

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 Devouring Widows

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.” ■*