

Mark 12:13-27 “Religion Versus Jesus”**

Main Idea: In Mark 12:13-27 we meet the kind of people who have the most trouble with Jesus, *religious* people. There they tried to trap Jesus with two controversial subjects, politics and religion. By looking at Jesus’ response, we learn not only about those subjects, but more importantly about the supremacy of Jesus.

I. Jesus faced a controversy regarding politics (13-17).

A. The Pharisees and Herodians asked a question about taxes (13-15a).

1. Some people sell out to the government.
2. Other people oppose the government.

B. Jesus turned the question into a teachable moment (15b-17).

1. We should give the government what belongs to the government.
2. We should give God what belongs to God.

II. Jesus faced a controversy regarding religion (18-27).

A. The Sadducees asked a question about the doctrine of the resurrection (18-23).

1. Some people ask questions for truth’s sake.
2. Other people ask questions simply to avoid the truth.

B. Jesus exposed their wrong thinking (24-27).

1. There is a resurrection coming.
2. What will matter in the life to come isn’t marriage, but God Himself.
3. If the reason you want to go to heaven isn’t Christ, you may not be going.

Make It Personal: How are you responding to Jesus?

1. It is not enough to be amazed by Jesus.
2. It is essential to submit your life to Him.

Relationship leads to religion. Chew on that statement for a moment...

It begins with a *relationship*. We enter the world as sinners cut off from God, but through faith in the person and work of Christ, we enter into a personal relationship with God. We enter His family.

That relationship, if it’s truly real, shows up in a new kind of life. We do things differently. We have new values, priorities, and habits. It’s sometimes said of such a person that he now “has religion.” Relationship leads to *religion*.

Answer this. Can a person have religion without a relationship? Indeed, many do. It’s possible to imitate the lifestyle of the person who truly has a relationship with God. You simply do the religious things he does—like going to church, praying before meals, giving a tithe, having a Bible on one’s coffee table, and so on—and assume you are okay, simply because you’ve “got religion.”

The 19th-century Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard identified two kinds of religion -- Religion A and Religion B. The first is "faith" in name only (2 Tim. 3:5). It's the practice of attending church without genuine faith in the living Lord.

Religion B, on the other hand, is a life-transforming, destiny-changing experience. It's a definite commitment to the crucified and risen Savior, which establishes an ongoing personal relationship between a forgiven sinner and a gracious God.

This difference explains why for many years British author C.S. Lewis had such great difficulty in becoming a Christian. Religion A had blinded him to Religion B. According to his brother Warren, his conversion was "no sudden plunge into a new life, but rather a slow, steady convalescence from a deep-seated spiritual illness - an illness that had its origins in our childhood, in the dry husks of religion offered by the semi-political churchgoing of Ulster, and the similar dull emptiness of compulsory church during our school days."[\[1\]](#)

Jesus had a showdown with "Religion A" kind of people in Mark 12. Quite frankly, "Religion A" folks don't get along well with Jesus. Not today, nor when He walked the earth.

In Mark 12:13-27 two groups of religious people tried to trap Jesus with two controversial subjects, ironically the same two subjects that often stir up controversy in our day: *politics* and *religion*.

Lyman Beecher once observed, "No great advance has been made in science, politics or religion without controversy." By looking at Jesus' response, we learn not only about those subjects, but more importantly about the supremacy of Christ and what it means to be a true Christian.

I. Jesus faced a controversy regarding politics (13-17).

The showdown took place during the Passion Week. Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to the cheers of the Jewish crowd. This infuriated the religious establishment. On Monday Jesus went to the temple and cleaned house, overturning tables and driving out the money-changers. This, too, incensed the religious elite, and on Tuesday, they told Him so.

The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders (i.e. the Sanhedrin) came to Him with a question in Mark 11:28, "By what authority are you doing these things?" The Lord silenced them with question of His own (11:29-33), followed by a parable that exposed their hypocrisy (12:1-11). They wanted to arrest Him, but refrained out of fear of what the crowd would do (12:12). They left, but certainly didn't give up.

