

Mark 12:38-40 (ESV) ³⁸ *And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*

The scribes have persistently attempted to perpetrate a lie about Jesus. They have tried to trip Him up so they could accuse Him of some death worthy crime against God’s Law. They have attempted to mislead public opinion against Jesus by misconstruing His words. They have failed every time. Jesus has passed every test. He has proven that He is the perfect Lamb of God, the right candidate to serve as God’s sacrifice to take away the sins of the world. Jesus now reveals the truth about the scribes. In this teaching in the temple, the last of his public instructions, Jesus sets out three charges.

Charge #1: To His audience: Beware

Definition - To look carefully in order to confirm or verify the truth, to scrutinize

Jesus tells his audience in the temple to pay attention, investigate the teaching and the teachers you accept as authorities in your life. There is only one head of the Church, Jesus, and one teaching that builds the church and molds the Church and prepares the Church to be presented to Jesus as His Bride, spotless, blameless, and without blemish. That authority is the word of God.

You need to pay close attention and confirm that your teachers are actually teaching, with their words and with the lives, the word of God. There is a great surge in our world, in our nation, and in our communities toward the philosophies and traditions of men and away from the word of God. Beware. Be aware. Just because it looks religious and spiritual and bears ornaments that make you think of Jesus does not mean that what you are hearing and learning and accepting is Jesus!

You’ve heard of CRT, LGBTQ+, COVID compassion, civil religion, social justice: these things are all being presented to us for acceptance and the world is working with great vigor to convince you that these are all reasonable extensions of the teachings of Jesus. Beware. Make the effort to know for yourself the biblical validity or relative falsehood of what you are being pressed to believe and accept as truth. Beware. Look to God and His word for truth.

Let me put you in mind of Revelation 13:5-10:

Revelation 13:5-10 (ESV) ⁵ *And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸ and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. ⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ¹⁰ If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.*

Someone might want to say, “Well Pastor, that relates to the last days and I’m not sure yet we’re in the last days, so maybe that doesn’t apply yet. Maybe your exaggerating or overstating the case a little.”

Listen, it doesn't matter whether we are in the biblical last days or not, though it certainly looks like we could be. It doesn't matter because the warning of Revelation 13 holds true for the church at all times. The enemy's number one weapon against the church is deceit. He is the deceiver, and he will always attempt to deceive you, and if he can't deceive you, he will deceive someone you love or trust and use them to lead you astray. Don't be fooled! Beware!

Do your own studying. Ask the hard questions of God's word. Work out the implications and applications of God's revelation of Himself to you through His word, His Son, and His Spirit. I keep telling you, you need to make time in your lives to join with other like-minded believers and study God's word together. And I don't mean an extended cake and cookie fellowship time that never gets around to any serious investigation of God's word. I mean careful, diligent, effort-requiring, life-changing, outlook-guiding, worldview-molding, conduct-determining, awareness-securing focused study. That's the essence of the first charge Jesus issues in this teaching in the temple: Church, beware!

And, folks, make note of this. To "beware of the scribes" means not just developing a personal ability to recognize real truth. It also means, beware of becoming like the scribes: proud, arrogant, convinced you have all the answers, that you are God's gift to the world. When you invest in studying God's wisdom for yourself, when you make the effort to gain His understanding of Himself and His creation, you will also find opportunities to gain God's heart.

You will read verses like

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV) *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

and

Mark 6:34 (ESV) *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.*

Matthew offers further explanation in

Matthew 9:36 (ESV) *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

When you make it your mission to understand the world in which you live from God's perspective, you will find truth, yes, but you will also find mercy and compassion. False ideologies abound, to be sure, and you are blessed if you are able to identify them, but those ideologies, philosophies, social trends are being used by the evil one to oppress and subjugate, to harass and harangue helpless, broken, wounded people who simply want to be loved into wholeness and health. A wholeness that the Bible tells us Jesus delivers!

Beware the scribes, Jesus said, and beware becoming like the scribes, who found the facts of God's word but missed the meaning of God's word. They missed the application. They thought that knowledge made them superior when their knowledge should have made them kind, compassionate servants. They reveled in authority but lacked real love.

God's word reveals the wonder of a perfect, holy, righteous Creator loving pitiful, rebellious sinners with the life of His Son. God's word reveals His intent not merely to identify the effect of evil in the world He created, but to lovingly, gloriously, mercifully save and transform those enslaved by that evil. When you study God's word, you will find God, you will find goodness and evil, and you will find broken, sinful people redeemed by grace. And you will hear Jesus say, "Beware the scribes."

