were humiliated by their status.

Roman taxes intensified that humiliation. In 6 AD, the Roman Empire imposed a “head tax” or “census tax” on the Jewish people. The tax was levied to remind Roman subjects that their “heads” belonged to the Empire. Each Roman subject was to pay one denarius, worth a day's wage for the common worker. A denarius was also a coin of Roman currency, and on each denarius was an image of Tiberius Caesar. Each denarius coin also included an inscription which read: “Tiberius Caesar, Son of the God Augustus, Pontifus Maximus (High Priest).” In other words, **paying that tax, with that coin, reminded Roman subjects that they were *owned*, politically *and* theologically, by the Empire.**<sup>2</sup>

Within a decade of Rome levying the head tax against the Jewish colony, Judas the Galilean led a revolt against Rome. He entered Jerusalem preaching about the kingdom of God, claiming that God alone was the Jews' true king. He also cleansed the temple of money changers and vendors. Although his revolt was *crushed* by the Roman Empire, the undercurrent of tax-revolt was not.

### D. The Trap

So, fully mindful of that tax-revolt undercurrent, and of the parallels between Jesus and Judas the revolutionary (both Galileans, both preached the Kingdom, both cleansed the temple), the Herodians and Pharisees set their trap. They knew whichever answer Jesus chose, he would lose.

- If Jesus answered **YES**, he would be viewed as a Roman collaborator by his Jewish followers. They would feel betrayed by Jesus, and they would consider his claims about the Kingdom of God to be hollow and empty. Ultimately, Jesus would be alienated from his people, whom the Sanhedrin feared as the final obstacle in their plot to destroy Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> The personal nature with which the government had afflicted the Jewish people is not so unlike the way many today feel treated and valued as residents in the United States, particularly minorities and people of color. The history of institutional racism and oppression goes far, far beyond political disagreement.

- However, if Jesus answered **NO**, he would be branded a political criminal and—like Judas the Galilean—be crushed by the Roman authorities. Rome would treat Jesus’ open rebellion as the beginning stages of an armed revolt.

No matter the answer, Jesus faced humiliation, alienation, and perhaps even death. The Pharisees and Herodians have designed a heads-I-win, tails-you-lose conundrum. The stakes are *very* high. And yet Jesus sees through their cunning trap, sidesteps the Judeo-Roman political fray, and asks to see a denarius.

The denarius was a small coin, similar in size to a quarter. As we already know, it was inscribed with both the image of Tiberius Caesar and the declaration that he and his father were gods. The denarius was also unique in that it was literally minted from Caesar Tiberius’s personal wealth. It was so personal to Tiberius that he criminalized taking a denarius into a bathroom! The Jews considered the coin idolatrous due to its inscriptions, and so the denarius coin was rarely used in Judea. It is noteworthy, then, that (1) Jesus did not possess a denarius of his own, and (2) his questioners did. By producing the denarius in the temple, Jesus’ questioners revealed their hypocrisy; they brought a profane item into a sacred temple space set aside for the worshipping of God. Before answering, Jesus has already subverted the Pharisees and Herodians.

Once he receives the denarius, Jesus asks another counter-question: “Whose image and inscription is on this?” Jesus uses two words—“image” and “inscription”—as a way to echo two key teachings from the Torah: **THE SECOND COMMANDMENT** and **THE SHEMA**.

- **The Second Commandment**, inseparably linked to the first, prohibits the worship of any Gods besides the one true God. Jesus’ use of the word “image” reminds his questioners that God’s people swear allegiance to God and God alone.
- **The Shema** is a Jewish prayer based upon Deuteronomy 6, Deuteronomy 11, and Numbers 15. It is translated as “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God—the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The Jewish people were commanded to “inscribe” the words of the Shema on their doorposts and city gate.

Jesus counter-question is impressive. When he asks, “whose image is on this, and whose inscription?” his questioners can only respond with one word: “Caesar’s.” They know, as do the audience here in the temple, that these religious and political leaders have confronted Jesus with a piece of pagan coinage. In one of the most ironic passages of the entire Bible, Jesus, the true Son of God, proclaimed king by his own people, is standing in the Jewish temple, holding a tiny silver coin depicting the image of an earthly emperor claiming to be a son of a god.

