

# The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees

📖 Matthew 23:1-12

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We are in the fifth section of Matthew. Remember that Matthew is divided into five narratives followed by discourse sections with a final narrative section that stands alone. Each of these sections in some way contributes to the overall argument of the book. The overall argument is that Jesus is the rightful King but Jesus' kingdom did not come because the nation Israel rejected Him. Each narrative-discourse section contributes in some way to those two arguments. We've already seen the narrative-discourse sections that contribute to the argument that Jesus is the rightful King. Now we are working with the narrative-discourse sections that contribute to the argument that Jesus' kingdom is postponed because of the nation Israel's rejection. That rejection was firm in Matt 12 and so the discourse in Matt 13 deals chiefly with the postponement of the kingdom and the course things will take during the interadvent age. The narrative-discourse which follows deals primarily with Jesus' withdrawal from public exposure so that He is able to prepare His disciples for the interadvent age and avoid being arrested, tried and murdered prematurely. The narrative section we are now in began in 19:2 and extends through the discourse in 25:46. The contribution of this section is further preparation of His disciples for their ministry during the interadvent age, further explanation of the interadvent age and the increasing opposition and rejection of the leadership as Jesus comes up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover as the Passover Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.

The gravity of the leadership's rejection is seen by the Herodians, the Sadducees and the Pharisees each trying to ensnare Jesus so that they could get rid of Him at the hands of the Romans. You are to see the vile nature of these opponents. They knew the marvelous things He was doing by miracles foreshadowed the great works of God in the kingdom, they knew His skill with the Scriptures. They knew that He changed the lives of harlots and tax collectors and yet they would not believe in Him. That is why He referred to them as "an evil and adulterous generation," as "vipers," as "hypocrites" and many other things we will discover in the chapter we now come to, Matt 23. Constable said, "chapter 23 appears to be the climax of the confrontations that preceded it (21:23–22:46)."<sup>1</sup> This climax is two-fold; first, it is a warning to the crowds and His disciples against the practices of the scribes and Pharisees and second, it is a rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees in the harshest terms.

First, in 23:1-12 He addresses **the crowds** and **His disciples**, warning them not to follow the practices of the Pharisees. Though it is addressed to **the crowds** and **His disciples** we know that the Pharisees were among them and listening. The whole chapter deals in some way with the Pharisees because they were the dominant sect in Israel, they controlled every aspect of Jewish society and they had led the people astray. They were false shepherds, wolves in sheep's clothing and they had no excuse. They should have believed in Him. They should have led all Israel to enthrone Him as King.

For context, there has been a climax leading up to this chapter. In Matt 3, John the Baptizer had preached the gospel of the kingdom near the Jordan, the same environs Elijah had ministered in centuries before. The kingdom of God was 'at hand.' In Matt 4, Jesus preached the same gospel of the kingdom in the Galilee with a great, though shallow response from the people. In Matt 10, Jesus commissioned the Twelve to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and preach the gospel of the kingdom. But by Matt 11, the leadership had rejected John and you begin to see the clear division in the nation over Jesus. In Matt 12, the leaders reject Jesus' miracle done by the Spirit and argue that the miracle was done by Satan. The people approve of this explanation though Jesus ably refutes it with Satan does not cast out Satan. The nation was willfully blind and as such God blinded them judicially. From here on they would only get parables and seeing they would not perceive, hearing they would not understand. In Matt 13:52, Jesus taught that the parables would only be understood by Jesus' disciples and the message would equip them to become the new leaders of Israel, replacing the corrupt scribes and Pharisees. In Matt 15:7 He rebuked the Pharisees for refusing to help their elderly parents financially because of the law of corban, which meant that anything dedicated to the Temple could not be used for another purpose. This invalidated the Law. Jesus' disciples still didn't understand what was going on because they were concerned that He had offended these great leaders. Then in 16:5-12 Jesus warned His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. But they were still not believing and did not understand. They thought He was talking about their lack of bread but the leaven was a figurative portrayal of the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. This is what they needed to stay away from. Jesus warned them because He saw that their teaching had worked its way into His disciples thinking and corrupted their ability to live by faith. When Jesus came up to Jerusalem for Passover He cursed the fig tree to show that that generation of Israel showed outward promise but no inward spirituality. He cleansed the temple to show that He was the Lord of the Temple and its purpose was to be a house of prayer but they had turned it into a den of thieves. He healed the lame and the blind to give them access to the inner courts. He rode into Jerusalem mounted on a colt as a great King and while some applauded Him as the Son of David the rest said He is just a prophet from Nazareth. When the leaders confronted Him in Matt 21:23-27 about the source of His authority for clearing the Temple, teaching in the Temple and healing the lame and the blind, He responded with a challenge of His own. If they would identify the source of John's baptism, He would identify the source of His authority. But they would not. He then gave the parable of the two sons, the parable of the vineyard and the parable of the wedding feast, all of which portrayed in some way the terrible rejection of the leaders and the consequences of that rejection.

