

Workshop 7

Meaning and purpose of taxes according to biblical witness

We dealt with 4 texts (one from Deuteronomy, 2 from Luke's Gospel and one from Paul's Letter to the Romans Ch.13.) From the O.T. we learnt how important the Hebrew basis is to the understanding of the N.T., and how socially progressive the Jewish laws were. The Jewish people are called to enjoy and celebrate the fruit of their labour , but to share one tenth with those who have nothing, namely the strangers, the poor, the orphans and the landless (Levites). So the O.T. has much to teach us, and it was after all the Bible Jesus would know.

We learn that everything belongs to God, that we should honour and obey him. That shapes our life and our attitude to worldly rulers, so that if we read between the lines of the N.T. we may recognise it as subversive literature. As for taxes, the Lucan text is the most obvious, with its question "is it lawful to render taxes unto Caesar?". The answer "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's." According to the O.T. all belongs to God!

The Letter to the Romans is more difficult, but here,too, we can understand that the powers Paul is talking about are subject to God, and they serve him only if their purpose is justice and righteousness.

We could have done with more time to discuss it all at greater depth, but it was a valuable exercise.

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Romans 13, 1-7

1 Let every soul be subject upon the higher powers. For there is no power but of / under God: the

powers that be are ordained of / under God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist

shall receive to themselves damnation.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not to be afraid of the

power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid;

for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute

wrath upon him that doeth evil.

5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon

this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear

to whom fear; honour to whom honour.