

Daily Bible Study

“The Opposite of Pure Religion”

Mark 12:38 - 40

March 4 – March 10, 2012

THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY –We return this week to our study in the Gospel of Mark and take as our text **Mark 12:38-40**. If you remember the last time we studied this Gospel together we saw Mark had just recorded Jesus answering a barrage of questions in **chapter 12** and then he writes of Jesus asking His own question concerning David’s Son in which Jesus let everyone know who was listening that He was in fact, the greater promised Son of David, David’s Lord and God in the flesh. As we continue along now and begin to close **chapter 12** we will see Jesus condemns the false and phony religious leaders of His day as He then turns to exclusively teaching His disciples as He leaves the Temple area in the beginning of **chapter 13**. Read our text for the week, **Mark 12:38-40** *“Then He said to them in His teaching, “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”*

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, teach me Your Word and help me learn to be careful & discerning.*

TUESDAY – **Mark 12: 38a** *“Then He said to them in His teaching, “Beware of the scribes...”* Some scholars believe the first sentence of the previous passage (**Mark 12: 37**) probably goes with this section and not with the passage before. It said, *“And the common people heard Him gladly”*. One thing we need to remember is the verse divisions of the Old & New Testament were not original in Scripture. Men began to divide the Scripture into divisions and subdivisions from ancient times as early as the days following the Babylonian captivity. The main chapter and verse divisions of the New Testament we see and use today were first inserted by a man named Robert Estienne (Robert Stephanus) living in the sixteenth century. The story is that he put them in while riding from his house to his printing factory. They are by no means always the best divisions, and our text is possibly one of the examples of this. Some argue that it is far more likely that the crowd of *common people heard Him gladly* because of the rebuke of the scribes that was upcoming rather than the theological argument which Jesus had just made previously. Jesus is addressing His disciples in the hearing of all the people as we are told by Luke in **Luke 20:45**. We now see that Jesus is about to warn disciples/followers and the *common people* are privileged to hear as well as He launches into a series of charges against the scribes as He lists six ways these men show their evil traits. He begins with the word blepo in the Greek, here translated *“Beware”*. The word means, “to see, discern, perceive”. It deals primarily with the observations from the physical eye and here Jesus is calling the people to look and see or to “watch out” in

today's vernacular concerning what He is about to tell them. It is a serious thing for us to be careful and observant of what we see in religion and the things we are taught and told concerning religious service. See some more of these type of warnings to be careful and watch out from Scripture in **1 Corinthians 10:12**, **1 Peter 5:8**, **Revelation 12:12**.

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, continue to teach and help me to listen and apply Your teaching I receive through Your Word. Thank you for giving me eyes to see and ears to hear You Jesus.

WEDNESDAY – Mark 12:38-39a “Then He said to them in His teaching, “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues...” Jesus begins His warning to the people to “watch out” by pointing out that the scribes... *desire to go around in long robes*. These were robes which swept the ground and were in that day a sign of an important person, a man wearing one would be considered a man of honor. You couldn't hurry or work in this type of robe as it would hinder that. Another possibility Jesus may be alluding to was the fact that in **Numbers 15:38**, the Children of Israel were told to put tassels with blue thread on the edge of their robes which were to remind them of the commandments of The Lord, that they were His people, needed to see their sin, His holiness and live in obedience to Him pursuing Holiness. According to Jesus in **Matthew 23:5** we see they enlarged the edges and tassel areas of their garments thus drawing attention to themselves and their perceived desire for holiness. Next, they *love greetings in the marketplaces...* Everyone likes a greeting from others but the scribes loved to be greeted with honor and respect and liked the titles given them by men. The very title *Rabbi* means ‘My great one’ and to be addressed as such flattered and increased their proud vanity. As a side note, in the parallel passage to our text (**Matthew 23:9**), Jesus speaking of addressing religious leadership says to call no man on earth “Father”. This we see is still a problem and violation of God's Word carried out today and the warning is still valid for the very same reasons. Then, *the best seats in the synagogues...* The scribes literally in the original language liked the “seats of honor” in the synagogue. In the synagogue, situated in front of the chest containing the sacred scrolls of Scripture was seating that was reserved for dignitaries and or the distinguished and the scribes liked these seats where the entire assembly could admire them.

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me be humble and always remember Your holiness and my sin. Give me the desire to follow after Jesus in obedience. Thank You Jesus that You lived a

perfect, holy life on my behalf, took my punishment on the cross, and gave me Your righteousness by faith.

