

Questions from the Jewish leaders

- Interesting but insincere
- Attempt to trap and report Him to the Roman authorities
- Religion and true love of Jesus are altogether different
- Their real need is to listen to Jesus
- Flattery and a 'trick question'
- Taxes: an answer which breaks the law of Moses or rebels against the Romans
- Which authority?

Jesus' answer

- Jesus distinguishes between two realms – the religious and the civic
- Asks for a coin

The Jewish leaders pretend to be interested in Jesus. They have interesting theological questions that they want to put to Him. But it is all totally insincere. They hate Him, and want to murder Him¹. However, they cannot do what they want to do because He is so popular among the people and they are worried about public opinion². They talk very religiously³ but they know what Jesus thinks about them⁴. They have their spies out watching everything Jesus does and listening to everything He says, hoping He will say something that will get Him into trouble with the Roman authorities⁵. Now they try to get Him to say something that they can report to the Romans.

It is strange that religious people have such an attitude towards Jesus. Religion is one thing; true love of Jesus and His gospel is another. Whether we are pleasing to God or not depends on our attitude to Jesus. These men are not seeing the glory of the Son of God who is among them. They want to ask their theological questions but are not asking the greatest question of all: who is Jesus? They are talking too much and listening too little. They need to stop the questions and listen to the Son of God who will teach them and save them if only they will listen to Him. They are preoccupied with small things (taxes!) and missing the big thing (Jesus!).

So these spies flatter Jesus¹ and then ask Him a question about the authority of the Roman colonial power. Should the Roman authority be recognised? Should the people pay taxes to Caesar, and so give recognition to the authority of the Roman power in Israel². It is an attempt to trick Jesus into saying something He should not say. If He says 'Yes', He will be recognising a pagan authority over Israel. That would break the Mosaic law (which demanded allegiance only to a Jewish king) and would displease the people, who looked for a Messiah who would remove the Romans. On the other hand, if Jesus said 'No, taxes should not be paid to Caesar', He could be taken to the Romans for punishment as a revolutionary.

Who is the authority in Israel? Is it God and the law of Moses? Or is it the occupying colonial power? Should they acknowledge Caesar's government by paying taxes to him?

Jesus answers by separating this world into two realms. Jesus could have refused to answer their question, but actually He did answer it. Although they were asking the question for bad reasons, the question was a good one and Jesus takes the opportunity to do some more teaching in the way in which He answers it. Jesus talks about church and state as two realms not one. He distinguishes between Caesar's realm and God's realm (although of course Caesar is under God). It is a very clever question, but it is only difficult if the view is taken that religion and state are to be unified. If Caesar is to be **religious** leader and **civic** leader, or if Caesar is to be rejected as **religious** leader and rejected as **civic** leader, then the question is difficult. The question assumes that a unified religion and state is necessary.

Jesus could see their deceit¹. He asks for a coin. Whose head is

1 19:47

2 19:48; 20:6,

19b

3 20:21

4 20:19a

5 20:20

1 20:21

2 20:22

1 20:23

• Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

on it? Caesar's. They themselves are using Caesar's money! They themselves are already showing some respect for Caesar by using his money^{□2}. So – says Jesus – ‘Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God.’ They are astonished that He could answer them so skilfully^{□3}.

□2 20:24-25a

□3 20:25b-26

• Give to God what belongs to God

Jesus' answer separated loyalty to 'Caesar' and loyalty to 'God' and treated them as **two** realms. He held out the possibility of being loyal to Caesar and yet not being loyal to Caesar's religion. It was the first time in the history of thinking that anyone had spoken of religion and state as two realms. Before this it was generally accepted that Caesar was entitled to say which god should be worshipped (like Nebuchadnezzar^{□1}).

□1 Daniel 3:1-6

• Loyalty to Caesar and loyalty to God – two realms

• Two realms with different memberships and functions
 • Christians are citizens of two realms
 • The state – serves God in civic life
 • The church – proclaims Jesus

Religion and the state must be viewed separately. They have different memberships. All people within a given geographical area belong to the state, but not all citizens of that same area are members of the people of God. Christians are citizens of two realms. The functions of church and state are different. The state exists to be the servant of God in civic life. It keeps the peace among all the citizens and against outside enemies. But the church has a different function. Its primary calling is to be the 'pillar and ground of the truth', to proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope of salvation. The church and the state have different weapons. The state 'does not bear the sword in vain'. The church has spiritual weapons.

• Different officials

The church and the state have different officials. The state has governors, magistrates, police officers, and so on. The officials of the Christian church are apostles, elders, deacons, and so on. The moment of entry into a nation is the time of birth. The moment of entry into the Christian church is the point of faith.

• Christians have different obligations to both

Christians are citizens of two realms. They belong to Caesar's realm: the realm of taxes, politics, education, health, welfare, and so on. They have a contribution to make to this aspect of life. Caesar has a certain amount of authority. He can demand that taxes be paid. But we are also to give to God the things that are God's: recognition, worship, faith, commitment.



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