

Mark 12:38-44

Religiosity vs. Reality

(20MAR2005)

Mark 12:38 In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and {like} respectful greetings in the market places, Mar 12:39 and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, Mar 12:40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." Mar 12:41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and {began} observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. Mar 12:42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Mar 12:43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; Mar 12:44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

Two contrasts are presented:

- The Scribes and the Widow
- The hypocrisy of religion and the reality of relationship

The hypocrisy of religion – is clearly seen in the Scribes, who were hypocrites. They had religion without any substance and without any reality. Jesus said that they would receive greater condemnation.

In contrast to them is the widow - unassuming and unnoticed, except by the Lord Himself. Jesus took notice of her. He sat and "watched" them both and seeing her actions, he called His disciples to Himself to point something out about her.

The widow gave everything she had to the Lord. New Testament theology declares that she would have tremendous reward for this.

- Not because **God** needs or wants our money.
- But, because **we** are so concerned with money.

The Bible deals with the issues of life and the issues of the heart. Our hearts are often wrapped around our pocketbooks. Therefore, the Lord deals with us in the Word. The Bible has over two thousand verses concerning money.

The Lord commends the widow because it was a picture of the giving of one's self. New Testament theology states: you cannot give of yourself without giving up your finances to the Lord. The way you relate to money speaks of where your heart is. It reveals where you stand spiritually in your relationship with the Lord.

Scribes

They were the Bible teachers and scholars of the time. They were responsible for interpreting and helping to apply the Word of God to the life of Israel. The people would come to the Scribes when they had questions about the Bible.

Jesus says to his disciples to beware of the Scribes: watch them, see them, observe them, take note of them and take heed of their **hypocrisy**.

The non-Christian world thinks we:

- Are all hypocrites
- Are inconsistent in the way we live our lives
- Make mistakes
- Say the wrong things
- Are sinners

The world does not understand that we are sinners saved by grace, but rather that we are sinners. Therefore, they call us hypocrites.

Hypocrite – a Greek term for an actor. Literally, one who is wearing a mask or one who is acting.

There is a difference between one who is playing a part and a sincere Christian who is trying to walk with the Lord. Every sincere Christian will walk and fail from time to time. A hypocrite is not sincerely trying to follow the Lord, but will put on an act and play the part.

The Scribes were putting on an act. This was very important in the heart of God for the nation of Israel to beware or be aware of the hypocrisy of the Scribes:

- **They like to walk around in long robes (Mark 12:38a)** – most people’s robes were bound up with a belt at the waste, but the religious leaders liked to walk or parade around in a long, opened white gown with white fringes that draped down to their feet.
Because it made them stand out before men. Made them appear and think they were different, better, important and very religious
- **They liked to receive respectful greetings in the marketplace (Mark 12:38b)** – the common people would stop and take notice of them and greet them as, “Rabbi”, “Master”, and “Father”. The Scribes ascribed to themselves all these terms of self-importance.
Because they enjoyed being noticed, honored and revered by the praises of men. They desired it and sought after it.
- **They liked the chief seats in the synagogue (Mark 12:39a)** – The Jews would gather here to hear the word of God and to worship God. The chief seats where the Scribes sat were on the stage where it was easy for them to take a pose of feigned importance and special-worth.
Because it showed what was in their hearts: self-importance, self-indulgence, and a phony religiosity. It showed they had positions of authority over the people.
- **They liked places of honor at banquets (Mark 12:39b)** – a gesture of respect given to people of high esteem and honor who were invited to banquets at someone’s home. They were usually seated to the right and left of the host.
Because it showed that they were the “who’s who” of religious life and the Scribes enjoyed the notoriety of being religious somebodies.
But Jesus taught in Luke 14:10, "But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place."

- Take the seat of least honor
- Don't assume for yourself some honor or position over others.

In Luke 14:11, Jesus said, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- **They would devour widows houses (Mark 12:40a)** – the Scribes were financially supported by the people of Israel and this allowed for some abuses to exist. Scribes, assumed for themselves some religious authority and took advantage of widows, who had free time to wait upon them and who also provided them with free finances.

