



Matthew 22:15-46 Three Questions for Jesus and One Great Command

Summary: People want to know: does God agree with me? Meanwhile, Jesus patiently explains the truth and calls people to love God and love others.

This morning, as we look at Matthew's biography of Jesus, we continue to see the events of the last week of Jesus' life and we find Him answering controversial religious questions. People are asking Jesus what He thinks about this or that, and they're deciding – do I like what He has to say? Does it fit with what I believe? They're inspecting or interrogating Jesus - hoping to trip Him up publically while He honestly answers their questions and points them to the God they think they know enough about.

Read with me here beginning in:

Matthew 22:15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk. 16 And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. 17 Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

OK, now this happened around 2000 years ago in a country many of us have never visited so let me give you some background – the Pharisees were a religious denomination of the Jews, it would be like speaking about the Methodists, or the Presbyterians, or the Baptists today.

And remember, all of this happened during the time of the Roman Empire. The Romans have occupied all of Israel and most of what we call North Africa, Southern Europe, and parts of the Middle East. You may have heard of the name Caesar Augustus, he was on the scene about 20 years before these events happened with Jesus. The current emperor is Tiberius and his government demands taxes of the people they conquer. The Pharisees want to know – what do *you* think Jesus, should we pay it?

Now, as Jews, the Pharisees think of themselves as God's chosen people and they know that if they pay taxes Rome is just going to use the money to fund it's pagan temples, support the decadent lifestyles of Roman aristocracy, and continue to occupy Israel with their unholy presence.

And then, on top of it all, they have to pay them using Roman coins which are stamped with a picture of Caesar, the man who is oppressing them, on one side and a Roman goddess on the other. So, they argue they almost have a moral obligation to resist paying Roman taxes.



But they don't have the most pure motives here. This isn't all about convictions and conscience. Notice it says the Pharisees sent their disciples [with the Herodians](#). A few weeks ago you may have heard the name of King Herod while reading about the Christmas story. These were people who support him. And as a result, they supported Rome who appointed Herod to rule the area for them. The Pharisees and the Herodians were not friends, they didn't get along or share the same views, in fact, they would have had opposite opinions on this issue. But they've both come together to see what Jesus has to say about this hot-button issue.

So, it's all a trap – If Jesus said don't pay the taxes, He would face arrest by the Herodians. If He said go ahead and pay the taxes, it would seem like He was endorsing the Roman government and all of its pagan temples, philosophies, and hedonist parties.

So, what do you think Jesus, which of us is right, which of us do you agree with?

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? 19 Show Me the tax money."

So they brought Him a denarius.

20 And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription *is this*?"

21 They said to Him, "Caesar's."

And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they had heard *these words*, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Obviously it was not the answer either side expected.

Jesus said give to Caesar the things that belong to him - the things that bear his inscription. He had them made; he ultimately controlled them.

And that is equally true today; you should pay your taxes. Even if the government spends money in ways you don't agree with or think is fair. There are way for you to address that but God doesn't look the other way while you cheat on your taxes or wink at you as if to say, "good job!"

Christians are called to be productive citizens, to pay their taxes, and to pray for their political leaders regardless of party or issue. Christians can, have, and do serve in all levels of government, in all of its departments and they can seek the good of fellow citizens, even non-Christian citizens, simply because justice, fairness, and excellence are godly virtues.

I am not saying Christians have to be unquestioning supporters of whatever policy, party, or politician holds power at the moment though.

You can, and should, oppose government at times. You can, and should, work for change, work to increase justice, equality, mercy, and peace - you should work, at all times, under

all circumstances, under all administrations to advance the things God values, because while you should pay your taxes because your money bears the image of your government, think about this: **in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and everything in and on them.** (Emphasis added) In fact, the Bible tells us:

Genesis 1:27 God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Pay attention to those words: **God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**

You and I are made in the image of God; in some way that we don't fully understand, we bear His image.

Now, **"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."**

My friends, do you see what this means? It means there is nothing in your life that God cannot, rightfully, lay claim to. God can lay claim to your money, but He can also lay claim to your time, to your entire life – to how, when, where, and with whom you spend it.

