

## Paying Back Caesar's Things to Caesar

"Render to all their dues."—ROMANS 13:7.

ACCORDING to Jesus, there are things we owe to God and things we owe to Caesar, or the State. Jesus said: "Pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." In these few words, he confounded his enemies and neatly summed up the balanced attitude we must have in our relationship with God and in our dealings with the State. No wonder that his listeners "began to marvel at him"!—Mark 12:17.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, the first concern of Jehovah's servants is that they pay back God's things to God. (Psalm 116:12-14) In doing so, however, they do not forget that Jesus said that they must render certain things to Caesar. Their Bible-trained consciences require that they consider prayerfully to what extent they can pay back what Caesar calls for. (Romans 13:7) In modern times, many jurists have recognized that governmental power has limits and that people and governments everywhere are bound by natural law.

<sup>3</sup> The apostle Paul referred to this natural law when he wrote about people of the world: "What may be known about God is manifest among them, for God made it manifest to them. For his invisible qualities are clearly seen from the world's creation onward, because they are perceived by the things made, even his eternal power and Godship, so that they are inexcusable." If they will respond to it, natural law will even move the consciences of these unbelievers. Thus, Paul further said: "Whenever people of the nations that do not have law do by nature the things of the law, these people, although not having law, are a law to themselves. They are the very ones who demonstrate the matter of the law to be written in their hearts, while their conscience is bearing witness with them."—Romans 1:19, 20; 2:14, 15.

<sup>4</sup> In the 18th century, the renowned English jurist William Blackstone wrote: "This law of nature [natural law], being co-eval with [the same age as] mankind and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times: no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this." Blackstone went on to speak of "revealed law," as found in the Bible, and he commented: "Upon these two foundations, the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws; that is to say, no human laws should be suffered [allowed] to contradict these." This is in harmony with what Jesus said about God and Caesar, as recorded at Mark 12:17. Clearly, there are areas where God limits what Caesar can require of a Christian. The Sanhedrin strayed into just such an area when they commanded the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus. Hence, the apostles correctly responded: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:28, 29.

### "God's Things"

<sup>5</sup> Especially since 1914, when Jehovah God, the Almighty, began ruling as king through Christ's Messianic Kingdom, have Christians had to be sure not to give God's things to Caesar. (Revelation 11:15, 17) As never before, God's law now calls on Christians to be "no part of the world." (John 17:16) Being dedicated to God, their Life-Giver, they must demonstrate clearly that they no longer belong to themselves. (Psalm 100:2, 3) As Paul wrote, "we belong to Jehovah." (Romans 14:8) Moreover, at a Christian's baptism, he is ordained as a minister of God, so that he can say with Paul: "God . . . has indeed adequately qualified us to be ministers."—2 Corinthians 3:5, 6.

### "Caesar's Things"

consciences allow them to satisfy these demands. For example, true Christians are among the most exemplary taxpayers on earth. In Germany the newspaper *Münchener Merkur* said of Jehovah's Witnesses: "They are the most honest and the most punctual tax payers in the Federal Republic." In Italy the newspaper *La Stampa* observed: "They [Jehovah's Witnesses] are the most loyal citizens anyone could wish for: they do not dodge taxes or seek to evade inconvenient laws for their own profit." Jehovah's servants do this 'on account of their consciences.'—Romans 13:5, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Are "Caesar's things" limited to paying taxes? No. Paul listed other things, such as fear and honor. In his *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of Matthew*, German scholar Heinrich Meyer wrote: "By [Caesar's things] . . . we are not to understand merely the *civil tax*, but everything to which Caesar was entitled in virtue of his legitimate rule." Historian E. W. Barnes, in his work *The Rise of Christianity*, observed that a Christian would pay taxes if he owed them and "likewise accept all other State obligations, provided he was not called upon to render unto Caesar the things that belonged to God."

