



Honor

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

Scripture Passage: Matthew 22:15-22,34-40 Memory Verse: Matthew 22:37-38

In the second of the five controversies on the Tuesday of Passion Week (Matt. 22:15-22), the Pharisees and Herodians sent their followers to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes to Rome. Jesus's response avoided the dilemma and provided a foundational approach to "church and state" that resonates with believers today. While its citizens are responsible to honor the government demands, God has the greatest claim on their lives.

The fourth controversy on that Tuesday involved an expert in the law who sought to trap Jesus with a question about the greatest command (22:34-40). Instead of the Ten Commandments, Jesus cited the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5), the credal statement of Judaism. Jesus said the greatest commandment was to love the Lord with one's whole being. For good measure, Jesus added loving one's neighbor as a complement to the vertical and the horizontal aspects of biblical faith.

As you plan for this session from Matthew 22, evaluate where God truly stands in your life. If He does not hold the highest place, identify what needs to change. Encourage the adults in your Bible study to do the same on a personal level.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



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 that 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. (PSG, p. 89)

What is your highest allegiance in life?



Understand the Context (Matthew 22:1–23:39)

On Sunday, known as “Palm Sunday,” Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9. On Monday, He cleared out those who bought and sold in the temple. Tuesday was a day of controversy, as Jesus taught in the temple courtyard (Luke 20:1).

First, the chief priests and elders challenged Jesus’s authority (Matt. 21:23–27). After Jesus avoided their trap, He told three parables to drive home His judgment of them (21:28–22:14). The next challenge came from the Pharisees and Herodians over the issue of paying taxes to Caesar (22:15–22). Once again, Jesus avoided their attempts to discredit Him and His teaching.

A third challenge came when the Sadducees confronted Jesus with a question about marriage in the afterlife. Since the Sadducees didn’t believe in the resurrection, they thought their question would make Jesus look ridiculous no matter how He answered (22:23–33). When the Pharisees saw that the Sadducees had failed, they came up with another plan, sending an expert in the law to question Jesus about the greatest commandment (22:34–40). Jesus identified both the greatest commandment and a second commandment, emphasizing the vertical and horizontal nature of faith. In the fifth and final controversy, the Pharisees questioned Jesus about the nature of the Messiah (22:41–46).

The second and fourth of these debates provide the focus of this session. In the second debate (22:15–22), the Pharisees were joined by the Herodians (22:16). Not much is known about the Herodians; but, as their name implies, they were supporters of the Herods (specifically of Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee and Perea from 4 BC to AD 39). As a result, they also supported Rome since the Herods owed their positions and power to the Empire.

Possibly those who came to question Jesus were officials attached to Antipas’s court. The mention of Herodians in Jerusalem is surprising since Judea was not under Antipas’s control. In fact, the last Herodian ruler of Judea had been deposed in AD 6. Perhaps the movement of many Galileans to Jerusalem for the festival, including Herod Antipas himself (Luke 23:7), accounts for their presence.

Nevertheless, their presence as it related to their political question was important in case Jesus spoke against the taxation of the Roman government. If He did so, they could witness that He promoted sedition. Indeed, Luke expressly stated this was their intention (Luke 20:20). While the Herodians’ focus may have been more political than spiritual, they were just as eager to see Jesus humiliated as the Pharisees were.

Read Matthew 22:15–22,34–40. Identify the ways we are to respond to the different authorities Jesus identified. (PSG, p. 90)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*) and **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Loving God, Loving Others*).

ASK:

What is your highest allegiance in life? (PSG, p. 89)

READ:

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 89 of the PSG. Point out that we don't use the word "allegiance" in everyday speech, but we should carefully consider who or what holds our allegiance as believers.

IDENTIFY:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Point out that, beginning in Matthew 21, Jesus entered Jerusalem and essentially stayed there until His crucifixion. Share that today's passage in Matthew 22 took place on the Tuesday after His "triumphal entry" and examines the balance between our allegiance to God and human authorities, including the government.

CONTEXT:

Share the following content from Understand the Context to provide more background for the session:

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. (PSG, p. 90)

TRANSITION:

The Jewish leaders already had tried to trap Jesus and failed. In today's passage, we'll see how Jesus taught the Jews—and us—to honor both God and human leaders properly.



Group Activity Option

Music

Direct attention to "Jesus Is Lord of All" (*Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 294*). Encourage adults to work in teams of two or three to examine the verses and to identify words and phrases that stick out to them. Allow a few minutes for teams to report. Emphasize that believers are called to honor Jesus in every area of their lives. Share that this session focuses on how Jesus's conflicts with religious leaders underscored the truth that honoring Him is our highest calling as believers.

