



Honor

BELIEVERS' HIGHEST CALLING IS TO HONOR GOD
IN EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR LIVES.

MATTHEW 22:15-22,34-40

For years in schools across America, the day began with the Pledge of Allegiance. As children, we were taught to honor and respect the American flag and the nation it represented. That is one of many allegiances in life. We give honor and loyalty to any number of causes and people. The critical issue is how we select what we give honor to. Allegiance to wrong things leads to potential disaster. Allegiance to honorable things can result in more joy and fulfillment in life. Choose wisely.

 **What is your highest allegiance in life?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

MATTHEW 22:1–23:39

The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders had been brewing for months. With the cleansing of the temple (Matt. 21:12-13), it had reached a boiling point. What followed would be several more days of confrontation with the chief priests and elders. The thrust of the confrontation centered around Jesus's authority and the rejection of His authority by the religious elite.

In His indictment of the establishment, Jesus had used three parables to teach about the kingdom of God. The first will be last, Jesus had said. In saying that, He was pointing to the fact that those who seemed to be farthest from the kingdom of heaven would enter the kingdom and the religious leaders would not.

The first two of these parables are in Matthew 21. The third one begins chapter 22. This final parable (vv. 1-14) pictured a wedding feast where those invited declined the invitation by treating violently the ones who had delivered it. The result was devastating to those invited. Their failure resulted in the invitation being extended to all who would come. This parable continues the theme of those who might be considered outside of the kingdom actually entering the kingdom.

Matthew's Gospel is full of triplets—groupings of threes to form his narrative, whether it is three parables, three healings, and now, three questions from three different groups opposing him. These will be the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and finally a Pharisee. Each of the three questions was designed to trap Jesus, but He adeptly handled each question to the amazement of the crowds. Teeing off from these questions, Jesus questioned the leaders concerning David's assertion that the Messiah was his Lord. This section closes with a long condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23. Jesus warned the disciples and the crowd to avoid the hypocrisy of these leaders as He pronounced a series of woes on them for their wickedness.

 **Read Matthew 22:15-22,34-40. Identify the ways we are to respond to the different authorities Jesus identified.**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY (MATT. 22:15-22)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to trap him by what he said. ¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are truthful and teach truthfully the way of God. You don’t care what anyone thinks nor do you show partiality. ¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” ¹⁸ Perceiving their malicious intent, Jesus said, “Why are you testing me, hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax.” They brought him a denarius. ²⁰ “Whose image and inscription is this?” he asked them. ²¹ “Caesar’s,” they said to him. Then he said to them, “Give, then, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

VERSES 15-17

This begins a section in which Jesus was questioned by three groups, all attempting to trick Him into saying something that could be used to arrest Him. He had just condemned the religious leaders with a series of three parables. Verse 15 says *then*—arising out of Jesus’s rebuke—the *Pharisees* plotted how they might *trap him*.

Since the intent of this encounter was to trick Jesus, the Pharisees, who would be identifiable by their clothing, sent *their disciples* to do their dirty work. They were joined by the *Herodians*, a group of loyalists to Herod’s family who were friendly with the Roman government. These unlikely allies normally would be oceans apart, for the Pharisees despised both Herod and the Romans. Yet they worked together in trying to get Jesus to speak against either the Mosaic law or the Roman rule in Israel.

The confrontation began with flattery: *we know that you are truthful*. Their barbed hook was covered with honey in hopes that they could catch Jesus off guard. The flattery continued, saying they knew Jesus could not be swayed by what others think. The trap was in place; next came the bait—the question. *Tell us, then, should we pay taxes to Caesar or not*. This tax was resented by the Jews because it represented Roman occupation. The idea of paying tribute to Rome was incredibly distasteful.

The payment of this tax formed the perfect bait for trapping Jesus. For Jesus to declare that the hated tax should be paid would bring the ire of the crowds and the loss of popularity among the people. For Jesus to denounce the tax would bring the wrath of Rome (represented by the Herodians), and Jesus could be accused of treason by the Roman government. This was a trap with no apparent way to win.

VERSES 18-22

Jesus saw their *malicious intent* and rebuked them as *hypocrites*. It was apparent what they were trying to do. He would not be drawn into their trap.

The *coin used for the tax* was not just any coin. It had to be the silver coin of Rome. Roman taxes were required to be paid with Roman coins minted under the direction of the Caesar and bearing the emperor's image on the coin.

In response to Jesus's request, they gave Him a *denarius*. The value of the denarius would equal a day's wage for a worker. While the tax was not a huge amount of money, the idea of the tax itself was repugnant to the Jewish people. Add to that the fact that the coin needed to pay the tax had the image of Caesar on it. That was even more offensive. The Mosaic law forbid the use of graven images, giving double offense to the whole situation.

