

# JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

## VOLUME THREE

### STUDY FIVE

## Questions, Questions, Questions

*Mark 12:13–34*

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*Rather than agonizing over questions you cannot answer, you need to deal with the realities of answers you cannot escape.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**G**OOD teachers know their students' individual strengths and weaknesses, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. They have mastered the course content to teach it effectively and to be able to answer any question students might have. Naturally intuitive and insightful, they can anticipate why a student's hand is raised, perceive the puzzled look on a student's face, and explain complex subjects in simple, down-to-earth terms.

We've been following the Master Instructor, Jesus. He possessed perfect knowledge about God and impeccable expertise in the human heart. Our classmates are His disciples who walked closely by His side and aspired to become like Him. Not everyone, however, admired Jesus. The religious leaders of His day eyed Him as a threat to their position and power. They wanted to expose Him as a fraud and do whatever it took to eliminate Him.

But Jesus was not intimidated. He stood tall in front of these hostile leaders, calmly answering their devious questions and exposing their murderous motives. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Jesus' interaction with them demonstrates His skill as a master teacher and skillful statesman, but more than that, it inspires our worship of Him as the true Messiah and Son of God.



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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

# Questions, Questions, Questions

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Teach me to do Your will,  
For You are my God.* (Psalm 143:10 NASB)

In prayer, echo the psalmist's plea and trust God's grace to lead you as you study His Word.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus taught with “real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law” (Mark 1:22). He could peer into His accusers' hearts and minds and discern the hidden accusations masquerading as questions. He exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees—who scored A+ on enforcing religious rules but flunked the course on obeying the heart of God's law: justice, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23).

The Pharisees had been taking shots at Jesus since the early days of His ministry. Now their rival sect, the Sadducees, joined forces with them against Jesus. Note some differences in beliefs between the Pharisees and Sadducees listed in the table below.

| Pharisees' Beliefs                                                 | Sadducees' Beliefs                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Divine sovereignty                                                 | Human free will                                           |
| Little interest in politics, separation from all gentile influence | Politically motivated                                     |
| Resurrection, eternal existence, angels, heavenly rewards          | No resurrection, no afterlife, no angels, earthly rewards |
| Old Testament and oral traditions                                  | The Torah only (Genesis–Deuteronomy)                      |

While populist Pharisees taught in the synagogues and opposed Roman rule, the aristocratic Sadducees controlled the temple and cooperated with Roman authorities to protect their wealth and status. As you can imagine, sparks flew whenever these two groups got together, but in their hatred of Jesus, they were arm-in-arm companions.

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Also mentioned in the passage is a scribe. Scribes were experts in the Scriptures and religious laws. They were like first-century lawyers, able to teach and resolve disputes—often associated with the Pharisees. The final faction is the Herodians. They had special ties with Herod the Great’s successors, including Herod Antipas, and were well connected in the Roman royal court. Notice how these widely disparate groups linked arms in attacking Jesus during His final week on earth.



## **Observation: Questions, Questions, Questions**

With this background information about these Jewish sects in mind, observe the questions that they asked Jesus on three issues.<sup>1</sup> Note who was asking the question, what the question was about, and, most importantly, their motive in asking.

### **A Question About Taxation—Mark 12:13–17**

Read [Mark 12:13–17](#). “The leaders” who sent the Pharisees and Herodians probably refers to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high council. Why did they send a group of Pharisees (who opposed Roman rule) and Herodians (who supported Roman rule) to question Jesus about taxation? What question did they ask? How did Jesus deftly avoid the trap with His answer? How did they react?

*Notice their motive was “to trap Him.” If He says, “Pay Caesar,” then they can scream, “He’s not really one of the Jews because we hate Caesar.” If He says, “Don’t pay Caesar,” then He’s guilty of treason and they can turn Him over to the Romans. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

### **A Question About Resurrection—Mark 12:18–27**

Read [Mark 12:18–27](#). Who approached Jesus next? What did they seek to prove with their question? How did Jesus’ response correct their “serious error” and demonstrate His authority?

*Jesus told them that they were way off. Why? Because they didn’t believe the Scriptures and they weren’t convinced of the power of God. And look at verse 27: “You are greatly mistaken.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## A Question About Interpretation—Mark 12:28–34

Read [Mark 12:28–34](#). After listening to the debate and Jesus' answer, what question did the scribe ask Jesus? How did Jesus reply?

