

### A Question the Religious Leaders Cannot Answer

Luke 20:20-47

*Luke 20:20-26: So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. 21 Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: 22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" 23 But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me? 24 Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." 25 And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 26 But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.*

#### Background Notes

In the first half of Luke 20, the Jewish religious leaders questioned the Lord's authority, specifically about His cleansing of the Temple. We would think that the religious leaders would have been glad to see the moneychangers thrown out of the Temple courts. But no - instead they questioned the Lord's authority, possibly because many of them were "on the take" in some way. Maybe some of them got a fee for giving permission to the moneychangers to set up their tables in the Temple courts.

In any case, it was in these same Temple courts that the religious leaders questioned the Lord's authority. However, He silenced them and claimed divine authority with His question about the ministry of John the Baptist. The Lord further convicted the Jewish leaders with the Parable of the Vineyard. Verse 19 says that "they knew *He had spoken this parable against them,*" but rather than admit that they were wrong, they proceeded to do exactly what the parable predicted.

These corrupt leaders sent out spies to entrap the Lord into making a convicting political statement so that they could have Him arrested, and convicted, and killed. *Verse 20: "So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor."*

The spies tried to make it appear that they were just common folk, part of the crowd, with no hidden agenda, but simply asking questions that anyone would ask. Notice how they started with flattery: "*Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth*" (v21). But then they asked Jesus asked a political question about paying taxes. There's no doubt that they were trying to set the Lord up, hoping He would make a political statement against Rome. The Lord saw through their scheme and answered them accordingly (v23).

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Unbelievers will question the lifestyle of believers.

The tactics used by the unbelievers in Luke 20, as they tried to discredit the Lord, are the same tactics that unbelievers will use today to try to discredit Christians. The unbelieving religious leaders wanted to catch the Lord in a statement which would be politically incorrect, or inconsistent with His teaching. In the larger context, they were questioning His personal lifestyle. Did He pay taxes to Rome or not? And was it right to pay taxes to a pagan occupying government? With either answer, they hoped to show that Jesus would somehow be inconsistent in His teaching and compromising in His lifestyle.

This is a tactic that unbelievers use today to criticize Christians. They question the lifestyle of believers, and all too often they are successful. Why do you, as a Christian, use company time to make personal phone calls? Why do you, as a Christian, drive over the speed limit? Or, (close to the tax time), why do you, as a Christian, pay taxes to a government that uses your money for ungodly purposes? The answer the Lord gave here is amazing in its wisdom and simplicity. *“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* In other words, pay your taxes to the governing authorities under which you live, and give to God the things that are rightfully His - your life, your commitment, your allegiance, and your obedience. It’s not always easy to sort through “rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” However, there is *always* a right decision and a right way to go.

You may be sure that the enemy of our souls will use unbelievers to try to find some inconsistency between what we practice and what we preach. We need to pray for courage and moral strength to be *consistent in our lifestyle*. In addition, we need to pray for *wisdom* for how we should answer the questions of unbelievers.

Let’s try to follow the example of our Lord here so that verse 26 would be true of us as well. *“But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people.”* Remember, unbelievers will question the lifestyle of believers.

### 2. Unbelievers will ridicule the faith of believers.

*Verses 27-40: Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, 28 saying: “Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. 30 And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. 31 Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children, and died. 32 Last of all the woman died also. 33 Therefore, in the*

*resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.” 34 Jesus answered and said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ 38 For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.” 39 Then some of the scribes answered and said, “Teacher, You have spoken well.” 40 But after that they dared not question Him anymore.*

The Sadducees, a Jewish religious party, were like the theological liberals of our day. They did not believe in miracles, and that included the resurrection of the dead and an existence after death. In these verses, the Sadducees tried to trip the Lord up by coming up with a hypothetical situation that they thought would be impossible to solve. The case study was based on the Law in Deuteronomy 25, which said that an unmarried brother was to marry the widow of his deceased brother. With their hypothetical case, they ridiculed the concept of the resurrection - and anyone who believed in such a concept.

This is a tactic that unbelievers still use today. Skeptical unbelievers will ridicule the faith of believers with comments like, “You actually believe there’s a God that created this universe? You really believe that?” or “How can you believe in a loving God when there’s so much suffering and pain and evil in this world?” or “Do you really believe there is a heaven and a hell? Come on, that’s ridiculous! Do you also believe in Santa Claus?” Unbelievers will ridicule the faith of believers.

The Lord’s answer to the Sadducees not only showed that they were wrong, but also that they didn’t understand the Scriptures. In reference to a continued existence after death, the Lord quoted Exodus 3:6, where God said: “*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*” God didn’t say, “I **was** the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” This indicates that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still living - they had not ceased to exist!

And in reference to marriage: in the age to come, there will be no marriage. In Heaven, believers will be like the angels in this respect. Notice in verse 36 the Lord ***did not say that believers will become angels!*** No, we will be *like* the angels with respect to marriage.

We, too, must answer the unbeliever with the simple truth, even though they make fun of us. Unbelievers will ridicule the faith of believers.

## Practical Application

### 1. Let's use the authority of Scripture to teach skeptics.

*Verses 41-44: And He said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David? 42 Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, 43 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" 44 Therefore David calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?"*

The Lord's point in quoting from Psalm 110, a messianic psalm, was to teach these skeptics that the Messiah would be both human (a descendant of David), and divine (because David called the Messiah "Lord"). What is significant here is that both in this example and the previous one, the Lord was **using Scripture to refute and to teach the skeptics** - even the Sadducees, who denied the miracles of the Bible!

Many Christians today think that they can't use Scripture to refute the arguments and questions of skeptics because skeptics reject the Bible, but this is incorrect. Let's follow the example of our Lord! Let's use the authority of Scripture to teach skeptics.

### 2. Let's heed the warnings of Scripture to avoid snares.

*Verses 45-47: Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, 46 "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."*

Once again we see in these verses that the scribes and Pharisees were filled with pride and self-consequence. They were guilty of greed and the desire to be wealthy. They loved to live lavishly and ostentatiously. They were guilty of self-righteous hypocrisy. The Lord not only exposed them for what they were, but He warned His disciples and the people listening to beware of their lives of hypocrisy.

This teaching has an important application for today. In what way? If we are not careful, we can be taken in and deceived by religious people who are proud and self-righteous hypocrites. It's easy to become desensitized to these sins, because they appeal to our sinful nature. *"...the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father, but from the world."* (1 John 2:16).

Be very careful not to associate with such folks, because you could be taken in by their false and sinful attitudes. You, too, could become proud, boastful and self-satisfied! You could fall into the trap of desiring to be wealthy (read 1 Timothy 6:9-10). You could become a self-righteous hypocrite yourself! It happens more often than you'd think, so be careful. Be warned! Let's heed the warnings of Scripture to avoid snares.