

Luke 20:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?

Analysis

Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? (ἐξεστὶν ἡμᾶς Καίσαρι φόρον δοῦναι ἢ οὐ, *exestin hēmas Kaisari phoron dounai ē ou*)—a masterfully crafted trap. The word φόρος (*phoros*) refers specifically to the Roman poll tax, paid annually by every Judean to Rome, a hated symbol of subjugation.

Answer 'yes' and Jesus alienates the Jewish masses who resented Roman occupation. Answer 'no' and he commits sedition against Caesar, grounds for immediate arrest. The question is theological (is it lawful, i.e., according to God's law?) but politically loaded. This is the same tax that sparked Judas the Galilean's revolt (Acts 5:37), crushed by Rome with mass crucifixions.

Historical Context

The Roman census tax (*tributum capitis*) began in AD 6 when Judea became a Roman province. Jews had to pay with Roman denarii bearing Caesar's image and the inscription 'Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.' For monotheistic Jews, coins proclaiming Caesar's divinity were especially offensive. Revolutionary zealots taught that paying was apostasy.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. When have you posed questions not to learn but to trap someone into a no-win situation?
2. How do you respond when facing a question designed to make any answer you give seem wrong?
3. What does Jesus's handling of this trap teach about wisdom in politically charged conversations?

Interlinear Text

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| ἔξεστιν | ἡμῖν | Καίσαρι | φόρον | δοῦναι | ἢ | οὐ |
| Is it lawful | for us | unto Caesar | tribute | to give | or | no |
| G1832 | G2254 | G2541 | G5411 | G1325 | G2228 | G3756 |

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 9:37 (Parallel theme): And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.