

## Lesson Ten

(Mark 12:13 - 13:8)

### The Question About Paying Taxes

(Mark 12:13-17)

*13 Some Pharisees and some members of Herod's party were sent to Jesus to trap him with questions. 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you tell the truth, without worrying about what people think. You pay no attention to a man's status, but teach the truth about God's will for man. Tell us, is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor? Should we pay them, or not?"*

*15 But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, "Why are you trying to trap me? Bring a silver coin, and let me see it."*

*16 They brought him one and he asked, "Whose face and name are these?" "The Emperor's," they answered.*

*17 So Jesus said, "Well, then, pay to the Emperor what belongs to him, and pay to God what belongs to God." And they were filled with wonder at him.*

"Politics makes strange bedfellows," as the saying goes. We see the amazing combination of the pro-Roman Herod's party and the anti-Roman Pharisees. "Taxes" is "kensos" (from which we get "census"), a poll-tax imposed on all the people and which was paid directly into Rome's treasury. This was one of the most hated evidences of the Roman occupation forces, and there had been riots when it was introduced (compare Acts 5:37). These people were not looking for information, but rather trying to get Jesus to incriminate himself. If Jesus said not to pay taxes to the Emperor, they could accuse him to the Romans on a charge of sedition. If Jesus said it was proper to pay taxes, they believed they could use this to turn the people against him. They thought Jesus was in their trap, no matter which answer he gave.

Jesus' answer was based on the fact that they themselves use Roman money in their everyday life. He asked *them* to bring him a silver coin. (The coin was a silver denarius, worth a day's wages. The Emperor's head was pictured on one side, and the goddess of Peace on the other, with the words: "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, High Priest." These words were especially offensive to the Jews, and also to the later Christians.) There could be no doubt as to whose authority the money represented. The fact that they used Roman coins was proof they were under Roman rule. "*Pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor*" pleased the members of Herod's party. "*Pay to God what belongs to God*" pleased the Pharisees. What Jesus says shows that civil government and God each have their own sphere and certain things that belong to them. Compare how Paul deals with this in Romans 13:1-7. But when there is a clash between the two, "*we must obey God, not men*" (Acts 5:29).

What Jesus said here does not go into the relative relationships of "Caesar" and God. But He does stress that the children of God do have a responsibility to the society of which they are part. Since we cannot possibly live without being involved in the benefits (and consequences) of the social structure, each must make his or her contribution to it, even though we may strongly disapprove of it. The Roman government was to some extent a vicious and cruel thing, and at times it persecuted

God's people. Yet the apostle Paul, one who was a special representative of God, did not hesitate to call upon its powers for protection and assistance when it was necessary to do so. When the Jewish opposition wanted to kill him, Paul appealed to the Roman government as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29; 23:11; 23-30; 25:10-12). Concerning this same godless Roman government, Paul could write: "Everyone must obey state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God" (Rom. 13:1). The Book of Revelation shows us that *every* government serves *both* God and Satan simultaneously. The point is that human governments are necessary to preserve moral order.

Those who are sons and daughters of the one true God are citizens of two worlds. "*We, however, are citizens of heaven.*" ("Conversation," KJV, means "citizenship" in this passage), as Paul tells us in Phil. 3:20. We humans are "God's coinage," with his image stamped on us, and we have an obligation to *pay back* to him those things which belong to him. In fact as Paul tells us, we are to voluntarily make ourselves (our flesh and blood bodies, 1 Cor. 6:15-20), a *sacrifice* (a praise-offering) to live Christ's life here in this present world (Rom. 12:1-2; Matt. 25:31-40; Rom. 5:1-5).

