

Matthew 22:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Analysis

The Pharisees and Herodians attempted to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Rome (v. 17). Either answer seemed dangerous—endorsing Roman taxation would alienate Jewish nationalists; opposing it could invite Roman charges of sedition. Jesus' brilliant response transcends their false dilemma. 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's' acknowledges legitimate civil authority and Christians' responsibility toward earthly government (Romans 13:1-7). Yet 'and unto God the things that are God's' establishes clear priority—God's ultimate claim supersedes all human authority. The coin bore Caesar's image (*εἰκών/eikon*); humans bear God's image (Genesis 1:27). We owe the state taxation; we owe God total allegiance. This principle establishes Christian civic responsibility while maintaining God's supreme authority. When government demands what belongs to God alone (worship, absolute obedience), believers must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Historical Context

Roman taxation was economically oppressive and religiously offensive to Jews. The denarius bore Caesar's image and inscriptions claiming divinity ('Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus'). For Jews, using such coins and paying this tax felt like endorsing idolatry and occupation. Zealots violently opposed Roman taxation. Herodians supported Rome's puppet rulers. These normally opposed groups united to trap Jesus. His answer satisfied neither party's agenda while establishing

profound political theology still relevant today. Early Christians faced this tension constantly—how to live faithfully under imperial authority that demanded worship.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How should Christians balance legitimate submission to government with ultimate loyalty to God?
2. What modern situations create tension between civic duties and kingdom priorities?
3. In what ways might we wrongly give to 'Caesar' what belongs exclusively to God?

Interlinear Text

λέγει	αύτοῖς	Καίσαρι	τότε	λέγει	αύτοῖς	Ἄποδοτε
They say	unto him	Caesar's	Then	They say	unto him	Render
G3004	G846	G2541	G5119	G3004	G846	G591
οὖν	τῷ	Καίσαρι	Καίσαρι	καὶ		τῷ
therefore	the things that are	Caesar's	Caesar's	and	the things that are	
G3767	G3588	G2541	G2541	G2532		G3588
τῷ	θεῷ	τῷ	θεῷ			
the things that are	God's	the things that are	God's			
G3588	G2316	G3588	G2316			

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.

Acts 4:19 (References God): But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

Proverbs 24:21 (Parallel theme): My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change:

Matthew 22:37 (References God): Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Luke 23:2 (Parallel theme): And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.

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