

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B

THE GOOD SHEPHERD IS LOVE

1 John 3:16-24

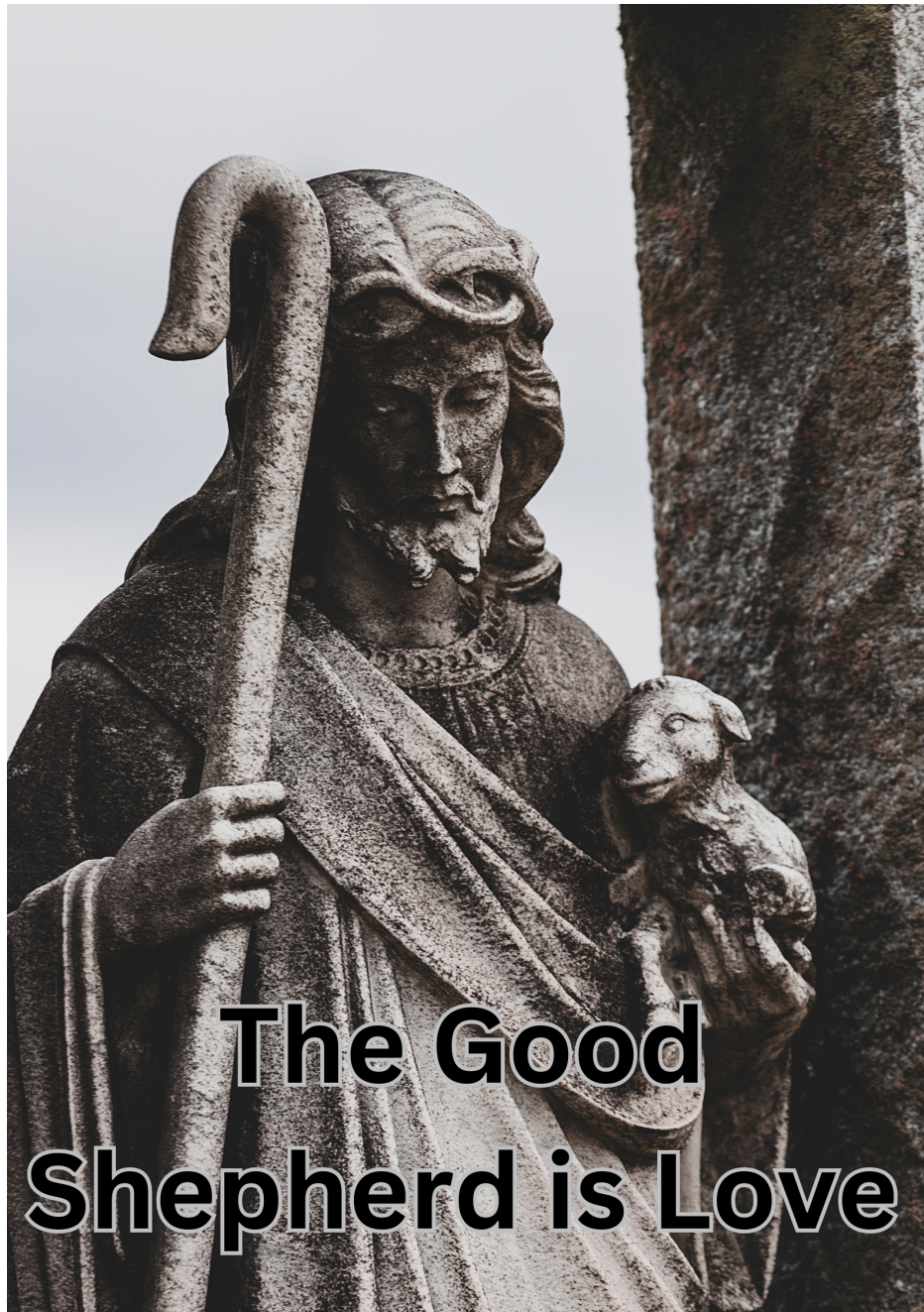
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Mark A Marius

16 We know love by this, that [Jesus Christ] laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. 19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him 20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; 22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.



