

## Luke 20:41-47 What's Under the Veneer?

In woodworking, one of the tricks of the trade is to cover a plain species of wood with a veneer of a more beautiful or desirable species. Veneer is a thin sheet of wood glued on the top of the undesirable wood. The piece of furniture looks like it's made of a beautifully figured species of wood, but in reality, the beauty is only skin deep. Under that thin veneer is something less desirable.

E.g., kitchen cabinets—often made of press board or plywood—covered by a veneer of a beautiful and desirable wood.

Sometimes we find good things under a thin veneer or coating. Sometimes beautiful wood furniture is hidden under several coats of paint. **Something** beautiful and valuable might be hidden by a plain exterior veneer. On the other hand, sometimes when we look under the veneer, we find something really horrible.

Things may not be how they appear to be on the outside. Sometimes that's good, but sometimes that's not so good. Sometimes we fail to understand how special a person might be under that veneer. Sometimes we fail to see how corrupt a person might be under that veneer.

Many of the Jewish people thought of Jesus as a great teacher and prophet, but nothing more than that. The Jewish religious leaders thought of Jesus as a deceiver and a false prophet. Both the followers of Jesus and the enemies of Jesus failed to understand the true nature of Jesus. There was something more to him under his appearance.

Many of the people thought of the scribes as holy, humble servants of God. These teachers of the law held positions of high esteem among the people, but underneath the polished exterior was a heart of darkness. Under that thin veneer was something entirely different.

On Tuesday of the Passion Week, Jesus had been in the temple answering various questions that hostile groups had been asking him. They were seeking to trip him up or entrap him in his words so that they might accuse him before the Roman authorities. Instead of getting Jesus in trouble, these questions only served to discredit the Jewish religious leaders and make Jesus even more popular. So the Jewish religious leaders stopped asking questions. Since they quit asking questions of him, he decided to ask a question of them.

Today we'll look at this question and the following warning that Jesus gave to his disciples. Both the question and the warning show that people are not necessarily what we perceive them to be. That veneer may hide something really wonderful—as in the case of Jesus—or something really horrible—as in the case of the scribes.

And as we consider what was under the veneer of Jesus and the scribes, we should think about what's under our veneer. Under the appearance that we portray before others, are we more like Jesus or more like the scribes? Is there good wood under our veneer or rotten wood? What is your veneer hiding?

I. A question concerning the true nature of Christ .41-44

In the previous section (20:21-33), the Jewish religious leaders had questioned Jesus' interpretation of Scripture. Now Jesus challenges them on their interpretation of Scripture.

A. .41 "How say they that Christ is David's son?"

1. "they" are the Jewish teachers of the Scriptures. It was commonly believed that the Christ would be a descendant of David. And that is indeed what the Bible teaches. There are several passages showing that the Messiah will be from David's family line.

*Isa 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.*

Luke 1:32 *He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.*

2. “Christ” is the Greek word for Messiah. The word “messiah” literally means, “anointed one.” In the OT, three classes of people were anointed with oil—prophets, priests, and kings. The Messiah was a combination of all three of these offices.
  3. .42 The problem is that David calls the Messiah “my Lord” in Ps 110:1.
  4. Note that there is a difference between the two instances of the word “lord” in vs. 42. One is all caps, and the other has only a capitalized first letter. Why is that?
    - a) This is a direct quotation from the OT, and the word “LORD” in all caps signifies “Yahweh,” while the word “Lord” with only the first letter capitalized signified the word “Adonai,” meaning “master, owner.”
    - b) So, in other words, “God said to the Messiah...” Jesus’ question focuses on why David would call his descendant his Lord. David, who is the greater, would not call his descendant, who would be the lesser, his “Lord.”
  5. BTW, this also is an OT hint of the Trinity. We don’t find direct teaching about the Trinity in the OT, but we do certainly have hints or subtle indications of it. Here we clearly have the Father and the Son communicating between themselves.
- B. What is the answer to the question?
1. His audience doesn’t answer, and Jesus doesn’t give an answer here either, but there is an answer.
  2. How can the Messiah be both the Son of David as well as David’s Lord? Jesus is both son and Lord because he has two natures.
    - a) As to his human nature, Jesus is fully, 100% human. In this aspect, he is David’s son.

