

***Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's,
and to God the things that are God's***

This is a tricky little passage...
And frequently mis-interpreted

Some have used it for to justify strict separation of church and state,
That Jesus was dividing life into two separate and distinct parts.

I actually heard one preacher claim,
Jesus had the coin... to pay a poll tax... so he could cast his vote.

Look carefully at this passage...
The Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus with a series of trick questions.

A woman was taking some air at the beach.
A little boy in swimming trunks, carrying a towel, ran up to her

Do you believe in God?

Why, yes, I do.

Do you go to church every Sunday?

Yes...

Do you read your Bible and pray every day?

Yes... where are you going with these questions?

Will you hold my dollar while I go in swimming?

The Pharisees were ***not*** honest in their questions
They had ***no*** intention of entrusting ***anything*** to Jesus
They ***didn't*** want answers.
They just want him ***gone***.
He was a threat to their authority... their power... their wealth...

But don't be too quick to judge...

Look, we know who Jesus is
 But then we have the privilege of knowing the *whole* story.
 We know how he was born... how he lived...
 how he taught... and how he healed.
 We know how he was betrayed... and how he died...
 We know how he rose from the dead...
 We know how he ascended into heaven

But the Pharisees knew none of it.
 It hadn't happened yet.

They thought he was some kind of a demon
 They though he wanted to king of Israel
 They though his mission was political!

And because their minds were already made up
 They couldn't... and wouldn't... *hear* what he said.
 And if you don't listen, you can't hear...

Two friends were standing near time square in New Your City.
 In the middle of the day, it is a very noisy place
 Horns honking... People shouting... Sirens wailing

One friend said to the other...

What an interesting place to hear a cricket.
What? You must be crazy!
You couldn't possibly hear a cricket in all this noise!

No, I'm sure of it. I heard a cricket.
That's crazy!

The man, who thought he heard a cricket,
 listened carefully for a moment,
 and then walked across the street to planter filled with shrubs and flowers.
 He looked into the bushes, beneath the branches,
 and sure enough, he found a cricket.

That's incredible. You must have superhuman ears!

*No, my ears are no different from yours.
 It all depends on what you're listening for.*

*But that can't be!
 I could never hear a cricket in this noise.*

Yes, it's true. It depends on what is really important to you.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins,
 and dropped them on the sidewalk.

Every head within twenty feet turned to see
 if the money that hit the pavement was theirs.

It all depends on what's important to you.

And if we carefully listen to Jesus...
 we can hear what's important to God.

*Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's,
 and give to God the things that are God's*

So what *is* the emperor's?
 And what *is* God's?

On his way out the door...

A parishioner asked the priest

Where in the Bible do you find anything about pledging?

Good question. Let's get together and talk about it.

So they met for lunch a few days later...

You know, your question is a good one.

It forced me to do some studying.

And I found that the Bible is full of pledging references.

Come on now, Father, full?

The word ***Pledge... means***

Commit... promise... dedicate... devote... vow...

These are all commonly used words in the bible.

Pledging... is merely a reflection of our spiritual commitment to Christ.

Stewardship is, first of all, our response to God.

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's,

and to God the things that are God's

There's this old story about the Pope needing a heart transplant.

Dozens of people gathered outside the Vatican shouting

Take my heart!

Well the pope came up with an idea.
 He would drop a feather from his balcony
 And whoever the feather landed on
 Would give him their heart
 And the crowds below leaned their heads back and shouted
 Take my heart...

[blow]

Take my heart

[blow]

Many are willing make an offering to God...
 But to give God our hearts?

And yet for those who do follow God's will
 And give him everything
 Find infinite reward

Martin Luther said,
***I have held many things in my hand, and have lost them all;
 but whatever I have placed in God's hands... that... I still possess.***

What God wants is to come into your heart.
 You have been made in the image and likeness of God.
 God loves you.
 God has your picture in the divine wallet and on the heavenly refrigerator.

Jesus didn't care about the tax... He cared about your hearts
 So give your heart back to God... after all he did make it...

What are the things that are God's which we are to give back to God?
 The answer is... **You.**