

The Man of Integrity

Jesus' Last Days (Mark): Part 8

Mark 12:12-14 (Mt.22:15-22, Lk.20:20-26) 11/12/2020

Summary: After highlighting how the authorities feared man three times, Mark now makes a point of how Jesus was the opposite. Against the dark backdrop of their sin (which results in hypocrisy, dishonesty, cowardice, and favoritism), Mark shows us Jesus in stark relief. He uses the very words of their flattery to show us the truth about Jesus. He is a man of integrity, courage, impartiality, and faithfulness to the way of God.

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Introduction

This passage preaches two sermons—one by Jesus and the other by Mark. Jesus is going to teach us about Caesar and taxes and God, and Mark is going to teach us some things about Jesus. So if the passage preaches two sermons, I'm going to preach two sermons. I'll start with Mark's sermon about Jesus, then next time we'll look at Jesus' sermon about government.

Fear of Man

I believe one of Mark's purposes in this passage is to showcase some facets of Christ's glory. And they are facets that shine against the pitch-black backdrop of the character of the religious leaders of

Israel. In order to really see the brilliance and beauty of Jesus character, we can best appreciate it in stark relief of the chief priests, Pharisees, teachers of the law, and elders of Israel. They were men with plenty of character flaws, but there's one that Mark has gone out of his way to show us in this section, namely, fear of man. Mark shows us the ugliness of that sin, then turns our attention to Jesus' character to show us the opposite of that sin. So let's look first at the sin, then we'll turn our attention to Christ.

Fear of man is when you desire man's approval or fear man's disapproval more than God's. You care more about what people think than about what God thinks. You crave human approval—the approval of certain people in your life, or maybe just people in general. Or you're more afraid of what man might do to you than you are of the consequences of crossing God.

And the spiritual leaders of Israel at the time of Jesus were the poster children for fear of man. Mark really wants us to see that in this section.

Mark 11:18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law ... began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

They were so driven by their desire for popularity and the respect of the people that they became murderous when they saw Jesus taking it from them. Skip down to v.30 and Jesus asks them where John's authority came from.

31 They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 32 But if we say, 'From men'...' (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) 33 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

When someone is infected with fear of man, that fear governs how he answers questions. The truth is irrelevant. Just answering truthfully doesn't even enter into their consideration—it's all about what answer will win them the most respect from people. And if they believed the people are being duped by a false prophet who is leading them astray, but that false prophet is popular—they won't say anything. They are like modern pastors who will allow people in their own flock to be deceived rather than risk criticism for calling out the false teacher. They care more about avoiding controversy than they do about people's souls.

And now Mark brings it up a third time in today's passage. Jesus spoke a parable about how God is like a landowner who is currently on his way to come destroy them. And instead of fearing God and dropping to their knees in repentance, look how they respond.

Mark 12:12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

They aren't one bit afraid of God, but boy, they're terrified of that crowd. Three times in the last several paragraphs Mark makes a point of how these men were driven by fear of man.

Do You Fear Man?

And whenever Mark turns the spotlight on someone, the implication is for the reader to ask, "Is that me?" Scripture is a mirror, and by showing us what was going on inside the hearts of those men, Mark is enabling us to peer into our own hearts to see if there's any of that same sin driving us. None of us knows exactly how we would have responded in their exact situation back then, but we can look at our lives right now and ask some questions.

- Are you an approval junkie?
- Do you judge your life based on the praise or criticisms of others?
- What effect does it have if 10 people criticize you? Or if 10 people compliment you?
- How does that compare to the effect on your emotions when you read in the Bible what God thinks about you or your actions?
- Do you ever daydream about people being impressed with you?
- Do you daydream about God being pleased with you?

- When you pray in church (or don't pray) are you motivated by what people might think of how good or bad your prayer is?
- Do you work harder when your boss is watching?
- Are you tempted to affirm gossip just to avoid offending the person who is talking to you?
- Do you worry and fret about what people think of you?
- Do you show favoritism toward the people whose respect you most desire?
- Do you think of rejection as one of the worst things a person could experience?
- Do you avoid conflicts rather than trying to solve them?
- Do you hate being rebuked or corrected?
- When you meet new people do you spend more time thinking about how to impress them than how to minister to them?
- Have you ever avoided closeness in a relationship out of fear of getting hurt?
- Do you see people as priests who have the power to make you feel clean, so if they approve of you then you are okay?
- Do you see people as dangerous, unpredictable terrorists so you have to keep your guard up all the time to keep from getting hurt?
- Do you see people as dictators, whose word and opinion is law for you?
- Have you ever kept your mouth shut about the gospel because you were afraid of what the response might be?