- b) As to his divine nature, Jesus is 100% God. In this aspect of his nature, he is David's Lord.
    - c) He's the God-man.
  - 3. The Jews were expecting the Messiah to be a human; they were *not* expecting him to be equal with God. They had not understood the Bible's teaching about the Messiah. They should have expected that.
  - 4. There are several OT indications that the Messiah would be more than a mere man.
    - a) Isa 9:6 – mighty God, everlasting Father
    - b) Micah 5:2 – goings forth have been from old, from everlasting
    - c) The Jews should have been expecting a Messiah who was both God and man.
- C. Believing that Jesus is anything short of genuine God and genuine man is theological error. We must avoid the ditches on both sides of the road.
  - 1. It's an error to say that Jesus is not really God. The Arian heresy, which is still common among JWs, holds that Jesus is not quite equal with God. He's the highest and greatest creation of God, but not of the same nature as God.
  - 2. It's an error to say that Jesus is not genuinely human. The Docetist heresy asserts that Jesus is not really human. He appeared to be human, but was really more like an angel.
  - 3. The biblical teaching, as shown by Jesus right here, is that the Messiah is both David's son and his Lord. He's both human and divine. That is the orthodox understanding of the two natures of Jesus. If you deny either one of those, you are in serious error.

**Trans:** Jesus asked this question to help the people see that he was more than just the son of David. David had many descendants. Jesus was one of those descendants, but he was much more than that. He was David's Lord, and that implied that he was God in the flesh. Under the human veneer is the divine nature.

And that's what we need to believe about Jesus as well. Any lesser belief about Jesus is gross theological error. Jesus is the God-man, and all genuine disciples of Christ believe it.

II. A warning revealing the true nature of the scribes/Jewish religious leaders .45-47

A. Who are the scribes?

1. The scribes were teachers of the OT law. Most of the scribes would have been Pharisees. They were very strict followers of their religious traditions. Their job was to teach the Scriptures in the Temple and in the synagogues throughout Israel.
2. Generally, the scribes were held in high esteem by all the people. But the people didn't really know the true nature of the scribes.
3. No doubt, there were probably a few scribes that were genuine followers of God. Some didn't fit Jesus' description here. But most of them fit the description Jesus gives here.

B. .46 What was true of the scribes? Jesus describes several things about the scribes:

1. They love to walk in long robes.
  - a) Everyone wore a long robe at this time in history. But in those days, you could tell a lot about a person's social status by the kind of robes he wore.
  - b) The scribes wore the kind of long, flowing robes that told everyone they were high-status people. They displayed their prominence by parading around in splendid clothing.

**App:** Even today, clothing remains a status symbol. People display their wealth by the clothing they wear.

2. They love greetings in the market. I.e., they loved the recognition that came along with their position as teachers of the OT law. Out in public, people would often address these teachers as “rabbi.” They liked the respect and prominence given to them because of their high status position.
3. They love the highest seats in the synagogues. Because they were high-status people, and because they were recognized as teachers of the Scriptures, the scribes naturally occupied the most prominent seats at the synagogues. They were the authorities, the first people in the assembly, so they sat up front on the platform where everyone could see them. They loved that position of public acclaim and prominence.
4. They love the best rooms at the feasts. The word “chief rooms” here literally means “first position.” It refers to a place of honor. Because of their high status, the scribes enjoyed special privileges.

“feasts” is the common word for “meals, banquets” (δειπνον). Prominent people commonly invited the scribes when they were hosting a banquet. The scribes enjoyed attending these banquets where the high and mighty socialized. They enjoyed inclusion in the most exclusive groups.

- C. So, from all appearances, the scribes were an honorable, favored group. They enjoyed high esteem within their society, and they enjoyed the perks and privileges of having that position. They liked the acclaim and status that came along with the job.
- D. There’s nothing wrong with acclaim, high status, and privilege. Some people earn their privileges. Some people use their high status for good purposes. That was not the case with the scribes.
- E. .47 What were the scribes doing behind the scenes? What did average people not know about them?
  1. They devour widows’ houses.

- a) The word “devour” (κατεσθίω) literally means “to eat fully, to consume.”
- b) The sense of it here means “to forcibly take or utterly consume, to destroy.” To devour was to take over the property of someone else through dishonest means; to appropriate something illegally.
- c) Widows were some of the most vulnerable people in that society. They often had little means of support. They would typically be very poor.
- d) How did the scribes “devour” widows’ houses?
  - (1) The scribes apparently made financial demands of these poor women, perhaps being heavy handed in extracting contributions to the temple or synagogue.
  - (2) Perhaps they were abusing the hospitality of the poor widows.
  - (3) In some way, they pressured these vulnerable women or took unfair advantage of them to extort money from them. They are guilty of some kind of exploitation or abusive conduct toward the widows.
  - (4) This disgusting behavior shows the true nature of the scribes. They were already high-status, prominent, wealthy people, yet they gained more money for themselves by abusing the most vulnerable people in society.
  - (5) The most powerful were preying upon the most vulnerable. The people who should have been protecting the widows were extorting money from them.

