

## Trick Questions and Truthful Answers

Matt. 22:15-46

**Intro.** Skeptics often respond to the Gospel with odd questions that don't have anything to do with their sin or need of salvation. These questions are clever tactics to support their unbelief or smoke screens to hide issues they'd rather not talk about. If we share our faith as we should, we're sure to be challenged by a bunch of "off-the-wall" questions. Here are a few examples:

- *"If everything was created as you insist, who created God?"*
- *"Can God make a rock so big He can't lift it?"*
- *"Doesn't science contradict the Bible and make belief in God unnecessary?"*

As you hear questions like these, some answers may come to mind. But the fact is...faith in Christ isn't a matter of the intellect only. Faith is a matter of the will. We choose to believe or disbelieve. Yet not everyone who asks questions is a skeptic determined to remain in unbelief. Mixed among the skeptics we are sure to meet a few who sincerely want to know if the Gospel is legitimate and Christ is all He claims to be. Our challenge is to respond to everyone with compassion, grace and patience. We don't have the insight to distinguish the honest inquirer from the hard boiled skeptic. **Jude 22, 23 instructs us to** respond to people in three different categories. **Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.** Here we are urged to show compassion to those who sincerely doubt / employ urgency for those in grave danger / and mix mercy with caution for those entangled in sin.

As we found in the previous section, Jesus had just given 3 parables that indicted Israel for their history of unbelief. Those who heard these parables got the point. They felt an accusing finger pointed right at them and it ticked them off. **21:45** say, **When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew He was talking about them.** But rather than repent and receive Him, **v.46** says, **They looked for a way to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that He was a prophet.** This section ends at **22:14** where Jesus said, **"For many are invited, but few are chosen."** Though Israel was first to know God and to become citizens of His kingdom, they refused. As Jesus said to Israel's leaders in **21:31 - the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.** This fried their grits! Their faces turned beet red and the veins bulged in their heads and necks. The believing lowlife they despised were getting in but the chosen people were being shut out. Only a few are humble and broken enough to sense their need and put their faith in Christ. Because the Jews rejected Jesus, **22:10** says, **So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.** While Israel remains blind in unbelief, this is what God has been doing since the Day of Pentecost. Through the Church He is reaching out to everyone who will receive His Son and be saved. I hope you are one of them.

So while Jesus was still teaching in the Temple, He was confronted and asked a series of questions by 3 groups of unbelieving leaders. First, came some Herodians, sent by the Pharisees...then came some Sadducees...then finally, the Pharisees came with a lawyer. The Herodians asked a political question / the Sadducees asked a doctrinal question / and the Pharisees asked an ethical question.

**22:15**, says, **Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words.** What triggered the asking of these questions is no mystery. I've called the inquiries "trick questions" because they were designed to catch Jesus in some inconsistency. The word translated **trap** is a hunting term. So Israel's leaders were stalking Jesus the way a hunter stalks his prey. Their questions were like bait piles to lure Jesus in so they might trap Him by His own answers.

The Herodians hoped to trick Jesus into defying Roman Law. The Sadducees hoped to catch Him contradicting the OT. The Pharisees hoped to embroil Him in an ethical debate. Their questions were clearly attempts to discredit and accuse Jesus. The fact that Jesus knew what they were up to is clear from what He said in **v.18**. Yet despite their tricks and evil intentions, Jesus spoke truth that exposed and silenced His critics. So let's hear their questions and learn from the answers Jesus gave.

### 1. The Herodians ask a legal question - vs. 15-22

The Pharisees were staunch practitioners of OT Law and the rabbinic teachings. They were the majority party in Judaism and their religion was intensely legalistic. Pharisee means "*separated ones*." They were very proud of how pleased they felt God was because they meticulously kept His Laws. But Jesus exposed their man-made rules and hypocrisy. They heaped heavy burdens of guilt on people yet didn't lift a finger to help them. He called them white-washed tombs and called them out for their self-righteous attitudes and heartless worship. They had a high view of God but they didn't know Him. Because they didn't know God the Father, they didn't recognize God the Son. They refused to believe Jesus was their Messiah despite the prophecies He fulfilled and the miracles He performed. They refused to repent despite the unique authority of His teachings. Their minds were made up. They believed Jesus was an imposter...a fraud...a false Messiah who had to be eliminated. **Lk. 19:47, 48** say, **Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill Him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on His words.** So the Pharisees sent some of their own disciples plus a delegation of Herodians to trap Jesus.