Then, and only then, does Jesus finally answer the original question: “Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar’s,” he says, “and to God the things which are God’s.” To the Roman audience, the pronouncement of giving Caesar his own property back sounded benign, maybe



even supportive.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Jesus said much more. His statement wasn't just a clever answer; it captured a Biblical theology of government.

#### IV. THE TEACHING | 12:17

As he often does, Jesus spoke volumes in just a few words. While I think we need to be wary of developing an *exhaustive* theology of government from just this one statement, I do believe we can and should try to understand the implications of Jesus' statement, and then examine how they intertwine with so many other important Biblical concepts pertaining to government.

Overall, I believe there are three principles we can learn from Jesus here, principles which complement the Bible's teaching on government found in both the Old and New Testament.

##### A. All Governments are Established and Ordered by God

*First, Jesus' statement affirms the Old and New Testament teaching that all governments are established and ordered by God for his glory and the good of his people.*

At the time Jesus spoke the words "render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's" they were probably *startling*. Jesus was permitting his listeners to use *idolatrous* coinage and pay *oppressive* taxes to a *pagan* emperor who was *subjugating* God's people. When Jesus declared that Jewish people can and should pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus was saying—straightforwardly—that a *pagan* state is a *legitimate* state. He was saying that governments which even oppose God and his people did not necessarily lose their legitimacy.

Although his words may have been startling, Jesus' teaching is consistent with the larger Biblical teaching on government. Even though the Old Testament often denounced *pagan* nations, some of the prophets doing some of the loudest and most enthusiastic denouncing also declared that God was working *through* those *pagan* nations for Israel's good and God's greater glory.

- **Isaiah 10:** God uses the *pagan* nation of Assyria to purify and judge the nation of Israel, even while he promises to judge and condemn Assyria itself.
- **Isaiah 45:** God refers to Cyrus, King of the Medo-Persian empire continuing the subjugation of the Jewish people, as "his anointed" (45:1).
- **Jeremiah 29:** The prophet Jeremiah commands the Jewish Babylonian captives to "seek the welfare of the city" because they, too, would flourish as Babylon flourished. At the time, Jeremiah was even considered "unpatriotic" by the people when he taught this.

The Jewish people lived in this great tension. They believed that God sovereignly monitored all nations, and yet they also believed *pagan* nations were wicked, *idolatrous*, and dangerous. That tension is captured when Jesus, before his crucifixion, tells Pontius Pilate his Roman authority—the same power Pilate would later use to execute Jesus—came from God (**John 19:11**).

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<sup>3</sup> Remember, these coins *were* minted from Caesar Tiberius' own wealth.

Both Jesus' statement and the Old Testament teaching are consistent with the New Testament, where Paul and Peter inspired early Christians to be good citizens, even when facing persecution.

**Romans 13:1-7:** *<sup>1</sup>Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup>for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*

The overarching purpose of government, according to Paul, is to create a lawful and orderly society out of what might otherwise be destructive, dangerous chaos. To do this, government is delegated some measure of authority by God. That doesn't mean all actions taken by governments are valid, but some government is necessary in a world where evil and sin flourish. Paul makes it clear here that God uses government to keep law and order in the world. For that reason, Christians are to be obedient, as far as possible, to whatever government they find in power over them. Christians should submit to their governing authorities, pay taxes, and leave their personal desire for vengeance to the wrath of the state's "sword." As Paul states, even an Emperor as evil and cruel as Nero can be "God's servant for good" (13:4).

Now, this does not mean that governments always use their God-given authority as intended. The Greek word Paul uses in Romans 13—*tetagmenai*—is probably best translated as "to station" or "to arrange" rather than "to direct" or "to lead." What Paul is saying is that God orders governments like books on a shelf; he brings them into line, providentially and permissively, for his own purposes. As he did with pagan nations in the Old Testament, God uses governments as he finds them—in all their ungodly and rebellious mess—to serve his own providential purposes.<sup>4</sup>

And while many scriptures wage a sustained attack against the abuse of power by human rulers, it is undeniable that God's will is for his creation to be ruled and governed by human authorities. As St. Augustine noted in his famous work *City of God*, order is better than chaos, even though 'order' can transform into tyranny (and often does). And though our hatred of tyranny may lead us to the normal kind of violent, revolutionary behavior we have seen throughout human history, the Bible teaches and commands a very different way.