The Good Shepherd is Love

From Canva

“God, full of compassion, decided to give us what we truly need – love in the person of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd who lays down his life for us.”

“Laying down his life for the sheep frees us to let go of our own lives in order to take up the lives of our neighbors.”

DIAGNOSIS: Not sharing the love we know

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Goods not living up to their name*

Goods: We all have some goods. We all desire goods – more goods, better goods. But so often our goods are not for the common good. They are pursued and procured for our own benefit, for our own lives. Once we are satisfied we may share the left overs or give them away when they no longer have value to us. But what about our responsibility to love those who suffer, lack resources, and are in desperate need of something good? Not sharing goods sounds bad, and void of love.

Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Hearts not living up to our words about love*

We know how to say words that sound like love. We may utter, “love the sinner but not the sin,” without any loving action of welcome or compassion to support it. We know how to affirm our love for all of creation, yet we exploit it for our own purpose. We paint a nice picture with our lip service, but our actions betray us. Our hearts are not in our words. The truth we may affirm is betrayed by our deceitful actions and intent. Our trust is not in how our loving shepherd leads and provides. It’s in the comfort of our own pastures.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *Not living at all*

God is greater than our hearts. Which means God has the power to condemn us and our hearts for not obeying God’s commandments. Living apart from God is not living at all.



PROGNOSIS: Loving us to share

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): *Jesus Christ is love in action*

God is greater than the deadly sin in our hearts. Which means that God has the power to change our hearts instead of condemning them as we deserve. And so God, full of compassion, decided to give us what we truly need – love in the person of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd who lays down his life for us. God resurrecting his Son to new life is an action through which we now know love.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *Hearts full of the Holy Spirit*

Before we abide in God, the good Shepherd calls us, and in doing so gives us the Holy Spirit to abide in us – in our hearts. Filled with this Holy love our hearts receive the faith necessary to trust the Truth that is Christ. Our hearts now long for all the goods God gives – the gifts of grace, forgiveness, compassion.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): *Meeting needs is good*

New hearts are where loving action is born. Laying down his life for the sheep frees us to let go of our own lives in order take up the lives of our neighbors. God's command to love one another is good and possible when we follow the Good Shepherd's lead. The Love we know flows from our faith that is latching on to Christ's death and resurrection. The goods of the world are now reclassified as the means by which we care for others and creation. And when these means are coupled with God's grace it is reckoned as right and good. So we share the means of grace with the flock, those in our midst and even those who have wandered off. In fact the means are anything but mean, as the grace of God produces great joy in the care and redemption of all that God has made.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
THE LOVE THAT SURPASSES ALL
AUTHORITY

Mark 1:21-28

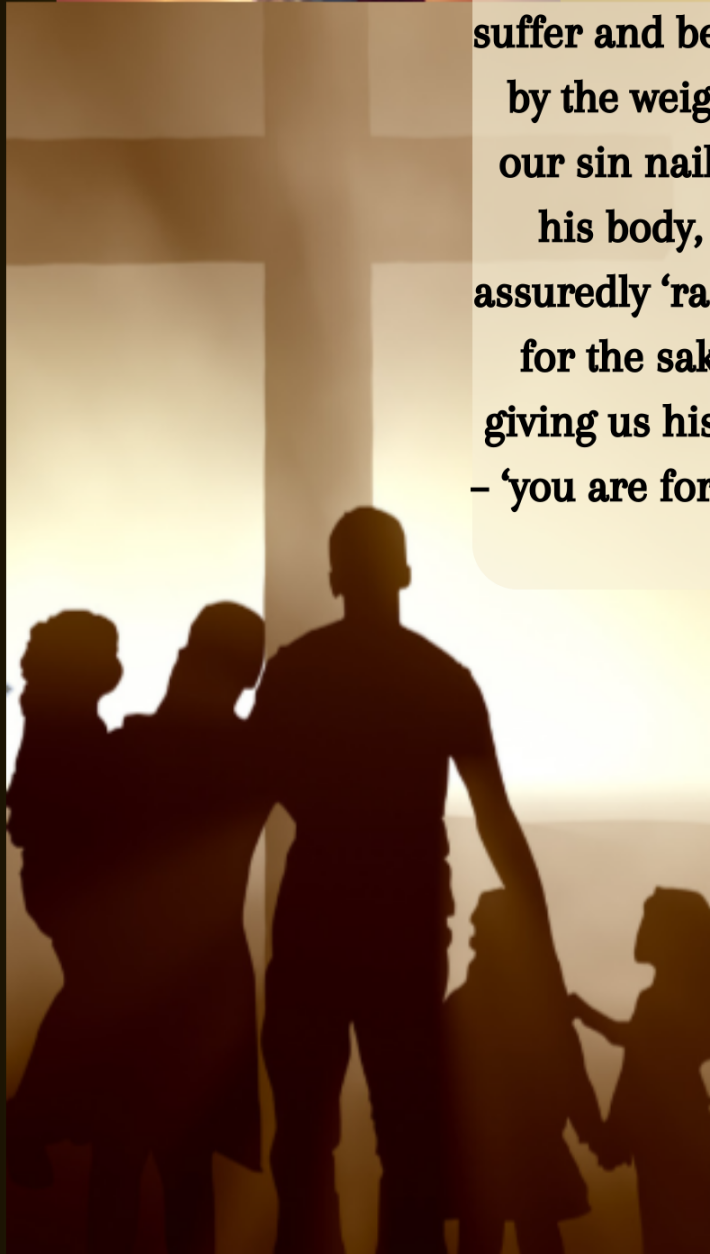
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Analysis by Matthew DeLoera

