
Confronting the Old Order

Matthew 22:15-46

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Sometimes, change is easy and smooth. The transition goes well.

Sometimes, transition is hard, full of conflict, confrontation, challenges. It does not go well.

Jesus is bringing about change, transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. He is being rejected, challenged. Conflict is about to ensue. Jesus is all about confronting the Old Order. In this way, he opens the way for the cross and resurrection, the opening of the New Order.

This is a plot. Keep that in mind. These representatives of varying understandings of the Old Testament are seeking a reason to destroy Jesus. The plot is moving from undermining His influence with the people to now, if necessary, finding a way to destroy His life. Jesus' question at the end exposes the real issue: whose son is the Messiah?

There has been a lot of discussion and debate between Jesus and these religious leaders. This confrontation will bring the end of arguing. This confrontation will highlight the deep problems of the Old Order, the Old Covenant.

Its Political Beliefs (v.15-22)

In almost every age of God's kingdom, our relationship to the kingdoms of this world have been a struggle. This question has divided Christians' over the last 18 months and will continue to do so. In Jesus' day it was a huge, huge issue. So, what better way to test Jesus than with a politically dangerous question in regards to owing our government taxes.

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.

¹⁶ And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²² When **they heard it**, they *marveled*. And they left him and went away.

The Challenge (v.16-17)

The Pharisees are behind this plot. But they send their disciples, their novates first. Frankly, they want to have plausible deniability. The question that is going to be asked is politically explosive. The Herodians also come. So you have two diametrically opposed groups here. The Pharisees were the religious and cultural conservative fundamentalists. They hated their Roman overlords but seemed able to keep from provoking them. The Herodians were followers of the false king, Herod. They were strongly allied to the Romans and were hated by the conservative Jews. So here come two groups, deeply divided and with a question. There will be no way to please both.

I love their approach. This is the worst in ironic, sarcastic manipulation. This is not for Jesus' ears, but for the ears of the people. And Jesus is the opposite of everything they are. They are liars, false and do not teach the way of God. They are all taken up with appearance and with the fear of man.

Their question is a matter of law. "Is it lawful for us as Jews under God's rule through the Mosaic Law to pay taxes to foreign emperor who has conquered us?" Is it lawful when the law of God and the law of Rome conflict? What is the duty of Jewish person?

It is a trap. If Jesus says, "No" then the Herodians will report Him to the Romans. If He says, "Yes", then He will alienate most of the people and give grounds for the Pharisees to attack Him. They think that they Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. It is the classic "either *this* or *that*". Except that it is not and either-or.

The Answer (v.18-21)

There is an old saying, "Do not ask a wise man a question unless you want a wise answer." First Jesus wisely calls out their malice and their intent. This is for the ears of the people around them. Jesus wants them to know that He is being tested. This is not an honest question. They are hypocrites. They are pretending to have an honest question when they are intending to trap Jesus. Do you note that this is evil? This tactic was and is still used by many today. It is wrong. It is hypocritical.

As a demonstration, Jesus asks for the Roman coin that must be used to pay the tax. Rome required that its own coinage be used and would not accept payment in local or a country's currency. It was the same in the Temple – the Temple taxes could not be paid with Roman currency. So, they brought Jesus a denarius.

Jesus looks at the coin. And then holds it up. Here is His question. Who issued this coin? Whose image and inscription are on it? Who issued this coin? Whose authority is represented by it? The inscription on the coin was "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, god and high priest". Blasphemous? Yes. Unusual? No. Imagine though the impact of such a coin and such a claim on a people living under the first and second commandments in the Mosaic Law.

Jesus' declaration is stunning. In Ceasar's realm of human government, give him what he is due. The tax pays for all the benefits that Rome brings. Yes, it can be bad. But God has ordained authority of governments. We are to pay your taxes. The New Testament drives this home as well. Christians living in the world under a government should pay their taxes.

But more importantly, in God's realm of rule, give Him what He is due. Pharisees, Herodians, crowd, are you giving God His due? What should be rendered to Him. Their total and complete allegiance. Jesus was standing right before them. He was their Messiah. Rendering to God meant bowing to Jesus. But did they?

The Effect (v.22)

They... marveled. They were amazed. But they were not humbled. They were not believing and bowing. They went away.