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<sup>4</sup> See the accessible commentary "Romans for Everyone" by N.T. Wright, one of several "Everyone" commentaries by Wright I relied up in preparation for this message.

**1 Peter 2:13-17:** <sup>13</sup>*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup>or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup>For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup>Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup>Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

Peter teaches what Paul said in Romans: Christians are to overcome evil with good (**Romans 12:21**). Christians are not forced to choose between oppressive tyranny and violent revolution. Living a peaceful, wise, visibly good life is, in the end, a far more revolutionary approach than overthrowing one corrupt regime and replacing it with what is likely to be another corrupt regime. That won't be easy. Christians will be called to suffer, and suffer unjustly—in the pattern of Jesus himself. Still, Christians must “respect the emperor” (**1 Peter 2:17**) just like Jesus acknowledged the authority of Pontius Pilate before his crucifixion (**John 19:11**).

Consider again Jesus' statement back in **Mark 12**. If Jesus is teaching his followers to submit to *Rome*, what government *can't* they support? After all, this is the government that would go on to kill Jesus and most of his apostles. And Jesus is saying that his followers should compliantly subsidize that government...not because Rome is in the right, but because government reflects God's character.

So, what do we learn from all of this? For one, we learn human government is not legitimate because it manages the military or police (“might makes right”). Human government is not legitimate because of some theoretical social contract made in the mists of time (John Locke). Human government is not legitimate because of an election (*vox populae, vox dei*). Human government is not legitimate because of the Marxist idea that it is inevitable, or that we as a people feel a need to be controlled. No, Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles are all saying the same thing: government is legitimate because it is established by God.

So, even when governments support immorality and sin, *as all governments have since the fall* in one way or another, we as Christians, at least normally, must continue to submit to our government even as we work to correct and improve it. We should be *very, very slow* to conclude that a government's action delegitimizes its God-given authority, and that Christians are therefore justified in openly rebelling against that government. We should, therefore, submit to the rules and authority of the governments over us, living as law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. We may or may not even agree with those taxes or laws, but if they are levied by legitimate authority, we should pay and abide by them. And we should thank God for all the good there is in our government, and we should pray for our leaders to uphold God's intentions for government to preserve order and justice.

#### B. All Governments are Influenced and Polluted by Satan

***Second, Jesus' statement affirms the biblical teaching that all governments are influenced and polluted by Satan.***

Jesus could have ended his answer simply by saying “give to Caesar that which is Caesar’s” but he did not. He finished his answer by saying, “give to God that which is God’s.” In so doing, Jesus contradicted what was declared on the very denarius they were all examining. After all, Tiberius used the denarius coins to declare that he and his father were gods. Yet here, Jesus is teaching that Caesar and God are *different persons*. He was teaching Caesar was *not* god, and while Jesus’ followers would obey the state, they would not worship it.

Here, Jesus is affirming another important dimension of the biblical teaching on government. While God organizes governments for the good of fallen people, scripture also teaches that Satan—a fallen angel actively working against God and his people—influences governments to accomplish evil. Indeed, Satan’s authority over worldly governments is astonishing. Consider the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, recorded in Luke 4:

**Luke 4:1-2, 5-8:** <sup>1</sup>And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup>for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry...<sup>5</sup> And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, <sup>6</sup>and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I will give it to whom I will. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will be all yours.” <sup>8</sup>And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

The Devil tempts Jesus and offers him “all the kingdoms of the world” (4:2). Jesus refuses to worship the Devil to acquire these kingdoms, but note that he does not dispute the Devil’s claim.

It would seem the authority of all worldly kingdoms has been given to Satan. It is not clear from this text whether we humans gave the Devil his authority when we sinned in the Garden (**Genesis 3**), or whether God originally entrusted Lucifer, the archangel,<sup>5</sup> with this authority before he rebelled. What *is* clear, however it came about, is that God’s enemy owns the authority of all versions of worldly governments and gives that authority to whomever he pleases.

This teaching is in various ways found in both the Old and New Testament.