It's strange to find Pharisees cooperating with Herodians because these 2 groups didn't share the same loyalties. The Pharisees boasted "**We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.**" - **Jn. 8:33** The Herodians, on the other hand, were loyal to King Herod and the Roman government. But acting as one, these agents agreed Jesus was an enemy of the state who must be destroyed. **Mk. 6:3 - Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.** This kind of unholy alliance will show up again in the Tribulation when the apostate church is aligned with the final world government leader, the AntiChrist. So as the Pharisees conspired to entrap Jesus, their first idea was to test His response to a political question. And who better to ask the question than the Herodians...the party most loyal to Herod and Rome. If the answer Jesus gave seemed treasonous, they could alert the Romans and let them deal with Him. All the better if they arrested and executed Him. But if He said something contrary to the beliefs of many in Israel, the people would join them in turning against Jesus.

As politicians do, the Herodians made nice with Jesus. They approached Him with flattering statements that happened to be entirely true and factual. **v.16 - "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are."** Here is the perfect model or pattern for Gospel teaching and preaching. Teachers must be men of integrity who don't teach their own ideas, but the ways of God in truth. They must not be tossed by winds of contemporary thinking nor should they allow themselves to be overly impressed by the credentials of those who espouse such things. This compliment from the Herodians underscores the unique and authoritative nature of Christ's teachings. His listeners were left amazed and spellbound. **(Matt. 7:28, 29)**

So in **v. 17** they asked, "**Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**" They wanted to hear His opinion. Their question asked what is legal or right according to the religion Jesus was teaching. They wanted to know what Jesus believed about taxation. To pay taxes was to admit that Rome had authority over them and many Jews were unwilling to admit that. On the other hand, Jesus would be condemned if He defied Caesar and Roman Law.

Cell phones hadn't been invented yet but tape recorders hidden beneath their cloaks caught every word. And Jesus minced no words when He responded in **v.18 - But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? They were hypocrites because they came with ulterior motives. With incomparable genius, Jesus then said, Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius... The denarius was a silver coin equivalent to a working man's daily wage. On one side of a denarius was an impression of Caesar and his name. The other side featured some symbol or historical representation. The denarius was the coin specified to pay the Roman poll-tax. When the Herodians furnished Jesus with one of these coins, Jesus borrowed it and held it up before them. He asked, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" No offense to 5<sup>th</sup> graders, but anyone smarter than a 5<sup>th</sup> grader could have answered this question correctly. The portrait and inscription of Caesar stamped on the denarius represented Roman ownership and control. Everyone knew that.**

Having created a perfect object lesson, Jesus said, *"There you have it. If it belongs to Caesar, each citizen is legally obligated to surrender it to him in the form of taxes. But on the other hand, if it is something that belongs to God, each human being is under obligation to give back to God what belongs to Him."* Here Jesus stated His position about the two spheres of authority that operate in the world. There is a sphere where man is in charge and a sphere where God is in charge. As Paul said in **Rom. 13**, it isn't an either/or situation. The answer is binary...one sphere is political and the other is spiritual. Human beings have dual responsibility. We bear responsibility to both spheres. **Rom. 13:1** says, **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.** Civil disobedience or the one exception to this rule is the situation where the demands of God and government are in direct conflict. We see this Daniel's situation. When the government outlawed his prayers, he prayed anyway. The Apostles also kept preaching when they were forbidden to do so. When answering for their disobedience Peter and John told the governing authorities...**"Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."** - **Acts 4:19**

The lesson in this section is quite obvious. If we believe God made us and owns us, our responsibility is to offer our lives back to Him. This is **Rom. 12:1 - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.** So with the genius of perfect wisdom, Jesus silenced these men. **v.22** says, **When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.**

## **2. The Sadducees ask a doctrinal question - vs. 23-28**

The Sadducees were the second ruling party in Israel. Theologically, they were liberals who denied the supernatural and especially the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels. The Sadducees were materialists and were often very wealthy. They must have stayed up pretty late thinking up their question because it's wild and crazy. It's like being asked, *"How many angels can fit on the head of a pin?"* or, *"Did Adam have a belly button?"* These questions have obvious importance.

According to a regulation called the Levirate Law, if a childless woman's husband died, an unmarried brother in law should marry his brother's widow to perpetuate his brother's name and line. This Law is specified in **Deut. 25:5-10**. So the Sadducees fabricated this *"one bride for 7 brothers"* scenario. It sounds like a Hallmark movie gone wild. One after another, her husbands died until she went through seven brothers. I feel like a special prosecutor should have been appointed after brother #3 or #4 assumed room temperature! Her soup begged to be investigated. But their story was pure fiction...it overblown and pretty ridiculous. This is often the sort of question asked when somebody is blowing smoke. They finally got around to their question in **v.28 - Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?**

These Sadducees think they're so smart. They think they've trapped Jesus with an impossible scenario that refutes any idea of a literal resurrection. I mean, providing all 7 brothers are resurrected to enter the kingdom, the woman couldn't possibly be married to 7 men at once. God wouldn't sanction that. Now remember, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection so they allowed something they don't believe to establish their unbelief. Like those who take verses out of context, they used the Levirate Law given by God to refute what Jesus was teaching about the resurrection. Since both scenarios couldn't be true at once, they reasoned that Jesus must be teaching heresy.

