

Bible Study Handout

Matthew 22:15–22

Theme: As disciples, we give to God what bears His image—our very selves.

The Passage

Jesus is confronted by Pharisees and Herodians who ask, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?” Instead of falling into their trap, He asks whose image is on the coin. When they answer “Caesar’s,” Jesus replies: “*Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.*”

This short statement cuts to the heart of discipleship. Coins bear Caesar’s image, but humanity bears God’s image (Gen. 1:27). Taxes may go to rulers, but our very selves belong to God.

Background of Matthew

- **Authorship:** Traditionally linked to Matthew the tax collector, showing deep knowledge of Jewish law and Scripture (Brown).
- **Date/Setting:** Likely 80–90 CE, after Jerusalem’s destruction, written for Jewish Christians wrestling with identity in a hostile world (France).
- **Themes:** Jesus as Messiah, fulfillment of prophecy, kingdom of heaven, discipleship, holiness, inclusion of Gentiles.
- **Structure:** Five teaching sections echoing the Torah. This passage comes during escalating conflict with leaders before Jesus’ arrest.

Wesleyan/Methodist Connection

- **Prevenient Grace:** Every human being bears God’s image, stamped from creation (Maddox).
- **Holiness:** To give God what is God’s means offering ourselves fully—heart, mind, soul, and strength (Collins).
- **Public and Personal Faith:** Wesley taught holiness is both inward and outward. Discipleship is lived in civic life, not apart from it (Outler).

Apologetic Notes

- **Political Question, Spiritual Answer:** Jesus does not dodge politics but reframes the issue. Ultimate allegiance belongs to God.
- **Christian Citizenship:** Respect for rulers does not erase our higher loyalty to God. This balance rebuts claims that Christianity is escapist or anti-political.
- **Identity Over Economics:** The deeper issue isn’t money but image—whose likeness we bear.

Verse-by-Verse Exegesis

22:15–16 – Pharisees and Herodians unite to trap Jesus. Strange alliances often form against God’s kingdom (Collins).

22:17 – The trap question about taxes forces a yes/no dilemma. Jesus reveals a third way, embodying God’s wisdom (Outler).

22:18–19 – Jesus calls out their hypocrisy and asks for a coin. They already use Caesar’s money while plotting against Him (Maddox).

22:20–21 – “Whose image is this?” Caesar’s coin bears Caesar’s image. Humanity bears God’s image (Gen. 1:27). Taxes may go to rulers, but our lives belong to God. For Wesleyans, this is sanctification—entire devotion to God (Collins).

22:22 – His answer amazes and silences them. God’s wisdom still unsettles shallow arguments and reveals deeper truth (Outler).

Cross References

- **Genesis 1:27** – Humanity created in God’s image.
- **Romans 12:1** – Offer yourselves as living sacrifices.
- **2 Corinthians 3:18** – We are transformed into His image.
- **Philippians 3:20** – Our citizenship is in heaven.
- **Revelation 7:9–10** – All nations worship before God’s throne.

Application Questions

1. What does it mean for you personally to “give to God what is God’s”?
2. How does bearing God’s image affect how we live in society, pay taxes, or engage politically?
3. Where do you feel competing loyalties—between your citizenship in the world and your discipleship to Christ?
4. How can the church embody this passage by showing the world that we belong wholly to God?

Thought for the Study

Coins may bear Caesar’s image, but our faces, hearts, and lives bear the image of God. To be a disciple is to live out that identity, offering back to God the very selves He created and redeemed.