21They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. 22They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, 24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." 25But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" 26And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. 27They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." 28At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.



**“Jesus ...moved
toward something
even more radical
and involuntary –
to the cross, to
suffer and be killed
by the weight of
our sin nailed to
his body, yet
assuredly ‘raised’ ...
for the sake of
giving us his word
– ‘you are forgiven.’”**



From Canva

“Jesus ...moved toward something even more radical and involuntary – to the cross, to suffer and be killed by the weight of our sin nailed to his body, yet assuredly ‘raised’ ... for the sake of giving us his word – ‘you are forgiven.’”

DIAGNOSIS: By Whose Authority?

Step 1 – Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): *Authorized*

Just when they thought they knew what to expect at synagogue, the assembly was “astounded” not just to hear this stranger (Jesus) teaching (can just anyone walk in off the street and teach?), but also “as one having authority.” His manner was nothing like the scribes’, as of trained authorities explaining doctrines, handing on old traditions, and insisting that it all really is “relevant” after all. His was an entirely new kind of proclamation, radiant with “might”, “power,” and “capability” (*exousia*). Perhaps folks even heard such a bold declaration as “this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (v. 21)

And if all this wasn’t already more than enough surprise for one sabbath, as if to further legitimize Jesus’ authority, in walked someone with “an unclean spirit” that Jesus rebukes as proof-point. Nevertheless, the assembly still questions what to make of all that they have seen and heard – “What is this?”

Step 2 – Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): *Skeptical*

It’s hard to imagine that the crowd isn’t also wondering, “Is he right?” That the assembly is questioning should not surprise us. In fact, such questions remain utterly necessary in such a world as this. In the face of disease or disaster, humans, even at the highest levels of power, have always despaired for some authority to explain and advise life-saving wisdom (i.e., the manner of the scribes) to hang onto said power. But there have always been and always will be many different “authorities” and

conflicting answers. Which one should we trust, or risk peril? And even once we sign on, are we ever really sure that we've chosen rightly? After all, authorities can change their minds, science is a moving target, and people say a lot of things about God. So, as we hear ever bolder proclamations and promises, despite facts and reason, we feel increasingly skeptical and unsure. If we're not responsible enough to "do our own research" (and who has time for that anyway?) we can only blame ourselves for our own misfortune. Or are we even more afraid of hearing "I told you so"? We can muster grit and determination, and we admire come-back stories. There's a certain honor in these. But losing face is a real killer.

However, we also know a way to soothe ourselves amid all this questioning and uncertainty, not just regarding the chaos of our lives, but especially regarding God's part in all of it. We take refuge in having our own authority – our right to choose (i.e., our "free will") what to believe or where to put our trust.

