MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE

The Reformers’ teachings on Scripture and righteousness by faith led to a new era of religious freedom. Embracing the Bible as the ultimate spiritual authority means rulers can’t coerce people’s consciences. When testifying before the 1521 Diet of Worms, Martin Luther concluded his defense by saying, “Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by the clearest reasoning, ... I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience” (Ellen White, The Great Controversy [1911], 160). The breach between church and state had been created. Before the greatest assembly of the empire, Martin Luther had denied the state’s so-called right to control matters of conscience.

Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was determined to crush this rebellion. Luther’s death seemed certain, but the Elector of Saxony, who believed all his subjects should get a fair trial, managed to secret him from the road outside Wittenberg to Wartburg Castle, about 125 miles (200 km) away. When Luther openly returned a year later, Charles V had become too embroiled in various wars to continue uprooting the Reformation movement. Amazingly, when the emperor convened the Second Diet of Spires in 1529 to prohibit Lutheran teachings, several German princes who had accepted those teachings risked their lives to stand firm on the same convictions Luther had articulated eight years earlier (Ibid., 201). They accepted no limitation on the people’s right to spread God’s Word. This week’s study examines biblical support for the separation of church and state that resulted from the Protestant Reformation.
Write out Matthew 22:15–22 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verses 17–21. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the passage.
Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/ phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw Arrows to connect words/ phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse.
Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Why did Jesus answer the religious leaders so concisely?
Why didn’t He explain more?

What hotly debated questions might people ask Jesus today if they could?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/RL05-3
After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

Are we in greater danger of being overly compliant with government or overly subversive? Why?

Are there any questions from Matthew 22:15–22 that are not explained in Romans 13:1–10?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/RL05-4
What relationship do the following verses have with Matthew 22:15–22?

Romans 13:1–10
Acts 5:28, 29
John 18:33–37
1 Peter 2:13, 14
Titus 3:1
1 Timothy 2:1–4
Daniel 2:21; 4:17, 25, 32

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

How did Jesus honor people’s free will?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you through the text of the week?

Prayer Response:

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.

Read more at
www.inversebible.org/RL05-6
inSight

Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the passage, what are some decisions that must be made in your personal life?

What are some practical decisions you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church life?

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/RL05-7
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What lessons can we learn from how Jesus responded to His critics in Matthew 22?

What differences does the New Testament identify between the church’s role and the state’s?

Do you think the government still derives its authority from God even when it’s grown corrupt? How does God handle such instances?

What is the purpose governing authorities? (Rom. 13:4)

What is the Christian citizen’s responsibility to the government?

Do you think it will be difficult to tell when the government’s laws conflict with God’s? Why or why not?

How can we nurture the courage to stand against the government now, before we need that courage?