

“12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away. 13 Then they *sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. 14 They *came and *said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? 15 “Shall we pay or shall we not pay?” But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, “Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.” 16 They brought *one*. And He *said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” And they said to Him, “Caesar’s.” 17 And Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him. Mark 12:12-17, NAS95.

This murderous attitude of vs. 12 found quick expression in a hasty coalition between two unlikely groups - the Pharisees and the Herodians.

1. An Unlikely Coalition.

Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. (Mark 12:13).

There were no two groups who were more opposed to one another than the Pharisees and the Herodians. They stood at the two opposite ends of the political spectrum. It was like the Klu Klux Klan joining forces with the ACLU.

The Pharisees were the political and religious conservatives of the day. They held to all of the Old Testament Scriptures as well as to the oral traditions of the rabbis.

The Herodians were the pro-Herod party. They were the religious liberals of the day and more interested in Roman politics than in Scriptures or spirituality.

There is a principle here. It is that the world will hardly agree about anything. But they will agree that they don't like you if you stand for Jesus.

2. A Politically Incorrect Question.

They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" (Mark 12:14-15a).

The Romans had ruled over Jerusalem in one form or another since 63 B.C. Since that

time, there had been a gradual increase in taxes all going to fund the Roman Empire. To be fair, it must be admitted that the Romans also provided certain services such as their system of roads. However, it is always true that government takes away more than it gives and Rome was certainly no exception to this rule.

Earlier in this century a rebellion had taken place under the banner of "no tribute to the Romans." It was claimed by these rebels that taxation was tantamount to slavery.

There were three taxes which were collected:

Ground Tax: Made up of 10% of all the grain and 20% of all the wine and fruit produced.

Income Tax: 1% of a man's income.

Poll Tax: A flat tax of one denarius (a day's wage) was paid by all men from 14 to 65 years of age and on all women between the ages of 12 to 65.

The enemies of Jesus have come up with a trick question. They feel that He will be wrong, no matter how He answers. Pay the tax Jesus will lose popularity with the people by advocating an unpopular tax

Then... Don't Pay The Tax Jesus can be accused of inciting rebellion against Rome

Notice how they approach Jesus. It is with flattery. They are lying through their teeth, hoping to disarm Jesus.

3. An Answer.

...But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at."

They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's."

And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him. (Mark 12:15b-17).

Jesus calls for a denarius. The fact that He had to call for one seems to indicate that

A denarius was a silver coin. It was one day's wages for a Roman soldier. On one side of the coin would have been an image of the Roman emperor - Tiberius Caesar. On the other side would have been an image of the goddess of peace. Around the image was an inscription which read, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus, Chief Priest."

It was the practice of all new emperors to issue new coins with their own likeness stamped on the face. There is a sense in which the coin was considered to be the personal property of the king. It bore testimony to the rule of the king whose likeness it carried. The first thing that a rebel or a conqueror would do would be to issue new coins with a new face. There is a principle here. It is that the state is ordained by God. The state brings valuable services to the people of God. And as we share in the benefits of the state, so also we are to share in the responsibilities of the state.

But what about paying taxes to a government that has set itself up against God? Is it right to pay your good hard-earned money to a government that wastes it, or puts it to a purpose that you adamantly oppose?

Jesus says that it is. He calls us to give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar. But notice that there is a limit as to what belongs to Caesar. Our ultimate allegiance is to belong to God. Caesar may own our money. But God owns US.

This has a direct impact upon the underlying issue in this chapter. That issue is one of AUTHORITY. Legal and political authority is real, but it is only of limited scope and duration. Final and lasting authority is in the hands of God.

Both of these types of authority are ordained by God. Jesus was not advocating an abolition of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Neither was He advocating a rebellion against Rome. Rather, He was establishing His claims to a higher authority - one that would be eternal both in scope and in nature.

D. THE RESURRECTION QUESTION.

The next question coming to Jesus also follows this theme of authority. In this case, it is a question of the authority of RATIONALISM. The rationalists of that day were known as the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were made up of the aristocracy. They were the advocates of Hellenization. They held the Law of Moses in high regard, but did not hold that the rest of the Scriptures were inspired. They did not believe in angels or miracles. They were not looking for any future Messiah and they rejected any notion of a future bodily resurrection. They tended to represent the upper class, the royalty and the priesthood. They were the intellectuals

Have you ever noticed that when people achieve a certain social strata, they often stop believing in certain things? Politicians are like that. And so were the Sadducees.

They did not believe in the supernatural. They did not believe in miracles. And Jesus had the nerve to have performed miracles. Therefore they decided on a plan that would put Him in His place.

1. Their Question.

18 Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying,

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother.

20 "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children.

21 "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; 22 and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also.

23 "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her." (Mark 12:18-23).

The question is meant as a trick. It is not a sincere question. It is one of those "can God make a rock so big that He cannot move it" questions. It is a question designed to disprove the doctrine of the resurrection.

The question revolves around the laws of the levite marriage as set forth in the book of Deuteronomy. Remember, the Sadducees only believed in the books of Moses.

There were seven brothers. The oldest is married, but before his marriage can produce

any children, he dies. According to Jewish Law, it is now the responsibility of the second brother to have a child by that wife and to raise the child as the heir of the first brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). And so, he marries here, but dies before there are any children. And so it goes with the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and the seventh. By this time, I think that I would be a bit suspicious of the woman. But she eventually dies, too.