Step 3 – Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): *Powerless*

Right or wrong, no one, not even God, can take that personal authority and free will away from us, right? Here, doubt and skepticism are recast from weaknesses to strengths, with just enough power to convince ourselves that we're not as utterly powerless as we really are. Sure, we may testify that "by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." (Small Catechism, Creed, Third Article) Yet whose heart doesn't still bristle at such suggestion to the contrary? Perhaps it's because we're not convinced that this God who seems to take as much as give, who seems to watch more than act, who lets innocent folks be demon-possessed at all, is particularly trustworthy. But God always gets the last authoritative word.



From Canva

PROGNOSIS: By Love's Own Authority

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): *Forgiven*

In this light, there's a striking irony in this miracle of Jesus casting out a demon. Though we (and let us hope some of the synagogue assembly in our lection) easily praise Jesus for gracious healing, we don't seem much fazed by the fact that the patient never asked for cure. We do not know if he was lucid to realize anything was being done to him, nor that he even came to synagogue of his own volition. We make a lot of assumptions, don't we? Nevertheless, we jump right to the result – that this one is now free by and in Jesus Christ. It's funny how easily

the end justifies the means that formerly so offended us. Yet, Jesus was not done, but swiftly (*euthus*, Mark's byword) moved toward something even more radical and involuntary – to the cross, to suffer and be killed by the weight of our sin nailed to his body, yet assuredly “raised” (Mark 16:6) for the sake of giving us his word – “you are forgiven.” This was nothing for which we ever asked, let alone anything we could ever have conceived, and done before we were ever conscious of it. And, what if this is precisely WHY it's the only thing that actually softens our brittle and hardened hearts, precisely what no flavor of human authority will ever have any power to do.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): *Freed*

So, perhaps the word “authority” falls short of what's really happening in this lesson, and even why the assembly struggles to make sense of what Jesus has done. Jesus' “authority” is so radically different from all the other & “authorities” in our lives, which wield laws (with attending laws and consequences) or reason to conform or convince us. Rather, Jesus' “authority” is bound up in the affecting power of his love for us, which frees us to trust him, to take him at his Word – our final authority in his love.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): *Enfleshed*

And because we trust, we get to love others without fear of consequence or betrayal. After all, we know what it did to Jesus, so why should we be surprised by anything else? We know full well what Jesus did to us, we no longer feel the need to justify ourselves or to prove anything to anyone, let alone pose as any sort of “authority”. Rather, we feel free to trust that Jesus' love will assuredly speak for itself through the earthen vessels of our bodies, and all of this is pure gift for the sake of our neighbors. “It shall not return to me empty, but it shall

accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isa 55:11) Of course, Jesus never promised that this kind of new creation would ever be easy, especially when folks have known us through all our missteps and imperfections. After all, for all that Jesus said and did, the assembly still went away asking “What is this?” And yet, “for while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.” (2 Cor 4:11)

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

YOU CAN BE SURE THERE WILL ALWAYS BE DEATH AND TAXES

(Originally posted in [2015](#))

Matthew 22:15-22

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

15Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. 16So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay

taxes to the emperor, or not?" 18But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" 21They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." 22When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.



JESUS Y LOS FARISEOS.

El cuadro original existe en el Museo de Madrid.

Jesús y los fariseos (Jesus and the Pharisees) From [Wikimedia](https://www.wikimedia.org/)

[Commons](#)

Jesus is changing the system. Instead of working hard at being good in order to be rewarded with God's blessings and kingdom, Jesus is offering the kingdom of God to those who don't qualify.

Diagnosis: Taxes and Death Are from God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): There Is a Hidden Agenda

Why try to entrap Jesus? Not because he was so popular (21:1-11, entry into Jerusalem to cheering crowds); not because he ruined your business (21:12-17, cleaning out the temple); not because he said that tax collectors and prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God ahead of you (21:31); and not because Jesus said, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produce the fruits of the kingdom" (21:43). Such things could make you envious, mad, or insulted. But you can deal with those kinds of events. People deal with those things, and worse, every week. They fix a business, find new friends, and try to be better, one day at a time. Why would people want to discredit Jesus? It's the same as when people entrap God by saying after a tragedy, "I can't worship a God who allows bad things to happen."

