

***Religious Robbers***  
***International Bible Lesson***  
**Matthew 23:2-12 & Mark 12:38-44**  
**Sunday, December 27, 2015**  
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“They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation” (Mark 12:40).

Jesus sees into peoples’ hearts and He strongly condemns leaders who use their expertise in legal interpretation or religious matters to steal from others. Jesus said they do everything to impress and lead people to trust in them. They like to sit in seats of honor and be greeted with respect, but they are hypocrites. Jesus warned His followers to watch out for such people lest they deceive them. Those who refuse to heed Jesus’ warning should not blame God if some religious leaders rob them. Jesus especially condemned those who used their understanding of the law to steal the homes of poor widows, leaving them destitute and homeless. Jesus promised that God would hold these thieves especially accountable for their sins. To help people turn from this temptation, Jesus warned that such thieves would be especially condemned by God. In Jesus’ day, and perhaps in some religious establishments today, robbing people in a place of worship became so pervasive that Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple with a whip, showing how seriously God considers this sin. Those stealing in the temple received a greater condemnation, as will those who devour widows’ houses. Jesus has not changed the law of love: those who practice their religion for the sake of appearance while they take unjust advantage of others will be justly condemned by God. God’s concern for the most needy among us led James to tell believers: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

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## **Thinking Further**

1. How did Jesus describe those who sat in Moses' seat?
2. Why did Jesus say His disciples and followers should not be called "rabbi"?
3. What do you think Jesus meant when He said we should not call anyone on earth "father"?
4. Why did Jesus say His disciples and followers should not be called "instructors"?
5. What are some lessons you learned about giving from the incident in the Court of the Women?