

85. Rebukes against hypocrisy

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In the Christian life, a hypocrite is somebody who tries to appear more spiritual than he or she really is. These people know that they are deceiving others, and they hope others will not find out. Their Christian life is only a shallow masquerade. When they continue in their hypocrisy, they do not only deceive others, they themselves start to believe their own deception.

Jesus showed His compassion to garden variety sinners and spoke to them about the truth and salvation. He wanted to reach out to them with love and mercy. But when it comes to the Pharisees and scribes, He saw them right through their religious phony baloney, sickeningly pious mumbo-jumbo, and double minded "Say-one-thing-but-mean-something-else" jive. In this chapter 23, Jesus dished out the most severe rebukes against hypocrisy in the entire Bible.

This was our Lord's last public message. It is a stern denunciation of false religion that paraded under the guise of truth. There were about 6,000 Pharisees in that day. We should remind ourselves that not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites. The name "Pharisees" came from a word that means "to separate" for the Lord their God. But for the most part, the Pharisees used their religion to promote themselves and their material gain. No wonder Jesus denounced them. Let's hear what the Lord Jesus says about hypocrisy.

A. DO WHAT THEY SAY, NOT WHAT THEY DO

Matthew 23:1-4 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Jesus says respect is due to the scribes and Pharisees – not because of their conduct, but because they sit in Moses' seat. They hold an office of authority, ordained by God.

The first accusation against these religious leaders could apply to many religious leaders today. Many still make Christianity a set of burdensome rules to follow. Some of the Christian denominations demand that you have to speak in tongue or baptize in a certain way by their denominations to be truly saved. That's very wrong.

B. EXPOSING THE FLAWS OF THE PHARISEES

Matthew 23:5-12 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' 8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

To them, success meant recognition by men and praise from men. They were not concerned about the approval of God. They used their religion to attract attention to themselves, not to glorify God. The Pharisees thought that position was a mark of greatness, so they sought the best seats in the synagogue. They also thought that titles of honor were a mark of greatness.

Since the Jesus Movement in the 1970s, American Christianity started to have mega churches. Some of those church pastors and other well-known Christian authors and singers made themselves into "Christian celebrities" status. People started to look toward them more than the Lord.

God has placed spiritual leaders in the church, but they must not replace God in our lives. A true spiritual leader directs his people into freedom and a closer fellowship with Christ, not into bondage to his ideas, ways, and recognition of themselves.

C. THE EIGHT WOES

Jesus was angry at their sins, and what those sins were doing to the people. But His attitude was one of painful sorrow that the Pharisees were blinded to God's truth and to their own sins.

The best way to understand with these eight "woes" is to contrast them with the eight beatitudes found in Matthew 5:1-12. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord described true righteousness. Here He described a false righteousness of the Pharisees.

1) Shutting up the kingdom - Entering the kingdom

Matthew 23:13 But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Why was Jesus so mad at the scribes and Pharisees? It is bad enough for a person to choose to go to hell by his own choice, but it is the most damnable thing for a person to drag others to hell with them by giving him a wrong Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many of you know Robert Schuller, the late pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in CA. He said, "In other words, Jesus had an ego. He said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' Wow, what an ego trip He was on!" Schuller was giving the idea to people that Jesus had an ego problem. Jesus doesn't have an ego problem since He is the Owner of the universe, but a mere creature Robert Schuller did. And he was the one who was making the people stray away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

2) Destroyers condemned - Mourners comforted

Matthew 23:14 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

The Pharisees stole widows' houses in the name of good business and "stewardship," and made long prayers for the sake of big donations. They used their religion as a "cloak of covetousness."

We see this exact pattern in the ministries of some of the crooked televangelists:

- Fred Price: "The Bible says that He has left us an example that we should follow His steps. That's the reason why I drive a Rolls Royce. I'm following Jesus' steps."

- Creflo Dollar: "I'm telling you, Jesus wasn't poor, and He didn't wear no rags.... Jesus didn't have no rags on. He wore designer clothes, honey!"

These two televangelists have Rolls Royces, private jets, and multi-million dollar mansions. But on TV, they beg for money from the viewers. They say, "Plant the financial seeds of your faith in this ministry. God will return your faith seeds in a hundred-fold."

If they have that much faith, why don't they send their money to little old ladies' homes and get a hundredfold from God? While these old ladies send their social security checks to their ministries, they wear four thousand dollar custom tailored suits, Italian alligator shoes and driving a Rolls Royce.

3) Proud send souls to hell – Meek inherit the earth

Matthew 23:15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

The Pharisees were out to win others to their legalistic system. Zeal in evangelism does not prove that a person is right with God. They make proselytes, but their converts cannot learn anything good from their mentors.

The convert usually shows more zeal than his mentor, and this "double devotion" only produces double condemnation. How tragic that people can think they are going to heaven, when actually they are going to hell!

The Jewish religious leaders were similar to Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses today. They were courageous and energetic messengers, but with a false message.

4) Greedy for gain – Hungering for holiness

Matthew 23:16-22 Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' 19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. 21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

The Pharisees were not hungering for righteousness, integrity, truth, and simplicity. They worked out a "religious system" that permitted them to rob God and others and still maintain their reputations.

5) Rejecting mercy – Obtaining mercy

Matthew 23:23-24 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. 24 Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

The Pharisees majored on minors. They had rules for every area of life, at the same time they forgot about the important things. It is usually the case that legalists are sticklers for details, but blind to great principles. These Pharisees thought nothing of condemning innocent Jesus to be crucified, yet they were afraid to enter Pilate's judgment hall, because they might be defiled themselves.

6) Extortion in heart – Pure in heart

Matthew 23:25-26 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

The Pharisees were careful to keep the outside very clean, because that was the part that men would see and they wanted the praise of men. But God sees the heart. When God looked within, He saw "full of extortion and self-indulgence".

7) Lawlessness in heart – Peace in heart

Matthew 23:27-28 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Jewish people were careful not to touch dead bodies or anything relating to the dead, because this would make them ceremonially unclean. They would paint the tombs white, so nobody would accidentally get defiled, and this was done especially at the Passover season. What a graphic picture of the hypocrite: white on the outside, but filled with defilement and death on the inside!

The great evangelist of yesteryear D.L. Moody once said, "If I take care of my character, my reputation will take care of itself." The Pharisees lived for reputation, not character.

8) Persecuting the righteous – Being persecuted for righteousness

Matthew 23:29-39 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' 31 Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. 33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? 34

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, 35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall

see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Pharisees and their kind are guilty of all the righteous blood shed in the name of "religion." The first martyr recorded in Old Testament Scripture was Abel in Genesis 4, and the last one recorded was the Prophet Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:20-22.

You claim that you are a Christian in the church. Your identification with Jesus does not stop at the church door as soon as you walk out the door. You must carry it on all the time. Let's not be hypocrites for the sake of our Lord Jesus.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) True spirituality is not something we can display outside as we want. It only shows during the time of difficulty from inside of our hearts.
- 2) We must see our own sins in the way God sees them.
- 3) We must remember that God despises Hypocrisy.