Now in 23:1ff we come to the climax of this rejection. Jesus denounces the Pharisees publicly in front of the crowds and His disciples. They needed to choose thee this day whom thee will serve. They could not follow the Pharisees and Jesus. They could only follow the Pharisees or Jesus and their decision was very important.

So the warning begins in 23:2. **The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.** There is a clear line between what they are to do and what they are not to do but it is difficult to understand without careful study of the **scribes and Pharisees**. The **scribes** were the experts in the law. They had begun in the days of David when they functioned as a guild of families who copied the word of God. They were usually priestly families from the tribe of Levi. Ezra was one of these priestly scribes. Figart says, "It is interesting that Ezra was both priest (*cohen*) and scribe (*sepher*), and was not only committed to seek and teach the Law, but also to do it, the latter being the very thing the scribes of Jesus' day were prone not to do."<sup>2</sup> In other words, there was a change among the scribes from Ezra's day to Christ's day. After Ezra's time what happened is the scribes separated from the priests, who were of the Sadducees, and became a part of the Pharisees. Among the Pharisees they functioned as a small group of legal experts and teachers. Over time they developed oral law or tradition as a hedge around the Mosaic Law so they would not get close to violating it. These traditions became more important and authoritative than the Mosaic Law itself as attested by the Talmud. This exalting of tradition above the word of God is what Jesus said in Matt 15:6 invalidated the word of God. The bottom line is they were following a religious system based on the word of God but distinct from what the word of God was really teaching. The **Pharisees**, of course, were simply the larger group of which these scribes were a part. They all believed the same traditions and followed them scrupulously.

In 23:2 Jesus said these two groups **had seated themselves in the chair of Moses**. Constable said, "According to Old Testament figurative usage a person who sat on a predecessor's seat was that person's successor (Exod. 11:5; 12:29; 1 Kings 1:35, 46; 2:12; 16:11; 2 Kings 15:12; Ps. 132:12)."<sup>3</sup> They were viewing themselves as being Moses' successors. As such they assumed for themselves the authority of Moses. Since Moses was both the giver of the law and the interpreter of the Law they viewed themselves as being the official interpreters of the Law. These interpretations were couched in their traditions. The posture of "sitting" was the posture of preparedness to teach with authority. When the teacher sat he was almost ready to teach. When he opened his mouth it meant he was ready to teach and everyone else was to shut their mouths. By taking the physical posture of sitting in synagogue they were taking the chair of Moses, telling the people that this is what Moses meant. The sense in verse 2 is that they **had seated themselves** on that chair, not that they were rightly in the chair as the later verses show. Figart says, "They *"sat [ekathesin, aorist tense of kathizo, "to sit"] in Moses' seat"* that is, there was no appointment; rather, they took upon themselves this position of authority, and it was continued by tradition."<sup>4</sup> Having **seated themselves in the chair of Moses** the people were expected to obey without question.

In 23:3 Jesus said, **therefore all that they tell you, do and observe**. This could sound like Jesus is telling them to follow their traditions. However, that is not what it means. Walvoord said, "By commanding them to observe and do what the Pharisees instructed them, Jesus certainly did not mean that they should follow the false teachings of the Pharisees but rather those teachings that naturally and correctly arose from the Law of Moses."<sup>5</sup> More concretely, the official procedure in synagogue was to read from the Law of Moses and then give the official interpretation. Jesus reflected this procedure in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "You have heard it said...but I say to you." They had heard the Law of Moses read at synagogue and that they were to **do and observe**, that was the actual word of God. However, what they were told it meant was their tradition. The following statement in verse 3 makes the distinction clear, **but do not do according to their deeds**. Their **deeds** or practices are described in their traditions listed in vv 5, 6, and 7; wearing large phylacteries, lengthening their tassels, loving the places of honor and desiring respectful greetings. These practices were done to be seen as super-religious holy people by men. So verse 3 is saying, **do** the Law of Moses that is read in synagogue, but do not do what they tell you it means, that is just their tradition.

