

## Confronting the Skeptics

Mark 12: 35-40

Our text today immediately follows the question Jesus was asked by one of the scribes regarding the Greatest Commandment. Having pleased this particular scribe with His answer, the remainder of those present were reluctant to challenge Jesus any further.

Although Jesus had silenced the crowd, He chose not to remain silent. In fact, knowing He had their undivided attention, Jesus began to challenge them regarding their view of Him. The Lord knew the majority had not received Him as the Christ, but He was committed to revealing Himself as such for those who were willing to hear. He had dealt with numerous questions by those within in the Temple, and now it was His turn to ask some questions.

As we discuss the [statements](#) Jesus made in these verses, I want to consider the thought: [Confronting the Skeptics](#). I trust these statements will deepen our commitment and resolve for Christ while challenging our hearts to serve Him unconditionally.

**I. The Witness of the Lord's Deity (35-37)** – Knowing the skepticism and doubt of many, Jesus confronted those within the Temple regarding His deity. Consider:

**A. The Questions of His Deity (35)** – [And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David?](#) Likely no one present that day would have questioned or denied the authority of the Scriptures. The scribes were given the task of transcribing the Scriptures in order to reproduce them for others to read. It's interesting when we consider the parallel passage in Matthew. [Matt.22:42 – Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.](#) These readily admitted that the Christ was the Son of David, as revealed in the Scriptures.

- The questions of Jesus had purpose. He was not seeking information for His benefit – He already knew their hearts. In fact, He was not at this moment seeking to discern what they thought of Him. Jesus specifically asked whom they considered the Christ to be. Who was the Christ; who was the Messiah? These rightly affirmed that the Christ was the Son of David, but they failed to see Jesus as the Christ. That was the major point of contention.
- This question remains today and is no less significant than it was then. Who is the Christ? What does the Bible reveal about Him? Did Jesus not fulfill every prophecy concerning the coming of the Christ? If He did, (and we know He did), then why do so many have a problem accepting Jesus as the Christ and the sole means of salvation?

**B. The Affirmation of His Deity (36-37a)** – For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. <sup>[37a]</sup> David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he *then* his son? Referring to the Messianic psalm, Psalm 110:1, Jesus declared David had penned these words through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The LORD, Yahweh, said unto his Lord, Adonai, sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. While David had not lived to see Christ in the flesh, through the Spirit he recognized his Lord as Christ, the Son of God, having a place of authority on the right hand of the Father. David affirmed the deity of Christ not having seen Him, and yet these stood in His presence and failed to recognize Jesus as the Christ. David affirmed the deity of Christ through recognizing His position with the Father, calling Him his Lord, while being led of the Spirit.

- Jesus then asked a question they were reluctant to answer. If David called the Messiah his Lord, how could He then be his son? The Scripture declared that Messiah would come through the lineage of David, but Jesus was pointing to a more significant truth. If these only saw the humanity of Jesus, and yet failed to recognize His deity as the Christ, they were unable to receive Him. A mere mortal would have been unable to provide for their deliverance and redemption. Had Christ not been God in flesh, there would be no salvation. (We too must see Him as more than a man who walked upon this earth with great wisdom performing mighty acts. We must see Him as the Sovereign Lord He is!)
- The question was actually two-fold. While challenging them to see more than the humanity of Jesus, He also laid claim to being the Son of David, the Christ, the Son of the living God. If they were unwilling to accept Jesus, they were unwilling to accept the Christ. The Promised One stood before them and there was no need to look for another! (We must embrace Jesus as the Christ. He came to earth, fulfilling the plan to redeem mankind from sin. Through Him there is forgiveness of sin, reconciliation to God, and eternal life. There is no need to look for another. Jesus finished the work of redemption, providing for our salvation!)

