

Growing Deeper
Divided We Fall

Week Four: We Resist Stances
Matthew 22:15-22

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. Begin this week by reading Matthew 22:15-22. What had the Pharisees planned to do in verse 15?
2. Earlier in Matthew, in 12:14, they had plotted in the same way. Why do you think they spent so much time and energy plotting to trap Jesus?
3. Verse 16 says that the Pharisees “sent their disciples” to Jesus. Why do you think they sent their disciples, essentially their “JV” squad?
4. If the Pharisees’ disciples, amateurs, were able to get the best of Jesus, that would make their victory even better. But, if they failed to trap Him, the Pharisees themselves would not look bad. This shows just how much thought they had given to tricking Jesus. Although it’s a coward move, it’s also smart on their part. What does this say about the character of the Pharisees?
5. What, if anything, do you know about the Herodians? They are only mentioned a few times in the New Testament. Based on their name, we can assume that they are followers of and support King Herod. Historians tell us they were in conflict with the Pharisees, but their hatred of Jesus brought them together in this instance. How have you seen common enemies become allies around a common foe?
6. Can you almost hear the sarcasm in verse 16? They say, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.” When they say, “You pay no attention to who they are,” do you think that is an insult or a backhanded compliment?
7. Think of a time when you either felt that you needed to take a stance or made someone else feel that *they* needed to take a stance. Looking back now, was it actually necessary to take a stance, or would it have been more beneficial to not take one?
8. Finish your FIFTEEN for today by asking God to help reveal to you those times when you have hurt others by taking a stance. Pray that, moving forward, God would help you to see His more loving approach to stances.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

9. To begin your FIFTEEN today, read Matthew 22:15-22 again to refresh your memory.

10. Verse 17 says, “Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” What made this question even more problematic is that the imperial tax needed to be paid with a specific kind of coin that had Caesar’s image on it. Since the Jews considered graven images, like the coin with Caesar’s image on it, to be idolatrous, how could Jesus’ answer put Him at odds with the Jews?

11. How would you have responded to this question in verse 17? Remember, the question was carefully worded to only allow for a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. If Jesus had answered that the taxes *were* lawful, He would have alienated Himself. But, if He had answered that the taxes *were not* lawful, the Romans could have arrested Him for treason.

12. How does Jesus initially respond to their question? Which option does He choose, if any?

13. Jesus says, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?” Then, He asks to see the coin used for paying the tax. How does He turn the tables on the Pharisees and the Herodians?

14. The Pharisees, who considered themselves the best, most faithful religious folks, who also happen to be standing in the temple (holy ground), immediately pull one of the coins out of their very own pockets. Do you find it hypocritical that the “religious leaders” happen to have coins with graven images on them? Even though refusal to carry these coins would have been inconvenient, it also would have served as a witness to God calling the Jews to be a people set apart from the rest of the culture.

15. Have there been times lately when you’ve been hypocritical towards others? It’s easy to place high expectations on others, while not meeting those expectations ourselves.

16. Finish your FIFTEEN for today by asking God to forgive you for those times when you’ve held too high of expectations for others or been hypocritical towards them. Ask Him to help you treat others, especially those outside of your circle, with the love and acceptance that He has shown to each one of us.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

17. Once again, begin your FIFTEEN for today by reading Matthew 22:15-22. Each time you read it, you’ll likely pick up new things in the passage.

18. After the Pharisees told Jesus that it was in fact Caesar’s image on the coin, how did Jesus respond?

19. Jesus said, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Jesus’ use of the words ‘give back’ implies that the coin originally came from Caesar. So it only seems appropriate then to return the coin to Caesar. It almost sounds like Jesus is saying, “Why are you even asking the question? If it’s Caesar’s coin, give it back to him!” Do you ever feel like you, or we as Christians, make things more complicated than they need to be? If so, give an example.
20. Again, in verse 21 Jesus says, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Read Genesis 1:26-27. In whose image were we made?
21. Since we were made in God’s image, it is appropriate to give ourselves back to God – all we have and all we are. What are some practical, measurable ways that you can give more of yourself back to God? What are some ways you can take that next step in your relationship with Him?
22. To finish your FIFTEEN for today, think about how you can challenge yourself to give more of yourself back to God. Make a plan to move forward in that challenge. Then end in prayer as you feel led.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

23. Read Matthew 22:15-22 again. Jesus’ words in verse 21 seem to be acknowledging the people’s obligation to Caesar, but also affirm their larger obligation to God. The coins with Caesar’s image on them may very well belong to Caesar, but all things, including the coins, Caesar himself, Rome, and the entire universe, ultimately belong to God and are under His control and power. Caesar’s earthly kingdom barely registers within God’s kingdom. How does it feel to know that God has all power and authority over man-made governments?
24. Read Romans 16:17-18. Who or what does it say we are to watch out for?
25. Verse 17 says, “Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.” What does verse 18 say about such people?
26. At the end of verse 17, it says, “Keep away from them.” Why do you think that is?
27. Can you think of a time when you were influenced or guided, in a negative way, by a person or group of people that you knew were not living in accordance with Christ? How did you resolve that or how did that end?
28. As you finish your FIFTEEN for today, spend time throughout the day thinking about Jesus’ approach to stances. He stood for people, not positions. He resisted every attempt by others to force Him to take a

stance. Jesus always put people above any agenda. Pray that, day by day, God would help you and those around you to live more and more like He wants us to, caring more about people than any stance or agenda.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

29. In Matthew 22:22 we are told, “When they (the Pharisees and Herodians) heard this (what Jesus said), they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.” After spending all that time and planning in hopes of trapping Jesus, how do you think they felt when He slipped away again?

30. Their questions represented the best efforts of their best minds. But, yet again, Jesus slipped away. It’s no wonder they were so amazed. Do you think they were more shocked or angry? Why?

31. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. Like the Romans passage from yesterday, the apostle Paul wrote this one as well. What does it say we should do? Look specifically at verse 10 for the answer.

32. As we know, we will never *always* agree on everything, but Paul does appeal to us to have no divisions among us. How good would you say we are at this, both as Christians and as society in general?

33. Who are some people or groups we follow that divide us today? For example, denominations (Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist, etc.) do quite the job of dividing us. Can you think of other, more specific individuals or groups?

34. Christ does not divide; He builds bridges and unites. How can you do a better job in your circle of influence to create unity?

35. As you finish your FIFTEEN for this week, spend some time thinking about what God has done for us. He could very easily be judgmental and divisive, but He isn’t. He loves us with an unconditional love that we can never completely understand. Spend some time in prayer thanking and praising Him for all He has done for you and for us.