



Religious Liberty

SUNDAY

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MARK 12:17, CSB

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How Baptists View Religious Liberty

BY ALEX WARD

And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 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.” (Matt. 22:20-21, ESV)

A Missional Principle

The *Baptist Faith & Message* rightly declares, “A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.” Defending religious freedom is part of the “DNA” of what it means to be a Baptist. For Baptists, religious liberty is a missional principle rooted in God’s character and his command to make disciples.

Lord of the Conscience

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. This is a reminder that God alone is Lord of the conscience, as he has created all people in his image (Gen. 1:27). The government should not interfere with the sincere religious convictions of individuals. 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 formed by Scripture, individuals should live in accordance with conscience rather than do what they think to be sin (Rom. 14:1-12).

Submission to Appointed Authority

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). However, Christians should resist commands from the government that call them to sin or reject the teachings of Christ. Most importantly, Christians must pray for all authorities and leaders—that they would further promote justice and justly govern society (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

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This bulletin insert is a publication of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, 901 Commerce Street Suite 550, Nashville, TN 37203

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