The explanation at the end of verse 3 is that **they say and do not do**. In other words, they say the Law of Moses when they read it in the synagogue, but they **do not do** it. Instead they do their traditions. Put succinctly, they did not do the Law of Moses but they did practice their traditions. This paves the way for verse 4.

**They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger**. By saying **they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders** Jesus means that **they** require men to follow their traditions. These numbered in the thousands. They added all these traditions because they felt that the Law did not cover every detail of life and so cried out for further amplification. Through this they justified filling in all the details such as details for business transactions, transferring property and what constituted work on Sabbath. All these additions were a **heavy burden** that no one could bear alone. The next phrase shows why they were condemned for this, **but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger**. In other words, they were unwilling to help their followers bear the burdens they had imposed. For example, they helped one another by easing tax burdens in transactions among themselves but they did not do this for transactions among their followers. By this their hypocrisy was exposed.

In 23:5, **But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men**. Pentecost said, "Christ condemned Pharisaic externalism, for it was designed to impress people."<sup>6</sup> They didn't do it to please God. It had nothing to do with God. It had to do with impressing men. In Matt 6 we saw that they had a trumpet blown in synagogue before they put their money in the offering plate so everyone would see how much they gave. We saw that their prayers were long, theatric and done on the street corner in order to draw attention to themselves and how holy they were. And we saw that when they fasted they went around with doom and gloom on their face so that everyone would know. That was just the tip of the iceberg. Jesus says **all their deeds** are done **to be noticed by**

**men.** The first two are in verse 5, **they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.** First, the **phylacteries.** The **phylactery** is a small leather box with straps to bind it to the forehead and the left arm, closest to the heart. Within these small leather boxes were placed four Scripture passages written on vellum; Exod 13:1-10; 11-16; Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21. They did this to fulfill Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8 and 11:18. Exod 13:9 says, "And it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt." Deut 6:8 says, "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead." They took these commands in a wooden literal sense as referring to enclosing these scriptures in boxes and tying them to the literal wrist and the literal forehead. But Deut 11:18 seems to interpret them in a figurative sense, "You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead." What was intended is not entirely clear. Many today argue for the figurative meaning only. However, probably what was intended was that they literally place these scriptures in boxes and bind them to the hand and forehead during the morning prayers in order to remind them of the true figurative sense of putting the Scriptures to memory on the heart and into action with the hand. They were to both learn and do the Law of Moses. This is because we note that Jesus did not condemn the practice of wearing **phylacteries** in this verse but of **broadening their phylacteries.** In other words, they may have been valid but the problem was either that they made them larger or they wore them all the time. Either would satisfy the intent of this word **broaden.** The exact sense is unclear though the thrust is not. Walvoord said, "They made broad their phylacteries... This they did, not only when they prayed in the morning, but throughout the day, for the purpose of being seen of men."<sup>7</sup> Second, the **tassels.** These, we read, they **lengthened.** The **tassels** were sown on to the four corners of a garment in order to remind them to follow all the commandments of the Law of Moses. This was to fulfill Numb 15:37-41, "The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, 38"Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. 39"It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, 40so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. 41"I am the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD your God." All the Jews were to wear these tassels as a reminder that they were a holy people and had a holy royal calling. Jesus wore these tassels and when the woman with the hemorrhage for 12 years touched the hem of his garment she was touching His tassel. There was nothing inherently sinful with tassels. It was a good and godly thing. However, Constable says, "...the religious leaders characteristically wore long ones to imply great piety and to attract the admiration of the common people."<sup>8</sup> This was the problem, they were going to extravagant measures to be seen by men. Figart is probably correct when he says, "What Christ condemned was not the wearing of the phylacteries nor the sewing of tassels on the borders of their garments, but the practice of making either or both of these things larger than normal in order for them to be seen by men. At the same time. He did not necessarily recommend wearing the phylacteries at

all.”<sup>9</sup> We might add that we have no indication for or against Christ wearing phylacteries but we do know He put the Law on His mind and He put it to work with His hands, for He is the fulfillment of the Law. It is significant to note that Jesus did live under the Law of Moses and that it remained in effect until His death. At that time the goal of the Law of Moses as pointing out sin and driving people to faith was met and it came to an end. It still serves the purpose of pointing out sin but the Law of Messiah is the rule of life for the Church. The two are similar but distinct units of Law. The major difference is that under the Law of Messiah the enablement of the Spirit is given to meet its righteous demands.