But I want to point out something really encouraging to you about that – it means you have intrinsic worth. You have a real identity, you have real value. You can't pay US taxes with monopoly money, it doesn't have any value, the US government wants US dollars because they have real value. God wants you because you have real value to Him, you bear His image.

Some people try to find their identity or sense of worth in their work. But what happens when work doesn't turn out the way you thought it would? What happens if you graduate and can't find a job? What happens if you're stuck working as a barista or in an unpaid internship, or your contract is cut, or your position is determined to be unnecessary or redundant or if you're replaced by automation or forced into retirement? There are all kinds of pitfalls to finding your identity in your profession.

Or maybe you find your identity in the things you own, the car you drive, the brands you wear, the things you tell yourself "you've earned." The things you surround yourself with.

Some people find their identity in their role – they're a parent. So, they pour themselves into parenting – making sure the kids have everything they need, running them to all their activities, doing their laundry, making their lunches, setting up their tutors. But one day, they graduate and they leave the house. Or, they decide they don't like all the activities you've been pushing them into. They don't want to be a whatever dream profession you're trying to steer them toward. What then? What do you do when your kid's lives turn out not to look the way you wanted? Have you failed?

Or, maybe you're the kid – where do you find *your* identity? Is it in what you do? Is it in the classes you made it into, or the school? Do you find your identity in the team you made, or the group you joined? What happens when you're no longer good enough to be captain, or first chair, when you don't make the travel or varsity team, when you can't seem to earn an A?

If you keep telling yourself, "this is who I am, this is why I'm good," and whatever that is falls apart or stays out of reach, what then?

We all struggle with this to some degree, we all look for a place of meaning in our lives, we look for something that defines us – it's often how we introduce ourselves or what we like to talk about most, it's how we want people to see us.

And Jesus, right here, is telling us, chill out. "[Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.](#)"

You are made in God's image – He loves you. He knows you. He cares about you. Don't worry so much about what you should be or do. Know who and know what you are – you bear His image. You might bear it well, or you might bear it poorly, that's another issue, but you do bear His image, so give yourself entirely to Him – pay your divine taxes at the 100% tax rate.

Well, next we see another religious group try their hand at questioning Jesus:

Matthew 22:23 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, 24 saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 25 Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. 26 Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. 27 Last of all the woman died also. 28 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her."

This group, the Sadducees, were the religious liberals of their day – they didn't believe in much of the supernatural. They rejected things like angels and the idea of a resurrection. So, they tried to point out what they saw as the inconsistencies of these ideas and they wanted to know: Jesus, if you're so smart, what about this?

The issue they bring up is called levirate marriage. It's described in Deuteronomy, one of the early books of Israel's history, but it occurred in other times and cultures as well. The idea was always to provide a sort of social and economic protection to women in family-based cultures where women typically did not work outside the home or own property. If a husband died, his widow likely had no means of survival except charity. So, a brother of the deceased man would marry her and take care of her.

Now, I know that sounds completely foreign to us. But you have to remember that our modern ideas of ‘finding the love of your life’ and ‘feeling completely fulfilled’ are a romantic invention that is very recent in the scope of human history. And, it actually doesn’t seem to be working out so well when you consider modern rates of divorce. So don’t rush too quickly to judgment about the way things were done at other times. And remember, the real question they had here wasn’t about the marriages, it was about how marriages on earth affect things in heaven.

29 Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.

Jesus says none of this actually matters in heaven where there are no marriages between human beings.

And then, He goes on to score points for the doctrine of the resurrection

31 But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 *‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’* God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” 33 And when the multitudes heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching.

The point He is making is, when God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He said “*I am* their God,” not “I was their God.” The point is the present tense language instead of past tense.

Now again, I know this leaves some of you saying, “I don’t get it, why is this all such a big deal?” It’s not the same question as the ones you’re asking, but note that this had a significant impact on the original audience – read verse 33, *And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.* It was like Mic Drop Jesus.

So, twice now we’ve seen people checking Jesus out, asking Him questions, interviewing Him, seeing if He lines up with what they believe. And now someone else is going to take a shot:

Matthew 22:34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, 36 “Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?”

