

Mark 12:13-34 • Three Types of Challengers

Introduction

We should take Jesus' example of how He dealt with different types of people and their agendas as these same types live in our own world today. And perhaps, if we're honest with ourselves, we've sometimes exhibited characteristics of these people in our own behavior from time to time and need to examine our own motives in the light thereof.

¹³Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. ¹⁴They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? ¹⁵Shall we pay or shall we not pay?"

But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." ¹⁶They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"

And they said to Him, "Caesar's."

¹⁷And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And they were amazed at Him.

[Read 12:13-17]

Information: The Pharisees and Herodians were two groups that were similar in only one regard: They both wanted to rule Israel. The Pharisees wanted to do it as religious rulers through the temple and the Herodians through the government. They were not closely aligned religious allies and on most issues were completely opposite of each other. However, **BOTH** the office of the High Priest and the kingship of Israel were granted by the Romans at this time. Pitting Jesus against Caesar would have served the agendas of both groups.

Q: Did the Pharisees and Herodians mean what they said in v.14? What kind of people or personalities might we encounter today that most resemble them?

A: They pretended to believe in His authority but in reality did not. They are the type of people who profess Christ with their mouth – have some sort of **knowledge** about Him – but are unwilling to **acknowledge** His authority or actually walk in obedience to Him. They use people and things to obtain what they really want.

Q: What is the word used in v.15 that shows their real state of character? What did Jesus see in them?

A: Hypocrisy. Their actions do not reconcile with their words.

Q: How did Jesus deal with these hypocrites? What are the options He provided them?

A: He gave them a choice that was very close to the nature of their hypocrisy: Choosing the things of this world (Caesar) or the things of heaven (God). He did not make their choice for them. He recognized that they had to decide if they would use people and things to obtain earthly things or heavenly.

¹⁸Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, ¹⁹“Teacher, Moses wrote for us THAT IF A MAN’S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. ²⁰There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. ²¹The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; ²²and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. ²³In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had married her.”

²⁴Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ²⁶But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob’? ²⁷He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.”

[Read 12:18-27]

Information: *The Sadducees were actually a larger group numerically than the Pharisees. They had come to the conclusion that the Bible was not to be taken literally and had a much more “humanist” view than the Pharisees. Historical records indicate that the Sadducees consistently held the position of High Priest, the majority of seats in the Sanhedrin, and were the majority party, so to speak, that was in charge of local Jewish life through the temple. They believed they were in charge of the people through their interpretation of the Old Testament Law and its use to legislate daily life in Israel. They used the law (the Bible) for their own purposes.*

Q: What part of their question might be termed “true” or “factual”?

A: The first part in v.19 where they quote the Mosaic law.

Q: Which part of their question might be termed “false” or “fictional”?

A: The example they use in v.20-22 of seven brothers and the one wife.

Q: So how would you characterize their question? What’s their purpose in using this type of question?

A: It’s a **theoretical** question, therefore it’s open to interpretation. By using theoretical situations they can always make up some kind of loophole to justify their own behavior, and therefore never have to **literally** obey the law. They can do as they please personally while interpreting it differently when applying it to those they wish to control.

Q: The Sadducees represent people that want to interpret the Bible any way that suits them. How did Jesus handle them? Did He directly answer their theoretical question?

A: He does not address the theoretical question. He responds with the direct truth and in v.24 starts with the point blank assertion that they do not understand the Scriptures and, therefore, do not understand the power of God. (Interesting that something visible and tangible like “*the power of God*” is only fully understood through comprehension of His Word, eh? Might explain why they kept rejecting Jesus as Messiah.)

Q: With what does Christ support His direct teaching contradicting their incorrect assumptions?

A: He quotes and interprets directly from Scripture.

Q: The Sadducees represent people we might come across who are deceived. How should we deal with them?

A: Directly, with the truth of God’s Word.

²⁸One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?”

²⁹Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; ³⁰AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ ³¹The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

³²The scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; ³³AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE’S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

[Read 12:28-34]

Information: Scribes were experts at interpreting Scripture. The Pharisees had scribes, the Sadducees had scribes, and then there were scribes who were affiliated with neither, merely a higher trained member of the priesthood. In this case, this particular scribe does not have a hidden agenda or a point he is trying to prove or disprove; he is asking a question from his heart.

Q: What is the chief difference in the motives of the scribe compared to the previous groups?

A: The Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees were seeking to place themselves above Jesus. The scribe was seeking to know **Jesus’** proper place in things. The others had already decided in advance.

Q: What is different about the scribe’s question from the previous questions? How is it’s point of view different?

A: The first question was not even based on Scripture but about things of the world (money/taxes/power). The second question was a theoretical application of Scripture but still concerning the things of the world (relationships). This third question is **NOT** about the things of the world but honestly inquires about the things of God.

Q: What did the scribe add in his response to Jesus in v.33 that gives us insight into this lawyer/priest’s heart?

A: “...is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” As a priest whose duty it was to uphold all the Law and Scripture concerning the operation of the temple and its associated offerings and sacrifices, he is the only one to recognize the greater principles behind them. He understands that the offerings and sacrifices are related to one’s relationship with God, not to building up one’s self in this life. Whereas the others see the things and rules of God as an opportunity to build their selves up in **this** world, this scribe sees past them as building a life for the **next** world.

Q: What kind of person might this represent in terms of someone that crosses our life’s path?

A: The true seeker, someone that is willing to seek God on God’s terms rather than his own.

Observation: *The Pharisees needed to have their choice made evident in order to convey the message that they must choose which master to serve: Caesar or God; the things of this life or the next. The Sadducees needed to be directly confronted with the truth of Scripture to not allow them to use the things of God to justify the things of this life. The scribe needed to be affirmed to seek the things of God over the things of this life. All 3 of these groups were legal “experts”, but only 1 was a spiritual expert.*

Q: When have we been more like the Pharisees?

A: When we've sought to make this life better at the expense of others.

Q: When have we been more like the Sadducees?

A: When we've sought to be “right” in our arguments at the expense of our love.

Q: When have we been more like the scribe?

A: When we've sought to apply God's commandments to our behavior and attitude.

Q: How do these compare with Christ's admonition in last week's reading to come to Him as a child and to aspire to become a servant?

A: [Group discussion.]