<sup>9</sup> What things might the State require without encroaching on the things that rightfully belong to God? Some have felt that they could legitimately give Caesar money in the form of taxes but nothing else. They certainly would not feel comfortable giving Caesar anything that might take up time that could be used for theocratic activities. Nevertheless, while it is true that we should 'love Jehovah our God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength,' Jehovah does expect us to spend time in things other than our sacred service. (Mark 12:30; Philippians 3:3) For example, a married Christian is counseled to devote time to pleasing his or her marriage mate. Such activities are not bad, but the apostle Paul states that they are "the things of the world" not "the things of the Lord."—1 Corinthians 7:32-34; compare 1 Timothy 5:8.

<sup>10</sup> Further, Christ authorized his followers to "pay back" taxes, and this certainly involves using time that is dedicated to Jehovah—since our entire lives are dedicated in this way. If the average taxation in a country is 33 percent of income (it is higher in some countries), this means that each year the average worker pays to the State Treasury four months' worth of his earnings. Put another way, at the end of his working life, the average worker will have spent about 15 years earning the tax money that "Caesar" requires. Consider, too, the matter of schooling. In most countries the law requires that parents have their children attend school for a minimum number of years. The number of years of schooling varies from country to country. In most places it is a substantial length of time. True, such schooling is usually beneficial, but it is Caesar who decides what portion of a child's life must be spent in this way, and Christian parents comply with Caesar's decision.

### Compulsory Military Service

<sup>11</sup> Another demand made by Caesar in some countries is compulsory military service. In the 20th century, this arrangement has been instituted by most nations in times of war and by some in times of peace as well. In France this obligation was for many years called blood tax, meaning that every young man had to be willing to lay down his life for the State. Is this something that those dedicated to Jehovah can conscientiously render? How did the first-century Christians view this matter?

<sup>12</sup> While the earliest Christians endeavored to be good citizens, their faith prevented them from taking the life of another or from sacrificing their own lives for the State. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* states: "The early church fathers, including Tertullian and Origen, affirmed that Christians were constrained from taking human life, a principle that prevented them from participating in the Roman army." In his book *The Early Church and the World*, Professor C. J. Cadoux writes: "Up to the reign of Marcus Aurelius at least [161-180 C.E.], no Christian would become a soldier after his baptism."

<sup>13</sup> Why do members of the churches of Christendom not view things this way today? Because of a radical change that took place in the fourth century. The Catholic work *A History of the Christian Councils* explains: "Many Christians, . . . under the pagan emperors, had religious scruples with regard to military service, and positively refused to take arms, or else deserted. The Synod [of Arles, held in 314 C.E.], in considering the changes introduced by Constantine, set forth the obligation that Christians have to serve in war, . . . because the Church is at peace (*in pace*) under a prince friendly to Christians." As a result of this abandonment of Jesus' teachings, from that time until now, the clergy of Christendom have encouraged their flocks to serve in the armies of the nations, although some individuals have taken a stand as conscientious objectors.

<sup>14</sup> Are Christians today obliged to follow the majority in this matter? No. If a dedicated, baptized Christian lives in a country where exemption from military service is granted to ministers of religion, he may avail himself of this provision, for he is in fact a minister. (2 Timothy 4:5) A number of countries, including the United States and Australia, have granted such exemption even in wartime. And during peacetime, in many lands that maintain compulsory military service, Jehovah's Witnesses, as ministers of religion, are granted exemption. Thus they can continue helping the people by their public service.

<sup>15</sup> What, though, if the Christian lives in a land where exemption is not granted to ministers of religion? Then he will have to make a personal decision following his Bible-trained conscience. (Galatians 6:5) While taking the authority of Caesar into account, he will weigh carefully what he owes to Jehovah. (Psalm 36:9; 116:12-14; Acts 17:28) The Christian will remember that the mark of a true Christian is love for all his fellow believers, even those who live in other lands or those belonging to other tribes. (John 13:34, 35; 1 Peter 2:17) Further, he will not forget the Scriptural principles found in texts such as Isaiah 2:2-4; Matthew 26:52; Romans 12:18; 14:19; 2 Corinthians 10:4; and Hebrews 12:14.

