

In this chapter, Jesus is asked three different questions designed either as a trap to get Him in trouble with the people and/or the Roman authorities, to discredit His scriptural position, or to merely challenge His theology. Each time, however, Jesus gives a wise and scriptural answer that avoided His enemies' efforts to trap Him.

Verses 1-12: Jesus tells a parable of a man who owned a vineyard that he had leased out to some husbandmen, but when the time came for the husbandmen to share the harvest with the owner, they refused, abusing the servants that he had sent to collect what was due him. Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking that the husbandmen would honor him because he was the son, but instead they kill the son. Jesus rhetorically asks what the owner will do next and then answers the question by stating that the owner will come and destroy these husbandmen and lease out the vineyard to others. The chief priests, scribes and elders wanted to arrest Jesus because they realized that this parable had been spoken to condemn them, but they couldn't because the people believed Jesus to be a prophet from God and might riot if Jesus were arrested.

13 And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.

Since their fear of the people prevented the Jewish leaders from arresting Jesus, they instead attempt to trick Jesus into losing public favor through His words. It is interesting that these two groups (the Pharisees and the Herodians) would come together for the purpose of discrediting Jesus, implying that both groups considered Him to be enough of a threat to warrant working together. The Pharisees hated Jesus because He contradicted their religious teachings. The Herodians were not a religious party but a political one that supported the dynasty of the Herods, who were in turn backed by Rome. The Pharisees hated Rome and anyone who favored their rule, making them natural enemies of the Herodians.

14 And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.

“And when they were come, they say unto him, Master [teacher], we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth” – The Pharisees and Herodians want to trick Jesus into saying something that they could use against Him, either in religiously or politically. They bait the trap by prefacing their question with remarks intended to encourage Jesus to say what He thought openly without regard to who heard Him or how His words might be received. They also feigned respect by addressing Him as “teacher.”

“Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?” – The tribute in question was an annual tax of one denarius per person. A denarius was a Roman coin that represented a day's wages for a Roman soldier. This, and all other Roman taxes, were hated by the Jews, especially since these taxes helped finance Rome's occupation force in Israel. The Pharisees are asking Jesus if paying this tax was permitted by the Mosaic Law, and they reduce the question to only two possible answers: they should pay the tax or they should not pay the tax. They hope to put Jesus in a dilemma, for if He said that they should pay the tax, then the public would turn against Him. If He said they shouldn't pay the tax, then the Herodians could report to the Roman authorities that Jesus was advocating rebellion against Rome. They also prefaced the question with remarks implying that Jesus was not afraid of teaching the truth. Their intent was to cause Jesus to feel compelled to answer out of fear that He would look like a coward if He didn't answer their question.

“But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny [denarius], that I may see it” – Jesus saw right through their deception and knew that their true intent was to lay a trap designed get Him in trouble. He responds by rhetorically asking why they are attempting to cause Him to sin and then asks that someone would bring a denarius coin for Him to see.

16 And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. 17 And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

“And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's” – When they brought the coin to Jesus, He likely held it up for all to see and asked whose image was stamped upon it. The image was of the current emperor of Rome, Tiberius Caesar, with a “superscription” of his name underneath. The crowd acknowledges that the coin, minted by Rome, had Caesar's image and superscription stamped on it.

“And Jesus answering said unto them, Render [to pay what is due] to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” – Their question was posed as requiring an “either/or” but Jesus bypasses their trap with a “both/and” answer. The word “render” means “to pay what is owed” and there are things we owe our government for the law and order it provides: obedience to the laws and taxes to finance its work. However, there are other things that we owe God (worship, love, obedience, etc.) that we cannot give to “Caesar,” even when it is demanded. Jesus split our indebtedness between government and God, each being due certain things.

“And they marvelled at him” – The question was designed to give Jesus no way to answer without getting into trouble and these Pharisees and Herodians were surprised and amazed that Jesus was able to answer their question without falling into their trap.

18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, 19 Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

The Sadducees were a religious sect that did not believe in anything supernatural, including the resurrection of the dead. They considered that only the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) was authoritative scripture and that nothing that Moses had written taught the literal resurrection of the dead. They now come to Jesus and ask a question based on the Mosaic Law, specifically a commandment concerning levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-6). Levirate marriage is marriage to a dead husband's brother for the purpose of preserving the dead husband's name and inheritance.

20 Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. 21 And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. 22 And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. 23 In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

These Sadducees present Jesus with a contrived hypothetical scenario concerning a woman whose husband had died and each of her husband's six brothers had married her before dying themselves. They presented this contrived scenario to Jesus with the intent to "prove" that the idea of resurrection was erroneous, foolish and impractical.

24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? 25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

"And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?" – They believed that their contrived scenario proved that the resurrection was a foolish idea but instead the scenario they concocted revealed that they neither understood the scripture nor believed that the power of God could accomplish the resurrection.

"For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" – The Sadducees assumed that marriages would continue after a husband and wife were resurrected, but the Sadducees were showing their ignorance of what the scripture actually taught about resurrection. Jesus states that resurrected saints would be monogamous, just as the angels in heaven are. He does not say that resurrected saints become angels – only that they will be like the angels with respect to marriage.

26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

After answering their immediate question, Jesus goes on to show that the Sadducees' rejection of the resurrection is also in error. He quotes what the LORD said to Moses from the burning bush in Ex. 3:6, pointing out that the LORD said "I am" and not "I was" the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The LORD did not speak of the three patriarchs in the past tense as if they were dead and no longer existed. Since the LORD is God of the living, that meant that these three patriarchs were still alive despite their mortal bodies being dead. Jesus then points out that the Sadducees have erred "greatly" (large, much) by not believing the resurrection.

28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

Matthew tells us in his account that this scribe asked the question with the intent of "tempting" (Greek: *testing*) Jesus (Matt. 22:35). It may be that this man, having heard the way that Jesus wisely answered the other questions, wanted to hear what Jesus thought about the question of the "first" (Greek: *first in rank or importance*) commandment given by God.

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. 31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Jesus immediately responds by quoting Deut 6:4-5, where Moses is giving instructions to Israel to fear the LORD and obey. The LORD requires our utmost devotion. Jesus adds the next most important commandment, which is also driven by love, that addresses our relationship with others. Jesus summarizes by stating that no other commandments are more important than these two.

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

"And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth" – The scribe is impressed with Jesus' answer to the question and cannot deny that He has spoken the truth according to scripture.

"for there is one God; and there is none other but he" – The scribe makes a brief commentary on the scripture that Jesus quoted, first stating that the LORD is the "one" (singular; alone) God and that there is no other God but him.

33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

The scribe continues by acknowledging that if someone loves God with every fiber of their being and loves their neighbor as they do themselves, then they are doing more to please God than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices they could possibly offer. The scribe recognized that obedience to these two commandments would avoid committing any of the sins that would require the burnt offerings and sacrifices.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

"And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly [wisely; prudently]" – Jesus also recognized the wisdom that the scribe used in responding to Jesus' answer.

"he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" – Jesus compliments the scribe for recognizing that love for God and love for one's neighbor was more important than the keeping of the law's ordinances and sacrifices. However, by stating that the scribe was "not far from the kingdom," Jesus indicated that the scribe was close and yet still not in the kingdom. This scribe would have to stop trusting in his own ability to keep the law and instead trust in Jesus Christ as Savior in order to enter the kingdom.

"And no man after that durst ask him any question" – The Jewish leaders gave up trying to ask Jesus trick questions designed to discredit Him after seeing Him skillfully answer the series of questions asked in this chapter. They recognized that it was futile to attempt it.