

Mark 12:13-44, From Opposition to Support
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H. Van Dyke Parunak

Overview

1. The conflict between the Lord and the Sanhedrin reaches a climax with their challenge to his authority and his response. Before, we begin with the triumphal entry and worked up to climax; now we work back down, through vignettes of the Lord with several different groups. The distinctions of the soils are still evident.
2. Features to compare across the first three episodes:
 - a) The group
 - b) Their motive
 - c) Their question
 - d) The Lord's assessment of their motive
 - e) The Lord's answer
 - f) The outcome of the conversation
3. The three participles in 38-40 summarize attitudes found in one or more of the three attacks in 13-34:
 - a) question on taxes: reflects Greed, Piety (question of pagan king), Pride (seeking to trip up the Lord)
 - b) question on resurrection: was probably a set puzzle, and reflects their Pride.
 - c) question on the first commandment claims Piety. "Not far from the kingdom," but not in it, either.

A. 13-17, Pharisees and Herodians: Taxes

1. 13a, the interrogators: Pharisees (the mass of the scribes) and Herodians (political party supporting Herod's rule). The same group that first thought of doing away with him (3:6).
2. 13, their motive:
 - a) to catch him in his words; try to get a negative sound bite for the Jerusalem Evening News.
 - b) sent, that is, by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. The Sanhedrin could not trip him up in their official capacity, so now they resort to guerrilla warfare.
3. 14, their method
 - a) flattery. Prov. 26:18-27:2; Ps. 12:1-4
 - b) a spiritually loaded question. Caesar claimed not only political but also spiritual sovereignty, as "High Priest" of the Roman cult. Many pious Jews refused to pay the tax; cf. Acts 5:37; Josephus, War II.118, "A Galilean, named Judas, incited his countrymen to revolt, upbraiding them as cowards for consenting to pay tribute to the Romans and tolerating moral masters, after having God for their Lord."

- 1) If he favors paying the tax, the Pharisees among his questioners will attack his piety, weakening his popularity with the people.
 - 2) If he recommends not paying it, the Herodians will report him to the Romans as a traitor.
4. 15, his assessment: Recognizes that they are hypocrites seeking to tempt him. Not fooled by their flattery. So must we guard against the world's praise.
5. 16-17a, his response
- a) Shows that they use the coin required for the poll tax by requesting it of them. Thus any attack on his piety for agreeing with the tax will recoil on them.
 - b) *Application*: Recognizes a limitation to Caesar's rules. This verse is the seed from which Rom. 13:1-7 grows, and shows the weakness of some modern libertarian views that equate Christianity with complete anarchy. We are in the world but not of it.
6. 17b, the outcome: they marveled at him. He was too clever for them to handle.

B. 18-27, Sadducees: Resurrection

1. 18, The group: Sadducees
 - a) The priestly party; the ones whose temple the Lord has so recently cleansed.
 - b) In a continual theological battle with the Pharisees. The Sadducees accept only the five books of Moses as Scripture, and so reject doctrines that are most fully revealed later, such as resurrection. Cf. Paul's use of this tension in Acts 23:6-9.
2. Their motive: not stated explicitly. Unlike the Pharisees and Herodians, they are not said to be sent, but apparently come on their own initiative. Perhaps, having just seen the Lord embarrass the Pharisees, they now wish to dispatch him with a puzzle that will trip up their theological sparring partners as well.
3. 19-23, Their method

The question appears to be a set theological challenge. Not a practical question of daily piety, as was the Pharisees' question, but an abstract situation that one can hardly believe would arise, fabricated for the purpose of teasing apart a theological doctrine. "Your teaching leads to a contradiction, therefore it must not be true."

Application: Beware of "foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law," Titus 3:9. The Pharisees' question was at least a practical one, wrong only in its motive. This one is wrong in both its motive and its substance.

4. 24, 27b, The Lord's assessment

They are in error, because they ignore two critical things, These correspond to two things that must dominate our spiritual lives.

a) The scriptures. The Lord Jesus honors these as the very Word of God, the answer to any question, with an authority that trumps reason. "It is written" is the highest authority.

b) The power of God. We are not dealing with natural law, but with the creator of the universe, who is more powerful than anything else. In our lives, this power is manifested through the Spirit, which dwells within us.

c) Thus this dual authority, so neglected by the Sadducees, corresponds to the twofold guiding pillar that God has given us.