Observe the end of the conversation between the teacher of religious law and Jesus in 12:32–34. What did he say to Jesus when he heard Jesus' response? What did Mark note about the man? What were Jesus' final words to him? What additional note did Mark give to us?

*The scribe's response was the only time [a religious leader had] said, "Right."  
In fact, remember his evaluation as he watched the argument and realized Jesus  
answered well. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Interpretation: Answers, Answers, Answers**

In interpretation, we consult lexicons and Bible commentaries to better understand the questions the Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, and scribe asked Jesus and the answers He gave.

The religious body instigating these attacks was the Sanhedrin. Peruse the section "Composition" in the article "[Sanhedrin](#)" in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com. What was the Sanhedrin? Who were its members?

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Consult Pastor Chuck’s commentary [Insights on Mark](#) or [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org). Describe the on-the-spot brilliance of Jesus’ answer to their question. How did He turn their “trap” into a platform to declare truth?

*To begin with, Jesus was saying, “I am not an insurrectionist. I do not believe that My calling is to overthrow the government. You owe a tax; you pay a tax.” Drawing from the same breath, He adds, “And to God the things that are God’s.” Why? Because the image of God is on us. Caesar gets his image back and God, of course, gets our respect and worship as well. And they were, in our terms, “blown away.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

The Sadducees’ question on the resurrection in Mark 12:18–27 referenced the Mosaic law regarding widows in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. Explain some key truths Jesus is teaching you about heaven and the afterlife.

*“When they rise,” He clarifies, “existence in heaven will not be just like life on earth except elevated to a higher plane. It’s completely different.” In heaven, there is another kind of existence, and the life that God has designed for us bursts the limits of earthly logic and imagination. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

In Mark 12:28–34, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4–5—the *Shema*, the Hebrew term for “hear”—and Leviticus 19:18. What is the significance of His response? What did Jesus mean when He said that the scribe was not far from entering the kingdom?

*The foremost of the commands is loving God and loving others. The vertical, the horizontal. You get that in place, and you get your life in order.  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## Correlation: Taxes, Heaven, and the Kingdom of God

Jesus' answer regarding paying taxes brings up the issue of good citizenship. Compare [Acts 4:16–20](#); [5:17–29](#), [40–42](#); and [Romans 13:1–7](#). What responsibility do we believers have toward the established government? When is it right to stand against the government?

*When we're told to violate the command of God, we don't do that. When we're required to be involved in immoral or unethical acts, we have the right to fight. When we're forced to compromise our personal Christian convictions, we have a right to stand up and speak our mind. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

What similarities do you find between our passage and [1 Corinthians 15:35–57](#); [2 Corinthians 12:1–4](#); and [Revelation 21:1–4](#)? Why do our descriptions of heaven fall short?

*Find comfort in that. Don't feel inadequate because you can't answer your child's many questions about heaven. The fact is, we don't know a lot. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

According to our passage, along with [Romans 13:8–10](#) and [1 John 4:19–21](#), what is the summary of God's commands? What does [John 3:1–18](#) tell us about what one must do to enter God's kingdom? How can someone know much about God's commandments and be far from His kingdom?

*You're sensible; you're intelligent. You're not far from the kingdom, but you're not there yet, either. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## **Application: Lessons for Modern-Day Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes**

Though we're in the twenty-first century and there are no Pharisees around, pharisaical pride can characterize our hearts. How can today's Pharisee find relief from this passage?

*You've got all these things that you're keeping, all this stuff you're proud of, all these people you're judging. You're full of religion, but you're lost. When you come to Jesus you realize that there's nothing in your hands you can bring; there's only a cross you can cling to. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

So many people today who have grown up in church question the reality of life after death. What advice would you give to a modern-day Sadducee who has come to you for spiritual guidance?

*Give up your life, that you might find it in Christ. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

Think of a modern-day scribe who knows a lot about the Bible and yet agonizes over questions that no one can answer. What wisdom does Scripture give to him or her?

What comfort to know that the One who knows you perfectly loves you unconditionally, just as you are! Close your study by praising Jesus for who He is and for securing a place in His eternal kingdom just for you.

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*Deliver all of us, our Father, from the ways of a Pharisee or a Sadducee, even the pride of a scribe. May we become like little children who trust You, without having all the answers but having come to terms with the realities we cannot escape. In Jesus' name, I ask this. Amen.*

## ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at [insight.org](http://insight.org).

For the 2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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