Notice verse 13, "Later [either later on Tuesday, or Wessel suggests the following occurred the next day, on Wednesday] they [the "they" refers to the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders, the ones who just challenged Jesus but failed] sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words."

Note the tag team effort the religious Jews are using to defeat Jesus. The priests, teachers, and elders failed in round one, so they sent some others in round two. It's not surprising that the Pharisees and Herodians are trying to trap Jesus. They've been plotting together to kill Jesus since Mark 3:6. What is surprising is that these two groups are *together*.

The Pharisees were the separated ones. They hated and resisted Rome. The Herodians were a political action group. They supported and worked for Rome. They were followers of Herod who sold his soul to Rome to gain control over Israel. The Pharisees were the right-wingers. The Herodians were the left-wingers. And yet their mutual hatred of Jesus brought them together. Hatred can do that, you know, bring people together for a time. Kent Hughes explains, "The Pharisees hated him because he was disrupting their *religious* agenda, the Herodians because he threatened their *political* arrangement. They both wanted him dead."[\[2\]](#)

Note the approach they took...

A. The Pharisees and Herodians asked a question about taxes (13-15a).

Verses 14-15—"They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' ¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

A man on vacation was strolling along outside his hotel in Acapulco, enjoying the sunny Mexican weather. Suddenly, he was attracted by the screams of a woman kneeling in front of a child.

The man knew enough Spanish to determine that the child had swallowed a coin. Seizing the child by the heels, the man held him up, gave him a few shakes, and an American quarter dropped to the sidewalk.

"Oh, thank you sir!" cried the woman. "You seemed to know just how to get it out of him. Are you a doctor?"

"No, ma'am," replied the man. "I'm with the United States Internal Revenue Service."^[3]

If there's any subject that sure to create controversy in any country, it's taxes. No one likes taxes. No one likes the person who collects the taxes. No one likes the person who speaks well of the person who requires taxes. Jesus' critics knew that and planned to use it against Jesus.

Luke 20:20 says the questioners were "spies who pretended to be righteous." They began with flattery. "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." Are they intending to compliment Jesus? No, not sincerely anyway. But no higher compliment can be said of a teacher than, "You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." The fact is, there are other ways to teach besides giving the truth. Some teachers simply tell people what they *want* to hear—and they get quite a following. But not Jesus.

The question came in two parts. One, is it right to pay taxes? Two, should we pay taxes? As Barclay explains, the Jews had to pay three kinds of taxes. There was a *ground tax*. This consisted in one-tenth of all the grain and one-fifth of the wine and fruit produced. There was an *income tax* which amounted to one-percent of a man's income. Then there was a *poll tax* which was levied on all men from age 14 to 65 and on all women from 12 to 65. This poll tax was one denarius (the usual pay for a day's work).

The typical Jew despised paying taxes to Rome. It wasn't just the money. It was the principle of it all, for they hated the Roman occupation of their land and many felt to pay taxes to Rome was to admit their right to rule.

You can see the dilemma Jesus faced. If He answered the tax question *yes*, He would alienate Himself from the Jews. If He answered *no*, He would be in serious trouble with the Romans.

We actually see two common attitudes towards government represented here. These two attitudes cause division in the church in America for they represent two common responses towards political involvement.

1. *Some people sell out to the government.* Like the Herodians did.

2. *Other people oppose the government.* Like the Pharisees did.

Let me restate something. The reason the Herodians and Pharisees are here working together is because the real issue isn't taxes. The real issue is their mutual hatred of Jesus. They may hate each other but they hate Jesus more. Why? Because Jesus calls them both to change. Just like He does you and me. And that's something a "good religious person" refuses to do, to admit he is a sinner who needs to change.

How did Jesus handle the predicament?

