

## Small Group Guide: "Render to Caesar"

Based on Mark 12:13-17

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### Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

**Icebreaker Question:** What's one thing you're grateful for this week that you might normally take for granted?

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### Sermon Recap (5 minutes)

This week's message explored Jesus' teaching on authority, taxation, and where our ultimate allegiance lies. The Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Caesar, but Jesus turned their trap into a profound lesson about giving to earthly authorities what belongs to them while giving to God what belongs to Him—ourselves, since we're created in His image.

**Key Scripture:** Mark 12:17 - "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

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### Discussion Questions

#### Part 1: The Snare of Subversion (15 minutes)

1. **Read Mark 12:13-14.** The religious leaders used flattery and twisted Scripture to try to trap Jesus. When have you seen people (or caught yourself) using a "hint of truth" to serve their own purposes rather than God's?
2. The sermon mentioned how we sometimes use Scripture selectively—like saying "God loves a cheerful giver" to avoid giving when we're not feeling cheerful. What are other ways we might twist biblical principles to justify our preferences?
3. **Read Deuteronomy 17:14-15.** How were the Pharisees misapplying this passage? What does this teach us about the importance of understanding Scripture in context?

#### Part 2: The Hypocrisy of the Heart (15 minutes)

4. The pastor shared: "We buy things we can't afford with money we don't have to impress people we don't even like." How does this "keeping up appearances" mentality affect our spiritual lives, not just our financial ones?

5. **Read 1 Samuel 16:7.** God sees the heart while people see outward appearances. What's one area where you struggle with presenting a "good front" while knowing your heart isn't aligned with God?
6. The sermon emphasized that "blessings follow obedience, not the other way around." Share an example from your life where you've seen this principle proven true (or where you're currently struggling to trust this).

### **Part 3: The Dichotomy of Devotion (15 minutes)**

7. **Read Matthew 6:24.** Jesus said we cannot serve both God and money. What are some practical ways this "divided devotion" shows up in modern Christian life?
8. The pastor pointed out that the coin bore Caesar's image, but we bear God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). What does it mean practically to "render to God" ourselves as those created in His image?
9. **Read Romans 13:1-7.** This is a challenging passage, especially when we disagree with authorities. How do we balance submitting to earthly authorities with standing up for biblical principles when they conflict?

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### **Key Takeaways**

- ✓ **God sees beyond our outward appearances to the true condition of our hearts.**
- ✓ **Obedience comes before blessing**—we don't bargain with God or wait to "feel like it" before obeying.
- ✓ **We are created in God's image**, which means our ultimate allegiance belongs to Him, not to money, comfort, or human approval.
- ✓ **Submitting to earthly authorities is an act of worship to God**, who establishes those authorities (even when we don't understand why).
- ✓ **Giving—whether taxes, tithes, or time—should be done as "In Reverent Service" (IRS) to God**, not begrudgingly.

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### **Practical Application (15 minutes)**

#### **Individual Reflection:**

Take 2-3 minutes of silence for each person to consider:

- What is one area where God is calling me to obedience before I see the blessing?
- Is there an authority in my life I'm resisting that I need to submit to as an act of worship to God?

**Group Application Challenge:**

Choose ONE of the following to commit to this week:

**Option 1: The Gratitude Shift** Every time you pay a bill, write a check, or submit a payment (including taxes), pause and pray: "Lord, I give this in reverent service to You, thankful for what You've provided."

**Option 2: The Obedience Step** Identify one area where you know God is calling you to obedience but you've been waiting to "feel ready" or see the blessing first. Take one concrete step of obedience this week.

**Option 3: The Heart Check** Each morning this week, pray 1 Samuel 16:7, asking God to reveal any areas where you're maintaining appearances but your heart isn't aligned with His will.

**Option 4: The Authority Prayer** Commit to praying daily for one authority figure you struggle to respect (boss, political leader, etc.), asking God to help you see them as His appointed servant.

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**Closing Discussion (5 minutes)**

**Final Question:** The pastor mentioned that the early church would worship on Sunday morning and then go to work. How can we cultivate a lifestyle of worship that extends beyond Sunday morning?

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**Prayer Time (10 minutes)**

**Group Prayer Focus:**

- Pray for hearts that are fully surrendered to God, not divided in devotion
- Pray for wisdom to know when to submit to authorities and when to stand for biblical truth
- Pray for a spirit of generous, cheerful giving in all areas of life
- Pray for specific needs shared during discussion

**Closing Prayer:** *"Father, help us to render to You what is Yours—our whole hearts, our obedience, our worship. Create in us clean hearts and help us to serve You in reverent service in every area of our lives. May our obedience flow from love, not legalism, and may we trust that Your blessings follow our faithfulness. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

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**For Next Week**

**Scripture Reading:** Continue in Mark 12:18-27 (Jesus and the Sadducees)

**Reflection Question to Consider:** What questions do I have about eternity and resurrection that I'd like to explore?