

Minister's Message – July 2014

Tax Time

How do you feel about paying taxes to the government? Is it true that no one likes paying taxes? I once heard a man say he was happy to pay his tax. He explained that if we did not pay tax we would not have roads, schools, hospitals, a police force or an army. Taxes are basic to living in a community or nation. We might question how much we pay or how our taxes are used, but not the principle of personal taxation.

We might think the government misuses our taxes, but it is nothing compared to the misuse and corruption found in many foreign countries. The roads in Kenya are notoriously bad; major sealed roads are marred by huge potholes. Government corruption is such that roads are poorly maintained. On one section we were surprised to see a man repairing the road. Cars stopped to throw money into a tin which he had. He was doing the repair out of his own initiative. Do we call this direct taxation? Our government says that a fuel tax will be used to build new roads- people are concerned that their taxes are not being used to benefit them.

Governments are made up of people like us. Rulers are tempted to line their own pockets and look after themselves, to the neglect of the people. Such sinfulness must be curtailed by checks and balances in the government and in society. We are privileged to have elections in which rulers can be removed if they are found corrupt.

The matter of paying taxes comes up in the Bible; in Romans 13 we read that rulers are appointed by God so we must submit to them and obey the law. 'For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending to this very thing' (Romans 13:6). Rulers are servants appointed by God. Their authority includes the power to punish evil doers or lawbreakers. We should do what is right and good and not give the ruler cause to punish us. We should also do what is right and good for conscience' sake (Romans 13:5).

We must submit to the governing authority, even in the matter of paying tax. Sometimes, however, we are guilty of dishonesty in our efforts to avoid paying tax. People who are in every other respect law abiding can be guilty of failing to obey tax laws. Is this why paying tax is highlighted in this passage of the Bible?

Back in the first century the Jews did not like paying taxes to the Romans, the foreign power that was ruling over them. We know this from the incident when they came to Jesus asking, 'Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' (Luke 20:22). Taking a denarius, a Roman coin, Jesus pointed to the image stamped on it. The image was that of Tiberius Caesar. Since the coin had this image on it Jesus said, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' (Luke 20:25). This means to give back or pay what is due. It is returning what rightfully belongs to the one in authority, the one from whom you received the money in the first place.

Some people want to hang onto every dollar they earn, but the wise person will understand that without God's blessing they would not be earning money at all, and that without a police force supported by their taxes they would have difficulty keeping what they earned anyway. Robbers and violent men might trouble them. Your obligation and mine is to pay taxes to whom taxes are due (Romans 13:7). It is not for us to reason that we are being ripped off, or that our taxes are being squandered. That is another matter, and there are legitimate ways to deal with this. We can inform the rulers of their obligation as God's appointed ministers to serve the people not themselves, and to do good not evil.

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