### Civilian Service

<sup>16</sup> However, there are lands where the State, while not allowing exemption for ministers of religion, nevertheless acknowledges that some individuals may object to military service. Many of these lands make provision for such conscientious individuals not to be forced into military service. In some places a required civilian service, such as useful work in the community, is regarded as nonmilitary national service. Could a dedicated Christian undertake such service? Here again, a dedicated, baptized Christian would have to make his own decision on the basis of his Bible-trained conscience.

<sup>17</sup> It seems that compulsory service was practiced in Bible times. One history book states: "In addition to the taxes and dues exacted from the inhabitants of Judea, there was also a *corvée* [unpaid labor exacted by public authorities]. This was an ancient institution in the East, which the Hellenistic and Roman authorities continued to maintain. . . . The New Testament, too, cites examples of *corvée* in Judea, showing how widespread it was. In accordance with this custom, the soldiers pressed Simon of Cyrene into carrying Jesus' cross [torture stake] (Matthew 5:41; 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26)."

<sup>18</sup> Similarly, citizens in some countries today are required by the State or by local authorities to participate in various forms of community service. Sometimes this is for a specific task, such as digging wells or building roads; sometimes it is on a regular basis, such as weekly participation in cleaning up roads, schools, or hospitals. Where such civilian service is for the good of the community and is not connected with false religion or is not in some other way objectionable to the consciences of Jehovah's Witnesses, they have often complied. (1 Peter 2:13-15) This has usually resulted in an excellent witness and has sometimes silenced those who falsely accuse the Witnesses of being antigovernment.—Compare Matthew 10:18.

<sup>19</sup> What, though, if the State requires a Christian for a period of time to perform civilian service that is a part of national service under a civilian administration? Here again, Christians must make their own decision based on an informed conscience. "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." (Romans 14:10) Christians faced with a requirement of Caesar should prayerfully study the matter and meditate on it. It may also be wise to talk the matter over with mature Christians in the congregation. After this a personal decision must be made.—Proverbs 2:1-5; Philippians 4:5.

<sup>20</sup> While engaged in such research, Christians would consider a number of Bible principles. Paul said that we must "be obedient to governments and authorities as rulers. . . . be ready for every good work . . . be reasonable, exhibiting all mildness toward all men." (Titus 3:1, 2) At the same time, Christians would do well to examine the proposed civilian work. If they accept it, will they be able to maintain Christian neutrality? (Micah 4:3, 5; John 17:16) Would it involve them with some false religion? (Revelation 18:4, 20, 21) Would performing it prevent or unreasonably limit them from fulfilling their Christian responsibilities? (Matthew 24:14; Hebrews 10:24, 25) On the other hand, would they be able to continue to make spiritual progress, perhaps even sharing in the full-time ministry while performing the required service?—Hebrews 6:11, 12.

<sup>21</sup> What if the Christian's honest answers to such questions lead him to conclude that the national civilian service is a "good work" that he can perform in obedience to the authorities? That is his decision before Jehovah. Appointed elders and others should fully respect the conscience of the brother and

continue to regard him as a Christian in good standing. If, however, a Christian feels that he cannot perform this civilian service, his position should also be respected. He too remains in good standing and should receive loving support.—1 Corinthians 10:29; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 1 Peter 3:16.

<sup>22</sup> As Christians we will not cease to render "to him who calls for honor, such honor." (Romans 13:7) We will respect good order and seek to be peaceful, law-abiding citizens. (Psalm 34:14) We may even pray "concerning kings and all those who are in high station" when these men are called upon to make decisions that affect our Christian life and work. As a result of our paying back Caesar's things to Caesar, we hope that "we may go on leading a calm and quiet life with full godly devotion and seriousness." (1 Timothy 2:1, 2) Above all, we will continue to preach the good news of the Kingdom as mankind's only hope, conscientiously paying back God's things to God