

WARNING TO THE CROWDS AND RELIGIONISTS: SOME THINGS TO GUARD AGAINST MARK 12:38–40

Introduction

Men need to be warned. There are some things that especially disturb and arouse anger in Jesus, some things that will result in terrible judgment. This passage discusses six of these sins. Note that all six have to do with pride or flaunting oneself, either by elevating oneself above others or by misusing others.

- I. Dress: to draw attention (v. 38).
- II. Greetings and titles: to exalt man (v. 38).
- III. Front seats and high places: to be seen, admired, and honoured (v. 39).
- IV. Devouring widows: to use widows for gain (v. 40).
- V. Long prayers: to show piety (v. 40).

I. *Mark 12:38 Dress, Clothing, Appearance*

Beware of dressing to draw attention. There are three ways a person can dress to draw attention.

1. A person can desire and love to wear the clothing of the extravagant and wasteful. The flowing robe was the dress of the nobility, the rich, the well-known, the person of style. It was a flowing robe reaching to the ground. A man was unable to work in it; therefore, it was the sign of *higher society* or of a man of leisure. Jesus was not speaking against fine clothing. What He said was, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes” (fine clothing). He condemned the person who was extravagant and wasteful, whose mind was on attracting attention, on self, on appearance. A person’s mind is not to be on clothing, but on ...

Phil 4:8 *Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*

A man’s life consists not in the things he has, but in the service he renders to others. The world is desperate, swamped with enormous needs. God’s will is for all persons to be wrapped up in meeting the needs of the world and not in clothing. This is especially God’s wish for the Christian. The Christian’s concern is to be righteousness. He is to work for Christ and His kingdom, not for expensive, stylish, ostentatious clothing.

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

2. A person can change his dress, his clothing, and his appearance *in order to attract attention*. A person often desires attention, so he seeks to attract by being different and making himself stand out. This was a sin of the religionists in Christ's day.
 - a. They wore phylacteries. These were little leather type boxes which contained a piece of parchment with four passages of Scripture written on it. The Scriptures were Exo. 13:1-10; 13:11-16; Deu. 6:4-9; 11:13-21.

The use of the phylacteries apparently arose from a literal translation of Exo. 13:9 and Prov. 7:3. The true meaning of these two passages seems to be that we are to have the Word of God in our minds just as clearly as if we had them before our eyes. The great fault of the religionists was that they not only interpreted the passages literally and wore little leather boxes on their forehead, but they enlarged the little leather boxes to draw attention to themselves as being religious.

- b. They also enlarged the borders of their garments; that is, they wore outside tassels. God had instructed the Jews to make tassels on the borders of their outer robe. When a person noticed them, he was to be reminded to keep God's commandments. Again, the error was that the religionist changed his appearance from others; he enlarged the tassels, drawing attention to his being more religious than others.
3. A person can wear clothes that expose the body, that actually attract attention to certain parts of the body. A person can wear clothes that are too tight, too low cut, too high cut, too thin. A person can wear too little clothing, clothing that fails to cover enough of the body.

Jesus very simply said to beware of dressing to attract attention. The religionists did it to appear righteous. Others do it to appear worldly (appealing).

Rom 6:13 *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

1 Tim 2:9-10 *I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.-*

1 Pet 3:3-5 *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands.*

II. *Mark 12:38 Honour and Worldly Titles*

Beware of greetings and titles that exalt man. The religionists loved the *titles* that greeted and exalted them with honour. Note the title was “Rabbi” which meant teacher or master. It was only a simple title, yet some loved and revelled in the recognition above other men. It took a man who was supposed to be God’s messenger and said, “Here I am; look at me.” It honoured the man and not the Lord.

Thought 1. Men exalt one another with titles: Reverend, Doctor, Director, Executive, Chairman — all to elevate one above the masses below.

Mat 23:12 *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Oba 1:4 *“Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord.*

Psa 49:17 *For he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him.*

The leaders were also to beware of showing themselves in the marketplace. Displaying oneself in the marketplace was and still is a sin. The marketplace is wherever the people are. It is the centre of traffic, the place where a person is seen and can attract attention. It is the streets, the office, the club, the school, the beach, etc. Neither dress nor title is to be used to attract attention and elevate oneself above others.

Thought 1. What Christ is after is love — love among all men and women, boys and girls. And the only way love will ever rule upon earth is for all to begin serving and *lifting up others* instead of self. Dressing and using titles to draw attention to oneself do not lend themselves to love. They tend to elevate self and to destroy the morals and stability of both families and the nation.

1 Pet 1:24 *For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”*

Psa 49:12 *But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.*

III. *Mark 12:39 Self–Seeking, Honour and Worldly Pride*

Beware of front seats and high places, seats and places to be seen, admired, and to show one’s prominence. In the synagogue the leaders and distinguished men sat on a bench in front of the ark (where the Scripture was kept), and they sat facing the congregation. No leader could be missed.