5. 25-27a, The Lord's response

a) 25, "The power of God." How futile to try to tie God's hands by logical deductions from far-out cases. In his power, he can arrange life in heaven in such a way that riddles such as this are of no consequence.

b) 26-27a, "The scripture." When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, promising to bring Israel to the land of promise (Exod 3:8), he identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom he had promised that land (Abraham: Gen. 13:15; Isaac, Gen 26:3; Jacob, 28:4), which they never fully possessed (Heb. 11:8,9). If his promises to them are to be fulfilled, they must rise again to enjoy them.

6. 28, The outcome of the conversation: impresses one of the scribes so much that he comes with a more sincere question.

C. 28-34, Scribe: First Commandment

1. 28a, The group: one of the scribes. This group was mostly Pharisees. Focused on their detailed knowledge.

2. 28b, motive: the Lord's previous insightful answer. Matthew makes clear that this is in response to the Sadducees' failure to trap the Lord.

3. 28c, question: "Which is the first commandment of all?" Contrast this academic question with the more practical one in 10:17. (Note in Luke that this more practical question is asked twice,

once with the answer from the first table as here in 10:25ff, later with the answer from the second table as in Mark 10, Lk 18:18ff.) Later Jewish tradition held that there were 613 distinct commandments, and identifying the most important would be an interesting topic of debate. The scribe probably intends "first" in the sense of "first in importance." Consider:

- a) Ex 21:2 If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. [Sabbath]
- b) Exod 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. [Coveting, cf. 22:29 and Guilding's article]
- c) Lev 11:4-7 Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: [as] the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he [is] unclean unto you. 5 And the coney, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he [is] unclean unto you. 6 And the hare, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he [is] unclean unto you. 7 And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he [is] unclean to you. [Idol worship, or taking the Lord's name in vain]

4. 34, The Lord's assessment of his motive: not far from the kingdom (but not in the kingdom, either).

5. 29-31, The Lord's answer

- a) Does not go down into the details. Rather, traces all commandments back to their common root in the two tables of the Decalog. Cites two other OT texts that summarize these,
 - 1) Dt 6:4-5
 - 2) Lev 19:18
- b) By including the second command and insisting that it is "like" the first, comparable to it, he refuses to single out one commandment as better or more important than another.
- c) Use a tree diagram to illustrate what the scribe wanted, and what the Lord did. Backs up Jas 2:10.

6. The outcome of the conversation: no one else dared ask him any further questions. He had silenced the opposition.

D. 35-40, Public: Two challenges to the Scribes

These surround a note of public approbation, 37b, thus balancing the public enthusiasm at the triumphal entry and affirming the Lord's victory over the Scribes. The Lord is now on the offensive against the scribes.

1. 35-37, Challenge over Messianic Expectation

Shows their understanding of Messiah's person to be defective; thus their assessment of his (Jesus') claims is not reliable.

a) It is the scribes, not he, who teach that Messiah will be the "Son of David."

1) 9x in OT, never of the Messiah. 6x (7 if we include Eccl. 1:1) it is of Solomon.

2) Only once in the NT is the phrase used of Jesus by the biblical writer: Matt. 1:1. The other refs are all quoted speech, and all in Matt, Mark, and Luke. Matt's usage derives from imitation of Gen. 25:12, 19, the "generations" formula in Genesis. "Son of ..." here is not a title, but simply a note of descent.

3) Why would it be wrong to speak of Messiah as "the son of David"?

a> 2 Sam. 7:12-14 makes this point by contrasting David's SEED with God's SON. The parallel in Chronicles makes the same distinction, though it adds that the seed is "of thy sons". Thus in speaking of Messiah as "son of David," they were failing to "hold fast the form of sound words."

b> The king's son came under the authority and tutelage of the temple in a way that other royal descendants did not (cf. Jehoshaphat under Jehoiada, 2 Kings 11-12, esp. 12:2). It may be that by this title the scribes sought to assert their authority over the coming Messiah. They expected to be the ones to authenticate him.

b) He challenges this title with Ps. 110:1, which they believe refers to Messiah, and notes that David calls him Lord, thus suggesting a relation of superiority, not the inferiority suggested by "son of David."

c) The point is not to divorce Messiah from David, but to emphasize the two sides of his person, divine AND human. The scribes had only half of it.

