

Income Tax Day

Joe Slater

The last day to file your income tax return this year isn't April 15! That day falls on a weekend, so ordinarily it would be pushed to April 17. However, the 17th is a federal holiday, so technically you can procrastinate until April 18!

Does anybody enjoy paying taxes? To ask that question is to answer it. Many Jews resented paying taxes to the Gentile/pagan Roman government. At best, tax collectors ("publicans" in older translations) were viewed as crooks; some considered them traitors to Israel. One burning issue in the first century AD was, *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"* (Matthew 22:17). In reply, Jesus pointed out that Caesar had a right to the coin bearing his image; and God has a right to be served by people made in His image. *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (22:21).

The apostle Simon (not Peter, but the other Simon) was a Zealot, a member of a fiercely anti-Roman party (Acts 1:13). Matthew Levi, on the other hand, was a tax collector. Ordinarily those two would have been overtly hostile to each other. Under Jesus' influence, however, we see no hint of animosity. What a grand example for us in this day of political extremism!

Paul echoed the teaching of Jesus in Romans 13:6-7 as he urged Christians to submit to civil government. *"For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers, attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."*

I don't approve of the way my government spends some of my tax money. But I'm happy to live in a free country and to support our military and first responders. I'm happy to have an income large enough that Uncle Sam wants a slice of it. I'll pay my taxes and try not to complain!

Happy Income Tax Day!

Love One Another

It is more accurate to say that we are responsible to others rather responsible for others. Understanding the difference can make a dramatic impact in our lives. How many of us rob ourselves of joy in life because we take on excessive guilt for the bad decisions of others. We cannot take personal responsibility for the decisions and actions of others. A better question is: "What is my responsibility to others?"

Our number one responsibility to others is to love them. What is love? Love is the identifying mark of Christ's followers. Jesus says, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35). Love is the natural response of one who has been saved. Peter writes, *"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God"* (1 Peter 1:22-23).

We might look at an Olympic gold medalist and say, "He was born to run!" Observing the lives of Christians, people should be able to say, "They were born to love!" Love is the proof of our relationship to God. John exhorts us to this end, saying, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God"* (1 John 4:7). The inspired apostle goes on to say, *"No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us"* (1 John 4:12).

Love is our obligation to others. Paul writes, *"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law"* (Romans 13:8). Love is a debt always needing to be paid. When asked

which was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, *"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"* (Matthew 22:37-39).

Love is active good will. It seeks what is best for others. Our responsibility is to love others. This is not easy in a world preoccupied with looking out for number one. But love is the foundation virtue upon which rests all other responsibilities.

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR)

Things Jesus Never Said

"Listen to your heart."

"Be true to yourself."

"Trust your gut."

"Feel good about who you are."

"Happiness is what matters."

"Just be a good person."

What Jesus Actually Said

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23)

Boys And Men

We need boys to grow up to be good men. And that can happen only when we don't disparage manliness or pretend that masculinity and femininity are purely social constructs to be discarded for purposes of emotional sensitivity.

--Ben Shapiro (via Facebook)