**C. The Reception of His Deity (37b)** – And the common people heard him gladly. The scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests rejected the words of Christ, but the common people heard Him gladly. Some think this may refer to their happiness about Jesus putting the arrogant scribes in their place, but this simply means they listened attentively to Jesus' words with gladness. I prefer to think these simply received the words of Christ as truth. While those who were supposedly educated in the Scriptures missed Jesus, the common folks listened intently and received Him.

- I will admit, there is much in Scripture that is beyond my ability to comprehend, much less explain. However, that doesn't create alarm or doubt. I do know enough to believe that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I do know He is sovereign in my life. He has promised eternal life in heaven, preparing a place for the saved. I am going to embrace what I cannot comprehend by faith!

**II. The Warning of the Scribe's Hypocrisy (38-40)** – Following the affirmation of His deity, although rejected by many, Jesus turned His attention to the hypocrisy of the scribes. Notice:

**A. The Danger (38a)** – *And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes.* As Jesus continued to teach those who were interested to hear, He offered a simple and stern warning – Beware the Scribes! This is quite amazing when we pause to consider it. As I said, the scribes were charged with copying the Scriptures. They were expected to be well versed in the Word and masters of its teaching. On the surface it would appear these would have been beneficial to those who needed guidance and direction. However, the opposite was true. Jesus warned the common people to beware of them. This has the idea of “*looking away from; to avoid.*” Rather than embracing their teaching, Jesus instructed the people to turn from their teaching and avoid them.

- I cannot overemphasize the importance of knowing what you believe and why. Our theological depth must be much deeper than relying simply on what we have heard or been taught. It must have more substance than “that’s what mother always said, or that’s the way we’ve always done things.” Our doctrine must be rooted and grounded in the Word. We must be like the believers in Berea. *Acts 17:11 – These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

**B. The Deception (38-40a)** – *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, [39] And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: [40] Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers.* Jesus revealed the reason for being aware of the scribes and avoiding them. They operated under deception. These loved long, flowing robes, seeking to be recognized as religious leaders. They loved to have the choice seats within the synagogues and at public feasts, being viewed as men of renown, spiritually mature, and socially refined. When called upon to pray they would pray long, articulate prayers, desiring to be seen as spiritual and wise in their communication with God. Jesus knew this was all an outward show. Within they were sinful and corrupt, willing to take advantage of the poorest and most needy within society for their own personal gain. They acted the part, but their hearts betrayed them.

- The world is watching while seeking something genuine. Men may put on a good show, but eventually our motives and desires will shine through. I would rather worship with a genuine saint of God wearing overalls than with a charlatan wearing the finest three-piece suit. I love to hear those close to the Lord pray unto Him, but I want to know their walk matches their words. I prefer those who seek no recognition from men over those who always want to be recognized and found within the center of attention. If Christ has transformed our lives, and we are walking with Him, our behavior will reflect that transformation!

**C. The Damnation (40b)** – **these shall receive greater damnation.** The scribes and Pharisees felt good about themselves, even criticizing others, but Jesus revealed their eventual fate. These would face greater judgment before the Lord. Why did Jesus make such a statement? I believe we find the answer in Luke's gospel. **Luke 12:47-48 – And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.<sup>[48]</sup> But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.** Being familiar with the Word, these should have recognized Jesus and lived to honor and serve Him. Knowing the truth and rejecting it, while taking advantage of others, would bring greater condemnation.

- We are responsible for the truth we have received. We have been given Light and we are accountable for the Light. I would not want to stand before the Lord being guilty of hindering another in the faith while ignoring the truth I had received. I am convinced we will all be surprised when we stand before the Lord in judgment. That is why it is so important to check our motives and strive to live for the Lord in every aspect of life. Those who know the Word are expected to live according to the Word.

**Conclusion:** This has been another challenging and convicting passage. If you have not submitted to Christ in repentance and faith unto salvation, I urge you to do so today. Nothing else will matter when life is through. If you are saved by His grace, does your life reflect the transformation that took place? Are you living to honor Christ or seeking personal gain and recognition? If there are needs, bring them to Jesus!