## **Rising from Death**

*(Mark 12:18-27)*

*18 Some Sadducees came to Jesus. (They are the ones who say that people will not rise from death.) 19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote this law for us: 'If a man dies and leaves a wife, but no children, that man's brother must marry the widow so they can have children for the dead man.' 20 Once there were seven brothers; the oldest got married, and died without having children. 21 Then the second one married the woman, and he died without having children. The same thing happened to the third brother, 22 and then to the rest; all seven brothers married the woman and died without having children. Last of all, the woman died. 23 Now, when all the dead rise to life on the day of resurrection, whose wife will she be? All seven of them had married her."*

*24 Jesus answered them, "How wrong you are! And do you know why? It is because you don't know the Scriptures or God's power. 25 For when the dead rise to life they will be like the angels in heaven, and men and women will not marry. 26 Now, as to the dead being raised: haven't you ever read in the book of Moses the passage about the burning bush? There it is written that God said to Moses, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 27 That means that he is the God of the living, not of the dead. You are completely wrong!"*

Next we see some Sadducees take their turn at trying to trap Jesus. They were a small Jewish religious party, whose importance was out of proportion to their size. It is amazing that most of the priests were of this group. They were materialists who worshipped wealth and power, and they strongly denied that the dead would be raised to life again or that there were such things as spirits and angels (Acts 23:8). They were aristocratic traditionalists, mostly political, and not religious at all. But the High Priests came from their group, and this fact placed them at the highest point in Jewish power.

Arguing religion was one of their favorite pastimes, and in the process they had developed this made up story which they felt exposed the "absurdity" of resurrection.

Under certain circumstances, a man was obligated to marry his brother's widow to carry on the family-line (see Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5-6). It would be theoretically possible for the things mentioned in their story to happen. (Some today ask what will happen in the resurrection to a man who had been eaten by cannibals?) In his reply, Jesus gives two important principles (verse 24).

The Sadducees based their disbelief of the resurrection on the fact that it is not specifically mentioned in the first five books of the Old Testament. (They rejected the other Old Testament books and would not use them.) These first five books were called "the books of Moses" (since he wrote them down, compare Luke 24:27, 44). But Jesus shows that there is evidence that death will be repealed, in the statement of God to Moses. God said: "*I am the God of Abraham, etc.*" Notice He does not say, "*I was the God, etc.*" (In Exod. 3:6, Zamenhof translating from the Hebrew Masoretic Text translates "*I am*" in the present continuous tense, as Jesus does also in His quotation of the passage.) Jesus shows them that the fact that these men were still alive because He was still their God. Alford says: "It is an assertion which *could not be made of an annihilated being of the past*. And notice also, that Abraham's (etc.) body, having had upon it *the seal of the covenant*, is against the so-called 'sleep of the soul' in the intermediate state." Compare also Luke 16:19-31.

The other part of Jesus' answer views God's power to create a new order of life in which marriage no longer plays a part. Marriage implies birth, and birth implies death. When death is abolished, birth and marriage vanish as well. Angels are a separate order of creation. The dead do not become *angels*, but become *like the angels*. The "new heavens and a new earth" which Peter mentions (2 Peter 3:13) will not be Eden restored, but something entirely new. Paul speaks of continuity between what we are now and what we will become (1 Cor. 15:35-58). Perhaps the little green worm which turns into a beautiful butterfly is a prophecy of our change (compare 1 John 3:1-3). Robert Brinsmead says: "Like righteousness, (Martin) Luther viewed immortality as something which stood outside of man. This did not mean that he concluded that a dead man ceases to exist. He whom God wishes to speak to, either in love or anger, cannot cease to exist. The immortality does not reside in the nature of man but in Christ and in His word of promise."

## **The Great Commandment**

*(Mark 12:28-37)*

**28** *A teacher of the Law was there who heard the discussion. He saw that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer, so he came to him with a question, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"*

**29** *"This is the most important one," said Jesus. "'Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. 30 You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 The second most important commandment is this: 'You must love your fellowman as yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two."*

**32** *The teacher of the Law said to Jesus, "Well done, Teacher! It is true, as you say, that only the Lord is God, and that there is no other god but he. 33 And man must love God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his strength; and he must*

love his fellowman as himself. It is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer animals and other sacrifices to God on the altar.”

34 Jesus noticed how wise his answer was, and so he told him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

After this nobody dared to ask Jesus any more questions.

35 As Jesus was teaching in the temple he asked the question, “How can the teachers of the Law say that the Messiah will be the descendant of David? 36 The Holy Spirit inspired David to say:

‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side, until I put your enemies under your feet.’