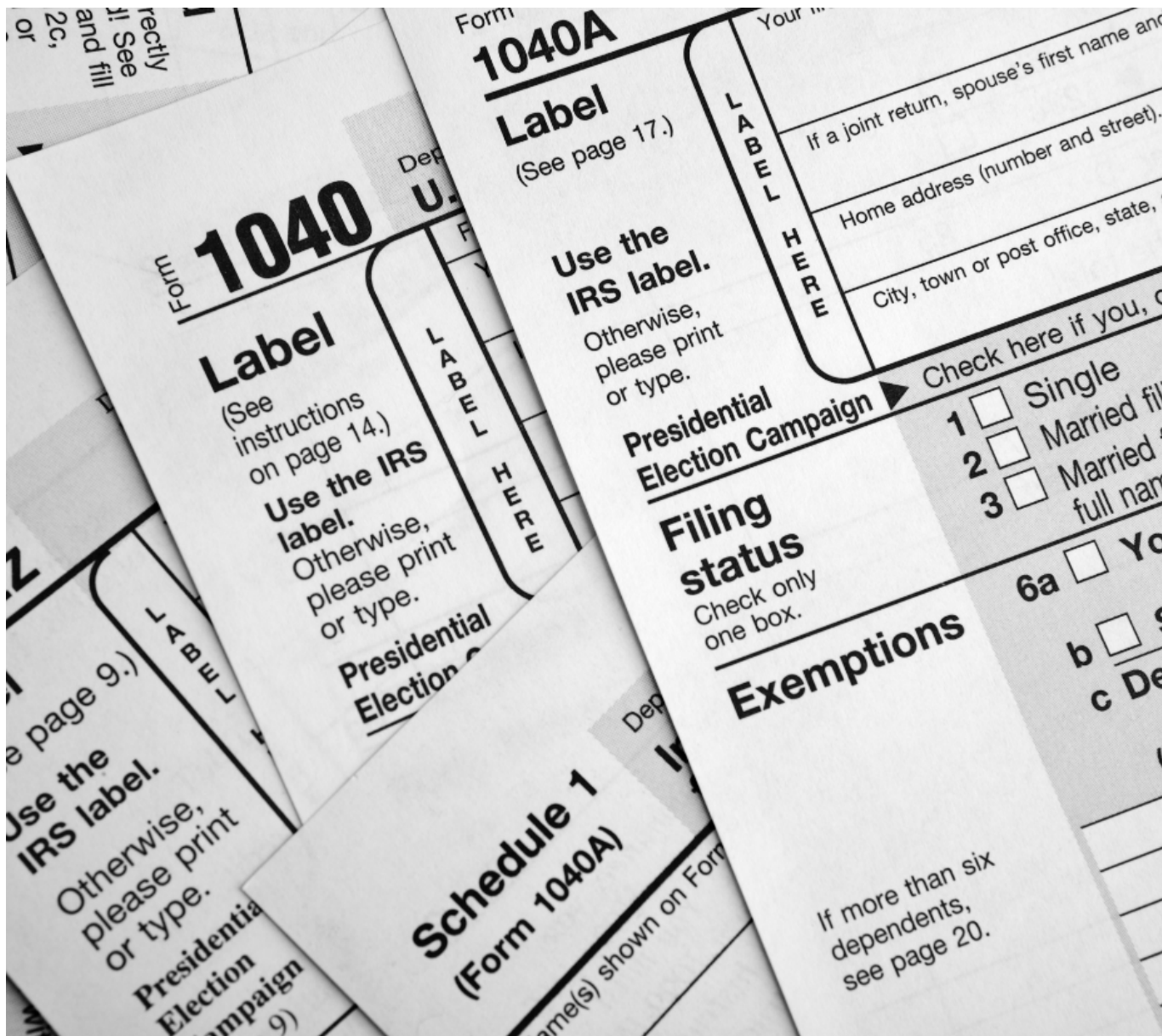
Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem): We Trust the System of Working Hard