- **Daniel:** A demon known as “the Prince of Persia” battles the angel Gabriel and attempts to delay a message sent by God to Daniel in Babylon (**10:13**).
- **John:** On three different occasions (**12:31, 14:30, 16:11**), Jesus refers to Satan as the “ruler of this world.” The term Jesus uses for “ruler” in all three of these passages is the Greek word *arche*. It was used almost exclusively in political contexts, and it denoted the highest ruling political authority in a region.
- **The Pauline Epistles:** Paul refers to Satan as “the ruler of the power of the air” (**Ephesians 2:2**) and as “the god of this age” (**2 Corinthians 4:4**).

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<sup>5</sup> Lucifer’s fall from an archangel to God’s cosmic enemy, Satan, is described in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14.

- **Revelation:** John also refers to all the kingdoms of the world as a single kingdom under demonic rule of Satan (**11:15**). This kingdom is symbolized as “Babylon,” the violent world empire that opposes God at every turn in the book of Revelation. Perhaps the most unsettling vision for this is found in **13:1-18**, where it is described as a beast.
- **1 John:** John teaches that “the whole world lies under the power of the evil one” (**5:19**).

So, while God does grant authority to governments to preserve law and order in a broken world, and while God orders governments to accomplish his own providential purposes, Satan—the “destroyer” who “deceives the nations” (**Revelation 9:11, 13:14, and 20:30**)—is involved in all of them, and he uses them to try and frustrate God’s purposes. In short, **while God sovereignly reigns over all of creation, Satan is still able to influence, pollute, and contaminate the rule of earthly governments.**

Once we accept that Satan’s evil influence taints earthly governments, we can begin to make sense our world, and why our history has been *defined* by violence. In all recorded history, there have been only a few decades where no major wars occurred, and even during those times significant local violence occurred. Most recently, the twentieth century—which was supposed to introduce the world into a new state of peace and prosperity—saw as many as 200 million deaths due to war and political conflict. This tragic reality testifies not only to the violent tendencies of the human heart, but also to the destructive nature of Satan and his influence.

Greg Boyd captures this idea by way of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, two of the most famous Greek myths. Homer’s stories, Boyd explains, are stories about humans driven by their passions to secure power, possessions, legacies, and to uphold religious tradition. And in every story, those humans encounter other humans who also possess their own desires for power, possessions, legacies, and religious faithfulness. Meanwhile, the “gods” incite violence by inflaming these individuals’ passions against one another—and the result is war. We see that same theme in the recent Wonder Woman movie, and even in our half-joking, half-serious conversations about the “Illuminati.” In all of these myths, **violence is not only the result of human passions, but how those passions are supernaturally affected and directed**

Our circumstances are not so different from Homer’s stories. As Boyd also notes, we often believe in *our* nation over and against *their* nation, *our* culture over and against *their* culture, *our* political ideology over and against *their* political ideology, and so on. Insofar as we yield to the demonic influences affecting the governments of this world, we will attempt to use our government’s power to control others whenever their nation, their culture, their religion, or their politics conflict with our own.

That is why we may, in limited circumstances, disobey governments. When obeying the government means disobeying a direct and straightforward command from God, the Bible teaches a consistent pattern of Christian civil disobedience. Consider the following examples:

- **Daniel:** Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all choose to disobey the laws of Babylon at various times, and to accept the consequence of their disobedience. In each instance, they explain to their Babylonian rulers they must obey God rather than man.

- **Acts:** After Jesus resurrects and ascends to heaven, the same Sanhedrin who sought to destroy Jesus are now working to silence His apostles. They order Peter and John to cease speaking about Jesus. Even though the apostles considered themselves part of the Jewish tradition, and therefore to some degree under the authority of the Sanhedrin, they refuse. “We must obey God, rather than man” they declare.

