

Pentecost XXII: Matthew 22:15-22: Not "either-or" but "both-and"

1. Read the parallel accounts at Mk. 12:13-17 and Lk. 20:20-26 for a better understanding of the whole situation. The Synoptics supplement each other. It is still Tuesday of holy week.
2. At 21:23 the "battle" between the Sanhedrists and Jesus began when they asked Him an arrogant question for which they already knew the answer. Jesus countered with a true "either-or" question, for their own good. They refused to answer the question. He shut their mouths. Then, in vs. 28 He asks "What do you think?" That there were Pharisees among them is plain from 21:45. In our text (22:15-22) the Pharisees and Herodians collaborate against Jesus in a most diabolical, sinister and hypocritical fashion. It is truly remarkable that they use Jesus' (good) tactics in an evil way. As Jesus had done (21:28) they ask: "What do you think?" This is followed by a diabolical "either-or" question which is intended to trap Him. A. T. Robertson (*Harmony of the Gospels*, 1922) remarks in a footnote, p. 164: "The Pharisees send a group of their keenest students to go with the Herodians to catch Jesus with the dilemma about paying tribute to Caesar, a live question in current politics and theology. They offered Jesus the alternative of popular disfavor or of disloyalty to the Roman government." Jesus had asked an "either-or" question for their own good. Then He said: "What do you think?" and they had to answer their question, but refused. They came to Him saying: "What do you think?" and asked an "either-or" question solely to trap Him. But, He did not refuse to answer.
3. Vs. 15: Τότε πορευθέντες implies that the Pharisees had heard everything Jesus said from 21:24 to 22:14, but it had left them cold and heartless. They laid a plan to ensnare Him in His own speech. παγιδεύω occurs only here in NT. It is metaphorical for trapping game. That has to be done stealthily, without the animal's or bird's awareness. That's the point.
4. Vs. 16: ἀποστέλλουσιν, to send with a commission, clearly shows that the Pharisees had coached their disciples. Read Lk. 20:20. There they are called spies, who feigned sincerity and were intent on delivering Jesus to the Roman governor. Fahling remarks: "Jesus' enemies did not lack resourcefulness. Since they had failed in their endeavor to question His authority, they tried to bring Him into collision with the civil powers. . . . They joined forces with the Herodians. A queer alliance indeed. The Pharisees, as the representatives of the extreme Jewish nationalists and haters of Rome, made common cause with a political party which sought to strengthen the dynasty of Herod by cultivating the favor of Rome. . . . The Pharisees would not come themselves, but would send a group of their keenest students together with the Herodians, who this time might be expected to come before Him without arousing in Him a suspicion of sinister motives on their part. The impression which they evidently designed to make was that a dispute had occurred between them and that they now desired to settle it by referring the matter to an authority such as Jesus was." We must always remember that the devil is a liar and the father of lies. There is no truth in him. He works through his agents. Heretics and liars use the very cunning of Satan to destroy the church and its work. Don't underestimate Satan and his agents. But, back to the text: λέγοντες indicates that the disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians had been coached as to the very words which they were to say. οἴδαμεν, "we know without further information". They practically say: "Everybody knows." They state three things: a) That Jesus is true, no falsehood or phoniness; b) That He teaches the way of God truly. ἐν ἀληθείᾳ likely denotes manner, indicating how He teaches; c) καὶ means "and therefore". That He is not swayed by prejudice or partiality. γὰρ is explanatory. He does not look on the face of people explains οὐ-οὐδένως, a very strong expression with double negative, making it quite emphatic. There is one item in their flattery which is conspicuously absent. They did not admit that He was the Son of God. Neither the devil nor any of Jesus' enemies ever went that far. When Jesus was tempted, Satan said: "IF you are the Son of God. . .". Jesus' enemies, under the cross, said similar words.

Fahling remarks: "So that infamous accusation that Jesus was in league with Beelzebub was admittedly false!" On one occasion they called Him Beelzebub. Now they speak with honeyed words of flattery. Satan and his agents cross themselves up with what they say. What underlies this text is that the forces of untruth meet the forces of truth.