37 David himself called him ‘Lord’; how, then, can the Messiah be David’s descendant?”

The large crowd heard Jesus gladly.

This man was a “teacher of the law” (a scribe or rabbi). He asks a question that had come up many times in the discussion among religious leaders. The Jewish scholars had studied the commandments and “discovered” the total of 613 commandments in the law. There was some thinking that by obeying the most important commandment, one was given credit for having obeyed all the commandments. (But compare James 2:10-11.) Therefore they spent a lot of time trying to decide which was the most important. Hillel, a famous teacher of the law, had said: “What you hate for yourself do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole law: the rest is commentary; go and learn.” This is a negative way of saying what Jesus said in the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). But here Jesus gives an answer that goes deep into the heart of the matter.

Jesus quotes the basic statement of faith of the religious Jew, the *Shema* (which means “hear”) which is found in Deut. 6:4-5. They would recite this statement daily, and there was some sense of *superstition* in the way in which they thought of it as a “good luck charm.” Jesus plainly shows that *loving his God* is the most important element in one’s religious life. He immediately adds a second element, that one should *love his neighbor* as he loves himself (Lev. 19:18). Then Jesus sums up by saying: “There is no other commandment more important than these two.” Matthew records Jesus as saying, “The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.” The first command sums up man’s obligation to God. The second sums up man’s obligation to his fellowman. One who loves God will not rebel against him, but will live to please him. One who loves his fellowman will try to help him.

Jesus was really saying nothing new in his answer. This agrees with the moral and spiritual insight to be found in the Old Testament portion of the Bible (compare 1 Sam. 15:22; Hosea 6:6). Religious Jews had already reached this conclusion (compare Luke 10:25-28). Yet there is a new element here as Jesus tells him: “*You are not far from the Kingdom of God.*” This teacher of the law must fulfill these two commandments by learning to follow Jesus (compare Mark 10:21). Unless one enters the kingdom through Christ the *door*, being *near* is no better than being *far off*.

The teachers of the law taught that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. This is true, but not the whole truth. Jesus asked a question to force them to rethink what they already knew. If David by inspiration could call the Messiah, “my Lord,” (Psa.

110:1), how could the Messiah be simply David's descendant? The Pharisees thought Jesus was only a human being, nothing more. Jesus showed them that: "Messiah, the descendant of David in human terms, is the Son of God -- the Eternal Logos -- who has appeared in history as a human being" (see 1 Tim. 3:16; Gal. 4:4). To understand the *mission* of Jesus, you must first understand *who he is*. It is important that He is a human being, but this is not all -- he is God as well! If he were *only* divine, and not human as well, he could not have died as our sin-offering.) But since He is *both* God and man, his death becomes the *infinite sacrifice* for sin and the *gift of life*! You must believe this to be in the kingdom. (Faith implies obedience.)

### **False and True Religion**

*(Mark 12:38-44)*

*38 As he taught them he said, "Watch out for the teachers of the Law, who like to walk around in their long robes and be greeted with respect in the market place; 39 who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts. 40 They take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and then make a show of saying long prayers. Their punishment will be all the worse!"*

*41 As Jesus sat near the temple treasury he watched the people as they dropped in their money. Many rich men dropped in much money; 42 then a poor widow came along and dropped in two little copper coins, worth about a penny. 43 He called his disciples together and said to them, "I tell you that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. 44 For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had -- she gave all she had to live on."*

This is the official close of his public ministry. (It came in the second year). This is more than a scolding, it is a tongue-lashing rebuke of the anti-God actions of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (These are called "the Jews" in some verses). These were the only religious teachers which the people had. They did teach the law of Moses, but they distorted it by adding their own traditions (compare Mark 7:9-13). They were correct when they did teach the law, but their actions taught a lie.