What can we learn from these passages about civil disobedience? I perceive three consistent principles for responding to our government if it requires us to disobey God and his commands:

1. **An Allegiance to the Laws of God.** When a government commands a Christian to disobey a direct command from God, God’s people must *never* obey the government. To do so would be to obey a lower authority while contravening God’s higher commands.
2. **A Commitment to Nonviolence.** When God’s people disobey, they should not resort to violence to reform or change the government. None of the examples above show a God-follower fomenting a violent revolution to overthrow the government. No, in each case, the God-follower pleads with the government civilly, graciously, and with conviction.
3. **Acceptance of the Consequences.** When God’s people disobey, they should be willing to accept the consequences of their actions. In each example, the God-follower never avoids consequences for his biblically faithful yet civilly disobedient behavior. Instead, the God-follower accepts the consequences of his actions. See especially **Daniel 3:16-18**.

There is perhaps no better example of a Christian applying these three of these principles than Martin Luther King, Jr. He, too, faced imminent danger, danger that often tormented him both physically and emotionally. Nevertheless, King’s civil rights tactics remained true to these ideas of Christian civil disobedience. His “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” is one of the most poignant arguments for prioritizing God’s law over the laws of men. King’s protests and marches were always non-violent, and when King and his fellow advocates broke the law, they graciously accepted the consequences of their actions, spent nights in jail, and continued to civilly disobey.

There is a legitimate role for government, and we must be thankful for it. But if Romans 13 speaks of the good of the state, Revelation 13 shows what kind of monster it can become when it does evil in the sight of God.

### C. No Governments Should Ever Be Confused or Conflated with the Kingdom of God

***Third, and finally, Jesus confirms that no earthly kingdom should be identified uniquely with God or his people.***

By affirming God’s sovereignty over all governments (including secular, pagan ones), *and* by affirming that governments remain polluted by Satan, **Jesus unhitched his followers from any specific nation.** Jesus’ teachings meant that his followers would never view themselves like the Jewish state or the Roman state, where god and government were inseparable.

God's people *had* been called into a national political and theological covenant with God. That was true with Moses, the Judges, King David, the Exile, Ezra, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, and so on. However, the time of Israel existing as a distinct nation was just a preview of what reconciliation could look like between God and man. **That era is now over and done with.** God's people are no longer to build a single, God-following nation-state. Now, we as the church are *international*.

Back in Genesis (12:3), God promised Abram all people would be blessed by his descendants, namely Jesus. That promise was foreshadowed in Rahab and Ruth's adoption into the Jewish community, and it was also foreshadowed by Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and the Magi from the East. Through them, we see glimmers of the international nature of God's people.

Today, as the people of God, we are freed to participate in and live under whatever government there is, wherever we live. Christ taught his kingdom was not of this world, and until his kingdom is *fully* realized, his people will live under the political reign of others. That is why Jesus turns his people to the nations before his ascension to heaven (**Matthew 28**). That's why brothers and sisters in Christ have more in common today than citizens of the same government. That is why the kingdom we seek to advance is not a government, but **the Kingdom of God**.

The Kingdom of God could not be any more different than worldly governments. Worldly governments are seen and known by their monuments and castles and political boundaries. But in Luke 17, Jesus makes clear that people would *not* be able to point at his Kingdom and say "Look, here it is!" because—as theologian J.I. Packer explained—the Kingdom of God exists *wherever* Jesus rules and reigns in the hearts of his repentant, obedient people.

Moreover, while worldly governments seek to make change in the world by way of might and military power, the opposite is true of the Kingdom of God. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones explain:

“When the world wants to change thing they send in the tanks. But the citizens of God's Kingdom, those he's chosen, are agents of transformation by way of sacrifice, peacemaking, humility, and love. God uses the simpler things of this world to humble the proud and powerful.”

If we fail to understand this...if we fail to grasp the distinction between the Kingdom of God and worldly governments, we are likely to commit two mistakes, one often leading to the other.

### **MISTAKE #1: When the Church “Theologizes” Politics**

As Christians, we must reject any argument that binds Christianity to any specific *political* view.

Today, I think it is more than fair to say many evangelicals believe a significant dimension of their responsibility to advance the Kingdom of God is *political*.

- **For Christian conservatives**, that often involves emphasizing righteousness, purity, and devout religious belief in the public square. It looks like outlawing abortion or gay marriage, winning the “culture war,” keeping the phrase “under God” in the pledge of allegiance, and fighting to keep prayer in the public schools system.