However, James 1:27 says, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." There is a mandate from the beginning of the Bible to the end:

God's people are to care for the oppressed, the poor, the widow, and the orphaned. If the Church is not about this, then it is not the Church of Jesus Christ. (Acts 5)

- **They offered long prayers for appearance’s sake. Mark 12:40b)** – the Scribes liked to pray for a long time and they liked to do it in public. The Bible doesn’t condemn long prayers or praying in public, however it **does** condemn praying for appearance’s sake: just to be noticed by others or just to be heard. The Scribes wanted to sound religious, pious and spiritual. They wanted the adoration of men. In Matt 6:5, Jesus said, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." God has no desire to answer their prayers; the fact that they are noticed and seen by men is their reward. Their act is totally fruitless. What they are doing is not what condemns them; it is the condition of their heart. Our heart should be praying **to** the Lord **for** His people and not praying to **yourself** in order to be heard **by** the people.

This condemnation was given to the Scribes, whom Jesus called hypocrites because they:

- Liked to look religious to others
- Liked to be noticed and reverently greeted by others
- Liked to have position over others
- Used their position to take advantage of others
- Liked to sound and appear religious and pious before others

In Mark 12:40c, the Lord said that, "these will receive greater condemnation." Not just condemned, but that their condemnation would be greater than:

1. Outright sinners.
2. Unapologetic, non-religious, irreligious people

The Lord would prefer that you be **honest** about your attitude and beliefs concerning Him, His Word and the relationship He wants with you, than for you to wear a mask and play games or play church. - - - Hypocrites!

This warning is firstly directed to pastors and teachers of the Bible. James 3:1 says, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." They will be held to a high standard of accountability for what they say and do.

Finally, this warning is also given to those who would pretend that they are Christian. To explain this, Jesus gave the Parable of the Tares and the Wheat in the Book of Luke. Amongst the wheat an enemy would come and sow tares, which looked just like wheat in its young stages of life. Sometimes tares grew alongside the wheat, making it difficult for the owner to distinguish between the two. Jesus said that in the Church there would be tares among the wheat. They would be allowed to grow there in the midst of the Church until the End of the Age. At that time, there would be a tearing out of the tares and a separation of the wheat from them. In Matt 25, we read about the separation of the goats and the sheep. Many will say in that last day, "Lord, Lord, we did all sort of things in Your Name." And Jesus would say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you."

The only way to tell the difference between the tares and the wheat was at harvest time:

The wheat would always bear fruit but the tares would not.

The Lord of the Harvest will know us by our fruit.

God is not impressed with our religiosity. God is impressed with our hearts

The true desire of a Christian should be to: Love the Lord, to be with Him, to be with His people, to get to know Him, and to get to know His people.

Like the Scribes, there are some sincere Christians today who choose to appear and sound ultra spiritual and enjoy the praise of men; some seek positions within the Church hoping to attain a place of authority in others lives; and some are going through the motions without a reality of relationship, never actually having been convicted by the Holy Spirit because they continue to hold a veil or shield over their hearts. Some people who call themselves Christians go through life:

- Never opening their hearts to the Word of God or to the Spirit of God
- Never having been redeemed or converted
- Never bearing any fruit

Jesus said we are to beware of such people. Hypocrisy and false religiosity are dangerous for the following reasons:

1. **Playing the hypocrite will keep you from salvation** – the person who acts religious and puts on an act is fooling no one but themselves. This is dangerous for it will keep you from salvation and from heaven.

The mask gives a false sense of "I'm okay". At times we think we need to **be** okay. The Church should be a place where you can get help, pray and praise. It is not a place where everyone has to **appear** okay in order to do Church.

Luke 18: ⁹And Jesus also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector."

Pharisees – were the ultra religious, ultra observant, hyper-religious people of the time.

Tax Gatherer/Collector – was considered to be the scum of the earth. Jews were employed by Rome to collect the taxes for Rome. Any extra money he received beyond that which Rome demanded was his pay. Helping to enforce this tax collection were the Roman guards. He could demand and usually got whatever he asked. These were Jews doing it to Jews and as such were considered traitors, greedy sinners.

Luke ¹¹"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to **himself**: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'

Check your heart: have you ever found yourself comparing yourself to anyone, boasting about your prayer life, tithing, or special relationship with God?

¹³"But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' ¹⁴"I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Tax Gatherer was deemed justified, forgiven, innocent and righteous. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

The Pharisees had a religious mask on. They believed they were separate from other people, better than others, didn't need to do what others did. "That's for them, I'm okay." Dangerous.