Fear of man is an issue for cowards, who are afraid of getting hurt or criticized. It's an issue for egomaniacs who have to have popular applause. It's an issue for approval junkies who have to have affirmation from certain people. It's an issue for everyone whose life is driven by what people think. This is a big problem. Fear of man—if it's not the #1 cause of unfaithfulness to God, it's definitely up in the top 2 or 3.

If you question how serious it is, just consider Galatians 1:10.

Galatians 1:10 ... If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

That's as serious as it gets. And for that reason, fear of man is strictly forbidden in Scripture.

Isaiah 51:7 ... Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults.

We are not permitted to murder, we are not permitted to commit adultery, we're not permitted to steal, and we're not permitted to fear men. It's sin, it's evil, it's wrong, it's disobedience.

The Effects of Fearing Man

And it destroys your life. Mark is showing us in this passage the devastating effect fear of man has on a person. For one thing, it leads to hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy

15 ... But Jesus knew their hypocrisy.

That's the Greek word for *actor*—someone who wears a mask pretending to be someone he isn't. You sample them on the outside and you get one thing; you look inside and get something very different. The opposite of integrity. Integrity is when you're the same all the time—alone, in front of a crowd, at home, at work, at church, tired, well-rested, in a crisis, on vacation—your character is always the same.

That's integrity, and it's rare. Why? If I am whatever I am, why is it hard for me to be the same all the time? What is it that makes me want to pretend? *Fear of man*. I adjust what I am to win the approval of whoever is around, or to avoid disapproval or rejection. When I'm at church, I want the people at church to respect me, so I act like the type of person I think they will respect. When I'm around enemies,

I don't want them to hurt me, so I hide the parts of me that will make them mad. When I'm at work, I'm tempted to morph into whatever version of me I think will win respect there.

We value people's opinions of us so highly that we become chameleons. We can have that approval we so desperately crave, and all it takes is a little deception. Pretend I have strengths I don't have, cover up the flaws I do have, and *voila*—I'm amazing. Everyone's going to like me, and no one's going to hurt me.

So fear of man will make you a fundamentally dishonest person in the way you present yourself, and a hopelessly inconsistent person, to the point where *you* don't even know your real identity. You're like an actor who is only in the movies and never in real life.

Dishonesty

And so your whole life becomes one big lie. Look at what liars these men are.

14 ... Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

At that point you want Jesus to say, "Gee, thanks. Does that mean you'd like to be my disciples? You believe I teach the way of God in accordance with the truth—you're all for following the way of God, right? So does this mean you want to follow me now?" Jesus doesn't bother asking that because look at v.15.

15 ... But Jesus knew their hypocrisy.

It was obvious because if they believed any of it they would have followed him. Jesus knew exactly what was going on here—it was the same thing that had been going on all along.

15 ... "Why are you trying to trap me?"

Your Bible might say, "Why are you testing me?" This is the third time in the book that Mark has used this word to describe what they were trying to do to Jesus.

Mark 8:11 The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.

Mark 10:2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

It's the same word used in the OT when describing putting God to the test, which means to challenge God and dare him to discipline you. In this context with Jesus it means to make a public challenge of Jesus for the purpose of exposing something that could be used to discredit him.

And here they try it using flattery. Flattery is saying something complimentary that you don't really mean because you have ulterior motives. You're trying to manipulate the person to like you or treat you well or to act the way you want them to act. Flattery is evil because it's dishonesty.

Psalms 78:36 they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues.

Proverbs 26:28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Psalms 12:2 Everyone lies to his neighbor; their flattering lips speak with deception.

These men were lying, and it's easy to see they are lying because they aren't following Christ. It's so easy to give lip service to the way of God. "Oh, I'm committed to doing God's will." But then when you show them some specific thing God requires, they say, "Uh, no, not that." No, I'm not going to reconcile with my spouse. No, I'm not going to give that money back. No I'm not going to give that relationship up. It's the old prayer, "God, make me pure ... but not tonight."

1John 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie.

1 John 2:4 The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar.

Jesus sees through our hypocrisy. We go to church and pretend to be something we aren't, and it's like hiding under a clear plastic sheet. And God says, "You know I can see through that, right?"

Cowardice

Thirdly, fear of man will make you a coward—just like the chief priests and Pharisees, who are constantly afraid of the crowd. That's also a deadly evil.