THURSDAY – Mark 12:39b - 40a “...and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.” As we read and study this text we need to realize that the attitude and heart of these men was what Jesus was pointing to and pointing out. Some of these things such as receiving greetings are not in and of themselves wrong but God sees our motive and heart’s desire for all things and this is primarily what Jesus was speaking to. The Scribes liked the *the best places at feasts*. There was fixed protocol at Jewish feasts and the place settings, like the head table of a modern wedding, were ordered and fixed. For instance, the “order” of priority was: the first place - on the right of the host; the second place - on the left of the host, and so on, alternating right and left, round the table. All a person needed to do was walk in and look and they could easily tell by how the people were sitting, who was there as the more “honored” guests. Obviously sitting in a place of honor had its privileges such as “better service” if you will. These men were also accused of the vicious and godless act of *devouring widows’ houses*. We see historically that first-century Law teachers got no pay for their services but they depended on the hospitality extended to them by many devout Jews. But as is the case with sinners, there were abuses of this hospitality. Jesus was saying that these men were exploiting the generosity of people of limited means, especially the widows. They were unethical and greedy and took advantage of people for their own gain. We don’t need to go much further than religious broadcasting to see this is still a major issue among religious “leaders” and interpreters of Scripture. Interestingly, Paul speaks to the vulnerability of widows in this matter of being deceived by false teachers and false teaching as he addresses the ungodliness of the last days (**2 Timothy 3:1-9** especially **verse 6**). All of us including the emotional and spiritually vulnerable widows need to understand and be warned that there are religious charlatans all over and they prey upon vulnerable people as did these scribes in Jesus day. Lastly, Jesus points out that these men *for a pretense make long prayers*. The long prayers of the scribes and Pharisees were notorious. We are not seeing here that God only desires “short” prayers. As a matter of fact we see some very lengthy prayers and times of prayer in sacred Scripture (**1 Kings 8:22-52**). We are told to be people *who pray without ceasing* (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**) so the point is not on the time taken to talk to God but the issue is the manner of the hearts attitude in the praying. The prayers condemned were prayers not so much offered to God as offered to other people. These men prayed in places where they could be seen and heard by men and that no one could fail to see how pious they were (**Luke 18:11**).

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, help me to be like Jesus and serve others rather than always desire to be served. Give me a humble servant heart and help me care for and protect the weak and vulnerable and not take advantage of others. Teach me to pray with a humble trusting heart.*

FRIDAY & SATURDAY – Mark 12:40b “*These will receive greater condemnation.*” Jesus sums up this section where He has alerted the people to watch out by saying that teachers such as these *will receive greater condemnation*. We understand Scripture gives a very serious and somber warning to all who teach for God (**James 3:1**). We are told they will receive *greater* (exceeding, superior, over and above) *condemnation*. Their religious faith was an outward show, not an active inner faith of love and service which Jesus had just taught in **Mark 12: 28–34**. These men of all the people were those who were the students, interpreters, and teachers of God’s law and therefore had every reason to know what God was like and what He required humility, justice, sincerity, mercy, and love (**Micah 6:8**). These among others, are the very things they did not exercise and for them the retribution is going to be all the more severe. The final place where the retribution will be seen is at the final judgment where all the motives of men’s hearts will be brought to light (**1 Corinthians 4:5**) and men will be judged according to their deeds (**Romans 2:6, 2 Corinthians 5:10**). As a summary of what we have seen from this text Jesus warns against pride (*the pride of life*-**1 John 2:16**) the sinful craving to be somebody, that is, to be prominent, to be honored above everybody else. Remember He had taught them to be the least and to be the servant of all was actually to be the greatest (**Mark 10:44, 45**). Christ’s true followers are not to be pretentious and phonies but are to be like little children in simplicity of genuine faith and trust (**Mark 10:15**). They are not to be greedy and use religion as a means of gain (**Mark 11:17, 1 Timothy 6:5**). Jesus ends with the warning that although we may know and even teach God’s law there will be *greater condemnation* to those who are stubbornly and unrepentantly sinful such as these scribes (**Luke 12:47-48**). As we close this week, whether or not you are or will be a teacher of God’s Word or a religious leader we are all to heed these warnings. God’s all-seeing eyes penetrate and pierce and go behind the curtain that is set up by pride. He sees behind and through the pious frauds who try to hide their real intentions and fleece and take advantage of God’s people and He also sees the hypocrisy in the actions and attitudes of even true Christians (**John 2:25, 21:17, Hebrews 4:13**). We all as God’s people should pray along with the Psalmist, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting*” (**Psalms 139:23-24**).

(Meditate)What is God teaching me from His Word today? (Apply)How can I put it into practice?

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, help me see and understand the seriousness of obeying You. Help me to love You with all my heart. Watch over Your true teachers. Help them be men of humility & dependence on You. Help me to be a confessing Christian always turning to You for forgiveness and cleansing. Thank You Jesus for Your death which satisfies the wrath of the Father against my sin. Help me now walk in obedience to You and protect me by Your mighty Word that always does what it says; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*