- **For Christian liberals**, that often involves emphasizing compassion, tolerance, and social justice in the public square. It often looks like campaigning for universal health care, championing public welfare systems, encouraging progressive cultural change, aggressively regulating corporations, and passing strict environmental regulations.<sup>6</sup>

Both Christian conservatives and Christian liberals often teach and believe that to be a faithful Christian is to advance either conservative or liberal policies. Both are *wrong*. **The kingdom of God cannot and must not be fused with any worldly government or political ideology.** This isn't about whether those political positions are "right" or "wrong." Thoughtful Christians can and probably should disagree about the best political approach to preserve and improve society. Some Christians may prefer conservative approaches, and other Christians may prefer liberal approaches. But that isn't the point; finding and working to achieve your preferred political view has *nothing* to do with *advancing* the God's Kingdom. Therefore, we must not bludgeon our brothers and sisters in Christ with guilt and shame when they choose a different political preference than we do. When we do that, we "**theologize**" our politics.

What do I mean by "theologize"? I'm referring to our tendency to heighten the stakes of our political debates and to infuse theological significance (i.e. a Christian *must* do X or Y in order to honor God) into political preferences (i.e. policy X or Y is best for society). **Christians should not do this.** Theology probably should inform our political preferences, but we must *never* declare a specific political strategy, tactic, or ideology as the one and only version to which a Christian may adhere. In the language we use at MACC, politics falls *squarely* within the category of preference, *not* principle.<sup>7</sup>

Consider a recent example: **the Affordable Care Act**. The ACA, also known as Obamacare, has been in the news nearly every day for a month. Recently, its repeal was defeated in Congress. Some believe Christians *must* support the ACA, while others believe Christians *must* fight to repeal it. **Neither are right.** Christians should agree that humans deserve to be treated with value, dignity, and worthy. They should also agree that oppression is wrong and unjust. That does not mean that Christians must agree that the most effective political means for achieving those goals is either passing or repealing a specific piece of legislation.

The same concept can be applied to **POVERTY**, **ENVIRONMENTALISM**, and even **ABORTION**. Christians can and should agree that humans should work to end unjust systems of oppression, to care for the environment, and to protect life inside the womb. But they do not necessarily need to agree about the preferred political approach to achieve those aims.

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<sup>6</sup> For recent examples, see Rev. William Barber's growing "New Moral Movement" as well as Jim Wallis' "Sojourners" publication and Rev. Troy Jackson's "Amos Project."

<sup>7</sup> I would describe political preferences as "principled preferences"—beliefs which the Bible does not speak to directly, but are informed in varying degrees by larger truths found in scripture. For example, a Christian conservative may reach the conclusion that the free market is more suitable to human affairs because it attempts to channel human depravity in a way that socialized governments do not. Likewise, a Christian liberal may reach the conclusion that universal health care is an appropriate way to care for the poor and marginalized in society. Both examples involve Christians thinking about Biblical ideas in relation not politics, but we must be careful not to confuse the general principles (total depravity, care for the poor) with specific policy ideas intended to address those general principles.



We get ourselves into trouble when we demand a certain kind of faithfulness from other Christians, where they *must* agree with a specific political policy. When we do that, we are ascribing Biblical weight where the Bible is silent. We are jumping into and aggravating the political fray where Jesus would refuse to. We are “theologizing” politics, and when we do that, we conflate the Kingdom of God with the governments and politics of this world.

Family, I have been convicted myself by this realization, and I believe that if we can get this right, we can not only avoid a significant amount of heartburn, but we can also avoid some of the pitfalls Jesus is teaching against here in **Mark 12**. We can avoid fusing together the state with the kingdom of God.

However, if we make this mistake, we are likely to make the second as well:

### **MISTAKE #2: When the Church “Wields the Sword”**

When we theologize our politics, we begin to believe that passing the right laws, electing the right people, and enacting the right policies will allow the church to “wield the sword” of the government (**Romans 13**) and begin to “take America back for God” as a Christian nation.

Family, we should be very wary of referring to any country as a Christian nation. Yes, some Christian principles influenced the founding of the nation, and yes, some founders were Christians, and yes, the courts have recognized the role of Christianity in the development of this country. But that does not mean our culture, our government, our society ever were “Christian.”