B. Jesus turned the question into a teachable moment (15b-17).

Verse 15b—“But Jesus knew their hypocrisy.” A hypocrite is a pretender. It’s the person who presents himself to be what he is not in reality. It’s acting like you are interested when you aren’t really. It’s singing songs in church about someone you can’t see and don’t know in order to impress those you can see and do know. Jesus knew their hypocrisy, and ours if it’s present.

He confronts it in verse 15—“‘Why are you trying to trap me?’ he asked.” ‘Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’” Notice the Master Teacher at work here. When Jesus taught He established involvement, used visual aids, addressed heart issues, and wasn’t afraid to offend or even anger His students if it was in their best interest. Here He exposes their true intent for all to see. *Why are you trying to trap me?* I know and you know that you’re not here to learn about taxes. You’re trying to get rid of me.

Having exposed their motive, Jesus addressed their question. “Bring me a denarius,” He said. It’s significant that Jesus asks for a coin, indicating He had no coin of His own. See the humble Savior, my friend. “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor... (2 Cor. 8:9).”

Verse 16—“They brought the coin, and he asked them, ‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.” The denarius was a small silver coin weighing about 3.8 grams. One side bore the image of Tiberius, the current Roman emperor (all emperors were called Caesar). The inscription read, “Of Tiberius Caesar, the divine Augustus, son of Augustus.” And on the opposite side was the title, “pontifex maximus,” “the high priest of the Roman nation.”^[4]

Verse 17—“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’” What an amazing statement! With it Jesus not only diffused the volatile situation but taught us two important lessons regarding politics.

1. *We should give the government what belongs to the government.* “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” What is Caesar’s? What do we owe Him, according to God’s Word? For starters, *submission*, according to Romans 13:1 (“Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God”).

What else do we owe Caesar? 1 Peter 2:17 says we are to give the King *honor*. 1 Timothy 2:1-6 commands us to *pray* for our rulers. Romans 13 tells us to give Caesar *obedience* to his laws, as well as *taxes, revenue, and respect* (13:6-7).

Let Jesus’ words sink in. Give Caesar what is Caesar’s. Of all people, Christians ought to be exemplary citizens in whatever country they reside. Granted, we have a higher authority, God Himself, and if our government requires us to violate God’s law we must respectfully disobey. But in all else, we are to give Caesar what is Caesar’s.

It’s easy to criticize Caesar, but think of the blessings we experience because of government, particularly our government. We enjoy services such as national defense, and fire and police protection. We have programs for the poor and disabled. We benefit from educational opportunities. We have representatives who make decisions in our behalf in conjunction with representatives from other cities and states. We have all this because, by God’s mercy, Caesar exists.

R. Alan Cole concludes, “If we accept the amenities of the state, in law and order, expressed in a guaranteed coinage as in other things, then we have no right to seek to escape the burdens imposed by the state.”^[5] J. D. Johnson similarly states, “Those who accept the privileges of the State must discharge the just demands of the State.”^[6]

There’s lesson #1. We should give the government what belongs to the government.

2. *We should give God what belongs to God.* What belongs to God? Our ultimate respect and fear (1 Pet. 2:17). Our love (Deut. 6:5). Our allegiance (Matt. 6:33). Our obedience to His commands (John 15:10). Our bodies for service (Rom. 12:1-2). Our worship (Heb. 13:15-16). Our treasure, time, and talents (1 Pet. 4:10-11; Luke 12:35-

48).

Yes, the coin has Caesar's image on it, so give it back to him. But give God that which bears His image. That's you, beloved. God created you in His image (Gen. 1:27). So give yourself to God.

Verse 17 concludes, "And they were amazed at him." Amazed, yes, but not willing to change. They still planned to kill Him.

It's tragic yet true. There will be people in hell who were amazed by Jesus, people who listened to His Word, who were impressed by what He had to say, who were even impressed by *Him*. Yet to be saved it's not enough to be amazed by Jesus. You must *believe* in Him.