- (6) The scribes were abusive, greedy, selfish people. And remember that these were the religious leaders of the Jews. These were experts in teaching the OT. They were strict and demanding. Everyone assumed that they were among the most godly and sincere of the Jews. But they were just the opposite. Under that religious veneer, they were greedy, grasping, abusive tyrants.

**App:** That should show us that just because you know the Bible, it doesn't mean that you obey it. Some of the people who know the Bible the best disobey it the worst. Don't think that God approves of you just because you read or know the Bible. The scribes and Pharisees knew the Bible very well; so does the devil. James 1:22 "be ye doers..."

2. .47b They make long prayers for a show.

- a) The word "show" (προφάσει) refers to a pretended cause; i.e., something done for appearance sake; that which is put *forward* to make wrong conduct *appear* right; a pretense, pretext.<sup>1</sup>

Their prayers were nothing but a show; it was appearance with no substance.

Matthew 6:5 *And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.*

- b) While they were *praying* long prayers, they were *preying* on vulnerable widows. These were really reprehensible people.

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 915.

3. So in short, the scribes were vain, greedy, and hypocritical abusers. To outward appearances, they looked like holy men, humble servants of God. But inwardly, under the veneer, they were just the opposite. They were selfish and materialistic. They didn't really care about others, even the most pitiful and vulnerable among them. They cared only about themselves.

**App:** All of us are familiar with hypocrisy among religious people. We are likely aware of many cases in which religious people were exposed as liars and hypocrites. They portray themselves as respectable, holy, and compassionate, but underneath the thin veneer is a grasping, greedy, selfish core. Religion for some is nothing more than a thin veneer covering a wicked heart.

All of us need to examine our own hearts to see if our religion is just a show, just a veneer. What do we find if we peel back that religious exterior? Is there solid wood under that veneer, or is it rotted and full of termites?

That's the way some people are—fine looking in appearance, but underneath is a corrupt, greedy, selfish heart.

- F. .47end What will the scribes receive? “greater damnation”

They were seeking greater *commendation*, greater honor and status, but what they'd get is greater *condemnation* or judgment.

1. Greater – there will be levels of punishment in hell.

Lu 12:47-48 *beaten with many stripes. ... few stripes.*

**App:** God keeps track of both the good and the evil that we've done. If you are not saved, God will judge you and punish you according to level of your sin. Some will receive a more severe judgment than others.

2. Damnation (κρίμα)—this word basically means “judgment,” but it often has the sense of a decision against an individual. Many translations use the word “condemnation.” And that, of course, pertains to the punishments of eternal hell.

3. Why would the scribes—the teachers of the OT law—be worthy of greater judgment/condemnation? Because with much knowledge comes much responsibility. The more you know, the greater your liability. The scribes, who supposedly knew God the best, disobeyed God the worst. They were fully aware of what God required and they were doing the very opposite.
4. Further, many of the scribes had direct contact with Jesus. They had listened to him on many occasions. I assume that some of the scribes had seen some of Jesus' miracles. Instead of believing what they heard and seen, they rejected Jesus as a fraud. They were attempting to destroy Jesus.

Because of that, they would experience greater damnation. And so will all those who squander their privileges. The punishment for those who know better is going to be far worse than for those who don't know any better.

.46a “Beware...” This was a warning to Jesus' disciples not to follow the bad example of the scribes. Under a thin veneer of holiness, the scribes were selfish, greedy, abusive hypocrites. They deserved the severe judgment that they would get.

Disciples of Jesus must not be like the corrupt scribes. They must be humble, sincere, and compassionate. They don't do their religious duties for a show. They are not interested in acclaim and recognition. We should be seeking God's approval, not man's.

If all we have under a thin veneer of religiousness is greed, hypocrisy, and abuse, then we are not followers of Jesus.

If we peeled back the thin veneer of appearances, what would we find in your life? Is there good wood under there, or is it all rotten and worthless?

Veneer can make a rather ordinary piece of furniture look fantastic. In some cases, a veneer hides an even more valuable wood underneath. That was true in Jesus' life. While most people didn't recognize it, Jesus was the God-man. He's David's son but he's also David's Lord. Under the veneer of humanity lay the divine nature in all its glory.

The Jewish religious leaders, on the other hand, had a thin veneer of holiness, but under it was a rotten core of pride, greed, abuse, and hypocrisy. Their religion was nothing more than a show. Their primary motivation was recognition and self-promotion. Because of that, they were ripe for severe judgment.

Obviously, the warning to us is that we avoid the bad example of the scribes. We must not be hypocritical, abusive, and self-serving. If we are like the scribes, a thin veneer of religion will not reduce the severity of God's judgment.

In order to avoid God's judgment, we must affirm/believe is that Jesus is both the son of David and David's Lord. He is both God and man. Only those who have repented of their sins and believed in Jesus can be assured that they will not experience "greater damnation."