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Your friend,
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BROOKLYN TABERNACLE
BIBLE STUDIES

THREE TEMPTING QUESTIONS.

Matthew 22:15-22; 34-46.—September 18.

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

THE Pharisees and Sadducees of our Lord's day were the leaders of religion. They had formed a trust or federation, so to speak, and rarely made an attack upon each other, although their doctrines were directly opposed. The Pharisees acknowledged God and the prophets and the Law, and believed in a future life by a resurrection from the dead, and believed in a coming Messiah to exalt their nation and through it to bless the world. The Sadducees believed nothing of the kind—they were agnostics, Higher Critics. They were making the best of the present life, doubting any future existence. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because he did not acknowledge them, but criticised them, and showed the hypocrisies of their claims to be perfect and holy in the keeping of the Law, and reproved them for their lack of sympathy with the poor and less pretentious.

The Sadducees opposed Jesus because, from their standpoint of unbelief, he was a fraud. But even as a fraud they would not have bothered themselves to oppose him, only that they perceived that he was gaining an influence with the people—an influence which they feared might, sooner or later, lead to some disturbance of the peace and unfavorably influence the conduct of the Roman Empire towards the Jews. So while the Sadducees and Pharisees both opposed Jesus, their opposition was for different reasons.

The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the crying of the multitude, "Hosanna to the Son of David," the Messiah! awakened envy in the minds of the Pharisees. But in the Sadducees it produced a fear that the common people should become so aroused as to involve their nation in some strife with the Empire. The Pharisees strove to turn away the sympathy of the people from the Great Teacher, and, to this end, sought to catch him in his words by putting the question, "Is it lawful to give tribute?"

They reasoned that if Jesus would say, "It is not unlawful, they would have little difficulty in having him arrested as a leader of sedition and thus compel Pilate to put him to death. They reasoned further that if Jesus should answer that it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar he would thereby alienate the sympathy of the multitude, which cried "Hosanna!" after him; for the Jews held, almost superstitiously, the idea that they, as God's Kingdom, must not pay tithes to any earthly Kingdom—that it would be irreverent to do so, excepting under compulsion. We notice how artfully they endeavored to ensnare the Master by complimenting him upon his truthfulness, saying, "Master, we know that thou art true!" Not only so, but they sought to impress upon him their appreciation of him as a Teacher—that he would teach the light, the Truth, at any cost. And so they said, "Thou teachest the way of God in truth!" And further, they fortified their position by saying, "We know that thou regardest not the person of men."

These treacherous compliments were intended to ensnare him, but he promptly answered, "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" Why do you veil your base designs under guise of speaking for the Truth? "Show me the tribute money." This was, literally, the census coin in which the tax was to be paid. They handed him a *denarius*, the usual wage for the day laborer, corresponding in value to about seventeen of our cents. Jesus asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They answered, "Caesar's." Jesus replied, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." No wonder the wily Pharisees were troubled to know how to catch him in his words! On the contrary, they were caught; for all of their complimentary remarks stood to his credit in the minds of the common people.

Next, the Sadducees, the agnostics, tried to entrap the Great Teacher by asking one of their stock questions. Seven different brothers in turn married the same woman and all died before she did. To which of them will she be wife in the resurrection? They did not ask, To which will she be wife in heaven or Purgatory or eternal torture, for neither Jesus nor the Jews held any such teaching. The Pharisees and Jesus taught the resurrection of the dead, and it was against this teaching that the Sadducees aimed their sarcastic question.

Note the majesty of the Master's answer: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God." You do not understand the Scripture teaching respecting such questions, and you are ignoring in your question the great Divine power which, at that resurrection time, will be exercised and will straighten out all the difficulties of the situation. Then the Great Teacher proceeded to inform them that such as would (gradually) attain to the resurrection, such as would get a complete raising up out of sin and death conditions, would "neither marry nor be given in marriage," but would be sexless, as are the angels. Thus the supposed great and unanswerable question of the Sadducees fell flat and their ignorance was exposed.

Next, one of the Doctors of the Law endeavored to entrap the Lord on a question of the relative importance of the Divine commandments, asking which Jesus considered the great one of all. The Great Teacher promptly divided the ten commandments into two, according to the Law (Deut. 6:5), and answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is the first and great (chief) commandment. And the second is like unto it—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." What could the Lawyer say to such a summarization of the Law? He had nothing left to say. He was answered as never before.

The Great Teacher asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of the Messiah? Whose Son is he?" They answered, "The Son of David." The Teacher then queried, "How then doth David in spirit (prophetically) call him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his Son?'"

Of course the question was too deep for the Pharisees. The Great Teacher could answer all of their questions, but they could not answer his. How beautifully clear we see it to be that the Messiah, according to the flesh, was born of the lineage of David, but that God's purposes were not fully accomplished in Messiah of the flesh—that he lay down his flesh, sacrificially, and was raised from the dead to the plane of glory, honor and immortality, "far above angels, principalities and powers." We perceive that in the days of his flesh he was the Son of David, but that in his glorification he is David's Lord in that David will receive through him, in due time, not only resurrection from the dead, but also the blessings of participation in the Messianic Kingdom. The father of Messiah in the flesh will thus become the son of the Messiah of glory, whose earthly life is to be the restitution price for the whole world, including David. Thus it is written, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes (rulers) in all the earth."—Psa. 45:16.

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