Revelation 21:8 But the cowardly ... their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Why? Because the fear of rejection will drive your life in whatever direction the world wants it to go. And guess what direction the world wants your life to go? Down the path of God's way? Nope. God points toward righteousness, the world is running the other way, and if you're a coward, you won't have the courage to resist the world's pressure.

That's why Scripture puts fear of man in the category of unfaithfulness to God. Because it makes you forget God.

Isaiah 51:12 ... Who are you that you fear mortal men ... 13 that you forget the LORD your Maker

We have no right to fear men, because just as our love and worship belong to God alone, so our fear belongs to God alone. Just as you can't serve two masters, neither can you fear two masters (because you'll ultimately serve whomever you fear the most). Fear of man takes control of your life away from God and puts it into the hands of men. So fearing men is a failure to fear God, a failure to remember God, a failure to serve God, it results in disobedience because it drives you to cave in to worldly pressure, and, ultimately, it's a failure to love God. It's a failure to love God because part of loving someone is caring about what they think. So if I care more about what people think than about what God thinks, I don't love God.

Favoritism

And one more effect fear of man has—it leads to favoritism. We treat the people whose favor we covet better than we treat the people whose opinion we don't care about. So not only do we violate the first commandment, but the second one as well. We won't love people.

The people whose opinion doesn't matter to us—we won't treat them well because our focus is on pleasing those other people whose opinion does matter. So we'll mistreat the people we don't care about. And the people whose opinion we do care about—we fail to love them too because we'll treat them well, not out of love, but out of selfishness. We'll show kindness and respect and whatever else, not for their good, but for our good—so we can manipulate them into liking us or at least not hurting us. It's all selfishness, which is the opposite of love.

Christ's Example

Okay, so is that enough on the ugliness of the sin? Shall we turn our attention now to Christ's example in this area? What does it look like when a man fears God instead of man? Mark has already painted a portrait of Jesus' courage, integrity, and total faithfulness to the Father in his actions. Even though he knew Jerusalem was the heart of opposition against him, and that when he arrived there they would torture him and kill him, but that didn't slow him down in the least. We've watching his unflinching courage as he marched straight into the lion's den—right into Jerusalem, out in front, leading the way as his disciples and the crowds dragged their feet in fear. We saw him go directly into the Temple and not only enter the lions' den, but ram his finger into the lion's eyes when he ransacked the Temple. Then he publicly humiliated the most powerful men in the country. Then he told a parable condemning them as prophet-killers.

So we've seen all that played out in Jesus' actions throughout the book; now Mark wants us to hear it stated explicitly. And so we're going to hear it, and in Mark's wonderful irony, we're going to hear it from the mouths of Jesus' man-fearing enemies. After Jesus gives the parable, they respond once again with fear of man.

Mark 12:12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

But they aren't giving up.

13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.

They send the Pharisees and the Herodians. They can't do it themselves because the goal is to convince Jesus that these guys are genuine, and that they are on Jesus' side.¹ If that same group tried that, it would be too obvious that they were lying, so they send some fresh faces.

And not only some fresh Pharisees, but also some Herodians. Pharisees and Herodians, who would normally be enemies, join together against Jesus. Powerful forces are coalescing to oppose Jesus—that's a fulfillment of Psalm 2.

Psalm 2:2 ... the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

Psalm 2 is happening. The powers of the world are joining forces against the Lord's Anointed One.

And they are doing so in a strategic way There's a reason why they include both Pharisees and Herodians. They want Jesus to feel pressure from two sides when they spring their question in v.14.

The Pressure

14 ... Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

This question was a very, very big issue at the time. Rome was a pagan, invading enemy that declared marshal law and occupied Israel. And guess how they raised the money to pay for that occupation? They put a 1 denarius head tax on each male Jew. A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer, so think a \$100 bill.

So you can imagine how that went over. Every Jewish man, rich or poor, had to pay the bill for their enemies to oppress them.

And that's not even the half of it. The denarius coin was minted for the express purpose of paying that tax. It had a portrait of Caesar with an inscription describing him as the son of a god. So it was basically a little idol—a graven image. And so there were people in Israel who believed it was a violation of the law of God to pay this tax. You're giving money to pagans to oppress the people of God using an idolatrous coin. The Zealots, for example, refused to pay this tax. In fact, they wouldn't even touch a denarius because it was a filthy pagan idol.²

Not long before this, when Jesus was 10 or 12 years old, a man named Judas of Galilee led a revolt over this tax. He said if you paid that tax you are a coward, and you're being unfaithful to God because by giving tribute to the Romans, you're putting pagan masters in place of God as the rulers of God's people. And so he led an armed revolt against Rome over this tax. If you want to know how that worked out, you can read about it in Acts 5.