Its Religious Errors (v.23-33)

Death is a part of the old order. Death is not natural. Life does not naturally end in death. Death is the result of judgment. It is necessary as a result of the fall and the curse. But that fact that all people die has led to all kinds of thinking about life after death. The Old Testament didn't say much about what happens after death. So, religious teacher of the Old Testament had some very... let's call them, interesting, ideas. The next confrontation

²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ³³ And when **the crowd heard it**, they were **astonished** at his teaching.

The Challenge (v.23-28)

On the same day, a new group approaches Jesus. The Sadducees were the religious liberals. They were secularists and unbelievers. Matthew, for the sake of his Gentile audience, points out the irony in the question these guys ask. They don't even believe in a resurrection.

But here they are with their question. This question is based on one of the odd, and frankly disturbing, things in the Jewish culture and the Mosaic Law. When a man died without children, and more importantly, no male heir, his widow would marry the man's brother in order to preserve the family line. Under the levirate law, the first male child would have the family name and would be accounted as the son of the deceased husband. This was common practice. It led sometimes to strange situations and to amazing blessings. There are stories in the Old Testament that only make sense if you know this.

The Sadducees, now come with a hypothetical situation. The trap here is to see if Jesus will consistently apply the Law, even when it makes no sense to do so. Frankly, I think they ask this question to make fun of the Law. Their questions implies that the Scriptures are ridiculous.

So, in a succession of levirate marriages, a widow runs the gamut of seven brothers, all who die and leave her to the next brother. This, in their story, continues until finally the woman died. So, in the resurrection supposedly in life after death in paradise, which of these brothers will be her husband? What dilemma. 7 husbands, all legit under the Law, but now a problem. How do you resolve this?

The Answer (v.29-32)

Jesus' answer is blunt and direct. They are simply wrong. They are in error. They believe and teach what is false. The Sadducees prided themselves on their brand of spiritual superiority. They prided themselves on their inside and out knowledge of the Old Testament. Their deep "knowledge" of the Torah was the basis for not believing. They were truly religious liberals and textual critics in the modern in the modern sense. They knew better than most what the Old Testament said, they just did not believe it.

Jesus' challenge is that they do not actually know the Old Testament and they do not know the power of God. Because they did not believe the Bible, they did not understand the Bible. Since they neither believed nor understood, they denied the power of God to raise the dead.

What is the truth? First, in the resurrection there is no marriage. The angels in heaven do not marry. He does *not* say they have no gender. In the resurrection, marriage will have reached its fullness in the marriage of Christ and the church. Its purposes in this world will no longer be needed in the new creation. That does not mean that there is no gender in the glorified body (not in the angelic body, either, in my view). Jesus is in heaven now in a glorified *male* body. What Jesus is saying that there will be *no marriage*.

Second, the Old Testament implies a resurrection. Using their own method of interpreting the Scripture, Jesus shows how the resurrection is taught in the Old Testament. Is this a kind of exegetical sophistry? Yes. But, since the Sadducees prided themselves on noticing this kind of nuance in the text, Jesus turns it on them. He does not create something that is not there, but highlights what is there. God declares Himself to be the God of multiple generations of patriarchs. But He

uses the present tense, “am”, not the past tense “was”. Implication? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all still alive. Even more pointedly, is God the God of these standing in front of Jesus? Would God make the same attestation of these Sadducees? No, obviously not.

The resurrection and the new creation are part of the new order. The Jews wanted to cling to and defend the old order, the Old Covenant. In Matthew’s day, the issues were even more clear. Jesus and Matthew both are showing us that a proper understanding of the Old Testament leads us to the wonderful blessings and the realities of the New Covenant. The scriptures are clear, and the power of God is great through the resurrection of Jesus.

The Effect (v.33)

The crowd hears this discussion and they were astonished. They were astonished, not that Jesus put the Sadducees down, but at His teaching. Was there a positive response? Yes. Did they believe? Doubtful.

Just a comment. We have so much ungracious, unkind, ungenerous discussion and debate among Christians on social media. Do not use Jesus’ approach here as an example of acceptable Christian polemics. Jesus is not talking to believers. He is talking to unbelievers who shred the Bible, deny basic truths and assert lies. There is more to say here, but some of you, in discussion and debate with brothers and sisters sound like Jesus here. *You should not.*

Its Fake Controversies (v.34-40)

The Old Order is not going to give up easily. The Sadducees have been humiliated. The Pharisees disciples have had their “Ceasar” handed to them. Different tactics from different groups have failed to trap Jesus. Jesus tends to answer directly from the Scriptures. So, let’s try to trap Him by creating a controversy using a lawyer.