5. Vs. 17: οὖν "in view of what we say you are". εἰπέ "tell us". Just like Satan at Mt. 4:3. ἔξεστιν is an impersonal verb meaning "to be lawful, to be legal". δοῦναι is the subject of ἔξεστιν. Eight of our translations have "taxes" for κήνσον, the tax required of everyone. It's an "either-or" question. Their intention, of course, is to impale Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. Fahling: "To answer it in Rome's favor would cost Him popular favor, and to answer it in favor of the people would get Him into serious trouble with Roman authorities, which would charge Him with disloyalty to Rome."
6. Vs. 18: γνοῦς, a form of γινώσκω. In vs. 16 Jesus' enemies used a form of οἶδα, to know inherently. But here we have γνοῦς, to know from an outside source. It plainly shows that Jesus' divinity enabled His humanity to be omniscient. Jesus' human nature was given all the qualities of the divine nature but Jesus used them only when proving that He was the Son of God or when necessary for the sake of truth, as here. πονηρία means active wickedness as opposed to κακία, latent wickedness. Luke says (20:23): "When He perceived their craftiness." JB renders this passages: "But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied 'You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me?' Cf. Mt. 4:7. Satan was ever trying to trap Jesus and now his agents do likewise. ὑποκριταί must have stung. Jesus knows that they are speaking with a forked tongue. Read again what they said of Him in vs. 16. He is proving that they were right in what they said, though they did not mean it.
7. Vs. 19: τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου. AAT renders: "the coin with which the tax is paid." τοῦ κήνσου is adjectival, indicating what kind of coin. προσήνεγκαν, most of our versions translate "they brought Him". The others have "handed Him". Fahling suggests that "brought Him" means that they had none on their person but had to go to the money-changers in the Court of the Gentiles to get this coin. That makes sense. δημόριον means a silver coin minted by the Emperor Tiberius.
8. Vs. 20: In vs. 18 we had εἶπεν "He said". Here we have λέγει "He went on to say". In 18-19 first He asks a question and then gives a command. He does the same in 20-21. Τίνος is possessive genitive of the interrogative τίς. εἰκῶν, Lenski quotes Trench who points out the precise meaning of this word. It denotes a prototype which it does not merely resemble but from which it is drawn. The coin does not merely resemble Caesar's face and name but represents his face and name. Where the coin goes, there goes Caesar, in this case, Tiberius. LB renders: "Whose picture is stamped on it? And whose name is this beneath the picture?" Though LB has many faults, one must admit that Taylor often makes the text alive. Read LB on the whole passage.
9. Vs. 21: Cf. Mt. 21:28. They had no choice but to answer. And, in both cases, their answer is the solution. In this instance the answer is only one word. By the way, very likely these "disciples" and Jesus could read Latin. Fahling gives us a translation of what was written on the coin: "'Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine August' and on the other side 'Pontifex Maximus' which title 'high priest' . . . made him both the highest civil and the highest religious ruler of the land." τότε (cf. 22:8 and 13) denotes more than time. Here it introduces the punch line, if we may call it that. λέγει "He went on to say". Jesus took things step by step. οὖν "in view of the fact that this coin actually belongs to and represents Caesar". Ἀπόδοτε is much more than "give". Cf. Lk. 19:8 where we have δίδωμι and ἀποδίδωμι in the same verse. The first means "to give", and the second means "to give back". The coin belonged to Caesar and represented the government. Their acknowledgment that it belonged

to Caesar and their use of the coin obligated them "to give back". Note the beautiful parallelism in this short sentence. A distinction is made between τὰ and τῶ. The genitives are both adjectival and possessive. And in both parts we have indirect objects. It is truly remarkable that some of the most important things Jesus said were said in a situation of hostility or danger. Cf. the first five of the great "I am" sayings in Jn. 6:48-51; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11 and 11:25, all spoken either to Jesus' enemies or in a situation of grief. Cf. the seven words of Jesus on the cross, all spoken by Jesus in a situation of grief, surrounded by enemies. Whole books have been written on the basis of the simple principle enunciated here by Jesus. Cf. also Rom. 13:1-6 and I Pet. 2:17. The moment a person, be he man, woman or child, comes into contact with the currency of the country of which he is a citizen, he thereby acknowledges that he is obligated to pay for the support of that government, to obey its laws, to render that government obedience, fear and honor, in fact he is obligated to pray for that government, I Tim. 2:2. Meditate on that fact that we Americans are very reluctant to pay taxes, try all too often to circumvent laws, consider it our privilege to make fun (not just humor) of our government, etc. etc. These matters are our obligation, not mere toys. τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ. What are the things of God? Everything. When Job (1:21) said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" he was acknowledging that he owned nothing, but that all was the Lord's. I am merely a steward of what God has loaned to me. I owe it all to Him. "Pay back to God the things which belong to God", for the Christian is the third use of the Law. If he truly does that, in Jesus' name, according to Mt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-6 and I Pet. 2:17 he will automatically also be obeying "Pay back to Caesar the things which belong to Caesar" because the fourth commandment covers this part of what Jesus said. Mt. 22:21 is found in the Table of Duties of the Small Catechism, along with Rom. 13:1.5-7; I Tim. 2:1.2; Titus 3:1 and I Pet. 2:13.14. The pastor ought carefully explain these texts to confirmands and they should commit them to memory. The Christian lives in two kingdoms, that of power and that of grace. The two must always be sharply distinguished and yet they do not contradict each other but must always work harmoniously side by side, in each other's interest. Before the Reformation people suffered from a Church-State. Luther and other reformers brought back the truth of Scripture and applied it. Since the Reformation many countries have suffered from forms of the State-Church. Our country, like no other country in history, has been blessed, for the most part, with a proper relationship of church and state. The state must have just laws and justice for all, not invading the religious rights of the individual. The church must use the Word of God and do all things in accordance with it, not invading the legal rights of the individual. But the Christian lives harmoniously in these two kingdoms at all times. The author of these notes once read an illustration which is pertinent: A Lutheran judge was requested by another Lutheran to grant him a divorce on legal grounds. Both men were members of the same congregation. Since the request for divorce was not on the basis of God's Word, though legal in that state, the judge privately pleaded with the man not to request a divorce. But the man persisted on legal grounds. The divorce was granted. Then the judge brought the whole matter to the congregation and disciplinary proceedings were begun. The man was eventually excommunicated. In the first instance the judge proceeded on the basis of state law. In the second he proceeded on the basis of the Word of God. He was rightly operating in two kingdoms. If a member of a congregation approaches the pastor with a contrite confession of murder, the pastor must absolve him immediately. But then he must be told to submit to the governing authorities by turning himself in. If he refuses, absolution must be withheld. These are but two examples of the relationship of the two kingdoms. For further reading on the two kingdoms see *The Abiding Word*, vol. II, pp. 562-607 and F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I 55; II 393; III 418. There is no special section in Pieper on this matter but see Index Volume, pp. 772-773, for further references in the three volumes.

10. Vs. 22: Two of our translations bring out the true meaning of this verse: NEB "This answer took

them by surprise and they went away and left him alone." AAT "They were surprised to hear this. Then they let Him alone and went away." ὀφέντες evidently means more than "they left Him". It means "they left Him alone" in the sense that they set a trap for Jesus, but fell into their own trap. And that teaches us a dear lesson. When we adhere assiduously to the Word of God and to our Lord, in true repentance, the traps which others set for us will become their undoing rather than ours. Ylvisaker says: "In spite of themselves there was nothing in this guileless wisdom which His enemies could attack." And Lenski: "The pity is that they did no more. All they did was to leave him and to go away. No man ever spoke like this man (Jn. 7:46); why then did they leave Him?" The answer is obvious: Though they went away, licking their wounds, their hearts had not been changed.