

INTRODUCTION

We are approaching a section in Luke when the enemies of Jesus are going to ask Him three strange questions. These questions were intended to force Jesus to incriminate Himself. They are bad questions, but Jesus gives good answers.

Sometimes questions can be absurd, even stupid. There’s a collection of funny questions lawyers have actually asked people under oath. I need to preface this by saying some of my best friends are lawyers, and I’m certain they would never ask these kinds of questions. Here are actual questions taken from court records:

1. “Now, doctor isn’t it true that when a person dies in their sleep they don’t know about it until the next morning?”
2. “The youngest son, the 20-year-old, how old is he?”
3. “Was it you or your younger brother who was killed in the war?”
4. “Were you present when your picture was taken?”
5. “How far apart were the vehicles when they collided?”

Sometimes it’s a follow-up question that’s funny:

Question: “Can you describe the individual?”

Answer: “He was about medium height and had a beard.”

Question: “Was this a male or a female?”

Sometimes it’s the answer that’s funny, not the question:

Question: “All your answers must be oral. Where did you go to school?”

Answer: “Oral.”

Question: “You were shot in the fracas?”

Answer: “No, I was shot between the fracas and the navel.”

Today we are going to examine two of the bad questions asked by the enemies of Jesus. He gives such good answers that by the 40th verse of Chapter 20 we read, “no one dared to ask him any more questions.”

Note the context. Jesus is in Jerusalem, and in only a few days He will be nailed to the cross. These events take place during the last week of His earthly life. We’re going to consider three separate sections of scriptures today and we’ll examine each text as we introduce the topic. Before the questions start, Jesus has business in His house, described in Luke 19:45-48:

Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be a house of prayer; but have made it a den of robbers.” Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.”

I. THE GROWING ANIMOSITY

After Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and wept over the city, He entered the temple area. Instead of praying, He took a whip and started driving out the dishonest merchants who had set up shop there. Can you picture Jesus walking through the tables of the religious money changers and driving them out? Jesus wasn't some 98-pound weakling who was afraid of His own shadow. He was strong enough to storm through that area of the temple courts like a Texas Tornado. It's obvious *why* the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus!

We know from Matthew and Mark the problem that infuriated Jesus was not the “business” of changing money or selling animals for sacrifice. Those were necessary components of the system. Jesus objected because the Chief priests were charging exorbitant exchange rates. The priests were the only ones who could approve the animals and the coins, so they required these be exchanged for their “approved” animals and coins—for a hefty fee, of course. See the scam? They had a corner on the market, so they could charge what they wanted. That's why the concession stand at a movie theater charges you \$6 for popcorn and a coke. They don't allow you to bring your own, so they can charge what they want!

Some folks have used this passage to justify their belief you should never sell anything in a church, no books, Bibles, or tapes. Remember, Jesus didn't say, “you have made this place ‘a house of selling.’” He said, “you have made it a den of robbers!” It was the dishonest extortion that caused Him to clean house. Although this happened 2,000 years ago, there is a 21st century lesson we can learn.

21st century lesson: Jesus has a right to clean out and clean up His temple.

When Jesus said, “My house shall be a house of prayer,” He was speaking with a sense of ownership. It *was* His house. If you decide to dump garbage in the middle of your living room, I don't have any right to tell you to stop. However, if you come over to *my* house and start dumping garbage on the floor, I would tell you to stop. Actually, Cindy would ask you first! The reason Jesus cleared out the temple was because the Old Testament temple was the House of God—and Jesus is God. Where is the House of God today? Where do we find God's temple on earth now? It's not this building or any building. It's *this* building (pointing to body). The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.”

In the Old Testament, God had a temple for His people. In the New Testament times, God has a people for His temple. I love this beautiful building because it's a place where we can gather and worship together. However, it would be better for you to defile this building than to defile your body, because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote those words in I Corinthians 6 because some Christians thought they could separate their spirits from their bodies, and they were still engaging in the use of prostitutes, which was part of the fertility cult of Corinth. Paul said, “No! You can't do that! Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit!”

Sometimes we only think about the negative ways we defile God’s temple: drug abuse, sex outside of marriage, tobacco, alcohol etc. Some people say, “Well it’s MY body, I can do with it what I want.” Not if you are a follower of Jesus! The Bible says you are NOT your own, you’ve been bought with a price. But you can also defile God’s temple by not properly caring for it. We have a spiritual responsibility to exercise and eat right. We’ve got to keep God’s temple healthy. Would you be willing to say, “Lord, just as you cleaned out your temple in Jerusalem, would you clean up this temple?”

The bad questions begin in Chapter 20. Let’s read about the first one beginning in 20:1-8:

One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said, “Who gave you this authority?” He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘from heaven,’ he will ask, ‘why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

II. THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

Hostility is often expressed in a question asked in public. Someone is angry and they ask a question not to obtain the information, but to discredit the one being questioned. These religious leaders wanted to publicly embarrass Jesus so they challenged His authority. They were demanding, “Who do you think you are, anyway?” Or like the kids sometimes phrase it, “Who died and made you God?” Jesus could have responded directly, instead, He answered with a question of His own.