In 23:6 we find a third evidence that they liked to be **noticed by men. They love the place of honor at banquets.** The word **love** is *φιλος* and means “affection.” They had an affection for the place of honor at **banquets. Banquets** or feasts were places where “The guests reclined on couches at low tables.” The **place of honor** was “the uppermost place “at the extreme left of the couch.” It was considered the place of honor because it was elevated so that the occupant could oversee “the entire table without throwing back his head or turning around.” They loved to recline from that position because of the honor attending it. The fourth evidence in 23:6 that they liked to be **noticed by men** is they **love the chief seats in the synagogues.** The **chief seats in the synagogue** were near where the law scrolls were kept. To sit close to these was to sit in the most esteemed position.

In 23:7 we see the fifth evidence that they liked to be **noticed by men. They love...respectful greetings in the market places,** perhaps being greeted with the title in verse 9, of “father” was in mind, a usage that implied source of life, which was seen as unlocked by the traditions. The sixth evidence in 23:7 that they liked to be **noticed by men** is that they liked **being called Rabbi by men.** The word **Rabbi** simply means “master or sir.” It is an honorary title of respect for an outstanding teacher of the law. In that sense there is nothing wrong with using this form of address. However, they loved being called Rabbi. It fed their lust for admiration. It is similar to being called a scholar. Years ago we heard Dr Ryrie speak at Tyndale Theological Seminary. At one point he told us the story of how he was invited to TCU to speak to a class. When he was introduced the professor referred to him as eminent scholar and professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. He said, “I basked in that moment far too long.” To be clear, it is not wrong to call someone a scholar, it is wrong for the one called scholar to desire it or to get pleasure from it. Yet all these things the scribes and Pharisees did; they broadened their phylacteries, they lengthened their tassels, they loved to sit in the high position at feasts, they loved to sit close to the law scrolls at synagogue, they loved to be called father and they loved to be called Rabbi. Therefore, do what they say when they read the Law of Moses but do not do their deeds. All that is people pleasing and has nothing to do with God, nothing to do with righteousness.

By contrast, in 23:8, Jesus now begins to address specifically His disciples. We think this because the **you, υμεις** is emphatic, meaning it comes first in the sentence. Toussaint says, “The emphatic pronoun “you” (*υμεις*) in verse eight, the understood subject of the first clause, stresses the fact that the disciples were yet to have the position

of leadership."<sup>10</sup> In other words, Jesus is now addressing His disciples as the new leadership in Israel. He had hinted at the need for new leadership as early Matt 5:19 where He said, "Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Evidently a new leadership was needed. He narrowed the field to the Twelve in Matt 13:52 when He said, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." The Twelve would become the new scribes for the believing remnant since they were able to understand the old revelation and wed it with the new revelation. So then Jesus is targeting His disciples as the new leadership who are to replace the false leadership of the scribes and Pharisees and lead the believing remnant of Jews as things progress into the Book of Acts.

In verse 8 He then begins to spell out their contrast in how they should lead. **But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.** Again, **Rabbi** simply means "master or sir" and was an honorary title of respect for an outstanding teacher. Jesus is not discarding this use of the term as one of respect. Of course, one cannot stop others from calling them **Rabbi** or pastor or scholar. Therefore, the meaning is that one who is called Rabbi or pastor or scholar should not love being referred to by that title. That is an attitude of superiority. Jesus explains, **for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers.** The main function of a **Rabbi** was to teach and so **Teacher** is used as a substitute for **Rabbi**. The Textus Receptus and the Majority Text both include *ο Χριστος* to identify the **Teacher** as Christ. Perhaps this is one reason all commentators identify the **Teacher** as Christ. Additionally, many passages refer to Christ as the Teacher during His first advent (e.g. John 13:33-34; 20:16; et. al.). In the context He had just silenced the scribes and Pharisees proving Himself to be the superior Teacher. However, His identification with the **Teacher** here is questionable in light of three facts; first, verse 9 identifies the "father" as the "Father," second, verse 10 identifies the "Leader" as "Christ," third, the Teacher is left unnamed. Could this unnamed Teacher be the "Spirit?" That would round out the Trinity. We can't say for sure. What we can say is that Jesus is identified as the Teacher during His first advent and that after His departure He said "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." These are not really at odds with one another since all that Christ teaches is identical to what the Spirit teaches. But the context is looking forward to their being the new leadership of the believing remnant of Israel and they did receive a special manifestation of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. So it is my personal preference to view the **Teacher** as the Spirit but I am not dogmatic about that. In either case, one reason they should not have an affection for being called **Rabbi** is because there is **One Teacher**, and whether Christ or the Spirit, it is not them. This should not be misconstrued as saying that you can't refer to someone as a teacher. Christ has certainly given gifted teachers to His Church. What is being forbidden is those who are called teacher thinking of themselves as pre-eminent. Walvoord said, "What He was saying was that the Pharisees and scribes had forgotten the preeminence of God and of their Messiah." Anyone called teacher today should not forget that important fact.

