



Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.

To many, taxes are simply an instrument of oppression.

The founding narrative of the United States centers on tax burdens the British placed on the American colonies. In the nineteenth century, a foreign miners' license tax was levied on gold miners in California, requiring a monthly payment of every foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen. The burden of the tax fell mainly on Chinese miners, as a federal law of 1790 restricted naturalization to white persons.



But taxes can also pool the resources of the many to address common problems too big for the charitable giving of individuals. They can express our shared participation in society, in a community where we look out for one another. So it is with our stewardship of giving.

Jesus' response to his opponents carried religious implications. Roman coins were stamped with the emperor's likeness and inscribed "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, high priest." So the coins constituted blasphemy both to Jews and to the Christians in Matthew's church — the blasphemy of idolatry in the form of money.

But what if we followed the logic that we owe back to someone a thing that bears that someone's image? What is Jesus telling us that we owe to God? Quite simply, everything that bears God's image — that is, everything given to us in creation. God's greatness is stamped everywhere in the created world: air, water, and sunlight, our food, our very existence, and our hope. Because God's image is everywhere, we owe to God our thanks for the earth's abundance, and we owe to God the right and just stewardship of this abundance. And the image of God, made flesh in Jesus Christ, is also stamped on the face of every human being with whom we share God's creation, every other child of God, especially our brothers and sisters in need.

In rendering back to God what was God's own to begin with, we are stepping away from idolizing and hoarding the things that God has given us and directing our worship to where it belongs: to God. We are simply walking the disciple's way with the gratitude for life that we owe as God's children.



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Reflection Questions

- Do you agree that God designed you for generosity?
- What does it mean to you to bear God's image?
- Do you believe that all is given by God as a gift?