Acts 5:37 ..., Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

Rome crushed him. But that didn't put an end to the movement. Just 6 years after this conversation here in Mark 12, the Jews tried it again. Then again on a bigger scale 30 years later, which resulted in the

¹ Luke 20:20 ... they sent spies, who pretended to be honest.

² NICNT.

annihilation of Jerusalem by Rome in 70 A.D. That happened because of a revolt over taxes. The first thing the Jews did in that insurrection was to mint their own coins.

So this is a hot, hot issue among the people of Israel at Jesus' time. And since the Messiah's whole job was to deliver Israel from their oppressors, if Jesus comes out in favor of paying taxes to Rome, not only will he lose popular support in general, he's totally disqualify himself as a potential Messiah. What good is a deliverer who says, "Yeah, just keep going as you are—keep paying tribute to the occupying force, remain subservient to your enemies"? Who needs a Messiah for that? They could do that on their own. So if Jesus says, "Pay the tax," he becomes a complete non-Messiah.

But on the other hand (and here's where the Herodians come in), if Jesus speaks out against the tax, the Herodians, who were tied in with the Roman government, can go straight to their contacts in the government and report that they've got another Judas of Galilee on their hands (except this time it's Jesus of Galilee), and the Romans would come and crush him like they crushed Judas.

And we know from Luke's account that second option was their preference.³ It would be nice for Jesus to be discredited in the people's eyes, but even better would be for him to defy Rome and be crushed like a bug. They want Jesus to say, "No, don't pay the tax" so that Jesus of Galilee will be just like Judas of Galilee. They want Jesus to feel the pressure from the crowds, just like they do, and for that pressure to control how he responds.

Flattery

This is what's known in politics today as a "gotcha" question. And modern politicians have made an art form out of refusing to answer gotcha questions. Anything that might cost them popularity, there's zero chance they will give a straight answer. But these guys really want Jesus to give a straight answer, so they ask him twice for a clear yes or no.

14 ... Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

Yes or no? And just to make sure Jesus doesn't try to give a politician answer, they try to box him in with some flattery about how honest and courageous he is. Look what they say to him before asking the question.

14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

Now Jesus really can't give a weaselly answer, right after they just praised him for never giving weaselly answers. After being publicly praised by such prestigious men for having courage and not being afraid of anyone, Jesus can't back away from the question and be exposed as a man whose afraid to stand up to Rome.

So they are trying to use this flattery to get Jesus to feel so much pressure that he will cave to it. They praise Jesus for not caring about people's opinions in order to get Jesus to care about people's opinions. That's the whole point of flattery. Flattery doesn't work unless the person cares about your opinion, right? If I lavish praise on someone because I want to influence him, but that person doesn't care one bit what I think, then my flattery gets me nowhere. They are trying to tempt Jesus to violate the very virtue they are praising him for. Their goal in flattering Jesus is to make the flattery untrue. They praise him for having integrity in order to get him to not have integrity. They praise him for not being afraid of anyone in order to get him to fear man. They are trying to make all their flattery prove false.

And they think it will work. They've seen Jesus' courage. No doubt they were envious of it. You know they hated it. You know it was with anger that they said the words, "You aren't swayed by men because you pay no attention to they are." That galled them because Jesus paid no attention to who these

³ Luke Lk.20:20.

men were. So they had seen all that in Jesus, and yet, they still think this will work, because they can't imagine someone not being like them.

If they believed Jesus really was a man of integrity who didn't care what people think and just said what he thought no matter what—then why use flattery? If Jesus always gives honest answers, why do they feel the need to pressure him into giving an honest answer? Probably because they can't imagine themselves giving an honest answer if they were in his shoes.

People who are enslaved to a particular sin very often think everyone else is more or less like them. Liars won't trust you, because they assume you're just as dishonest as they are. Angry people assume you're mad at them. Impatient people think you're sick and tired of them. We just naturally project our sins and weaknesses onto others.

Well, they're about to find out just how true their flattering words really were. Jesus didn't care about human opinion, especially theirs.

You can see that in his response. Try to imagine yourself in this situation. What would you say if you were in front of a whole crowd of people and some VIP's that everyone looked up to and respected introduced you by saying, "This is a person of integrity who isn't swayed by popular opinion and faithfully, courageously teaches the way of God in accordance with the truth"? How would you respond? Here's how Jesus responded:

15 ... "Why are you trying to trap me?"