On social occasions the most honoured sat at the right hand of the host, then the next honoured at his left hand, and so on, alternating from the right to the left down the table. Position and recognition were set.

Some loved the positions of honour, special seats, and places of recognition. There are those who love the restricted neighbourhoods and clubs, the preferred lists. They love the pre-eminence, to always be first (3 Jn. 9). Note what is condemned: not being in these positions and places, but the *love* of them. Someone has to hold the upper positions and fill the major places. It is the *love* of such, the love and the feeling of pride because of the place and position that is wrong.

John 5:44 *“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”*

Psa 49:12 *But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.*

IV. Mark 12:40 Stealing from Widows, Evil Motive

Beware of devouring widows, of using widows for gain. Many commit this sin, and Jesus is most severe in His warning against it. He says that the man who devours (takes advantage of) a widow *“will be punished most severely.”* Note who these men were.

1. They were teachers of the law (Scribes). Of course others were guilty as well, but the ones who stood before Jesus were lawyers. They used their legal position to manage the wills and other legal business for the widows, and they cheated, devouring the widows by skimming too much out of their estates.
2. They were religionists, professing to believe in God. Some used the guise of religion to steal from widows.

There are some today — lawyers, religionists, preachers, and institutional, civic and Christian leaders (all professing hypocrites) — who court the attention and favour of people, especially widows, for the purpose of securing money. They seek large donations, endowments, trusts, investments and gifts *to promote themselves* and their institution. And the great tragedy is, such false and hypocritical hearts use the guise of religion to promote themselves and their false ideas. Their call to people is to institutional religion, not to the honour of God and the spirit of self-denial. Vain men, of course, are susceptible to such appeals, but widows in particular are exposed to those who seem to be so devoted to God.

Note that Jesus said the punishment of these will be very severe (“most severely”). There are some sins more horrible than others. Using religion for selfish ends is one of them. Such will be punished most severely. Something should be noted here. Widows hold a special place in God’s heart. He has always instructed His people to care for them in a very special way.

Deu 10:18 *He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.*

Deu 27:19 *“Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”*

Psa 68:5 *A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.*

Isa 1:17 *Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

Luke 18:3-7 *“And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?”*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

V. **Mark 12:40** Long Prayers

Beware of long prayers to show piety. There are two prominent sins and dangers with lengthy prayers.

1. There is *the danger of praying publicly for attention*. The problem in Jesus’ day dealt with *long public prayers*: however, in our day short public prayers are just as big a problem. Men too often pray publicly....
 - to sound good
 - to demonstrate their language skills
 - to show their devotion to God
 - to impress people

Again, some use long prayers while others use short prayers to show their piety.

2. There is *the danger of sharing one’s private prayer life* with others, in particular when one has spent a long time in prayer (all night or for hours) or is consistent in daily prayer. Sharing such a personal matter as prayer, even with one’s closest friend, causes a surge of spiritual pride, of *super-spirituality*, of being a little bit better than a Christian brother.

Again, the sin of pretence in praying, of sharing one’s times with God, is a gross sin. It shall receive greater condemnation.

Mat 6:7 *“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” ■*

THE WIDOW'S OFFERINGS: REAL GIVING

MARK 12:41–44

Introduction

This is a touching story with a powerful message often ignored. It is a story that...

- shows how God's heart reaches out to those in need — reaches out in tenderness and compassion and love.
- shows how much devotion and commitment and boldness mean to Him.
- shows how deeply God is moved by those who give all they are and have to Him (contrast the Rich Young Ruler, Mk. 10:17-22).
- shows what real giving is.

I. Real giving was demonstrated: Jesus observed some people giving (vv. 41-42).

II. Real giving is sacrificial giving (v. 42).

III. Real giving is measured by how much a person has left — not by how much a person gives (v. 43).

IV. Real giving seeks to have a need met (v. 44).

V. Real giving is giving all a person has (v. 44).

1. *Mark 12:41–42 Jesus Observed People*

Jesus observed people giving. Following all the plotting and argument in the Court of the Gentiles (Mk. 11:27-12:40), Jesus walked into the Court of the Women over by the treasury. The treasury was an area in which there were thirteen trumpet shaped collection boxes where the worshippers dropped their offerings. He sat down, apparently all alone, to get some relief and rest from the tension of the past hours. While resting, He “watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasure.” The word *watched* (*etheorei*) means He was deliberately observing, discerning the motives of the people as they made their offerings. He saw many walk by and drop in sizeable offerings. Some were apparently quite large contributions. He could see the handfuls of coins and hear them clang against the sides as they slid down the funnel shaped trumpets. But none attracted His admiration. Finally a poor widow came along and threw in two copper coins, which were the smallest of coins, coins of very little value. Christ took what he saw and taught what true giving really is.

