

A Taxing Demand

The IRS is the newest soldier in the war on drugs. I pity the dealers.

Twenty-nine states now have laws which tax illegal substances. You can even purchase stamps which show that you've forked over the tariff on your illicit inventory. Alabama docks grass by the gram and issues official stickers that read, "Say No To Marijuana." New York has proposed legislation that would exact \$3.50 per gram of grifa and a couple hundred bucks per gram for the hard stuff.

Of course, no one's paying, and that's just the point.

Prosecutors figure they can nail someone for tax evasion much more easily than for drug running. Bust the dealer, impound his stash, then suck him dry of capital so he can't restock. The state makes money and the dope business becomes unprofitable. I think it'll work; remember – these are the guys who got Capone!

Matthew 9.9 records Jesus' calling of a tax collector. Matthew was probably a low-level bureaucrat recently hired to collect the toll on the newly-minted border between territories controlled by Antipas and Philip, sons of Herod the Great. In their dad's time it had been one big province; the tax was fresh and so was the resentment of those who now had to fork it over. Then as now taxation trumped invasion as an efficient tool of conquest. Sword-slashing clashes with Zealot rebels drained revenue and were bad PR. Taxation threw positive cash and enslaved more effectively. Nobody liked the tax man.

Jesus had just lost a couple of prospective followers because he didn't offer rent-control or life insurance (Mat 8.18-22). Turns out, though, the real challenge to following Christ is not what we have to give up but what we have to put up with. The Pharisees never taunted Peter and the boys by asking, "Why does your Teacher forbid spare sandals?" They were plenty ready, however, to sneer, "There goes the neighborhood," and the disciples seem to have felt the sting.

Of whom are we most afraid? What segment of society represents the biggest threat to our job security, our social prominence, our retirement plan, our way of life? Who really ticks us off, leaving our souls to do a slow burn of righteous resentment? Don't look now, but that's who Jesus just called.

Taxation Without Frustration
Doug