

Politics and Religion Collide with God: The Final Debate of the Pharisees and Sadducees with Jesus, Matthew 22:15-46

There are two kinds of revolutionists, as of most things - a good kind and a bad. The bad revolutionists destroy conventions by appealing to fads - fashions that are newer than conventions. The good do it by appealing to facts that are older than conventions."
G.K. Chesterton, The American Chesterton Society.

A little background: Sectarian groups in Judea and Jerusalem

- **Essenes.** A monastic order devoted to study, self-denial, and the preservation of ancient texts. _____
- **Pharisees.** Believed in life after death, angels, spirits, and a less strict interpretation of scripture. _____
- **Sadducees.** Denied life after death, eternal souls, angels, spirits, and promoted a strict interpretation of the Torah, yet were involved in politics; Herodians. Refused adaptation to Aramaic text. _____
- **Relationship to community.** The Sadducees isolated themselves to the Temple and practices associated with it, and to the court of Herod, while the Pharisees associated with the synagogues and had little to do with Herod or Rome. The high priest was usually a Sadducee.

The first confrontation; the Pharisees, v.15-22

- One more attempt to trap Jesus in words.
 - The logical fallacy of their question, known as the *false dilemma or bifurcation fallacy*: the assumption that there are only two alternatives. _____
- Jesus perceives their malicious intent.
 - Their question was not intended to invoke truthfulness. _____
 - "Hypocrites," actors. _____
- The brutally simple answer to the question.
 - "Do both," render to _____
 - The Pharisees, blinded by their own need to find fault. _____

The Sadducees take their shot, v.23-33

- Another weak argument, another logical fallacy, that of *presumption*, as in "heaven and earth operate on the same principles. _____"
- A quick, terse response from Jesus.
 - *You are mistaken, not understanding the scriptures or the power of God.* _____
 - Heaven isn't like here. _____
- An additional rebuke of Sadducee doctrine.
 - *He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.* _____
 - There are eternal consequences. _____

One last attempt by the Pharisees, v.34-41

- *What is the greatest commandment?* A final try to trap him, by a lawyer. _____
- The answer, in this case, is almost too easy.
 - *You shall love . . .* _____
 - It is the rule overriding all laws and overlooked by the lawyers in their mass of legal opinions. _____

Jesus now tests the Pharisees, v.41-46

- *Whose son is the Messiah?* _____
- In this case, a relevant appeal to a textual paradox, without the fallacy of presumption, and requiring a specific answer. _____
- The Pharisees declined to answer and stopped asking questions from that point on. _____

Application

- Fundamentalism/rigidity. _____
- Power and control. _____
- "Doctrine" can also drive "bad" ideas. _____

This passage, deliberately stripped of extraneous dialogue, points clearly at the excessive pride and spiritual blindness that tends to infect all religion. These two communities had become so trapped in the mass and rigidity of their doctrines that they refused to open their eyes to the universal truth before them. Though they thought they appealed to the truths of their traditions, Jesus appealed to even older truths from the same tradition.