1) Rom. 1:3 picks up exactly "seed/son" contrast of 2 Sam. 7.

2) Other NT references speak only of the descent of the Lord from David, not of his sonship

a> Seed, 2 Tim. 2:8

b> Offspring (*genos*, "kind, nation, family"), Rev. 22:16 (but also his root, cf. also 5:5)

2. 38-40, Challenge over Conduct

The previous criticism was over a particular point of doctrine. Now he goes further and shows that their very character is defective. The characteristics outlined here have already been

illustrated in the challenges they bring against him earlier.

a) Their Characteristics: called out by three participles.

1) "Love": Pride.

a> Four signs of this pride, the first leading to the next three. They wear distinctive garments, thus expecting special honor among their fellows, whether it be in the public market, the synagogue, or social occasions.

b> The problem with their garments is not that they are long and flowing, but that they are emblematic of the privileged spiritual position to which the scribes presume. "Beware of the scribes, who love to wear clerical garments." Modern translation: "Never trust a man with his collar on backwards."

c> *Application*: Sounds harsh, but this is a direct warning against clericalism. The Great Shepherd of the Sheep did not move among his flock wearing badges of prominence, but as one of them. His method was not Ordination, but Incarnation.

2) "Devour": Greed

Women are in general more concerned with spiritual matters than men, and widows, being especially cast on the Lord because of the economic circumstances of that day were particularly susceptible to manipulation. The scribes took advantage of this. The following episode is an example of the godly response of a believing widow, perhaps under influence of these ungodly men.

3) "Make prayers": Hypocrisy

They pray to be heard of men, not from a true desire to converse with God.

b) Their Judgment

1) The general principle is that God's judgment will be harsher on those who knew better than on those who did not. Cf. Mt. 11:22-24; Lk 12:47-48.

2) So far from scriptural learning alleviating our responsibility, it increases it. Knowing God is a great privilege, but also a tremendous responsibility; we fly close to the flame.

E. 41-44, Disciples: The Widow's Mite

There are two contrasts here that demand our attention.

1. Poor vs. Rich

a) People usually emphasize the contrast between the poor widow

and the rich, commending her piety for the proportionate size of her gift.

- b) *Application*: God views our service to him differently than people do. People are impressed with the size of a gift, the sophistication of a ministry, etc. God looks on the heart.

2. Clergy vs. Laity

- a) The Lord selects a representative of the class he has just identified as being abused by the scribes, the widows. So there is a contrast here between her and them, as well as between her and the rich. (And in fact, many of the rich may have been the scribes.) He commends her simple-hearted piety even as he condemns them for taking advantage of it.
- b) *Application*: In recognizing the failings of organized religion, we do not issue a blanket condemnation of all people who are entrapped in this system. Many of them are sincere, and even in supporting the corruption of the leadership they are serving God with a pure (if unsophisticated) heart.

Analysis

A. 13-17, Pharisees and Herodians: Taxes

1. * 13 Kai\ a)poste/llousin pro\s au)to/n tinas tw^n Farisai/wn kai\ tw^n (Hrw|dianw^n
a) i(/na au)to\n a)greu/swsin lo/gw|.
2. 14 kai\ e)lqo/ntes le/gousin au)tw^|,
a) Dida/skale,
b) oi)/damen o(/ti
1) a)lhqh\s ei)^
2) kai\ ou) me/lei soi peri\ ou)deno/s,
3) ou) ga\r ble/peis ei)s pro/swpon a)nqrw/pwn,
4) a)ll' e)p' a)lhqei/as th\n o(do\n tou^ qeou^ dida/skeis:
c) e)/cestin dou^nai kh^nsou Kai/sari h)\ ou)/;
d) dw^men h)\ mh\ dw^men;
3. 15 o(de\ ei)dw\s au)tw^n th\n u(po/krisin ei)^pen au)toi^s,
a) Ti/ me peira/zete;
b) fe/rete/ moi dhna/rion
1) i(/na i)/dw.
4. * 16 oi(de\ h)/negkan.
5. * kai\ le/gei au)toi^s,
a) Ti/nos h(ei)kw\n au(/th kai\ h(e)pigrafh/;
6. * oi(de\ ei)^pan au)tw^|, Kai/saros.
7. * 17 o(de\)Ihsou^s ei)^pen au)toi^s,
a) Ta\ Kai/saros a)po/dote Kai/sari
b) kai\ ta\ tou^ qeou^ tw^| qew^|.
8. * kai\ e)ceqau/mazon e)p' au)tw^|.