2. **Playing the hypocrite will keep others from salvation.** People know if you are faking it. If you are faking it there is no reality, no power, or transformation in your life. As they see that hypocrisy in ones life, which will make them question why they'd want to be a Christian. What they see in you would justify their every excuse to reject Jesus Christ. And, the Christian Hypocrite is in some way guilty of sending them to hell with a smile on their face.

Playing religious games is very dangerous!

The Christian needs to model truth and honesty before an unbelieving world, and not try to present themselves as perfect. Share how you needed a Savior when you found yourself guilty before God; how you have been forgiven of your sins and given a new nature; how sin no longer has power over you, but how you now have been given the power to overcome sin. Model grace and forgiveness, because you have been saved by grace (unmerited favor). You make mistakes just like the world. You know God's forgiveness and can model it. Grow in grace, sanctity, holiness, and in Christ Jesus. The best way is to model it by extending it to the unbelieving world. Jesus said, "As you have been forgiven, so forgive others." And, "If you don't forgive others, I won't forgive you".

Extending and modeling forgiveness is one of the hardest things to do. But, we have been empowered by Jesus Christ to do so.

Not forgiving:

- Is to hold on to bitterness. Like drinking poison and hoping that it hurts the other person.
- It is wrong, self-destructive and nonsensical.
- It is comparable to opening the doors to your heart and asking Satan to come in and mess with your emotions, your well-being, your perception of yourself and others, your spirituality, your relationship with God, and your effectiveness for His Kingdom. According to Ephesians 4, your refusal to forgive gives Satan the opportunity he craves.

Forgiving:

- Closes the door to the enemy in your life
- It is being Christ-like.
- It is not easy, nor does it erase the pain and hurt.
- It is **not** pretending it never happened.
- It recognizes that there is a real debt against you, but you are writing it off - - forgiving the debt, like Jesus did upon the cross.
- It opens the door to God in your life and it shuts the door to the enemy.

Modeling grace and forgiveness to an unbelieving world makes it hard to be called a hypocrite.

3. **Playing the hypocrite carries no power to deliver, heal or set free.** Jesus came that He might give life and that more abundantly. He came to set the captives free. He came to heal, both physically and spiritually. He came to forgive and make brand new.

2Timothy 3: ¹But realize this that in the last days difficult times will come. ²For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

In the last days, men will be terribly messed up but they will be holding on to **religiosity**.

They believe they are Christian

They believe they're okay, you're okay and everyone is okay.

They go to Church and take communion; they tithe, etc.

They hold on to religion but are denying the power of pure godliness.

They have not been delivered, redeemed and made brand new.

4. Playing the Hypocrite, Playing at Religiosity is Dangerous

- It denies a fallen hurting world the power of God working through us. Eph 3:20 states, "God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."
 - i. We are the ambassadors of Christ, commissioned to be ministers of reconciliation.
 - ii. God's power is manifest and works in this world through us.
 - iii. If we are playing games we are denying those around us the power of God.
- It denies the fruit of the Spirit. Some of us have never allowed the Lord to work in our hearts. Galatians 5: 22-23 states, ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."
 - i. Growth is very painful: emotional, physical, and spiritual.
 - ii. God wants to grow you. Open your heart to Him and He will do wondrous things in you.
 - iii. God will cause to abound in your life the fruit of the Spirit.
 - iv. If we play games with God, these will never be a part of our lives.

In John 10:10, Jesus said, "The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy:" Religiosity does not restore these things - - only a **living relationship** with Jesus Christ does.

- It is a sedative. It lulls you into a place of complacency, where you are out of touch with reality.
- It is so destructive in your life that God declares that He hates it! In Isaiah 1:10-20, God is addressing the rulers and people of Israel as if they are the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah because they have acted sinfully and are out of touch with God:

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah.

¹¹"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" Says the LORD.

"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams

And the fat of fed cattle;

And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats.

¹²"When you come to appear before Me,

Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?

¹³"Bring your worthless offerings no longer,

Incense is an abomination to Me

New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies--

I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.

¹⁴"I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts,

They have become a burden to Me;

I am weary of bearing them.

¹⁵"So when you spread out your hands in prayer,

I will hide My eyes from you;

Yes, even though you multiply prayers,

I will not listen

Your hands are covered with blood.

