

Do You Demonstrate Taxable Integrity?

Then Jesus said to them, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s (taxable) and to God what is God’s.” ([Mark 12:17](#) / NIV, parenthesis added)

“What the IRS doesn’t know won’t hurt them.”

Those words came from a college professor while justifying his reasons for intentionally misrepresenting his tax returns. In view of the recent scandals involving the Internal Revenue Service and their intrusions into people’s privacy, it’s tempting to agree with his philosophy. It is easy to rationalize our actions when there is corporate misconduct – even easier when it benefits us financially.

The justification goes something like this: As a Christian who gives to the local church and missions, I sponsor and support many homeless, underprivileged, widowed, and orphaned people, and the government doesn’t seem to be doing an adequate job addressing this need; therefore, it’s okay for me to “creatively doctor” my tax returns since I’m already doing my fair share for the nation’s good. Another rationalization is: since the government continues to sponsor organizations and fund activities that oppose Scriptural morals, it’s okay to fudge on my tax returns to reduce the amount of taxes I owe. Unfortunately, this taxable perspective doesn’t align with what Jesus taught.

Obligation Versus Integrity

The Pharisees brought a similar “situational ethics” question to Jesus. “Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” ([Mark 12:14](#)). Although they were tried catching Jesus in a no-win situation, I love His wise response. By telling them to pay Caesar his dues and to pay God His dues, Jesus changed

the entire paradigm. Instead of a question of financial *obligation*, He made it one of financial *integrity*.

As a citizen, I am obligated to pay my fair share of taxes. When Jesus said to be “shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” ([Matthew 10:16](#)), I believe it includes being knowledgeable about the tax code and using as many *legal* allowances available to reduce my overall financial exposure. However, I am also accountable to a higher moral code.

One day, I will stand before God to give an account for all my actions (Romans 14:12). This includes explaining my taxable gains, losses, and write-offs. Since God’s audit process is much more thorough than the IRS, my financial integrity must incorporate prudent practices that stand up under God’s scrutiny. All our financial resources are blessings from God. He will hold us all accountable for [honest stewardship](#) – including the money we’ve hidden from the IRS.

Now if we could just hold the IRS accountable to that same standard....