Consider **2 Chronicles 7:14**. It is used frequently cited among Christians eager to see America become a Christian nation.

*<sup>14</sup>If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land*

Family, this promise from 2 Chronicles is *not* for the United States of America. Christian identification with *their* nation and Israel in 2 Chronicles—while well intended—is exceedingly dangerous and confusing. Those promises *do not apply* to any earthly governments today.

The church is not the state, and the church should not seek to achieve its mission through the state. When the church has confused itself with the state, and attempted to co-opt the state’s power, it has often been corrupted and overwhelmed by the temptations of power.

In 4<sup>th</sup> Century Rome, the **Emperor Constantine** claimed to convert to Christianity after seeing a vision of Christ before a key battle. While the church was not perfect before Constantine, it was by and large an oppressed, minority religious group suffering wave after wave of persecution, known for its sacrificial deeds of love.<sup>8</sup> After Constantine’s conversion, however, Christianity

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<sup>88</sup> At the height of what became known as “the Plague of Cyprian,” believed to have been a version of deadly smallpox, as many as 5,000 people a day were dying in Rome. Most nobles, doctors, statesman, and priests fled the city, believing the disease was a representation of the gods’ anger. Meanwhile, Christians rushed the very city that

was popularized, nationalized, and institutionalized. It transformed from a community of persecuted, self-sacrificial, loving people into a political power structure coopted by Constantine and Rome.

Let us never forget that we are ambassadors of the Gospel, not “soldiers” for the Kingdom. The battles we fight are not against flesh and blood (**Ephesians 6**) but against evil, Satanic forces. That is why the church must *never* commandeer the state to achieve or protect its own interests. We certainly should not do so out of fear, for Christians have nothing to fear! As Pastor Mark Dever once said, “**Christians are like cockroaches; we can survive anything!**” Neither the Kingdom of God nor its gospel depends on government to go forward. The church has survived persecution for thousands of years. We always have and we always will (**Matthew 5**).

Family, we *are* indeed called to win America back to God, but not just America. We are called to preach the gospel to all nations: to Mexico and Korea and Afghanistan and the United Kingdom and the Sudan and the rest of the world. The question is: *in what power do we trust?* If we think for a moment that we are fulfilling the Great Commission by using the power of the sword to control behavior, we are deceived. We overcome not by the power of the sword, but by the blood of the lamb and the testimony of Jesus Christ (**Revelation 12:11**).

## V. CONCLUSION / Jesus Demands Everything

Before concluding, I want to make sure we do not miss an important point contained in Jesus’ teaching. Remember, when Jesus answered the Pharisees and the Herodians, he used the word “image” in his counter-question. He also said that we must “give to God that which is God’s.” Here, Jesus’ teaching is about *so much more* than government. It is about each of us, as humans, owing the entirety of our lives to God.

You and I are made in God’s image, in his likeness, and so we belong to him (**Genesis 1**). Despite our sin and rebellion, Jesus—fully God and man—was born as a baby, lived a difficult life, and died an unjust death so you and I could be reconciled to God and adopted into his family. But when we are adopted, we must begin to un-learn the ways of our old family and take on the ways of our new family. We must—as Paul says—offer our bodies as living sacrifices to Jesus (**Romans 12:1-2**). When we do that, we will find joy like the man who—after discovering a treasure hidden in a field—sells all he has and buys that field (**Matthew 13:44**).

My prayer is that you would hear Jesus’ words today, and you would prayerfully consider submitting your entire life—everything that you are—to the rule of Christ. If you do that, you will no longer be first and foremost a citizen of any worldly government. Instead, you will immigrate into a new kingdom, the Kingdom of God, and become a new brother or sister in our family here.

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had persecuted them for decades and began to care for the poor, sick, and dying at great risk to their own lives. They understood to love God meant to love and care for others just as Jesus did. During this period of time, Christians not only buried their own, but also pagans who had died without proper funds for burial. Reports estimate that some churches fed as many as 3,000 people per day. Once the plague hit Alexandria, the Christians there also risked their lives by washing the sick, offering them food and water, and consoling the dying. Romans began to marvel and often whispered in the streets “*look how they love one another.*” An epidemic that seemed like the end of the world helped spread Christianity.