

Children are often busier than their parents: sports, scouts, music, dancing, karate, Ninja turtle support groups--the list goes on. So parents have to help them avoid conflicting activities. Most parents like to have kids involved, as long as they keep doing homework, chores, sleep, church, and whatever else leads to a wholesome life.

When the Pharisees plotted to entrap Jesus, they tried to nail him on activities which conflict. Would Jesus pay taxes? In those days, the emperor considered himself a god, so to pay a tax was more than a civic duty--it made a religious statement; for a Jew taxation equalled contributing to a Gentile religion. The Pharisees assumed Jesus would never fill out a 1040, because in principle taxes conflicted with a wholesome religious life.

Jesus counters by saying payments need not conflict. You may support both the emperor and your religion. In another age, he could have held up a wristwatch. Do you give your time to God or to the state? They need not conflict. You can do both.

Jesus avoids two extremes: One is overextending yourself. Give to the emperor and give to God. Easy enough. But we also give to family, job, Bally, Ford, Pepsi free, to Betty Crocker, and to Hoover. It's hard to give each its due if we're overcommitted. The other extreme is to give too much to one thing, to become obsessed. Give to the emperor and give to God. Some people are so consumed with society they forsake God, or so consumed with religion they lose touch with society. Even in our most intimate relationships we sometimes place too many demands on the person or the activity we most love. We suffocate by breathing too little air. That's giving too much to one thing.

To give God and the state their due establishes a principle of wholeness. Staying busy is good if it doesn't wear us out; commitment is good if it isn't too narrow. The many parts of our lives need not conflict with one another. They can work peacefully together if we sort them out and let God govern them all.