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

The Challenge (v.34-36)

The leaders of the Pharisees themselves now gather around Jesus. One of them, a lawyer, steps forward with a question. In all of the Mosaic Law, what is the great commandment? One. “The” Single out one commandment and identify it as the greatest. As a result of Jesus’ answer this seems straightforward to us. But before Jesus answers this question, before we have a record of it in the gospels, somehow the Jews didn’t get it.

The Answer (v.37-40)

Jesus' answer moves from action to attitude. It is almost certain that they are expecting either the first commandment of the Ten or the fifth on the Sabbath. But Jesus answers with what is not even in the Tablets, nor is it a part of the Levitical or civil code. It is disingenuous to try to make these two commandments somehow a part of the two tablets, the Ten Commandments. They are not.

The greatest commandment is to love God with every fiber of your being. Love then transcends law, relationship transcends rules, an inner orientation transcends an outer form. The greatest command is not worship God or to give God a day a week, it is to love God. No checkbox even possible here. Has anyone ever loved God purely, completely with every thing they are? Yes, one. The one answering this question. The second greatest is like the first. It is to love neighbor as you do love yourself. Don't turn the second commandment into tow, love yourself and love neighbor. Further, the New Testament transforms this second commandment to loving neighbor as Christ has loved us.

One writer observed:

The summary is exceedingly powerful and disturbing, for it takes the questioner from the area of achievement, which he might conceivably fulfil, to that of attitude, where nobody can boast fulfilment. For people who, like this *expert in the law*, were strong on ethics and weak on relationships, this strongly relational teaching was a revealing mirror of the heart. Nobody has ever loved God with all his being. Nobody has ever loved her neighbour as herself. So nobody can possibly merit eternal life. Once again, it brings us back to grace. If we are to have any place in the kingdom of God, it will be due to the unmerited grace of God for sinners who could never make it by themselves. (Green, p. 236-237)

Jesus makes a final, startling declaration. You want to know how important these two commandments are? The whole Old Testament that relates to Israel, that is, the Law and Prophets, hang on them. The common link between the old order and the new? Loving God and loving neighbor.

So are the Pharisees, in challenging Jesus, loving God and loving neighbor?

Its Self-Deceits (v.41-45)

Jesus flips the table on them. All of the representatives of the old order, the old covenant, have had their shot at Jesus. He has confounded every one of them. They have been asking questions. Now, it is time for Jesus to ask a question.

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 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 is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ " 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your

enemies under your feet" ' ? ⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The Challenge (v.41-42)

The questioner now is Jesus. He asks a very simple question which should not be a problem at all to answer. "Whose son is the Messiah?" The question is not talking about Solomon so it is a lineage question. The Messiah will be descended from whom?

The Answer (v.43-45)

Their answer? Obvious, easy, answer, Abraham or David. Since this is a confrontation with the Old Covenant under Moses, then the answer is, David.

So, if that is true, you have an exegetical problem. From the Psalm 110:1. Jesus asks a question that is powerful and profound

David says and writes what He writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is counter the Sadducees. What David wrote is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative.

David, referring to the Messiah, calls Him, "Lord". In other words, David is acknowledging that the Messiah is deity. He is God.

The question: if the Messiah is God, then how is He also a descendent of David?

Implication? The Messiah will clearly be both the eternal God and the human born descendent of David, the King.

The challenge? If this is so, then why are they rejecting Jesus as Messiah? HE is the eternal God, the second person of the Godhead and He is the human born son of David.

The Effect (v.46)

"And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. "

One writer said it best:

Jesus really puts his opponents on the spot. How could they possibly answer him? His claim to be both David's son and David's Lord is clear. The grounds on which that claim has been put forward are equally clear: the Gospel has been tabulating them since chapter 4. Why do they not believe him when the testimony of his words and works is so powerful? The answer is that they have chosen to believe a lie. They have blinded their eyes to the truth. They have wilfully turned away from the one who came to reconcile them with God. Woe has come to the leaders of Israel... (Green, p.258)

Reflect and Respond

Thank God we live in the age of the New Covenant. Jesus has come. He is both God and man, He fulfilled the Old Covenant. He has died for our sins. He was raised for our justification. He is the final word. Against Him, there is no argument...

But the question remains for us, for you. Have you believed and bowed to Jesus?