



Religious Liberty

SUNDAY

“Jesus told them, ‘Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they were utterly amazed at him.”

MARK 12:17, CSB

What Baptists Believe About Religious Liberty

BY ALEX WARD

Then [Jesus] said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matt. 22:21, ESV).

In the same passage where Jesus reminds his disciples to render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, he also says that there are things which belong rightly to God, not Caesar (Matt. 22:15-22). *This is a reminder that God alone is Lord of the conscience, and the government should not interfere with the sincere religious convictions of individuals.* In the words of John Leland, Baptist preacher and religious liberty advocate, if the government won’t answer for a person before the judgment seat of Christ, it should not interfere with an individual’s religion in the present.

Baptists have historically held that though the conscience is not infallible, recognizing that it can be malformed because of sin’s effects, it should be inviolable. When rightly normed by Scripture, individuals should live in accordance with conscience rather than do what they think to be sin (Rom. 14:1-12).

As a divine institution of God, Christians are to give obedience to government when it exercises its power justly within its sphere of authority. The command to give obedience to government is not a blessing of all the uses of government’s power, but a submission to the authority established by God (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:14). Christians should resist commands from the government that call them to sin or reject the teachings of Christ.

However, in other instances, Christians should willingly submit to the authority instituted by God, availing themselves of all the rights of citizens for protest and redress of grievances. They should do so while also praying for all authorities and leaders to further promote justice and justly govern society (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

As the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000* declares, “A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.”



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