B. 18-27, Sadducees: Resurrection

1. * 18 Kai\ e)/rxontai Saddoukai^oi pro\s au)to/n, oi(/tines le/gousin a)na/stasin mh\ ei)^nai,
2. kai\ e)phrw/twn au)to\n le/gontes,

- a) 19 Dida/skale,
- b) Mwu+sh^s e)/grayen h(mi^n o(/ti
 - 1) e)a/n tinos a)delfo\s a)poqa/nh| kai\ katali/ph| gunai^ka kai\ mh\ a)fh^| te/knon,
 - 2) i(/na la/bh| o(a)delfo\s au)tou^ th\n gunai^ka kai\ e)canasth/sh| spe/rma tw^| a)delfw^| au)tou^.
- c) 20 e(pta\ a)delfoi\ h)^san:
- d) kai\ o(prw^tos e)/laben gunai^ka,
- e) kai\ a)poqnh/|skwn ou)k a)fh^ken spe/rma:
- f) 21 kai\ o(deu/teros e)/laben au)th/n,
- g) kai\ a)pe/qanen mh\ katalipw\n spe/rma:
- h) kai\ o(tri/tos w(sau/tws:
- i) 22 kai\ oi(e(pta\ ou)k a)fh^kan spe/rma.
- j) e)/sxaton pa/ntwn kai\ h(gunh\ a)pe/qanen.
- k) 23 e)n th^| a)nasta/sei [, o(/tan a)nastw^sin,] ti/nos au)tw^n e)/stai gunh/;
- l) oi(ga\r e(pta\ e)/sxon au)th\n gunai^ka.
- 3. * 24 e)/fh au)toi^s o()Ihsou^s,
 - a) Ou) dia\ tou^to plana^sqe mh\ ei)do/tes ta\s grafa\s mhde\ th\n du/namin tou^ qeou^;
 - b) 25 o(/tan ga\r e)k nekrw^n a)nastw^sin, ou)/te gamou^sin ou)/te gami/zontai, a)ll' ei)si\n w(s a)/ggeloi e)n toi^s ou)ranoi^s.
 - c) 26 peri\ de\ tw^n nekrw^n o(/ti e)gei/rontai ou)k a)ne/gnwte e)n th^| bi/blw| Mwu+se/ws e)pi\ tou^ ba/tou pw^s ei)^pen au)tw^| o(qeo\s le/gwn,
 - 1))Egw\ o(qeo\s)Abraa\m kai\ [o(] qeo\s)Isaa\k kai\ [o(] qeo\s)Iakw/b;
 - d) 27 ou)k e)/stin qeo\s nekrw^n a)lla\ zw/ntwn:
 - e) polu\ plana^sqe.

C. 28-34, Scribe: First Commandment

- 1. 28 Kai\ proselqw\n ei(^s tw^n grammate/wn a)kou/sas au)tw^n suzhtou/ntwn, i)dw\n o(/ti kalw^s a)pekri/qh au)toi^s, e)phrw/thsen au)to/n,
 - a) Poi/a e)sti\n e)ntolh\ prw/th pa/ntwn;
- 2. * 29 a)pekri/qh o()Ihsou^s o(/ti
 - a) Prw/th e)sti/n,
 - 1))/Akoue,)Israh/l,
 - 2) ku/rios o(qeo\s h(mw^n ku/rios ei(^s e)stin,
 - 3) 30 kai\ a)gaph/seis ku/rion to\n qeo/n sou e)c o(/lhs th^s kardi/as sou kai\ e)c o(/lhs th^s yuxh^s sou kai\ e)c o(/lhs th^s dianoi/as sou kai\ e)c o(/lhs th^s i)sxu/os sou.
 - b) 31 deute/ra au(/th,
 - 1))Agaph/seis to\n plhsi/on sou w(s seauto/n.
 - c) mei/zwn tou/twn a)/llh e)ntolh\ ou)k e)/stin.
- 3. * 32 kai\ ei)^pen au)tw^| o(grammateu/s,
 - a) Kalw^s, dida/skale,
 - b) e)p' a)lhqei/as ei)^pes o(/ti
 - 1) ei(^s e)stin
 - 2) kai\ ou)k e)/stin a)/llos plh\n au)tou^:
 - 3) 33 kai\ to\ a)gapa^n au)to\n e)c o(/lhs th^s kardi/as kai\ e)c o(/lhs th^s sune/sews kai\ e)c o(/lhs th^s i)sxu/os