So ended the controversy regarding politics. A second followed...

II. Jesus faced a controversy regarding religion (18-27).

In the book *Gaily the Troubadour*, published in 1936, Arthur Guiterman wrote the following poem. Reading his observations, you wouldn't guess it was written seventy years ago.

*First denistry was painless;
Then bicycles were chainless
And carriages were horseless
And may laws, enforceless.
Next, cookery was fireless,
Telegraphy was wireless,
Cigars were nicotineless
And coffee, caffeineless.
Soon oranges were seedless,
The putting green was weedless,
The college boy hatless,
The proper diet, fatless,
Now motor roads are dustless,
The latest steel is rustless,
Our tennis courts are sodless,
Our new religions, godless.[\[7\]](#)*

Religion. Now there's a subject that gets people fired up! In verse 18...

A. The Sadducees asked a question about the doctrine of the resurrection (18-23). Verse 18—"Then the

Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.” The Sadducees were a small but powerful party of Jews. They lived in Jerusalem and controlled the temple. In one sense, the Sadducees were the most conservative group in Israel. They accepted only the Law and rejected not only Jewish oral tradition (which the Pharisees endorsed) but also the Prophets and the Writings. They did not believe in immortality, nor in spirits nor angels. It’s not surprising, then, to see the subject with which they tried to trip Jesus.

Verses 19-23—“‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?’”

Talk about a hypothetical situation! What are the odds of one woman outliving seven brothers! Though the Sadducees ask a question here, it’s a loaded one. Know this...

1. *Some people ask questions for truth’s sake. However...*

2. *Other people ask questions simply to avoid the truth.* That’s what the Sadducees are doing. Asking a ridiculous question simply to avoid the painful truth.

B. Jesus exposed their wrong thinking (24-27).

Verse 24—“Jesus replied, ‘**Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?**’” We get in trouble when we fail to know these same two things: God’s Word and God’s power.

Verses 25-27—“**When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.** ²⁶ **Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’** ²⁷ **He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!’”**

Jesus pointed out their wrong thinking and He used the very part of the Bible the Sadducees said they believed in, the Book of Moses, the Pentateuch! He made three things very clear...

1. *There is a resurrection coming.* Death isn’t the end. We will live forever somewhere. Jesus uses the story of the burning bush to prove His point.

Moses lived over five hundred years after Abraham, yet when speaking to Moses at the burning bush, God said, “I AM the God of Abraham.” Not I *was* but I *am*. That indicates that Abraham, though not on earth, was still living hundreds of years after He died. So was Isaac. So was Jacob. I *am* their God. It wouldn’t make sense for God to say He was the God of people who no longer existed.

There is a resurrection coming. Everyone will live forever somewhere. Those who know Christ as Savior will receive a glorified body fit for life in the new heaven and earth. Those who don’t will receive a body fit for eternal torment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15).

2. *What will matter in the life to come isn’t marriage, but God Himself.* Listen again to verse 25—“**When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.**”

Marriage won’t exist in the new heaven and earth for a very simple reason. There will be no death there and no more need for procreation, as there is in this life. Actually, there will be a marriage there, just one marriage with one bridegroom and one bride. Christ will be the groom. We will be His bride.

God’s people will be like the angels. Jesus didn’t say we would become angels, for angels are a different type of created being from humans. We will be *like* them. What will matter to us then will be what matters to the angels now,

pleasing and serving God alone.

That doesn't mean we won't know each other in heaven. Again, even hundreds of years after his death, Abraham was still Abraham, Isaac was still Isaac, and Jacob was still Jacob. Though there will be great differences in our glorified bodies, there will be similarities, too.

