

Mark 12:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,

Analysis

Jesus warns: **Beware of the scribes** (Βλέπετε ἀπὸ τῶν γραμματέων)—the imperative βλέπετε means 'watch out,' 'be on guard.' This isn't blanket condemnation (Jesus just praised one scribe, v. 34) but warning against scribal hypocrisy. The scribes **love to go in long clothing** (θελόντων ἐν στολαῖς περιπατεῖν)—στολαῖ (stolai) refers to flowing robes that distinguished scribes as religious professionals. This clothing signaled status, demanding public deference. **Love salutations in the marketplaces** (ἀσπασμοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς) describes their craving for public recognition and honorific titles ('Rabbi,' 'Teacher').

Jesus exposes the core issue: θέλω (thelō = 'to desire,' 'to love')—these scribes love honor, status, and recognition. Their ministry serves ego rather than God. This indictment applies to all religious leaders who use position for self-exaltation rather than service. Matthew's fuller account (23:5-12) records Jesus condemning those who do religious works 'to be seen by men.' The desire for human acclaim corrupts ministry, transforming servants into celebrities.

Historical Context

Scribes occupied high social status in first-century Judaism. As Torah experts and teachers, they received public honor—standing when they entered, best seats at banquets, respectful greetings. Their long robes (similar to academic regalia) visually distinguished them from common people. Markets and synagogues

provided stages for public display. Jesus' critique echoes prophetic denunciations of leaders who exploited their positions (Ezekiel 34; Micah 3:5-12). This warning came during Passion Week, as scribes plotted Jesus' death (Mark 14:1). The religious establishment's hostility to Jesus stemmed partly from His challenge to their authority and popularity. His teaching attracted crowds (v. 37), threatening their status. Jesus modeled the opposite: servant leadership (Mark 10:42-45) and humility (Philippians 2:5-8).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do modern ministry trappings (titles, platforms, honorifics, clerical dress) risk fostering the same pride Jesus condemned?
2. What motivates your service in the church—genuine love for God and people, or desire for recognition and status?
3. How can Christian leaders cultivate the humility and servant-heartedness Jesus modeled?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῦ ἐν ταῖς διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ Βλέπετε
And he said unto them in which doctrine unto them Beware
G2532 G3004 G846 G1722 G3588 G1322 G846 G991

ἀπὸ ταῖς γραμματέων ταῖς θελόντων ἐν στολαῖς
of which the scribes which love in long clothing
G575 G3588 G1122 G3588 G2309 G1722 G4749

περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀσπασμοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς
to go And love salutations in which the marketplaces
G4043 G2532 G783 G1722 G3588 G58

Additional Cross-References

Luke 11:43 (Love): Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.

Matthew 6:5 (Love): And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.