

Sunday, October 12, 2025

Matthew 23: The Responsibility of Spiritual Leadership

Matthew 23 : 13–36 (sans verse 14)

13“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. [14]

15“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. 16“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ 17You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? 18You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ 19You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. 22And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it. 23“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. 25“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. 27“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. 28In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. 29“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started! 33“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? 34Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. 35And so upon you will come all

the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

(Note verse 14 – Mark 12 and Luke 20 you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore, you will receive greater condemnation.)

1. Introduction:

Last week, we looked at the first twelve verses which speak to specific 'criteria or characteristics' that should be found in a Spiritual Leader:

- Spiritual authority
- Integrity
- Compassion
- Humility

This week, the rest of chapter 23 shifts to showing us the responsibility of Spiritual Leaders as Jesus condemns the spiritual leaders of the time. These 'WOES' are self-explanatory. The word here used is the Hebrew word OUAH (pronounced oh I). We interpret it as 'WOE.' Strong's defines it as Woe!, alas!, uttered in grief or denunciation. It has the implication of finality. The sentence has been declared.

Spiritual Leadership carries with it great responsibility, and false spiritual leaders pay a heavy price for their sin.

2. False spiritual leaders:

- Lead people away from God:

Matthew 23 :13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

- Lead people to the Devil:

Matthew 23 :15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

3. How do false spiritual leaders accomplish this:

- DISHONESTY

Matthew 23 :16“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ 17You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? 18You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ 19You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. 22And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

Matthew 5:33“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’ 34But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

- TWIST SCRIPTURE

Matthew 23:23“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

The Bible does not and will not contradict itself. You need to understand that. Just like Satan used the Word to tempt Jesus, False Spiritual Leaders weaponize Scripture by twisting it.

- FALSE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 23:25“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Spiritual Leaders in your life must be close enough to you so you can EXAMINE THEIR FRUIT.

- FALSE HUMILITY

Matthew 23:27“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. 28In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

- SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 23:29“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started!

4. False Spiritual Leadership leads to DEATH.

Matthew 23:33“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? 34Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. 35And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.

- Spiritual leaders are responsible for the words said and the life lived because God has anointed them and appointed them as a Spiritual Leader. You too are accountable:

II Corinthians 5:17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

- Different level of accountability for 'Positional Spiritual Leadership.'

Luke 14 :47"The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Acts 20 :28Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

James 3:11Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Hebrews 13:17Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

5. Is this the Heart of God?

No.

Matthew 23:37"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

II Peter 3:8But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is

patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

- Judgement is not the Heart of God. It is the deserved penalty.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

We do not need Jesus to condemn us. We need Jesus to SAVE US! "How do I keep that from happening to me??"

BELIEVE IN JESUS.

QUESTIONS:

1. Quick, check your scripture retention from today! What 3 spices are mentioned in today's passage? What is your favorite spice to cook or bake with. When making a dish from a recipe- do you follow or change as you wish?

2. Are you a legalistic person? Are you a "follow the law as it is written," "follow the intent of the law," "laws? They are for someone else, not me" type person. Have you ever said do as I say, not as I do? In what situations? Is that "an okay" statement? What can we learn from the "Seven Woes" about the dangers of legalism and losing sight of faith's heart? What steps can we take to avoid the pitfalls of religious hypocrisy outlined in the "Seven Woes"?

3. What practical steps can we take to ensure our religious practices are not merely outward shows but sincere acts of faith? How can we balance adherence to religious rules with prioritizing justice, mercy, and faith? In what ways does Jesus' criticism of those appearing righteous externally but are internally corrupt challenge us to cultivate inner righteousness?

4. Has someone had to give you a hard truth? How did you respond? How does Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem's rejection impact your view of God's heart towards

those who reject Him? How does Jesus' desire to gather Jerusalem under His wings reflect His care for us today?

We do not need Jesus to condemn us. We need Jesus to SAVE US!