The second reason the disciples in v 8 should **not be called Rabbi** is because they **are all brothers**. There are all equals. They are not superior to those they lead. It's easy for those in leadership to think that they are above those they lead. That is not the case. In the Church there are those who do have authority, elders and deacons, and the congregation should follow their lead, but their authority does not transcend their equality with all the saints. Constable rightly says, "It would be incorrect to conclude from this teaching that Jesus discouraged all recognition of distinctions between leaders and their roles among His servants. The apostles, for example, had authority in the church that surpassed that of ordinary Christians. Elders and deacons continue to exercise divinely recognized authority in the church, and God has commanded us to respect these individuals (1 Cor. 16:15–16; Heb. 13:7, 17). What Jesus was condemning was seeking and giving honor that transcends what is appropriate since believers are all brethren, since God is our true spiritual Father, and since Jesus is our real teacher and leader. As the teachers and leaders of God's people, we must remember that we are always fellow learners with the saints. We are still children of the heavenly Father, and we are ever subject to Jesus Christ."<sup>11</sup>

In 13:9 they are told **Do not call anyone on earth your father**. Before in verse 8 it was passive, **do not be called**, which is do not love to be called. But here it is active, **do not call anyone on earth father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven**. The Jews often referred to those Rabbi's who had passed away as their spiritual fathers. By doing so they were crediting them with giving them spiritual life through their teaching. But they should not call anyone on earth their father. The reason is because they have **One Father, He who is in heaven**. The contrast is between earth and heaven. No one on earth gave them spiritual life through their teaching. Only the **Father in heaven** imparts spiritual life. Again, one must be careful not to misconstrue this teaching. This does not mean you do not refer to your earthly physical father as father. Nor does it even mean that one cannot be one's spiritual father in the sense of leading them to faith in Christ by preaching the gospel to them. Paul referred to himself as the father of the Corinthians through the gospel in 1 Cor 4:15 when he said, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." Even saying this, he is careful to say "in Christ I became your father through the gospel." The exact nuance must be caught in Christ's teaching. He is only saying that they should not use the term "father" in the way that the scribes and Pharisees did, as crediting someone on earth with giving them spiritual life. In that sense, if someone uses this to refer to someone as a spiritual superior, as in Roman Catholicism, it is a violation of this command. But other uses may be valid as long as they do not usurp the Father in heaven's work.

In 13:10, **Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, Christ**. This also is a passive command and so means "do not love to be called leaders." The word translated **leaders** is *καθηγεται* and is only used here in the NT. In extra-biblical literature it always refers to a teacher or professor. It could denote one in a priestly office who instructs. If so, it would strengthen our contention that the teacher of verse 8 is the Spirit and that the Priest in heaven who instructs through the Spirit is Christ. In any case, by now you should see clearly that the intent is to say do not usurp this role from Christ. The scribes and Pharisees had so elevated themselves in their own mind



that they had usurped the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus' new leadership, the Twelve, should not do this. Instead, what they should do is stated next.

In 13:11, **But the greatest among you shall be your servant.** True leadership is servant leadership. Earlier in Matt 20:21 Jesus said, "...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" using the word *διακονος*, one who serves periodically. Then he said, "and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" using the word *δουλος*, one who serves permanently. And then He states who will be first of all when He gives our Savior as the ultimate example; "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus Christ took the lead as the ultimate servant leader. All who would now be first among ourselves would enslave himself permanently to the service of others. And all who would be great among ourselves would enslave himself periodically to the service of others. The path to greatness is servanthood. So the next time you are complaining that you are not getting the respect or honor that is due you, remember that you are taking on the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees. Remember that you are here to serve. And remember that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are the Ones to whom all honor and glory and respect are due, not you.