Notice that Jesus didn't call these men **hypocrites** as He did the Pharisees. Instead he replied in **v.29, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.** The Sadducees were dead wrong about the resurrection. They were wrong because they didn't know the Word of God or the power of God. Many people are drowning in this sort of confusion. They think the Bible is full of contradictions but they've never read it. They believe science has all the answers to life and refuse to acknowledge the power of the Creator whose word is life. Though their argument seemed logical, it was fatally flawed and Jesus told them so.

*First*, in **v.30** Jesus said, **At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.** Hey, listen, did you know that? Did you know marriage and procreation will be non-existent in the life after this life? If you're single, don't worry about it...you're practicing for heaven. If you're married and things aren't going too well...rejoice! (that's all I'll say about that) Actually, you need to sign up for our Reviving Romance conference Feb. 10, 11. If you're blissfully married like me and Peggy, there may be a little sadness. But that's only because we don't get it...we don't realize how wonderfully satisfying life will be in Christ's kingdom. Besides that, Peggy and I have a post-nuptial agreement that allows me to visit her in heaven without being turned in as a stalker. But who will wash and fold my socks? Who will color match and separate them in cute little boxes? No worries...our Creator has all this figured out. The life to come will be wonderfully different than life as we presently know it. Can you trust God for that? The stages of life prepare us for this. Each stage is distinct, but we bless the Lord because each one is sweet in its own way.

*Second*, in **31, 32** Jesus said, **But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."** Notice the Tetragramaton...the name of God. He is **I am**. Not I was or I will be. God is forever existent. He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end (and everything in between.) Therefore, He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Once again, it Jesus didn't say *God once was the God of these men*. He is their God today. Centuries after these men died, God continues to be their God. This can only mean that they too are alive. The fact that they are alive was demonstrated by the appearing of Moses and Elijah when Jesus was transfigured. Finally, to affirm this Jesus said, **"He is not the God of the dead but of the living."** This refutes the notion of "soul sleep" or the idea that we die like dogs or remain perpetually unconscious after death. Like Lazarus who was comforted and the rich man who was in torments, **Lk.16** teaches continued consciousness after death. *Thanatos*, the Greek word translated death, means separation not annihilation. What point would there be to affirm that believers who died are present with the Lord experiencing something better, if they're unconscious? That's a stuffed animal on a shelf, not a believer who has been given the gift of eternal life.

So, if the Sadducees were trying to publically rebuff Jesus by their crazy tale, it didn't work. They simply revealed their wrong thinking. They were exposed as poor students of the Scriptures and misinformed about the resurrection. And as you know, Jesus decisively backed up His teaching about life after this life by His own literal bodily resurrection. This Q & A session ends at **v. 33 - When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.** **Astonished** means His teaching blew their minds.

### 3. The Pharisees ask an ethical question - vs. 34-40

According to **Mk.12:28**, the Pharisees asked this third question because Jesus had given **good answers** to the previous two. Their conspiracy to trap Him with His own words wasn't working. So again they tested Jesus by asking Him a new question. **vs. 36 - "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"** According to scribal tradition, there are 613 rules in the Mosaic Law which happens to coincide with 613 Hebrew letters in the Ten Commandments. Though the Jews never agreed which was which, they believed some laws were weighty and some were lighter. But which of these 613 commands was the greatest was a subject of endless debate. Some believed the Sabbath regulations were the greatest. Others felt tassels on the hem of a garment was the highest precept. Still others felt the dietary laws were greatest and most important. So the Pharisees sent a lawyer to ask the question. If they could entice Jesus to express His opinion about which law was the greatest, His response would surely inspire hostility in those who disagreed. And who knows, maybe they could catch Him suggesting something they could label "heresy."