Mark condenses Matt. 23:1-36 into just three verses. Only Mark gives the phrase: "*who like to walk around in their long robes.*" These long robes, sweeping the ground, imitated those of the priests of Rome. The teachers of the law wore these to impress people with their importance. When Jesus sent his apostles to preach, he specifically told them to dress in the clothes of the common, ordinary people (Mark 6:9). The Jewish leaders wanted people to know they were not just *ordinary people*, but that they were *important*! This was not to honor their status as teachers, but to get the glory for themselves! Rather than pointing people to God, they were seizing the honor for themselves. There were a few good men among these leaders (such as Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and perhaps Gamaliel, etc.). But we must not ignore the lesson that zealous faith can be distorted into a *pride* which feeds on itself and proudly holds

itself up to the world. A good question which we must ask ourselves is: “When does ‘Christian witness’ become exhibitionism???”

Jesus especially emphasizes that these religious leaders “*take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes,*” and then make a show of saying long prayers to impress people with their righteousness. The sin of showing off (ostentation) was the root of the Pharisees’ other sins. Jesus rebukes all who use (misuse) religion as a means of domineering people. W.N. Clarke writes: “Our Lord’s denunciations of the representatives of Judaism in his day seem terribly severe and almost cruel; but what is shown of the absurd and heartless refinements of the Pharisaism of that age fully supports the strong language that he used. What must have been the indignation of such a soul as his at such perversion of the religion of his Father!”

For a contrast to the attitude of the Jewish leaders, Mark shows us the widow’s offering. In the world in which Jesus lived, widows had almost no job opportunities, and so were extremely poor. The very religious leaders who should have been their protectors, rather were the ones who often victimized them. As Jesus sat near the temple treasury (in the women’s court), he watched as people dropped their free-will offerings into the thirteen trumpet-shaped boxes. (Free-will offerings were made in addition to the temple tax, before the Passover.) Many rich men dropped in a lot of money (some of them ostentatiously and loudly), and it cost them little to do this because of their wealth. The poor widow gave almost the smallest gift possible to give -- two small copper coins worth about a penny. But Jesus said she had given more than all the rest! How could this be??? Because she had given everything that she had! The two coins were all she had to live on, and to give them meant self-sacrifice and doing without some things she needed. This showed her love for God, and her faith. Jesus praises her for it.

## **Termination**

*(Mark 13:1-8)*

**13** *As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said, “Look, Teacher! What wonderful stones and buildings!” 2 Jesus answered, “You see these great buildings? Not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down.”*

*3 Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, across from the temple, when Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him in private. 4 “Tell us when this will be,” they said, “and tell us what will happen to show that the time has come for all these things to take place.”*

*5 Jesus said to them, “Watch out, and don’t let anyone fool you. 6 Many men will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and fool many people. 7 And don’t be troubled when you hear the noise of battles close by and news of battles far away. Such things must happen, but they do not mean that the end has come. 8 Countries will fight each other, kingdoms will attack one another. There will be earthquakes everywhere, and there will be famines. These things are like the first pain of childbirth.*

Jesus prophesied: “*He will come and kill those men and turn the vineyard over to other tenants*” (Mark 12:9). God was going to terminate His relationship with the Jewish leaders (but not necessarily with the Jewish people, compare Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 11:1-12). This chapter is the most difficult for the interpreter, as it speaks of strange future

events and signs. Verses 30-32 set the time-frame, as much of the things would happen in the *normal life-time* of those who heard him predict these things (verse 30). “*That day or hour*” (verse 32) is obviously still in our future, and Jesus points out that *only the Father* knows when it will take place.

Jesus probably said these things to his disciples many times. This may be the climax as he repeats these things, and Luke identifies the “Awful Horror” (“abomination of desolation,” KJV) as armies surrounding Jerusalem. Luke also speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem as *The Days of Punishment* (compare Matt. 23:35-39; 1 Thess. 2: 14-16).