The Lord is stating, "My people, don't play games with Me!" If God says He hates something it is because it is destructive. Nothing is more destructive, wicked and wrong for you and the Kingdom of God than you playing Church. When you get together in your solemn assemblies, here is what the Lord suggest you do:

¹⁶"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight

Cease to do evil,

¹⁷Learn to do good;

Seek justice,

Reprove the ruthless,

Defend the orphan,

Plead for the widow.

The Lord is saying, ¹⁸"**Come now, and let us reason together,**"

Says the LORD,

"Though your sins are as scarlet,

They will be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They will be like wool.

¹⁹**If** you consent and obey,

You will eat the best of the land;

²⁰**But if you refuse** and rebel,

You will be devoured by the sword "

Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Our coming together, our solemn assembly is here. We come together at church. They were conducting sacrifices of animals, as ordained by God, but they were doing it with the wrong attitude, with the wrong heart, with religiosity and no sense of reality - - the Lord hated it. The New Testament Church is ordained to offer up the sacrifice of praise: the fruit of the lips that gives thanks to His Name. Don't present your praise with levity and frivolity. There is no joy in that for the Lord. He is looking for the heart.

The heart of a woman totally given to the Lord

In Mark 12:41 "And He sat down opposite the treasury, and {began} observing how the people were putting money into the treasury." Jesus is in the Court of Women. The Mishna, a collection of Jewish writings, states that in the Court of Women there were 13 trumpet-like coffers or containers, where people could put their money in for the Temple services. It was for their tithes, offerings and alms. Jesus was sitting there watching not **what** they put in, but **how** they put the money in it.

In Matthew 6:2-4 Jesus says: ²"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you to draw attention to yourself." When you give money to the Lord. Matt6: ³"...do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" In other words, do it discreetly, and not as to be noticed by people. It is between you and God. Matt 6:⁴ "...and your Father who sees what is done in secret will repay you in secret." But those hypocrites who do that to be noticed by men have their reward in full; there is no reward to be had from God, only from men. When we give to God out of the sincerity of the heart, there is tremendous reward.

Take this challenge: Read Malachi 3 in order that it may also change and bless your life forever.

⁷"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. "But you say, 'How shall we return?' *What have we done wrong?*"
⁸"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'"

The answer is: In tithes and offerings.

The consequence is: ⁹"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!"

The remedy is: ¹⁰"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. ¹¹"Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts. ¹²"All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

If you bring to the Lord that which He asks for, He will open up the storehouses, the floodgates, the windows in heaven and pour out blessings 'till you can't take it anymore. And, He will rebuke the devourer for you. But, until you do so the Word of God says you are cursed. This is the only time in the Bible in which the Lord says: *Test Me in this!* God is unbelievably faithful on this. Give to your church or any worthy ministry of God and test Him.

The lesson of the widow with the mite is: giving sacrificially. The idea is *reality of relationship*. This is what the Lord is looking for. The Lord gave Himself upon the cross sacrificially. The response to this is to give of ourselves sacrificially.

In Romans 12: 1 states: "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship." It only makes sense to give yourself to God in light of what He has done for you; and it cannot be apart from that which you give up in your pocketbook. NOT because God wants your money but because your heart and identity are wrapped around it.

Whatever your giving is like will tell you about your relationship with the Lord; about your reality of relationship.

Have you ever given sacrificially to God? Not out of surplus as most people do, but in a way that it hurts and you will have a serious problem if He doesn't keep His word. If you haven't:

1. You are disobedient
2. You are missing out on the blessing

The Bible teaches that we are stewards not owners. Entrusted to expand the Kingdom of God and give of those resources sacrificially when the Lord calls.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think that, as a whole, we are so concerned with money?
2. Take a circumspective look at yourself. On what or where do you still find your heart wrapped around?
3. What does your financial and corporal giving say about your relationship with the Lord?
4. What do non-Christians really mean when they say that Christians are all hypocrites? How should you respond to them?
5. Why do you think that there is a clear mandate from God to help the oppressed, the downtrodden, and the poor?
6. Can you recall a time when you found yourself praying, boasting or doing something just for the sake of appearances? What was the condition of your heart at that time?
7. Do you think you have a responsibility to someone who is "playing church" and trying to impress God or someone with his or her religiosity?
8. Knowing about the love and forgiveness you have received from our Lord, and the power you can give the enemy, is there someone whom you need to forgive for His Names sake? Or, is there something you need to forget once and for all?