

Luke 20:19-26

The Freedom of Religion is Determined by God, **Not** the Government

Introduction: This confrontation takes place on Tuesday, March 31, 33 AD. This illustrates the age-old conflict between nationalist zealots and global political enthusiasts. The Jewish leadership attempts to catch Jesus unprepared.

- 1) The initial response to the parable of the rebellious farmers—20:19
 - a) The religious leaders—¹⁹ *Then the chief priests and the scholars*
 - i) Both Sadducees and Pharisees, but it includes the Herodians as well (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:13)
 - ii) The Sadducees had sold their soul to the devil and made a pact with imperial Rome in exchange for the right to rule their people under Rome. (Guinness, *Fool's Talk*, 181)
 - b) They attempt to arrest Jesus—*endeavored to lay hands on Him that very hour,*
 - i) But fear kept them from fulfill their desire—*but they were afraid;*
(1) The ET includes the phrase “feared the people”
 - c) They got the point of the previous parable—*for they understood He told this parable against them.*
 - i) Their attempt to arrest Him was not from a misunderstanding of what Jesus said. Everyone understood Him.
 - ii) Their thought seems to be, “What gives Him the right to say what God would do?” (Bock)
 - iii) Os Guinness relates the following: You only had to watch the crowd to see who was getting the point—in spite of themselves. Judging from the body language in one section of the crowd—the uneasy shuffling feet, the clenched fists, the grinding teeth and the veins standing out on the foreheads—those upset were the temple aristocrats, the Sadducees themselves, with their guards alert and suspicious around them like so many Doberman Pinchers straining at the leash and waiting for the word to pounce. (*Fool's Talk*, 182)
- 2) The ongoing response to the parable of the rebellious farmers—20:20-25
 - a) The religious leadership authorizes hypocritical spies—20:20
 - i) Their hypocrisy—²⁰ *And as they kept Him under surveillance, they sent [ἀποστέλλω] spies (set an ambush) who pretended to be righteous,*
(1) They get others to do their dirty work while hiding in the background.
 - ii) Their immediate purpose—*in order that they might catch Him in some statement,*
 - iii) Their ultimate purpose—*so as to deliver Him up to the rule and the authority/jurisdiction of the governor (Pontius Pilate).*
 - b) An example of their hypocritical righteousness—20:21-25
 - i) The hypocrites take the initiative—20:21-22

- (1) Hypocritical **flattery** concerning His teaching to make Him susceptible to their scheme—20:21 ²¹ *And they asked Him, “Teacher, we know*
 - (a) Precise accuracy—*that You speak and teach correctly* [ὁρθῶς],
 - (b) Impartiality—*and You show no partiality,*
 - (c) Truthfulness—*but teach the way of God based on truth.*
 - (i) They falsely state that they know Jesus’s teaching aligns with truth.
- (2) Hypocritical **curiosity** concerning His authority—20:22 ²² *Is it right for us to give tribute tax to Caesar* (emphatic) *or not?”*
 - (a) They pretend to be struggling with a matter of conscience. (Magill)
 - (b) In other words, “Do You think we really need to submit to Caesar Tiberius? Should we be paying money to a foreign government?”
 - (i) The coin said, “Tiberius Caesar, the august son of Divine Augustus.” This would violate Ex. 20:4.
 - (ii) This made it difficult for these men because they were lovers of money (cf. 16:14)
 - (c) NB the trap: it is presented as a false either/or dilemma.
 - (d) They want Jesus to commit either for Rome (against Israel) or for Israel (against Rome).
- ii) Jesus’s authoritative, perceptive response to religious hypocrisy—20:23-25 ²³ *But He, having perceived their trickery,*
 - (1) His authority demonstrated by a question—20:23b *said to them, “Why are you^{pl} testing Me?”*
 - (a) Giving them an opportunity to tell the truth
 - (2) His authority demonstrated by a command—20:24a ²⁴ *Show Me a denarius.*
 - (3) His authority demonstrated by a second question—20:24b *Whose image and inscription does it have?”*
 - (a) Their answer—*And having responded they said, “Caesar’s.”*
 - (4) His authority demonstrated by teaching the separation of authority—20:25 ²⁵ *So He said to them, “Then (accordingly) give back ...*
 - (a) Jesus recognizes government’s delegated authority—*to Caesar what is Caesar’s,*
 - (i) Government has a right to exist and to support itself
 - (ii) The religious leaders will lie about this later on (cf. 23:2)
 - (iii) The tribute coin belongs to Caesar’s and they have no right to withhold what belongs to Caesar.
 - (b) Jesus recognizes God’s supreme authority—*and to God the things that are God’s.”*
 - (i) Honoring God means that one cannot refuse the state’s right to exist and function. (Bock)
 - (ii) Everything and everyone belongs to God and they have no right to withhold what belongs to God.

- (c) Jesus is making a subtle yet powerful contrast: Caesar's image is on the denarius, so he can lay claim to money through taxation, but God's image is on humanity, so he can lay claim to each individual life. (NET)
 - (d) Jesus's answer was a both/and, and not the questioners' either/or trap. (NET)
- 3) The impotent reaction to the parable of the rebellious farmers—20:26
- a) Their inability—20:26a ²⁶ *And they were not able to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people.*
 - i) Luke reminds us of their immediate purpose (cf. 20:20), thus frustrating their ultimate purpose as well.
 - b) Their silence—20:26b *And having marveled at His answer they became silent.*
 - i) This is one of the wisest things these fools have done so far! (cf. Prov. 17:28)
- 4) Things we need to remember
- a) Beware of traps laid by insincere religious people
 - i) Don't fall for the trap of hypocritical flattery
 - ii) Don't fall for the trap of answering either/or questions with either/or answers.
 - b) Praise Christ for the demonstrations of His wisdom.
 - c) Paying taxes and devoting oneself to God are both expressions of submission to God. (MBC)
 - d) God does not take the rejection of His Son lightly. If you reject the exalted Stone, He will crush you.