Jesus always answered sincere questions. When a scribe asked Him, “What is the greatest commandment?” He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself.” But Jesus never gave a direct answer to trick questions. Proverbs 26:5 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.” Someone once said, “When you are arguing with a fool, be sure that he is not similarly engaged.”

So, when they served their question, Jesus fired a forehand return at their feet. He said, “I’ll answer you if you’ll answer me. Did John the Baptist get his authority from God or from men?” Brilliant volley! If they said, “From God.” Then Jesus would have said, “Why didn’t you let him baptize you then?” If they said, “From man” the leaders would have been attacked by the people, because after John had been beheaded, he became a hero to the people.

Jesus was saying, “The answer to my question is the same as the answer to your question.” If John was from God, then that would verify Jesus came from God. John said, “I baptize you with water, but One is coming after me whose sandals I’m not worthy to untie. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:8). When John baptized Jesus in the Jordan, a voice came from heaven

saying, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11) That was a pretty strong indication of the source of Jesus’ authority! Here’s the 21st century lesson:

21st century lesson: Choose: Is your ultimate source of authority from men or from God?

There’s a standard everyone uses to determine what is truth or error and your basis for truth is either man’s wisdom or God’s Word. Years ago, as I was searching for truth, I made the conscious choice that ultimate truth can be found in God’s Word, the Bible. It takes faith, of course, but there is also plenty of evidence this book is supernatural. You can’t *prove* the Bible is God’s Word in a test tube but if you will honestly study history, you have to admit there are hundreds of predictions in this Book that have already come true. People who are on an honest search for truth cannot ignore that amazing evidence.

The Bible calls man’s wisdom the “wisdom of this world.” I think every person should study, learn, and get as much education as you can—and you should never stop learning. But empirical knowledge and scientific facts will never change your life. There’s a fundamental distinction between facts and truth. $2+2=4$ is a fact, but it won’t change your life. “Jesus is alive” is truth that can change your life and your eternity.

Some people have chosen to reject the Bible as an outdated book of fairy tales and myths. They have designated their source of authority to be what some other person has said or written, or in most cases, their source of authority is their own intelligence.

Here’s how you can tell the difference. If you ask a follower of Jesus what they think or believe about a moral issue like war, capital punishment, abortion, homosexuality, etc, their answer should be, “The Bible says...” If you ask a self-proclaimed independent thinker what they think or believe about an issue, they’ll say, “Well I think...” Without admitting it, they have made their mind their own god. It’s still a question of authority—and you’ve got to answer Jesus’ question. “Does what we read in this Book come from God or from man?”

I love Eugene Petersen’s paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 1:20-21: “Where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn’t God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb—**PREACHING**, of all things! To bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.” (1 Corinthians 1:20-21 *The Message*)

Some folks would say I’m an outdated idiot to stand up here and teach you out of this Book. They would say you are a fool—one enchilada short of a combination platter—to come and sit here and listen! But what we are doing right now is God’s joke on the pseudo-intellectuals: He uses preaching to communicate the way of salvation!

In the next few verses Jesus told an amazing parable. I don’t have time to develop it completely in this message, so it will be the focus of the next lesson, entitled, “The Shocking Truth About God.” Instead, skip down to verse 20:20-26 to discover another bad question:

Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

He saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

He said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

They were unable to trap him in what he had said to them in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

III. THE QUESTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The Jewish leaders decided to trick Jesus by using flattery. Flattery is not the same thing as a true compliment. Flattery is patting someone on the back to find the soft spot to insert the dagger. Flattery is gossip in disguise. Here’s the way you can tell the difference: Gossip is saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his face; flattery is saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind his back.

After softening Jesus up with a few short jabs of flattery, they slipped in their knockout question: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?” As soon as this question was asked, I can almost hear the Jewish leaders giggling with glee because they were certain Jesus was trapped with no room for escape. Don’t you hate questions where the questioner restricts you to only yes or no? It’s like that old question, “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?” They thought it was a “yes or no” question. If Jesus said “yes,” all the people who expected the Messiah to liberate them from the Romans would have deserted Him. On the other hand, if Jesus said, “No,” the Romans would have arrested Him for treason. Instead, Jesus asked for a Roman coin, a denarius, and asked His own question. The issue was and still is accountability. The Jews were trying to get Jesus to take a position on whether they were accountable to the Romans. Jesus’ brilliant reply teaches us a two-fold lesson:

1. The government’s claim

When the coin was provided, Jesus asked, “Whose image and inscription is on this coin?” The word “image” (“portrait” in the NIV) is the word *eikon*. The answer was self-evident: Caesar’s icon and Caesar’s words were stamped on the coin. Jesus gave one of the all-time great principles when He said: Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s; and give to God what is God’s. Clearly, He was teaching we are accountable to the government. As Americans, we should submit to our government, unless it commands us to do something that clearly violates God’s Word. Whose face is on this dollar bill? George Washington. So, give to Washington that which is Washington’s and give to God what is God’s.