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.

(vv. 15-17) Once again it is *the Pharisees* who opposed Jesus (see also Matt. 21:45). And, again, they *plotted how to trap him* (as in 12:14). But instead of confronting Jesus themselves, *they sent their disciples*. This is the only place Matthew mentioned *the Herodians* (see “Understand the Context”).

They addressed Jesus as *Teacher*, a term used in Matthew by outsiders (8:19; 12:38; 19:16; 22:16,24,36). Then they made four truthful statements about Him. They affirmed that He was *truthful*, which referred to His integrity. Next, they said He taught *truthfully the way of God*, highlighting the ethical lifestyle God demands. Third, they acknowledged that Jesus was not concerned with *what anyone thinks*. While Jesus was interested in people, He did not alter His message for them. Finally, they noted that He did not *show partiality* or favoritism.

These opponents moved on to their question: *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?* Every adult Jew paid this poll tax (*tributum capitis*), including women and slaves. However, Roman citizens were exempt, emphasizing Israel’s subjugation. If Jesus said “yes,” He would lose favor with the crowd. If He said “no,” the Herodians would accuse Him of insurrection.

(v. 18) Jesus perceived *their malicious intent*. He knew they were *testing* Him (see also 9:4). *Testing* is used of tempting people in hopes that they will fail. Jesus called them *hypocrites* for hiding their true motives.

(vv. 19-21) The *coin* Jesus requested was a *denarius*. The Jews hated this coin and the accompanying tax because of its *image and inscription*. Minted by Rome, it carried Caesar’s likeness, which Jews considered idolatrous. Further, the Latin inscription on the coin referred to the emperor as “Son of the Divine” and “High Priest” of the state religion. While Rome did allow Jews to mint imageless copper coins for other purposes, the poll tax required the denarius, equivalent to a day’s wages (20:2).

Since the coin carried Caesar’s image, it belonged to him. So Jesus stated, *Give, then, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*. The Greek word Jesus used (*apodote*) means to “return” or “restore” what rightfully belongs to Caesar. Then Jesus reminded them of their greater obligation—giving to *God the things that are God’s*.

They needed to give themselves fully to God since they bore His image (Gen. 1:27-28) and belonged to Him (Ps. 24:1). Caesar could claim their money, but God held a higher claim on their lives.

(v. 22) Jesus’s listeners *were amazed* at His words. For their part, Jesus’s opponents likely were taken aback because He successfully avoided their clever trap. They also may have recognized the profound theological insight He had provided. When all was said and done, they simply *left him and went away*.

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.)



APPLICATION POINT: We are called to submit to government officials and laws.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 22:15-22** aloud as the group considers the challenge Jesus faced and how He navigated the Herodians' question.

ASK:

What does it look like to honor our government in today's culture? (PSG, p. 93)

BIBLE SKILL:

Direct adults to work in groups of two or three to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 95). Point out that Jesus spoke about giving Caesar his due and giving God what He deserves. Instruct the adults to compare Matthew 22:17-21 to Acts 5:27-29; Romans 13:1-7; and 1 Peter 2:13-17. Encourage them to write a description of the Christian's responsibilities toward government based on these verses. Allow the groups to share their descriptions.

RECAP:

To summarize a Christian response to government, enlist a volunteer to read the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 93). Highlight this content to provide more background:

Jesus recognized the legitimate responsibility of His followers to be obedient to the government, which includes paying lawful taxes. . . . [But] 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. (PSG, p. 93)

EXPLAIN:

Emphasize that Jesus saw through His opponents' trap and explained that His followers should be obedient to both government and God. His words here created a foundation on which believers continue to build their understanding of the relationship between our faith and the government.

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Quarter

Invite all adults to look at a quarter. Explain that every quarter has some symbol of allegiance to the United States government, but quarters also carry the words "In God we trust." Challenge adults to let the quarter serve as a reminder that Jesus's people are called to honor God and honor our government.

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.”

(vv. 34-35) After the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus (vv. 15-22), He confronted the Sadducees over the doctrine of the resurrection, which they denied (vv. 23-32). That one, too, ended with the crowds being astonished at His teaching (v. 33). While the *expert in the law* here seems to ask a legitimate question, Matthew clearly intended his readers to see this as another test. *The Pharisees* took this action because they learned that Jesus *had silenced the Sadducees*. The Greek word suggests that He “muzzled” His opponents, leading the Pharisees to plan their next move.

Came together may indicate a formal or semi-formal conclave. During this meeting, the expert in the law may have been chosen as a delegate who could do a better job questioning Jesus than others had done. Regardless, Matthew clearly identified the purpose of his question—*to test him*.