George MacDonald offers these reflections, "The new body must be like the old. Not only that, it must be the same body...with all that was distinctive of each from his fellows more visible than ever before. The accidental, the nonessential, the unrevealing, the incomplete will have vanished. That which made the body what it was in the eyes of those who loved us will be tenfold there. Will not this be the resurrection of the body?"^[8]

Though marriage won't exist in heaven, that doesn't mean we won't know our spouses and other loved ones. We certainly will.

J. D. Jones explains, "Husband and wife shall be as dear to one another in the world to come as they are down here. Only the relationship between them shall be sublimed of every suggestion of the earthly; it shall not be 'marriage' any more. It will be love, without a touch of earth about it—love, holy, sacred, perfect. 'They shall not marry,' no, but we shall know each other and love each other, and contribute to each other's gladness there as here."^[9]

Then Jones offers this summary thought, "We shall miss nothing in heaven that is really worth having."^[10] And this, "We do not know everything about the world to come. But we know this: we lose nothing that is worth keeping."^[11]

In similar fashion Kent Hughes observes, "To be sure, there will be no marriage in Heaven and no concern about past husbands or wives, but that does not suggest in the slightest a reduction in love. We will be ourselves at our ultimate best, and we will be more lovable and more capable of loving than ever before."^[12]

It's so easy for us to become distracted and even enamored with the present. Beloved, if you know Christ, the best is yet to come! If you don't know Christ, you need to trust Him today! The resurrection is coming!

Kent Hughes writes about a friend named Susan who contracted rheumatoid arthritis at the age of two, lived a painful life in a twisted body, and died at the age of 35, immobilized in bed, not even able to turn over. He shares this:

"When I see Susan again, or you see a friend who has gone ahead of you into Heaven, it will be the same body in which they died. We will recognize them at once. Everything that was theirs will be perfected. Their bodies will be glorious, grown to their eternal potential. Their personalities will be at their fullest—their wit, their charm, their tenacity, their love. They will be noble, beautiful, regal—they will be like Jesus!"^[13]

Having said this, let me offer an important caution. For many professing Christians, heaven is special for deficient reasons. Ask them why they're looking forward to heaven and you'll hear the following, "No more suffering. Peace and joy. Seeing loved ones." And so on.

You say, "What's deficient about those reasons?" There's no mention of Christ! My friend, know this...

3. *If the reason you want to go to heaven isn't Christ, you may not be going.* Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil 1:21; see also Phil. 3:7-11)." Beloved, a true Christian knows the only reason he will be in heaven is because of Christ, because Christ suffered and died in his place, because Christ conquered the grave and gave him the free and undeserved gift of eternal life. That's what the true Christian wants most out of heaven—and everything else pales in comparison (even spouse). He wants to see His Savior. He wants to be with His Savior. He wants to praise and worship His Savior.

In his book, *God Is The Gospel*, John Piper offers this thought, "Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. And people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there, will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been

converted by the gospel.”^[14]

Make It Personal: How are you responding to Jesus?

It boils down to this...

1. *It is not enough to be amazed by Jesus.* The religious leaders in Jesus’ day were amazed by Him, but that’s as far as it went. Maybe you’ve been amazed by Him, by His Word, by the wonders of His goodness. More is needed, my friend...

2. *It is essential to submit your life to Him.* “Believe in the *Lord* Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Rom. 10:9).”

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

^[1] *Our Daily Bread*, March 15, 1994.

^[2] Kent Hughes, p. 101.

^[3] *Bits & Pieces*, March 31, 1994, p. 5.

^[4] Barclay, p. 286.

^[5] R. Alan Cole, pp. 262-3.

^[6] J. D. Johnson, p. 449.

^[7] Arthur Guiterman, *Gaily the Troubadour*, 1936.

^[8] Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 111.

^[9] J. D. Jones, p. 456.

^[10] J. D. Jones, p. 457.

^[11] J. D. Jones, p. 458.

^[12] Kent Hughes, p. 112.

^[13] Kent Hughes, p. 112.

^[14] John Piper, *God Is The Gospel*, p. 47.