In 13:12 He states the principle, **Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.** There is a road to greatness and there is a road to leastness. The road to greatness in the future is humility now. The road to leastness in the future is arrogance now. One who **exalts himself** has an overestimate of himself. That is what the scribes and Pharisees did. The disciples knew that to be true servant leaders in the coming interregnum they had to learn humility. Humility is an important concept to handle correctly. Contrary to popular thinking, it is not thinking of oneself and his abilities as less than reality. Nor is it demeaning oneself and his abilities which is usually just to get attention. True humility is having a correct estimate of oneself and his abilities, a good assessment, and it is responsibly administering those abilities within the confines of the assessment. I see leaders in my field on both sides of this equation. Some are easy to identify, they have taken on so many responsibilities that they can't keep up, they don't get back to people or they have other people write their books. I think they have an overestimate of themselves. I think they think that the world would pass away without them. Then there are those who are truly humble. They always make time for others, they do their own work and live quiet and respectful lives. I think they have a right assessment of themselves. I think they know that what you do in life is important but the world will not pass away without them. I think this is the truth.

In summary, in 23:1 Jesus had just finished His confrontations with the Herodians, the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the Temple Compound. He turned to the crowds and His disciples to warn them about the practices of the scribes and Pharisees. In 23:2 the scribes and Pharisees took it upon themselves to assume the chair of Moses and the authority that comes with that chair. They viewed themselves as the authoritative interpreters of the Law. In 23:3 He says all that they tell you, which refers to the reading of the Law of Moses in the synagogue,

this do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds, which deeds refer to their traditions. The explanation is that they say and do not do, that is, they say the Law of Moses but they do not do the Law of Moses. In 23:4 here is what they do: they tie up the heavy burdens of the traditions and lay them on men's backs, but they themselves are unwilling to help the people shoulder them. In 23:5 they do all their traditions to be seen by men. First, as to their phylacteries, the small leather boxes with four OT Scriptures within them strapped to their forehead and wrist, they broaden, meaning they make them large or they wear them all the time rather than during the appointed morning prayer. Second, as to their tassels, they lengthen them to show how pious they are. Third, in 23:6, they love the place of honor at feasts where they can oversee the whole room. Fourth, they love the chief seats in the synagogue, near the scrolls of the law. Fifth, in 23:7, they love respectful greetings in the market places, the most public of places. Sixth, they love being called Rabbi by men, they relished it. In 23:8 Jesus turns specifically to His disciples to teach them how they should lead since they will be replacing the scribes and Pharisees as the leaders of the believing remnant of Israel. Do not love to be called Rabbi, for you have One Rabbi, that is either the Spirit or Jesus and you are all brothers, you are on equal footing and not superior to your fellow believers. In 23:9, do not call anyone on earth your father because you have One Father in heaven. He is the source of life. In 23:10 do not love to be called leaders, which is another term for priestly instructors because you have One leader that is Messiah. Instead, in 23:11 this is how they should conduct their ministry as leaders, they should be servant leaders. The greatest among you shall be your servant. In 23:12 the principle is stated, the path to leastness is exalting oneself; and the path to greatness is humbling oneself. This humbling is a right assessment of one's worth and abilities and responsibly administering them.

What can we learn? First, the reason this is included is to warn against following false teachers and leaders. The crowds and the disciples had to choose who they would follow. These false teachers may quote the Bible, the scribes and Pharisees did in synagogue; if they did they should follow what the Bible teaches but what they practice they should not follow. If Jesus were here today He would tell you to attend the Church that teaches the Bible most faithfully to its original intent. If that is not an option you would go to the church that exposes you to the most Bible reading. What they read you study carefully on your own and follow, what they practice you do not do. In the end you should attend somewhere because Heb 10:25 commands it. It is not biblical to just sit at home and listen to tapes or watch videos. That is isolationism and it leads to arrogance and exclusivity and sin. Second, whatever you do it is to be seen by God and not men. The scribes and Pharisees did everything to be seen by men. The only one that matters is God. Whatever you do, do it to be seen by Him. He is the one who matters. It does not mean that you can't pray in public or you can't give with someone else knowing. What it means is that in your mind's eye you have God alone in mind. You are doing it for Him alone. Third, we should never desire honor that would usurp honor from the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. That is what the Pharisees did by loving to be called Rabbi, by loving to call other earthly men fathers and by loving to be called leaders. Fourth, we should be servant leaders. Humble service to others is the path to greatness in the kingdom. Fifth, have a right estimate of yourself. You have been given gifts, ministries and abilities. Learn what they are, their

limitations, their proper use in love and exercise them to that extent in a responsible manner. That is true humility and it leads to greatness in the kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 22:46.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Figart, *The King of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p 428.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 23:2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 170.

<sup>6</sup> J Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 392.

<sup>7</sup> John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 170-1.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 23:5.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Figart, *The King of the Kingdom of Heaven*, p 431.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 261.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 23:8.