(v. 36) As in the controversies of Matthew 22:16,24, the legal expert addressed Jesus as *Teacher*, using a generally respectful term by which Matthew indicates an outsider (see also 8:19; 12:38; 19:16). The question of *which command in the law is the greatest?* was hotly debated in rabbinic circles. Realizing some commands were more important than others, the rabbis divided them into categories. Within the weightier group, various rabbis proposed different commandments as the greatest. Perhaps this expert believed he knew the answer and was prepared to debate Jesus.

(vv. 37-38) The expert and the crowd probably expected Jesus to quote one of the Ten Commandments. However, He pointed to the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5). Every pious Jew repeated these words twice a day—morning and evening. They also posted them on their doorposts and placed copies of them in their phylacteries (6:8).

Jesus’s answer focused on *love for the Lord your God*. Such love is not mere sentimentality or emotion, but absolute devotion. Jesus named two of the three items of Deuteronomy 6:5—*all your heart . . . all your soul*—but added *all your mind* in place of “strength.” In biblical terms, the heart includes both the intellect and emotions, while the soul refers to one’s essential being. The mind is the seat of the will that defines action.

These terms alluded to the entire person. This is why *all* is repeated with each term. To be sure, the expert understood what *greatest* meant, but Jesus added *most important* to emphasize this command’s priority.

(vv. 39-40) Without being asked, Jesus offered *the second*. When Jesus said the second command *is like it*, He was focusing on priority, not just format. The command to *love your neighbor* well is just as important as loving God well because, taken together, these two commands cover both tablets of the Mosaic law.

The Jews understood *neighbor* as a fellow Jew. Jesus, however, clarified in the story of the Good Samaritan that a neighbor is any fellow human being (Luke 10:25-37). When Jesus added *as yourself*, He meant that believers’ love for their neighbor should be as great as the love they have for their own being. They should seek the benefit of others just as they would seek what’s best for themselves.

All the Law and the Prophets encompasses the whole of Scripture (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13). *Depend on* literally is “hang on,” as a door hangs on its hinges. In other words, *these two commandments* bear the whole weight of—the essence of—God’s expectations for His people as defined by the law of Moses. The expert had asked for one command, but Jesus emphasized the vertical and the horizontal aspects of genuine faith.



APPLICATION POINT: We are to honor God exclusively as the one true God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read **Matthew 22:34-40** aloud as the group considers the test presented by the lawyer.

ASK:

Why do you think Jesus gave the lawyer two commands instead of just one?

EXPLAIN:

Summarize the following content (PSG, pp. 94-95) to explain the significance of this question and Jesus’s response:

“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. . . . 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.”

ASK:

What’s at the heart of this command to love other people? What does this demonstrate? (PSG, p. 95)

SAY:

Jesus identified these two commands as the greatest and most important because all other laws spring from them. We can’t really love God fully without loving our neighbors, and we can’t love our neighbors fully without loving God. Every aspect of living a healthy Christian life that honors God can be traced to our ability to obey these two commands.

APPLY:

Direct adults to **Pack Item 6** (Poster: *Loving God, Loving Others*). Lead adults to identify ways they can love God with their entire being and love their neighbors as themselves. Encourage the group to find ways to demonstrate these actions as they step into the “real world” this week.



CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 96 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- We are called to submit to government officials and laws.
- We are to honor God exclusively as the one true God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

ASK:

Which is more difficult to honor in your own life: God or the government? Which love is most difficult to demonstrate: love for God or love for your neighbor?

DISCUSS:

Lead adults in a brief discussion of the first set of questions on page 96 of the PSG. Point back to **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Loving God, Loving Others*). Remind them that loving God includes loving our neighbors—and Jesus defined a neighbor as any other human we meet (Luke 10:25-37).

CHALLENGE:

Invite a volunteer to read the second set of questions on page 96 of the PSG aloud. Emphasize that God calls His people to honor Him in every aspect of their lives. Encourage them to spend time during the week talking with God about what areas they might be holding back and how they can surrender those areas to Him for His glory.

PRAY:

Encourage adults to pray in pairs. Instruct one adult in each pair to pray that God would empower both adults to honor Him in every aspect of life. Instruct the second adult to pray for government leaders. Close with a prayer for your group.

AFTER THE SESSION

This week, consider how you have seen the adults in your group honor God with their lives. Send a text or email to each individual, acknowledging how they have revealed what it means to honor God. Thank them for the example set for others. Send another text or email to the whole group, challenging them to continue looking for ways to apply what they listed on **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Loving God, Loving Others*).

LEADER EXTRAS



For free bonus introduction and application ideas that connect to a current news event, go to goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras.

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.