then Jesus goes a step further. What does he say about the coin?

10. Roman coins, as is common today, is stamped with the likeness of the ruler under whose authority the coin is minted, in this case the Roman emperor, Caesar Tiberius. The Law of Moses (Ten Commandments) forbid the making of "any graven image, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth." (Exodus 20:4) To pious Jews like the Pharisees, such coins bearing the emperor's likeness, were not only symbolic of political oppression, but theologically taboo. But Jesus doesn't affirm their hardline position. Instead, what does he say?
11. Jesus implies that since the coin has Caesar's face on it, it's his, so they should give it back: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's" But then he adds "give to God what is God's". This answer has been used by Christians in the West to justify a separation of church and state, or at least the view that God and the government have legitimate but non-overlapping spheres of authority—God is in charge of "spiritual things" (belief, prayer, going to heaven), while the earthly government has authority everywhere else. But such a "secular" state was simply not conceivable to 1st century Jews, nor really to anyone else, not until the 18th or even 19th century. To understand what Jesus meant here about the coin, it is helpful to look at earlier references to "image" in the Old Testament. Besides all the references to idols ("graven images"), the earliest references is Genesis 1:26-27. What does this verse say?
12. Since humans are "made in God's image," what are we to "give to God," according to Jesus (v21)? Does this suggest the kind of separation of spheres that people commonly think Jesus is advocating here?
13. What was the reaction of the Pharisees and Herodians?
14. In what ways do Christians today—do we—fail to honor the fact that all humans are made in God's image? How do we fail to "give God what is God's"?

Family Bible Study

10/18/2026



Matthew 22:15-22 ***Paying Taxes to the Emperor***

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Jesus in his
words. 16 And they sent their students to him, along with the
Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and
teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's
opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. 17 Tell us, then,
what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 18 But
Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you
hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him
a denarius. 20 And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and
inscription is this?" 21 They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to
them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and
to God the things that are God's." 22 When they heard it, they
marveled. And they left him and went away.

Questions to Wonder with Kids

- In this passage, Jesus is confronted by some of the leaders among Jesus' fellow Jews who try to trick him, to get him in trouble. There are two groups involved—"Pharisees," a religious group who insisted Jews needed to strictly follow God's laws, and the "Herodians," a political group who supported King Herod. Herod wasn't very religious but he was friends with the Roman emperor, who supported and defended Herod as ruler over the Jews. The two groups had very different opinions about who should be in charge.
- What did these Jewish leaders ask Jesus? Why would anyone object to paying taxes? Doesn't everyone pay taxes? Taxes are supposed to be used to benefit the people who pay the taxes. I wonder where these taxes might be going instead…
- What did Jesus think of the question they asked him? What name did he call the Jewish leaders? "Hypocrite" back then meant an actor, a pretender, a faker. What then did Jesus understand they were trying to do?
- Jesus then does something very clever—he asks for a Roman coin. And on the coin is the face of the emperor (not unlike how our dollars and coins have the faces of past presidents). The leaders give him one. Wait, didn't they just ask him if it was permissible to use the Roman coin? So why did they have one, if they didn't think they should?
- What does Jesus say about the coin? What does he say they should do with it?
- Jesus adds that not only should they give to Caesar what is Caesar's, they should "give to God what is God's." I wonder, what belongs to God…
- According to Genesis, humans are "made in the image of God," stamped with his likeness, just as the coins were stamped with the image of Caesar. How then do we give *that* back to Him?
- I wonder what the Jewish leaders thought of Jesus' answer…

Questions for Adults

1. In this passage, Jesus encounters a delegation of Jewish leaders. One of the groups represented was the Pharisees, a religious faction who stressed the importance of ethical purity through the strict adherence to the Mosaic Law (Scripture), over the Temple sacrifices. According to Matthew, what is their aim here in this encounter with Jesus (v15)?
2. Matthew also mentions the presence of "Herodians," (v16) members of a political faction in support of King Herod, who was not a particularly pious Jew, nor really a Jew ethnically. What do these two groups have in common? Where do you suppose they would disagree? Knowing this, what would you expect is the Pharisees' motive in challenging Jesus here?
3. How do the Jewish leaders preface their question (v16)?
4. After flattering Jesus, what question do the Jewish leaders pose to Jesus (v17)? What do you suppose they expected Jesus to say?
5. Given the political context of Judea (a client state ruled by Roman occupiers) and the respective allegiances of those asking the question, what is at stake in Jesus' answer?
6. How does Jesus respond to their question?
7. Verse 18: Today when we accuse someone of being a *hypocrite*, what do we mean? Originally the term came from Greek theater, where it referred to an actor, one who "interpreted from underneath (a mask)." By extension, a hypocrite became a term for someone who was an actor, a pretender, a faker. What is Jesus saying about the Jewish leaders in calling them hypocrites?
8. Do you suppose Jesus' answer would be different if theirs was a sincere question?
9. Jesus is very clever. Instead of answering plainly, he tricks the leaders into answering for him. For when he asks for a Roman coin, and they gave him a denarius. So, the leaders who asked the question were tacitly admitting they had one, therefore the implication is that they themselves were willing to use it. But