II. *Mark 12:42 Real Giving is Sacrificial Giving*

Real giving is sacrificial giving. The word *poor* (*ptoches*) means pauper. She was not just poor, she was destitute, in deep poverty. Her poor dress and plain appearance showed her desperate plight. The coins were all she had, yet she gave them despite her own desperate need.

Now note the point: what she gave was a *sacrifice*. What the others gave was not a sacrifice. It did not cost them nor hurt them. They still had plenty left, for they gave only what they could spare. But not the widow. Her gift cost her. It hurt to give, for she gave what she could not spare. She gave what Christ called a *sacrificial gift*. She sacrificed; she went without a meal or gave up something else so that she could give.

Thought 1. There is a great difference between giving what one can spare and giving sacrificially, actually giving up something in order to give. Sacrificial giving costs something. Sacrificial giving is giving when it hurts, when a person has nothing left, nothing to spare. The difference needs to be stressed, for God expects sacrificial giving. If the world and its desperate needs are ever to be reached for Christ, then every believer must give sacrificially.

1 Cor 16:2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

2 Cor 9:7, 12-13, 15 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Deu 16:17 Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.

III. *Mark 12:43 Measuring Real Giving*

Real giving is measured by how much a person has left, not by how much a person gives. Jesus called His disciples to him and used the great sacrifice that the widow made to teach a much needed lesson. Note several facts.

1. They all gave an offering to God: both "the crowd" (v. 41) who had and the poor widow who did not have.
2. The ones who had plenty gave more money, much more than the widow. Their contributions were generous. Their incomes were dazzling, so their offerings were large.
3. But in God's eyes the widow gave more. Why? Because God measures what was *kept*, not what was given.

=> The widow had less remaining; the others still had much.

=> The widow had given more of what she had; the others had given less of what they had.

=> The widow had sacrificed more: the others had sacrificed less.

In proportion to what she had, the widow gave a larger percent. The others gave a much smaller percent. After they had given, they still had 85 percent or 90 percent or 95 percent to spend on themselves.

This is the lesson Jesus was teaching, a critical lesson. God counts what we have left, not what we give. He counts the amount of sacrifice, not the amount of money. The gift that matters is the gift that costs the giver to give. To the thoughtful recipient it is not the size of the gift that impresses, but the sacrifice the giver had to make in order to give the gift. The greater the sacrifice the more appreciative the recipient.

Mat 6:21 “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 19:8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

IV. Mark 12:44 Meeting a Need

Real giving seeks to have a need met. Note the words, “She, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on.” She had great need for food, clothing, and shelter. She had so little; she was the kind of person who would have had to wander about seeking odd jobs just to survive in a depressed economy. Looking at her, a person could tell she never knew where she would get her next meal. She had no one to care for her and no one to help her. The weight of the world seemed to lie upon her shoulders. There was no man who cared or expressed care. This was evident in her appearance, but she knew something. Men may not care, but God cares; so she came to God for help. And what she did is a crucial lesson for men to learn.

She took her need and gave it to God. Her need was financial, so she took what money she had and gave it all to God. She simply said, “God, I have need, the need for money. I do not even have enough money to buy food. If I am to eat, you have to provide somehow, some way. I have worked as hard as I can at the jobs I have been able to find. Here is all I have. Take it; use it in your kingdom. You now take care of me.”

She knew the great principle that God will take care of those who give all they are and have to Him. She knew that if she were to be assured of God's care, she had to give *all* to God. If she gave *all*, God would not deny her anything. He would provide all the necessities of life (Mt. 6:33). She took her need and all that was involved in it and gave it to God. She sought God to meet her need by giving *all that she had* to God.

Note something else. Two needs are present and being met.

1. God's temple (church) had need. The widow, though poor, gave to help carry on the ministry of God.

2. The poor widow had need. She gave, believing God would see to it that she had food, clothing, and shelter.

Luke 6:38 *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

2 Cor 9:6 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

Prov 11:25 *A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

Prov 22:9 *A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.*

Isa 58:10 *And if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

V. **Mark 12:44 Giving All a Person Has**

Real giving is giving all a person has. “She, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on.” Just imagine! *She gave everything* — not just part — not just a sacrifice — but *all!* She could have easily said what so many often feel:

=> “My gift doesn’t matter. It’s so little.”

=> “I have so little. God will understand. He doesn’t expect me to give it when I can’t even buy food.”

Thought 1. The lesson is twofold.

- 1) We lack devotion and dedication in our commitment to God, whether commitment of life, time, gifts, or money.
- 2) We lack boldness in giving and using what we have for God.

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

Mat 19:29 *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”*

1 Cor 10:33 *Even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. ■*