Quite possibly the coin given to Jesus was minted by the current emperor, Tiberius Caesar. The inscription on that coin included the emperor's face and, on the backside, a picture of him sitting on a throne. In the image of the throne, Caesar was wearing a priestly robe. The inscription read "God and High Priest." While this was highly offensive to the Jews, this was not the focus of Jesus's attention. Turning to His critics, He asked, *whose image and inscription is this?* In asking this question, Jesus had turned the trap on those seeking to entrap Him.

The antagonists readily answered Jesus's question by stating that the image and inscription was *Caesar's*. They were confident they had trapped Jesus and waited for His next reply. What came next was not what was expected.

Jesus told both the Pharisees and the Herodians what they wanted to hear. *Give . . . to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*. Both sides of the issue received the answer they sought. When Jesus said, *give*, He used a word that meant "give up, or give back," meaning render to Caesar and to God what is rightfully due to them.

In stating this, Jesus recognized the legitimate responsibility of His followers to be obedient to the government, which includes paying lawful taxes. Paul spoke of the fact that governments are established by God and believers have an obligation to submit to them. He said that we are to “pay taxes, since the authorities are God’s servants” (Rom. 13:6).

We must not forget the second part of Jesus’s response: we are to give *to God the things that are God’s*. While believers are to give the government taxes that are due, their ultimate duty is to honor God, the Creator and Giver of all things. Jesus will spell out in the next section what allegiance or honor to God looks like.

Jesus’s response caught everyone by surprise: ***they were amazed***. That amazement no doubt involved two things: the clever way Jesus had avoided their trap and the deeply profound answer Jesus had given.



What does it look like to honor our government in today’s culture?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and the Social Order*

Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. (See Romans 13:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:1-2.)

GOD’S AUTHORITY (MATT. 22:34-40)

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. ³⁵ And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: ³⁶ “Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the greatest and most important command. ³⁹ The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

VERSES 34-36

After the question about paying taxes, Jesus was approached by the •**Sadducees** with a question about the resurrection. The *Sadducees* were the wealthy aristocrats of Judaism and included those who served as the chief priests. They did not believe in supernatural things like angels, demons, and the resurrection.

Next the **Pharisees . . . came together** for a second try at trapping Jesus. This time the Pharisees themselves confronted Jesus; there would be no more sending their disciples. **One of them** served as the spokesman for the group. The man is identified as an **expert in the law**, or a scribe and teacher of the law who was perhaps the most learned among the gathered Pharisees. He posed a question to Jesus to **test him**.

The scribe began his question by addressing Jesus as **Teacher**. Based on Mark's account, this scribe may have been showing respect for Jesus (Mark 12:28-34). Perhaps he wasn't as mean-spirited as his fellow Pharisees.

His question was one of theology: **Which command in the law is the greatest?** This was an age-old debate among the rabbis. The rabbis taught that Moses had received 613 laws on Mount Sinai. Could they be boiled down to the most important ones? A scheme had been created that labeled some laws as "heavier," meaning they were a higher priority. Some were not as critical and were called the "lighter" laws. In Psalm 15, David boiled the essential laws down to eleven. Isaiah pared them down to six (Isa. 33:15-16), while the prophet Micah got them down to three things required by God (Mic. 6:8). Finally, both Amos and Habakkuk boiled them down to one central command (Amos 5:4; Hab. 2:4).

VERSES 37-40

Jesus answered the question outright. This was the first direct answer in these instances of confrontation in Matthew 21-22. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This keystone passage of Judaism was and is known as the *Shema* of Israel. The word *shema* means "hear" or "listen" and the verses Jesus quoted begin, "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." In these verses is wrapped up how God's people are to honor Him and show allegiance to Him. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

The word *heart* includes our affections. *Soul* speaks of all our life surrendered to God and His service. *Mind* speaks of our intellect and thinking capacity. The Gospel of Mark includes one

more aspect to this command. It speaks of loving God with all our strength (Mark 12:30). This would be to love with all our efforts. These words describe giving God our ultimate allegiance to honor Him.

Jesus proclaimed that loving God wholeheartedly was the **greatest and most important** of all the commandments. However, Jesus wasn't finished. The Mosaic law is symbolically represented by the "two tablets" of the law—the first four commandments dealt with the vertical relationship with God, while the last six commandments related to horizontal relationships with others. Because of this, Jesus said, there was one more command that was essential. **The second is like it**, meaning a commandment that is equally important. **Love your neighbor as yourself**. This is the command to love others unselfishly and to demonstrate that love through intentional acts of caring.

These two commandments rise above all else that is taught in **the Law and the Prophets**. In fact, all other laws come from these two. What had initially started as a question about the priority of government versus religion ended in an emphasis on honoring and loving God completely and demonstrating His love to others.



**What's at the heart of this command to love other people?
What does this demonstrate?**



BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a Bible passage.

In Matthew 22:17-21, Jesus spoke about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Compare this to Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Based on all these passages, write a description of the Christian's responsibilities toward government.