This was a common question that religious teachers wrestled with in Jesus’ day. They had identified over 600 commands in the Scripture and would often theorize about which were most important.

37 Jesus said to him, “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” 38 This is *the* first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Jesus gives them an authoritative answer to a question they have been debating vigorously. And His answer is one we refer to often here at City Gates, you see it on the cover of your bulletin and in other places reduced to the simple reminder: Love God, Love Others.

If you're wondering what to do with your life, there's the answer. Love God, and Love Others. In that order. Because, loving God compels us to love others. Receiving the love of God allows us to reflect love to others.

And notice, this is a call for a comprehensive, whole of life strategy – a grand strategy involving your heart, mind, soul, and strength – it involves every part of you mentally, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. We might say, "with every part of you that bears God's image, render to Him what He is due." Pay your divine taxes by surrendering to God that He might have His way through you.

You might also consider this something of a tool to assess your life – do certain ways of loving God and loving others come easily to you? Which are difficult? You might think of yourself as more of a doer. Not much of an intellectual. It's easier for you to love God with your strength.

Or maybe the opposite is true, you fancy yourself an academic – you can love God all day long with your mind. OK, but do you ever worship with your heart? Is there anything that moves you?

We're all going to be prone to identify more with one side of things than the other, but we're each called to actively love in all of the domains: heart, soul, mind, and strength – and to show that love not just to God, but to people around us.

Let that be a challenge to us. Jesus said people will know we are His disciples by our love for one another.

I met with a man a few weeks ago who needed someone to talk to after going through some really rough spots in life. He doesn't usually attend church, but he has gone to several men's retreats with Burke Community Church because he said, the men there genuinely seem to care about each other and he could tell. He felt they really cared about him too. That was the reputation they had in his mind – that they really cared about other men.

Now, I've often said that I want us to have a reputation in the community as a church that really teaches the Word, that if you're looking for a good Bible teaching, Bible believing church, you should check out City Gates, but I also hope we have a reputation for love, for kindness, for mercy and grace. Because that's a reputation for looking like Jesus, a reputation for rendering back to God the things that belong to Him, a reputation for receiving His love and then reflecting it to others.

Well, after being asked all of these trick and trap questions, now Jesus has one for them:

Matthew 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"

They said to Him, "*The Son of David.*"

43 He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him '*Lord,*' saying:

44 *'The LORD said to my Lord,*

"Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" '?

45 If David then calls Him '*Lord,*' how is He his Son?" 46 And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

The men Jesus was speaking with were looking for a descendant of the great king David to show up and lead a rebellion against Rome. They were waiting for someone to come along and re-establish the glory days of Israel's past. But God is focused on establishing a new kingdom - the kingdom of Heaven - and one last time, Jesus tries to help them see the error of their ways. They've spent the day trying to make a fool of Him with their trick and trap questions, and He's spent the day reaching out to them by answering with patience and wisdom.

We all have thoughts and ideas about life, where it comes from and what happens when we die. We have ideas about what is right and wrong and what should be done about it and whether or not a god or gods are involved in any of it. We're all theologians at some level.

But the question we should all need to ask is: where did I get these opinions and ideas? And, if God were to show me that I was wrong about any of them, would I be willing to change my opinion?

We've seen people ask Jesus three different questions this morning, each time hoping that Jesus would give an answer like theirs, but each time He gave His own answer.

What do you do when God's answers don't line up with yours? Do you ask God to change, or are you willing to change yourself? And where do you go to find information about God and life and heaven and hell and right and wrong? Where do you go for information about how to live? Where do you go for counseling? Where do you go for affirmation and approval and belonging?

My friends, God offers you answers. He patiently answers questions. Even tricky questions. He gives you a sense of identity, peace, direction, and purpose. He tells you what you were made for: you were made, you exist, to know God and make Him known to others with every aspect of your life.

You bear His image, your heart, soul, mind, and physical body are all designed by Him, designed to be filled by Him, to bear His image, and to reflect that image to people around you. So, bring God your questions, receive His answers, and then live for His glory and the good of the people around you.

Let's pray.