In **vs. 37-40 - Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.** Jesus quoted a command expressed in the Shema of **Deut. 6** and repeated in **Deut. 11:13. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** This was the highest and weightiest core value of the Jewish people. Faithful Jews recited the Shema daily. Like "*Jesus first*" pins or "*What would Jesus do?*" bracelets, this command was written on little pieces of parchment, rolled up, and inserted into phylacteries worn on their wrists or foreheads. This is how they responded to God's command to "**Tie them** (that is, God's commands) **as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.**" – **Deut. 6:8**

So Jesus said the greatest command is to love God completely! He then added something at no extra cost. In **vs. 39** He said, "**And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**" These twin commands were clearly stated in the OT. **Lev. 19:18 - "'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.** The Jews should have known and obeyed these commands, but they didn't. Their worship was external and empty. Their hearts were far from God. Speaking for God and as God in **Matt. 15:8**, Jesus said, "**These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me.**" Not only were their hearts far from God, but they had no love for their Jewish neighbors and nothing but hatred for the Gentiles. So Jesus didn't cite something novel. He quoted commands they knew but disobeyed.

Mark adds more of the story by citing the lawyer's response. **Mk. 12:32-24 - "Well said, teacher," the man replied.** (Imagine the irony of saying this to God?... "Well said, God!") "**You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.**" When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "**You are not far from the kingdom of God.**"

So Jesus was tested by Herodians, Sadducees and Pharisees...the main representatives of Judaism. They tried to trap Him with questions that were political / theological / and ethical. To each question, Jesus gave a wise answer supported by their own Scriptures. Can I suggest something? Human beings can't devise a question Jesus can't answer! It doesn't matter if you're name is Albert Einstein or Bill Nye the science guy. **Col. 2:2, 3** explains that resident in Jesus **are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** And class, what does **all** mean? So my recommendation is this...whether your question is genuine or disingenuous, "give it up!" Quit dodging the issue and blowing smoke. Just trust Jesus. He has the answer for whatever question is troubling you.

At first I planned to preach this passage in 2 parts. But I soon realized that part one would be like a movie that ended without resolution. If I pulled the plug at **v. 28** or **40**, the message would have been like Schubert's unfinished symphony or like an episode of Downton Abbey. Having answered 3 questions designed to trick and trap Him, Jesus turned the tables on His questioners in **vs. 41-45**. Using their own Scriptures, He asked the Pharisees to answer the most important question of all.

#### **4. The Messiah asks a personal question - vs. 41-46**

When Jesus asked, "**What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?**" The Pharisees responded, "**The son of David.**" Their answer was correct as far as it went. The Jews were certain their coming Messiah would be a **son of David**. Based on God's promise in **II Sam. 7** and repeated later, their coming Messiah would be a direct descendant of the royal line of their revered ancestor, King David. And Jesus was precisely that. He is repeatedly called **the son of David** throughout Matthew's Gospel beginning with the genealogy in **Matt. 1**. In fact, the relation of Jesus to David was so well documented it was never challenged by the Jewish authorities. They could have easily written Jesus off if it wasn't for their well preserved genealogies.

The answer the Pharisees gave was only partial. Yes, the Messiah is to be the son of David, but He is more than that. So Jesus said, If the Christ or Messiah is merely a descendant of David, then tell me this...Why did David call Him **Lord**? The word translated **Lord** is equivalent to *Adonai* which is one of the most common names of Deity...of God. David would never address a human being by that name! Yet speaking by the Spirit, He called the Messiah, **Lord**. And that's not all...God the Father made a promise to this One who He calls, **Lord**. He said, "**Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.**" *So it's as if Jesus said, "Hey listen guys...who is uniquely qualified to sit at the right hand of God? And to whom has the Lord promised to subdue nations and give the kingdom? Remember **Psa. 2**?* The Jews knew this Psalm well! These honors belong to the Son of God. Now hang with me a minute and let's put this together. *"Israel, who is your Messiah? He is the son of David. But David said He is also the Son of God."* And without saying so, because His miracles and the authority of His Word made the answer so obvious and patently evident, Jesus led them to the punch line...*"This is who I am. I am the Son of David and the Son of God."*

In his classic work entitled, Protestant Christian Evidences, Bernard Ramm gives a series of incisive answers to questions he himself propounds. He asks, *"If God became incarnate, what kind of man would he be?"* In condensed version, here are 6 answers to his own question. *"We would expect Him to be sinless / we would expect Him to be holy / we would expect His words to be the greatest words ever spoken / we would expect Him to exert profound power over human personality / we would expect Him to perform supernatural doings / and we would expect Him to manifest the love of God. Of all human beings who have ever lived, Jesus Christ alone met all of those criteria!"*

Notice **v. 46 - No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.** By one potent question Jesus turned the tables on these men and their unbelief. This is something Jesus does with amazing effectiveness. And listen, we're no match for His wisdom and we can do no damage to His truth. In **Rom. 3:3** Paul summarized the futility of trick questions rooted in an unwillingness to believe. He wrote, **What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."** When the smoke of our many questions disappears, only one question remains. Who is Jesus Christ to you? **Jn. 20:30, 31** say, **Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** Have you believed Him? Have you trusted Jesus to save you?