This was the third temple standing in Jerusalem, rebuilt by Herod in such splendor that it would not be finally completed until some thirty years after Jesus’ death. It was built of white marble and was nineteen acres in size. Josephus describes some of the larger stones in it as being between 68 and 80 feet in length. The temple was so worshipped by the Jewish people, that the disciples associate the destruction of the temple with the Coming of Christ and the end of the age. Jesus had predicted: “*And so your temple will be abandoned and empty*” (Matt. 23:38). This was a double prophecy. It says that when Jesus would leave the temple, God would also desert it and no longer accept its worship. It also says that God would remove his protection and allow the city to be totally crushed (Zech. 11:6). Other great temples stand in ruins, still showing their splendor. The Jewish temple would vanish completely from the face of the earth.

Jesus warned that many false messiahs would come to delude the people. They would claim to be his representatives, or to be the Messiah himself. Josephus, the Jewish historian, shows that these things happened just as Jesus said. DeWalt says: “As the destruction of their holy city drew near, and the Messianic hopes of the Jews were at fever-heat, many fanatics arose, and awakened false expectations, and drew large numbers after them (compare Acts 5:36-37; 1 John 2:18). Josephus says that in the reign of Claudius (who died 54 A.D.), the land was overwhelmed with deceivers who pretended to be in the Christ (the Messiah).”

Jesus warns of wars and earthquakes. Rumors of an expected invasion are often worse than the invasion itself, as people react in terror. All the world seemed to be at war at this time. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes of the years preceding 70 A.D.: “It was full of calamities, horrible with battle, rent with seditions, savage in peace itself.” At least five major earthquakes took place during these years; along with epidemics of disease in which thousands died; and famines (see Acts 11:28).

These things would persuade some that the end had already come, and so turn their minds away from Jesus. For others, these same events would tempt them to believe that God had forgotten them and that the end would never come. Such events must be accepted as part of the “Plan,” and must be viewed as part of the pain that precedes the joy of birth. The birth and growth of the kingdom/church of our Lord would be during the death-agony of the Jewish age. Compare Rev. Ch. 6.

### **Questions for Discussion**

(Mark 12:13-13:8)

1. Did the enemies of Jesus really believe that He told the truth and taught God’s will for man?

2. Why ask about the inscription on the coin?
3. Where is the emphasis? On the thing to be paid, or the person to receive it?
4. Did Jesus recommend paying taxes to the government?
5. What things belong to God -- are they the same things that belong to the Emperor (Caesar)? Discuss this.
6. What guidance does the Bible give to the concerned Christian who feels he cannot approve of the purpose for which his taxes are being used (such as developing nuclear weapons; for abortions; etc.)?
7. Since the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, why ask a question involving it?
8. Was this a real case or a made-up one? What does their choice of question imply about their character?
9. Jesus states two things absolutely essential to escaping religious error (verse 24). What are they?
10. Why not marry in heaven? Will we lose our identity as husband and wife? Discuss.
11. Do angels have *identity* -- that is, can they be recognized as separate and distinct individuals?



12. Show how the reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob proves the immortality of man. Discuss.

13. What was the *Shema* ' and how and why was it used?

14. Why preface the greatest commandment with a statement about the nature of God?

15. Show how love includes all that God wants us to be and to do.

16. How does Jesus view this second commandment as the result or counterpart of the first?

17. Specify areas of love involved in loving our neighbor as ourselves.

18. In what sense was the Messiah to be both the son of David and the Lord of David? How was this possible?

19. What does the reference to "long robes" imply?

20. How was it possible to rob someone and pray to God in the same day?

21. Wasn't Jesus unnecessarily severe with the religious leaders?

22. Discuss the deadly danger of hypocrisy in prayer today.

23. If the widow had two coins, why didn't she keep one? Wasn't she being foolish in her generosity?

24. How does Jesus evaluate our gifts? Show how this principle is reasonable.

25. Jesus said: "and so your temple will be abandoned and empty." How does this fit in with Mark Ch. 13?

26. Jesus was answering at least three questions (see Matt. 24:3). What shows us how to divide the time-frame of his prediction?

27. In what year was his prediction about the temple fulfilled?

28. Why would the disciples associate the second coming with the destruction of the temple?

29. What caused the Messianic hopes of the Jews to rise to fever-heat?

30. When was verse 8 fulfilled, or is it still in the future? Compare Rev. 9:13-21 with verses 5:8.