

¹³And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. ¹⁴And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" ¹⁵But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." ¹⁷Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him. Mark 12:13-17

The Trap

Who and why

¹⁹The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. ²⁰So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. Luke 20:19-20

The bait

²⁸And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:28-29

²And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" ³He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." ⁵And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' ⁷Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." Mark 10:2-8

The trick

"Is it Lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"
Referring to the Mosaic Law or to Roman law?
Demanding a Yes or No answer

The Response

Part 1 - "Why put me to the test?"

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹where your fathers put me to the test Hebrews 3:7-9 referring to the event in Numbers 14 during the Exodus.

Some historical background on the Roman tribute

Part 2 - Render to Caesar

Show me a denarius - they had access to one, so they were using the Roman coins

apodidomi rather than didomi - The idea is not just to give something, but to give back something, to repay it, to discharge an obligation.

Part 3 - Render to God

The Amazing Christ

The Pharisees and the Herodians (and presumably the chief priests and scribes who sent them) were amazed - ekthaumazoo - indicating an intense astonishment.

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were amazed - existemi - "shaken out of their wits" or "beside themselves."

Questions for Personal Study

1. The Pharisees (the strict observers of the Mosaic Law) and the Herodians (the cooperators with the Roman law) asked Jesus a question about how the Law applied to taxes. They were not interested in His answer - just in using either answer to trap Him for their purposes. How interested are you in God's answers to your questions?
2. How does it make you feel when you see Jesus' rapid recognition of their hypocrisy and lack of faith - putting Him "to the test?"
3. Are there gifts that you need to "repay" to God?
4. Spend some time this week exploring how amazing Jesus is. How has knowing Him changed your life?