When Jesus says that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to others who will produce fruits, then that threat makes you promise that you will produce fruits just as good as anybody else. But that is not what Jesus is saying. He is saying that he will give, without cause or reason, he will give the kingdom of God to those who are not good, who don't try as hard as you do. In other words, Jesus is changing the system. Instead

of working hard at being good in order to be rewarded with God's blessings and kingdom, Jesus is offering the kingdom of God to those who don't qualify. Jesus is offering forgiveness from God as a gift. Jesus is offering peace with God as a gift. Jesus is offering heaven to people who are disobedient, unbelieving slobs. That makes us want to entrap Jesus. We are not disobedient, unbelieving slobs. Why should Jesus give them God's kingdom? They don't deserve it. We want the system of working hard to do good and get heaven to remain in effect. Jesus can't just change how we deal with God. We will show he can't by entrapping him. We will attack him instead of his policy of giving God's forgiveness. Get rid of him and his policy is also gotten rid of.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Render unto God What Is God's

Our preference for the system of working hard to do good as the way to get the kingdom of God means our hearts trust our actions. Our hearts trust the law that defines what actions are good. "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (19:16). We always think we can be good enough. When we trust the good deeds we do, then we are quite against those who do not do those good deeds, like those tax collectors and prostitutes. We are blind to our own disobedience to the First Commandment of loving God most of all; we love our good deeds more. So we come under our own judgment that says people who do wrong must be gotten rid of. Oh, it's not just our judgment that says so. It's God's judgment. Death is God's judgment against all people, for no one loves God more than their own good deeds. And if we don't have good deeds, we still trust our bad deeds as the determiners of how God deals with us. No one can change the system of law. We must render to God what is God's—our lives.



Taxes (from Canva)

Prognosis: Life and Love Are from Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Jesus Renders unto God

Jesus evaded the trap about taxes, but he did not evade the trap about whether or not he was the Son of God. The law made it clear that no son of God would give God's kingdom to tax collectors; Jesus was guilty of being the Son of God who wrongly

gave God's kingdom to unbelieving slob. Jesus rendered to God his life. Yet God declared Jesus not guilty; God declared Jesus to be the Son of God who has the authority (28:18) from God to give God's kingdom to all people. God did both by raising Jesus from the dead (28.1-10). The system has changed.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Jesus Renders to Us

Jesus gives us faith in him by saying, "You can believe me." Trusting him gives us the faith he offers. We render to God faith in Jesus, not that our faith is a good deed, but that our faith, little as it is, is in Jesus whom God raised from the dead. We trust he gives people the kingdom of God. We no longer trust our good deeds or the law. Faith takes away our desire for the law and replaces it with a desire to love our neighbors with Christ's love and mercy.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Taxes Say, "I Love You"

The trap about whether paying taxes to Caesar was lawful (a good deed to God that gets one eternal life) is not about us paying taxes to our government. The trap was about paying taxes to an enemy government. There were Roman coins and Jewish coins. To give Caesar his own coins could have been a patriotic statement: "Let them take what's theirs and get out." That verse about giving Caesar what is Caesar's and giving God what is God's is used to divide our lives, as if some things and activities are ruled only by the government and God has no say about them. Some say rightly to keep religion out of government because ideology can cause bad governing. But all belongs to God (Romans 13:1: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God."). Taxes are what

citizens pay to work together to provide roads, energy distribution, clean water, medicine for those in need, and safety for the nation and local government. In Christ, we do not ask, "What is lawful?" That is, we do not ask about what we must do to please God or to get eternal life. We only please God by our faith in Christ. So we ask, "What is loving for my neighbor?" Taxes are a way to love our neighbor, because neighbors belong to God. And if people still want to trap God (as one who allows bad things to happen), they are like the Pharisees and think they have done nothing wrong. They trust the system of doing good to get life. They do not see tragedy as a call to repent, to change what their hearts trust to get them eternal life. It is natural for people to think that righteousness comes from the law ("For human reason only focuses on the law and does not understand any other righteousness except obedience to the law," Book of Concord, Kolb and Wengert, 154.229, also 151.206; 165); it is not natural to trust Jesus who died on a cross to give us eternal life. So Jesus is proclaimed to us and our neighbor so that we might believe in his name and have life; the thing we render to God is faith in Jesus. We render to others our love, including our care for our mutual citizens—even in the form of taxes.