Matthew tells us that he called them hypocrites first.⁴ Can you imagine? Some big time pastor introduces you to a crowd, or maybe the Governor, and talks about how you have impeccable integrity and faithfully teach the truth and all the rest, and you say, "Yeah, you big hypocrite."

Jesus was the opposite of a hypocrite because he had no fear of these men or any other men. You can almost see Mark winking at us as he writes this, because the way he has constructed his gospel, everything Mark has been showing us about Jesus is perfectly encapsulated by this flattery.

14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

Integrity

They call him **a man of integrity**. Literally, "You are true"—true in the sense of being consistent, so integrity is a good translation. I once asked my Hebrew professor, Robert Alden, to define the word *integrity*. He said integrity is like homogenized milk. If you don't homogenize milk, the milk fat rises to the top, so what you have at the top is different from what you have beneath. Depending on where you take your sample, you get something different. But when you homogenize it, it's exactly the same whether you take some from the top or bottom or side or anywhere else. It's consistent.

A man of integrity is the same whether you catch him in church, in public, at home, in a crowd of liberals, in a crowd of conservatives—wherever you sample him, he's always the same. That's Jesus. He was always the same. In public, in private, when he was tired, when he was rested, in front of hostile enemies, at home with friends, talking to big shots or children—always the same. That's integrity, and it's the opposite of being a hypocrite, which is what these men were. They were one thing on the outside and something else on the inside. When they call Jesus a man of integrity, what they are doing in that moment is the exact opposite of integrity.

Courage

So they say Jesus has integrity, and then this:

⁴ Mt.22:18.

14 ... You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are

Jesus wasn't afraid of powerful people. He rebukes the most powerful officials in Israel to their face. He singlehandedly ransacks the Temple. He faces down Pilate when he's on trial for his life. And Pilate is astonished. He says, "Don't you realize I have power to have you beaten, flogged, crucified; and I have the power to let you go?" And Jesus basically said, "You got nothing. The only power you have is what my Father gives you." And Jesus teaches him, like a superior instructing a student. He was a man of unflinching courage.

Impartiality

And not only did he have integrity and courage, but also impartiality. The literal translation of v.14 is: "**You are true and it is not a concern to you about anyone because you do not look at the face of men.**" You're not afraid of powerful people, you're not swayed by favorable people, you don't care if they're rich or poor, influential and powerful or weak nobodies, attractive or repulsive, male or female, young or old—none of that factors in to how you treat people. When King Herod summoned him, Jesus blew him off. But when a desperate, unclean woman grasped his cloak for healing, he stopped and spent time with her. He blows right by Herod's palace at Jericho, but when a blind beggar calls out, he stops the whole procession. He rebuked the elite authorities to their face, but he honored little kids. He turned away a rich, young ruler who was very favorable and really couldn't have helped the cause financially. And he went out of his way to minister to sick, impoverished, invalids who had nothing to offer but germs.

Faithfulness to the Way

So without any fear of man, Jesus was free to focus 100% on one thing: the way of God.

14 ... You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

The Bible describes our movement through life as being like walking. As you move through life, every decision you make, everything you do is a step. And there's a way of stepping that is in light with the way God operates. It's called the way of God, and it's the path he calls us to take.

Job 23:11 My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside.

Deuteronomy 8:6 Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways.

Deuteronomy 10:12 ... what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways.

We are to walk in the way of God, and doing that takes some instruction.

Psalms 27:11 Teach me your way, O LORD.

It's something we need to be taught. The problem is, a lot of teachers are afraid to teach the parts of it that will be unpopular. But not Jesus.

14 ... You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

Conclusion

So this passage begins by showcasing these attributes of Christ—integrity, courage, impartiality, godly teaching, commitment to the way of God, truth, honesty, no fear of man. Then if we skip ahead to the end of this pericope, we see one more: Christ's wisdom. They ask Jesus an impossible question, he gives them an answer that blows their minds.

17 ... And they were amazed at him.

As much as they hated him, as much as they wanted him dead, still, they were astonished at his wisdom. And as these questions continue, we'll see more of that as we go. Christ went up against the wisest and most learned of men, his elders, experts, and compared to him they look like absolute morons.

1 Corinthians 1:20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

There's a reason why the teachings of Jesus turned the world upside down, and 2000 years later they exert more power and influence than any person in human history, or any school of thought or philosophy, any organization. No one ever spoke like this man. His words are truth, his words are life, they are the wisdom of the eternal God.