The Bible says, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established...This is why we pay taxes, for the authorities

are God's servants, who give their full time to governing." (Romans 13:1,6) (If you want a more thorough explanation of that verse, get the tape or CD from the Roman series or read the message from Romans 13 on our website) Our government provides us with many services; they protect our rights, ensure the public good, and exercise authority to arrest and punish criminals. For these services we pay taxes.

During all times, but especially during this time of war, we should support our government with our prayers, our allegiance, and our service. Our government isn't perfect, but it has been established by God and as April 15 approaches remember what Jesus said! We often focus so much on giving to Caesar that we miss the second part of Jesus' statement. Let's consider:

2. God's claim

When people looked at a Roman coin they saw the image of Caesar because his image was stamped upon it. Where do we find God's image? To answer that question, you must go all the way back to when God created the world. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in His own image, male and female he created them." What do we owe God? We owe Him that which upon He has stamped His image—we are to give Him our lives. When God created us in His image it doesn't mean we look like God, it means that as God is a tri-unity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are created as tri-unity: Body, soul, and spirit. You and I are made in God's image, and we are to give Him something greater than our money—we give Him ourselves. None of us may look very "godly" but we are made in His image!

John Stott writes: We bear the royal stamp of God upon us, we are His kingdom's royal coin. Jesus looks to us and asks, "Who's image is this? Who made this life? Who owns it? Who gives value to it?" Our Creator, of course. And Jesus challenges us, "This life is not yours. It was provided for you to use. But, it really belongs to someone else. So, give it back!"

When I look at photographs of my biological father when he was in his 50s I feel like I'm looking into a mirror. I bear his likeness. Have you ever heard someone say, "He's the spittin' image of his father?" As followers of Jesus, we are to bear the likeness of Christ. Sometimes we aren't a very good picture of Christ because sin has marred that image. But God's purpose for our lives is we be "conformed to the likeness of His Son." (Romans 8:29) Here's the 21st century lesson:

21st century lesson: A follower of Jesus holds dual citizenships. (Not citizenship)

If a child of an American citizen is born in another country, they are often legal citizens of both nations. The regulations concerning dual citizenship require they obey the laws of both nations. When they enter and leave the U.S., they must use a U.S. passport, and when they enter and leave the other nation, they must use that passport. As Americans, and followers of Jesus, the same is true of us. The Bible says, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 3:20) "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors..." (2 Corinthians 5:20)

We have an obligation to pay taxes and obey the laws of this land. I am an American citizen because I was born here. While we are here in this land, we are ambassadors for Christ. We represent Him. We are to say and do things that will cause others to respect and love Him.

In addition to my American citizenship, I’m also a citizen of heaven because I was born again—born from above. Stamped upon me is the likeness of the Creator. It’s not a very good picture now, neither is the picture on my U.S. passport! But God is making me more and more like His Son. It’s not my appearance; it’s my character He’s working on. My American citizenship will expire someday, but my citizenship in heaven is eternal!

CONCLUSION

Where do you get your authority—from God or man? To whom are you accountable? We belong to God because He made us; His image is stamped on us. As we saw in I Corinthians 6, we belong to God because He bought us with a price; our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Years ago, I heard a story of a young boy who spent many hours carving a little sailboat to play with in a stream near his home. One day as he was playing with the boat, the current caught it and pulled it downstream. He was not quick or agile enough to make his way through the thick underbrush down the riverbank to catch it, and it went out of sight. It was lost. He mourned for the boat, but finally gave up looking. Some time later when he was passing a store which sold models, he spied the boat in the window. He thought it was his, and upon closer examination, found it was. He went into the store and told the owner his story. The store owner said he purchased the boat from someone who found it. And although he wanted this young boy to have it back, he could not just give it back. The boy would have to buy it for what he paid for it. The boy asked the seller to save it for him. After several weeks of mowing grass and running errands, the boy returned with the money and bought the boat. And after paying for the boat, he said to it as he walked down the street, “Little boat, you’re mine. You’re twice mine. I made you, and now I’ve bought you—you’re twice mine.”

And so it is with us. God can well say to us, “You’re twice Mine. I made you, and I bought you with nothing less than the precious blood of My Son. You’re twice mine.” What do we owe to God? We owe Him ourselves totally.

OUTLINE

I. THE GROWING ANIMOSITY (19:45-48)

21st century lesson: Jesus has a right to clean out and clean up His temple.

“Do you now know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” *1 Corinthians 6:19*

II. THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY (20:1-8)

21st century lesson: Choose: Is your ultimate source of authority from men or from God?

“Where can you find someone truly wise, truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age? Hasn’t God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense? Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, god in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb—PREACHING, of all things! To bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.” *1 Corinthians 1:20-21 The Message*

III. THE QUESTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY (20:20-26)

1. THE GOVERNMENT’S CLAIM

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established...This is why we pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.” *Romans 13:1, 6*

2. GOD’S CLAIM

“So God created man IN HIS OWN IMAGE, male and female he created them.” *Genesis 1:27*

21st century lesson: A follower of Jesus holds dual citizenships.

“But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.” *Philippians 3:20*

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors...” *2 Corinthians 5:20*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes