

The Attackers: Jesus Told He Is Not Intimidated by Anyone & Is Not a Respector of Persons; Asked for His Opinion Regarding Payment of Poll-Tax to Tiberius; Meaning of the Term, “Is it lawful”

37. The verse continues with the group’s third piece of propaganda beginning with the negative conjunction **οὐ (ou)** followed by the present active indicative of the verb **μέλω (mélō)**: having interest or concern; giving serious attention or consideration applied to doing something correctly or to avoid damage or risk.
38. With the negative *ou*, we learn that the Lord has no interest or concern about how people deal with His message; He is unintimidated by negative volition.
39. Often decisions are made in order to avoid a negative reaction. If a person is concerned about how another person thinks of him, he will modify the expression of his opinion to avoid blowback. Politicians beat around the bush, preachers hem and haw, and the expedient crawfish.
40. In this case, the blowback from Tiberius would be treason and execution. The Sanhedrin accused Him of blasphemy which is a capital offence under Jewish law. Pilate assumed Jesus was campaigning for Herod’s throne and knew there was nothing improper about this since the records showed that Jesus was its rightful Heir.
41. With the negative conjunction, *ou*, the Lord’s attackers are claiming that Jesus is not influenced by the political, social, or cultural position of others but stands fast on His own beliefs.
42. The proper way to express this is that He is indifferent to what another person thinks regardless of his position whether the powerful Tiberius or the rich young ruler.
43. The current idiom is “I couldn’t care less,” which means to be indifferent. The best way to describe what the attackers mean is that Jesus is unintimidated by those in political power.

44. Setting the trap involved publically stating that Jesus would not lie and would make claims based on His devotion to the mandates of God. They assume their subsequent question will put these principles to the test.
45. A person is intimidated by another when he knows his actions or comments could result in ramifications. He is therefore motivated by fear to defer to another's standards and for personal expediency to knowingly lie.
46. The attackers are rightly claiming that Jesus is unintimidated by any such consideration. The translation of this phrase is, "... and You are unintimidated by anyone."
47. The final phrase by the attackers is specifically intended to introduce the specter of Tiberius: "... for you are not partial to any."
48. The key phrase is **βλέπεις εἰς πρόσωπον (blépeis eís próso̅pon)**: Literally: "You do not look at a person's face." This is an idiom that is expressed much more precisely by Peter in Acts 10:34b, "... God is not one to show partiality," or by Paul in Romans 2:11, "For there is no partiality with God."
49. Implication: "You are unintimidated by Tiberius or the prospect of his stern treatment of those who challenge his authority since you tell the truth and do not lie, and show no favoritism to anyone."
50. This concludes the verse and we now have an expanded translation:
Matthew 22:15 - Then the Pharisees convened to devise a plot to entrap Jesus in His speech.

v. 16 - And they sent their star students to Him along with representatives of the Herodian Party who, from public and temple records, knew Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne of Judea, saying, “Esteemed Theologian, we know from a process imposed throughout our elite level of theological training that You are truthful—unable to lie—and teach the manner of life and conduct of God by means of His integrity and rectitude, and You are unintimidated by anyone including Tiberius; for You are not One to show favoritism to anyone. (EXT)

v. 17 - “Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar, or not?” (NASB)

1. This verse includes two interrogatives. In the first the attackers solicit the Lord’s opinion by use of the present active indicative of the verb **δοκέω (dokéō)**. This word solicits another’s subjective opinion. They want to know what the Lord personally thinks regarding something.
2. The present tense is aoristic for punctiliar action in present time. The aoristic present is used for those instances in which an action of present time is conceived of without reference to its progress. It is an event set forth as now occurring but completed at the moment of speaking. Therefore it is also referred to as an “instantaneous present.”
3. This question sets up the second. The attackers want to Lord to give his opinion on the spot. They gamble Jesus will not have a ready answer and hope He will respond in such a way that He’ll be caught in a chargeable offense.
4. At this point the attackers are confident they have Jesus right where they want Him. Assured that flattery will cause Jesus to become arrogant, their compliments although true were duplicitous in their objective.
5. Be careful when someone begins a conversation with a flurry of compliments followed by a question. Never give an ad-libed response in such a case. There is nothing wrong with saying, “I don’t know.”

6. Secondly, if you do know, be sure you are able to articulate the answer in a way that will successfully convey your *knowledge* – not your *opinion* – in a way that cannot be misunderstood.
7. If the inquisitor reacts to it through body language, facial expressions, or gestures, do not flinch. He asked you to tell him what you believe. Respond with a clear statement of what you know to be true.
8. Flattery is designed to solicit arrogance and vanity. Were it not for the Word of God and the ministries of the Holy Spirit you would be condemned to give your opinion.
9. Because of these assets you are fortified with divine truth; fire its artillery into the soul of the inquisitor and you will learn quickly with whom you are dealing and so will he.
10. The attackers' second interrogative is designed to spring their trap: "Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar or not?"
11. The word "lawful" is **ἔξεστιν (éxestin)**: "Permitted by law; the proper thing to do; with reference to the civil law under which the speaker resides and to which he is obligated."¹

ἔξεστιν. Denotes that an action is possible in the sense that there are no hindrances or that the opportunity for it occurs, i.e., "to be able."

It also means that an action is not prevented by a higher norm or court, that "it may be done or is not forbidden." ... to have "the right, authority, or permission to do or not do something." (p. 560)

In the New Testament ἔξεστιν relates most commonly to the Law and will of God. The term is used in relation to the Jewish Law and the exposition of the Pharisees, and the use of this legal formula is typical of Jewish legalism.² (p. 561)

12. Thus the word ἔξεστιν, "Is it lawful," is a verbal formula used by the Pharisees to determine if a person is in violation of or in compliance with the Mosaic Law.

¹ Randolph O. Yeager, "Matthew 8–18," in *The Renaissance New Testament* (Bowling Green, KY: Renaissance Press, 1977), 2:255.

² Werner Foerster, "ἔξεστιν," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 2:560–61.

13. This word is used by the attackers to quiz Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels regarding issues pertaining to the Sabbath (Matthew 12:2; Mark 2:24; Luke 6:2), divorce (Matthew 19:3; Mark 10:2), and taxation (Matthew 22:17; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:22).
14. On each of these occasions, the Pharisees are attempting to find wrongdoing among those involved and thus accuse Jesus of approving actions that violate the Law.
15. The junior scribes used this same approach on the Lord and, since He had heard the line, "Is it lawful," many times, Jesus knew He was receiving loaded question.
16. The question inquires as to whether or not it is lawful to pay a poll-tax to Tiberius. The Lord has demonstrated that He knows the Mosaic Law. The attackers are hoping He is not as familiar with the laws imposed by Rome related to taxation.