

Mark 12:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

Analysis

Jesus answered the Pharisees' question about paying tribute to Caesar: 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's' (Τὰ Καίσαρος ἀπόδοτε Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ). This establishes dual responsibility—civil obligations (taxes to governing authorities) and spiritual obligations (worship, obedience to God). Christians aren't anarchists rejecting civil government, nor idolaters making government ultimate. Jesus distinguished realms without divorcing them—God is sovereign over all, yet delegates temporal authority to governments. This grounds Christian political theology: submit to governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17) while maintaining ultimate allegiance to God. When government demands what belongs only to God, Christians must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Historical Context

The poll tax (tributum capitis) required annual payment of one denarius per person to Rome, deeply resented by Jews as symbol of subjugation. Zealots rejected it, advocating violent resistance. Herodians supported it, collaborating with Rome. The question was political trap: if Jesus endorsed the tax, He'd alienate the masses; if He opposed it, authorities could charge Him with sedition. Jesus' answer brilliantly transcended the trap, establishing legitimate but limited government authority. Roman coins bore Caesar's image and inscription claiming divinity ('Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus'). Giving coins bearing Caesar's

image to Caesar was permissible, but humans bear God's image (Genesis 1:27), owing themselves to God. This became foundational for Christian political thought—Luther's two kingdoms, Reformed sphere sovereignty, modern separation of church and state all build on this principle.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' answer balance legitimate civil obligations with ultimate allegiance to God?
2. What does giving to God 'the things that are God's' (including ourselves, made in His image) demand beyond mere religious ritual?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἀποκριθεὶς	τῷ	Ἰησοῦς	εἶπεν	αὐτῷ	ἀπόδοτε
And	answering	the things that are	Jesus	said	him	Render
G2532	G611	G3588	G2424	G2036	G846	G591
τῷ	Καίσαρι	Καίσαρι	καὶ	τῷ		
the things that are	Caesar's	Caesar's	And	the things that are		
G3588	G2541	G2541	G2532	G3588		
τῷ	θεῷ	τῷ	θεῷ	καὶ	ἐθαύμασαν	ἐπ'
the things that are	God's	the things that are	God's	And	they marvelled	at
G3588	G2316	G3588	G2316	G2532	G2296	G1909
αὐτῷ						
him						
G846						

Additional Cross-References

Romans 13:7 (Parallel theme): Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

1 Peter 2:17 (References God): Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Romans 6:13 (References God): Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.