

The second three traps deal with the attempt of the Jews to divide the followers of Jesus by trying to force Him to align Himself with one side or the other of a great controversy. In a very interesting side note at the end of the questions found in Matthew 22, Christ Himself asks a trapping question to the Pharisees which they are not able to answer. These passages are a tremendous lesson in the overpowering wisdom of God.

First Christ is asked a question about taxation (Matthew 22:15-22). The real issue was, 'I don't want to pay this tax! I want to keep all my money for myself!' It bothered the Jews greatly to have to pay 'tribute' to a foreign government, but mostly they were just greedy. The Roman government provided many services such as magnificent roads, centralized government, and perhaps the greatest era of world peace the world has ever known! But the Jews were so stubborn that they rebelled against any one being over them, no matter how beneficial they were.

As far as the Christ's choices went, the Jews saw only two: He could side with the Zealots and show loyalty to God, or he could side with the Herodians and be loyal to Rome. If He chose not to pay the tax, most of the Jews would be extremely pleased. But this view would brand Him as a dangerous rebel in the eyes of the Roman government. If He chose to pay the tax, the Zealots would no longer follow Him, for they believed that Israel should owe tribute to no one.

Christ chastised them for putting Him to the test, showing them that He knew exactly what they were up to. While they were in this shocked state He asked them for a coin. By making them produce a coin themselves He showed that they had indeed received benefits from the Roman government. Then by asking them about the coin's image and superscription, He again caused bewilderment, for surely everyone knew the answer to this! Christ pointed out that if it has Caesar's name and picture on it, then it must be Caesar's! His accusers could not argue against their own use of the services represented by this coin.

The second trap follows this passage (Matthew 22:23-33). Here the attack comes from the Sadducees, a more worldly-oriented group that did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or inspired scripture beyond the first five books of the Old Testament. The real issue here was that of the existence of the resurrection, which the Sadducees and Pharisees had been arguing about for years. There seemed to be only two sides to choose from. And they had a special example, based on their own conception of heaven, that they thought made any idea of a resurrection so ridiculous that Christ would not dare agree to it!

The goal was to make Christ lose one segment of his audience. First, though, He disrupted their smugness by exposing their ignorance of the scriptures. They wanted Christ to be on the defense, but at the very beginning He shocked them by taking the offense. Christ explained that they if they really knew about heaven, they would know that there is no marriage there. Then He shocked them even further by showing from the books of Moses that the Lord God is the God of the living and therefore the resurrection must be true! This was in the scriptures all the time, but the scholars had never noticed it! When the crowd heard it, they were astonished at His teaching, and were afraid to ask Him any more questions.

The third situation concerns marriage and divorce (Matthew 19:3-9). The real issue was, 'We want to know what we can legally get away with', not, 'What does God really want?' An attempt was made to split the followers of Christ between the major schools of interpretation for the 'indecency' mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: Hillel, who said it could mean anything that a husband didn't like, and Shammai, who said it could only mean adultery. Thus, there was a very strict and a very loose interpretation of the passage. The Jews thought that Christ would lose followers no matter what. But Christ once again stunned them with His answer. He put them on the spot by exposing their ignorance, not only of scripture but what God really meant. He showed that they had not paid attention to what God wanted to accomplish with the institution of marriage. God wanted strong commitment and an earnest covenant, just as He wants between Himself and us. God has had enough of this attitude, 'what do we have to do?' We should make every effort to become pleasing to God, not just on the outside by binding ourselves by the law, but on the inside by wanting to be more like Him every day.

Christ's enemies could not trap Him into making a mistake. We need to learn about the lessons He taught here, as well as the power He has to keep us from being trapped ourselves.

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