Now is the question. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Do you see what the Sadducees are doing? They are not asking this question because they are actually worried about this situation. They are asking it because they think that the question shows a flaw in the whole teaching about the resurrection. They expect Jesus to stutter and stammer and get red in the face so that they can laugh at Him. But he does nothing of the sort.

2. The Answer.

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? (Mark 12:24).

Jesus was not intimidated. He had honest answers to their questions. But before He answers their question, He comments upon their reason for their lack of understanding.

Sometimes we get the idea that unbelievers are well-educated and that they have reasonable and thought-out reasons as to why they have chosen to reject Christ.

It has been said that when a hundred pagans jump off a sinking ship, a hundred Christians will hit the water. It is like saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. Why is that? It is because foxholes are real. They cannot be explained away in a comfortable intellectual discussion.

The answer of Jesus comes in two parts:

a. The manner of the resurrection.

"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Mark 12:25).

The resurrection does not constitute a continuation of life as it is on earth. The old physical laws will no longer apply. The old physical and social relationships will be insignificant in the presence of our relationship with the Lord.

b. The fact of the resurrection.

"But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?

**"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."
(Mark 12:26-27).**

The Sadducees rejected the resurrection because they did not think that it was taught in the Torah - the first five books of Moses. But Jesus points out that this is not the case. He does this by quoting the words of the Lord to Moses when He spoke to Him out of the burning bush (Exodus 3:6).

In that passage, God identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If He IS the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then it stands to reason that they must still be alive. And if they are alive, then there is life after death.

E. THE QUESTION OF THE LAW.

Jesus was in the critic's den. He had answered trick questions from the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and even the Herodians. He had answered them correctly and He had answered them in a way that showed that His authority was supernatural. He had put them all to silence.

And it is in the midst of this situation that one of the scribes comes forward and asks a legitimate question.

We don't know much about this man. Mark says that he was a scribe. A scribe was a man whose profession it was to make copies of the Scriptures. As a scribe, he knew the Bible forwards and back.

The scribes and the Pharisees were known for adding things to the Law - for building a fence of ordinances around the Law to protect the Law. But they were also known for

Mark 12:13-31 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier January 11, 2008
trying to sum up the entire law into a single sentence – a general statement that would summarize the entire Law.

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Hillel was once challenged to expound the entire Law while standing upon one leg. He replied: "What you hate for yourself, do not to your neighbor. This is the whole Law, the rest is commentary."

When asked a similar question, Rabbi Akiba had answered: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There were others who believed that all of the laws of the Old Testament carried an equal weight. As a result, there was an ongoing debate among the Jews on this matter.

1. The Question.

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" (Mark 12:28).

I have to admit that on first glance I questioned this man's motives. He is in bad company asking a question where every question up to this time has been asked under false pretenses. If that were not bad enough, Matthew's parallel account says that he asked this question to "test" Jesus.

But the comments of Jesus to this man indicate that his heart was in the right place. The test was not so much to trip Jesus up as it was a test of orthodoxy. And hence, a test of AUTHORITY.

2. The Answer.

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one lord; 30 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'

"The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31).

Notice that the issue here is one of obedience to the LAW. This is seen in the question which the scribe first asked, "What COMMANDMENT is the foremost of all?" (Mark 12:28). After Jesus answers the man's question, He will conclude by saying:

"There is no other COMMANDMENT greater than these." (Mark 12:31b).

The scribe was asking a question about the LAW. When you say the word "law" and then look for a corresponding verb to go with it, that word is "obedience."

We would all agree that obeying God is important. That is not a tissue here. What this scribe is asking is this: "What is the number one way of obeying God?" The answer is love.

When asked about the secret to the Christian life, Augustine replied, "Love God and live as you please." He wasn't advocating sin and he wasn't saying that we can ignore the commandments of God. He was saying that when you love, obedience comes naturally.

Think about it. If you really love God, you don't have to be told not to set up any other gods or idols or not to take His name in vain or to set aside a day to worship Him.

If you really love your parents whom God has given to be an authority over you, then you do not have to be told to honor your father and mother.

And if you really love your neighbor who is created in God's image, then you don't have to be told not to bear false witness against him. You don't have to be told not to steal from him or murder him or commit adultery with his wife or covet his possessions. Love is tested by obedience. And when you love, obedience comes naturally.

a. Love begins with God.

Do you see it? Before Jesus talks about loving man or even about loving God, He begins by talking about who God is.

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord'" (Mark 12:29).

What has that got to do with love? It has everything to do with love.

The reason that we love is because God is who He is and because He has done what He has done. Love is defined by God because GOD IS LOVE.

Do you want to know what real love is all about? Look at God. Look at the Creator who carefully and tenderly fashioned man in His own image and placed him into a beautiful

And when man sinned in rebellion against God and brought death to the world, look at the promise that God gave of one who would one day restore it all.

Do you want to know what love is? Look at God bringing His people out of slavery in Egypt and watching over them in the wilderness. Look at His accepting their repentance after they had deserted Him to worship an idol. See His faithfulness in feeding them each day and in watching over them each night.

Do you want to know what love is? Look at God sending His own Son to be born to a humble family with a lowly stable as a delivery room and a feeding trough for a cradle.

Do you want to know what love is? Look at the cross as the Son of God hangs spread-eagle on rough, wooden beams, His body enduring all of hell's agonies and His ears ringing with the taunting mockery of His enemies. Listen to Him whisper a prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

You have been loved with an infinite love. And you are called to love with that kind of measure.