- kai\ to\ a)gapa^n to\n plhsi/on w(s e(auto\n perisso/tero/n e)stin pa/ntwn tw^n o(lokautwma/twn kai\ qusiw^n.
4. 34 kai\ o()Ihsou^s i)dw\n [au)to\n] o(/ti nounexw^s a)pekri/qh ei)^pen au)tw^|,
 - a) Ou) makra\n ei)^ a)po\ th^s basilei/as tou^ qeou^.
 5. * kai\ ou)dei\s ou)ke/ti e)to/lma au)to\n e)perwth^sai.

D. 35-40, Public: Question on Ps 110; warning against the Scribes

1. 35 Kai\ a)pokriqei\s o()Ihsou^s e)/legen dida/skwn e)n tw^| i(erw^|,
 - a) Pw^s le/gousin oi(grammatei^s o(/ti
 - 1) o(Xristo\s ui(o\s Dauid e)stin;
 - b) 36 au)to\s Dauid ei)^pen e)n tw^| pneu/mati tw^| a(gi/w|,
 - 1) Ei)^pen ku/rios tw^| kuri/w| mou,
 - a> Ka/qou e)k deciw^n mou e(/ws a)\n qw^ tou\s e)xqrou/s sou u(poka/tw tw^n podw^n sou.
 - c) 37 au)to\s Dauid le/gei au)to\n ku/rion,
 - d) kai\ po/qen au)tou^ e)stin ui(o/s;
 2. kai\ [o(] polu\s o)/xlos h)/kouen au)tou^ h(de/ws.
 3. 38 Kai\ e)n th^| didaxh^| au)tou^ e)/legen,
 - a) Ble/pete a)po\ tw^n grammate/wn tw^n qelo/ntwn
 - 1) e)n stolai^s peripatei^n
 - 2) kai\ a)spasmou\s e)n tai^s a)gorai^s
 - 3) 39 kai\ prwtokaqedri/as e)n tai^s sunagwgai^s
 - 4) kai\ prwtoklisi/as e)n toi^s dei/pnois:
 - b) 40 oi(katesqi/ontes ta\s oi)ki/as tw^n xhrw^n kai\ profa/sei makra\ proseuxo/menoi,
 - c) ou(^toi lh/myontai perisso/teron kri/ma.

E. 41-44, Disciples: Widows' Mite

1. 41 Kai\ kaqi/sas kate/nanti tou^ gazofulaki/ou e)qew/rei pw^s o(o)/xlos ba/llei xalko\n ei)s to\ gazofula/kion:
2. * kai\ polloi\ plou/sioi e)/ballon polla/:
3. 42 kai\ e)lqou^sa mi/a xh/ra ptwxh\ e)/balen lepta\ du/o, o(/ e)stin kodra/nths.
4. 43 kai\ proskalesa/menos tou\s maqhta\s au)tou^ ei)^pen au)toi^s,
 - a))Amh\n le/gw u(mi^n o(/ti
 - 1) h(xh/ra au(/th h(ptwxh\ plei^on pa/ntwn e)/balen tw^n ballo/ntwn ei)s to\ gazofula/kion:
 - 2) 44 pa/ntes ga\r e)k tou^ perisseu/ontos au)toi^s e)/balon,
 - 3) au(/th de\ e)k th^s u(sterh/sews au)th^s pa/nta o(/sa ei)^xen e)/balen, o(/lon to\n bi/on au)th^s.