"Beware the scribes" means not only identifying what is wrong with them. It means don't be like them. Don't make their mistakes. Don't adopt their attitude. Don't be people so proud of getting the Law right

that you miss entirely the purpose of the Law: a means of sinners coming to God for forgiveness and life. The first charge Jesus delivers is this: Beware the scribes. Learn to know them, don't be like them.

Charge #2: Against the Scribes

The second charge Jesus brings in this teaching in the temple is aimed at the scribes themselves, the teachers of the law, the religious professionals of the day that have been at the heart of this effort to discredit Him. Jesus aims three charges at the Scribes (Teachers of the Law) as He describes their behavior.

1. They are ambitious men.

Walk around in long robes - stylized for attention, not the usual attire

Greetings in the marketplaces (what are they doing strolling in the common public gathering places rather than focusing on knowing and instructing in God's word, a Temple centered activity?)

2. They are proud men

Have the best seats - "The ones nearest to God . . ."

Place of honor -

They want not only to sit at the head table, they want to sit next to the host.

Remember what James writes in James 2:1-7?

2 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

James essentially re-teaches and applies this temple teaching of Jesus. The spirit of partiality was at the heart of the scribes conduct. And it was not only that they were showing partiality to others, it was that they wanted everyone to show partiality to them! They are proud men who yearn for the attention and accolades of men more than the favor of God. They want everyone to know they've got God right.

Matthew records a more fuller teaching of Jesus regarding the scribes than Mark does. Listen to Jesus in Matthew 23:1-12:

Matthew 23:1-12 (ESV) ¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place

of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. ¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

3. They are greedy men

Devour widow's houses (whom the Law calls them to defend!)

Make long prayers for the sake of appearances or for monetary gain

Jesus reveals the outcome of the scribes. Theirs will be the "GREATER" condemnation. His use of a superlative invites a comparison. Greater than what?

Here Jesus is making a statement of severity. What they have coming, the justice of God, the wrath of God, will fall all the more heavy on those who know the word of God and mislead the people of God into the sin of stealing away the glory of God for themselves.

This is what James warns us of:

James 3:1 (ESV) *Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

Peter as well cautions the church:

2 Peter 2:1 (ESV) *But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.*

The intensity of God's judgment will fall more severely on false teachers.

Greater than whom? The statement of "greater condemnation" begs the question not only of a greater condemnation than what but of a greater condemnation than whom? Greater than the rest of us who may be less pretentious but are NOT less culpable for sin!

Charge #3: The charge of Jesus to the rest of us

Why Beware the Scribes? Because the essential flaw that resides in them resides in us! And their need of genuine faith in a genuine Savior is our need as well!

Romans 3:23 (ESV) *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Romans 6:23 (ESV) *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Wages of sin: what sin deserves for its labor

Free gift: given by God not as a reward for good work or a negotiated payment to secure your faith but as a personally motivated bequest

Restrictions on Understanding "Free"

Salvation through Christ alone

Salvation through faith alone

Salvation by grace alone

Salvation for the glory of God alone

God's freely gives a gift we neither deserve nor earn, and He gives this gift on these terms. So what must we do? (We always love to think we have to do something to earn God's grace. We don't, but God does hold us responsible to the offer of grace. So what are our options in light of the offer of grace? How are we to respond to Jesus at this moment under this teaching in the temple?)

Call to Respond to the Teaching of Jesus

1. Respond with faith to God's call to salvation

Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV) ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

2. Live in the grace God bestows

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

3. Glorify God with your praise, your bodies, and your lives

- a. **Worship flows from a graced life**
 - i. **Romans 12:1 (ESV)** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*
 - ii. A principle response of a saved soul to the grace of God is whole-hearted faith, obedience, and worship
- b. **Holiness flows in a graced life**
 - i. **1 Corinthians 6:20 (ESV)** *for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*
 - ii. **2 Corinthians 7:1 (ESV)** *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.*
- c. **Praise adorns a graced life**
 - i. **1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)** *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

Salvation, the forgiveness of sin, the removal of guilt, the delivery of a new nature, the life of faith, all of this is the gift of grace, undeserved and unearned by those who receive it. Boasting and pretense are excluded.

Beware the scribes. Beware thinking you're good enough to get into the grace of God on your own.

Beware thinking you're better than those around you because of some position you have. Beware missing the grace of God, freely given by God to the undeserving, by thinking you are obligating God in some way.

Beware the scribes, but love Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, who gave Himself to God and to the cross a sacrifice acceptable to God by which your sin and guilt are removed through faith in Him. Beware the scribes, but love wounded, broken people. Beware the scribes and beware becoming like them.