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Cursing the False leaders!

Matthew 23:13-15

Matthew 23:13-15, *“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. ¹⁴Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. 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.*

Communism, secularism, humanism, immorality, and all that put together does not pose as great a threat to Christianity as to false spiritual leaders.

Without question, this is the most significant issue facing the church, and it always has been in God's redemptive history.

This is the reason why our Lord saves His most blistering words, His most strong condemnation for false spiritual leaders.

Why it is that the threat of false religion is so much more severe than any other threat that could possibly face Christianity in the world?

Isaiah 24:2, And it shall be: As with the people, so with the priest; As with the servant, so with his master; As with the maid, so with her mistress; As with the buyer, so with the seller; As with the lender, so with the borrower; As with the creditor, so with the debtor.

People follow their spiritual leader. However, it is with the priests, that's how it's going to be with the people.

Jeremiah 5:31, *The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?*

Give them to lying prophets, lying leaders and they will love it. God condemns the false leaders of Jeremiah's time.

Jeremiah 12:10, *“Many rulers have destroyed My vineyard, They have trodden My portion underfoot; They have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.*

They have trampled down the garden of God. People follow their leaders.

False spiritual leaders have followers. Many of their followers are those who are seeking spiritual answers. Those who are seeking religious answers.

They have been turned away from the truth to lie. A severe threat.

In this text, the Lord Jesus confronts and reveals the true nature of the false spiritual leaders of Israel, the scribes, and the Pharisees.

They were the religious leaders. Jesus attacks them head on directly beginning in verse 13.

Jesus has already warned the people about them in verses 1-12 along with warning the disciples not to be like them.

Matthew 23:1-7, Jesus said, you are to be warned about them.

Matthew 23:8 to the disciples, you are not to be like them.

You be true spiritual leaders manifesting the true attitude and the true heart of one who really serves God.

Matthew 23:13 from here He turns from the crowd which He was warning and the disciples which He was exhorting, to those false religious leaders.

Jesus is in the temple court a couple of days before His death. The crowd there swelled by the Passover season. The leaders were there, and He confronts the leaders in the face of the whole crowd so that everyone hears exactly what He calls them.

This is Jesus' last public sermon.

Jesus last public sermon dealt with the most important subject.

He calls those false spiritual leaders what they are and warns the people to stay away from them, because He knows that they must avoid the error if they are to follow the truth.

This great final sermon of Jesus is not a sermon on salvation. It is not a sermon on the power of God in the life of a believer. It is not a sermon on His resurrection. It is a sermon against false teachers.

A very important issue.

It isn't the first time He has condemned them. He condemned them quite often.

In **Matthew 7** in the first sermon on the Mount, He told the people to beware of the false prophets who come as wolves dressed like shepherds and they don't spare the flock.

- ✓ Jesus first sermon was a warning about them.

✓ Jesus last sermon is a warning about them.

We need to be reminded today that our society needs to be warned not only about communism, humanism, secularism, and immorality and all the other things that we hear so much about, but we need to warn continually about false spiritual leaders.

For some reason even evangelical Christianity seems a little bit hesitant to deal with this. More hesitant than the Lord Jesus Himself.

Who told the people that they were false because they lacked authority, integrity, sympathy, spirituality, and humility.

Now Jesus turns to them and tells them exactly what He thinks of them and what is true of them and what is about to come to pass on them.

This is a warning not only to that day and that people, but to us today, because we have false spiritual leaders just as they did.

The false spiritual leaders always been around. It seems today that they flourish in a way that's beyond anything we have ever known in the past in our society.

The further we move away from our Christian foundations, the greater the flourishing of false religious systems becomes.

Paul said, "night and day for the space of three years, I cease not to warn you." He said that to the Ephesian elders.

He was warning them about grievous wolves who would enter in not sparing the flock and perverse men from among you rising as false spiritual leaders.

The Lord in the last sermon then is calling the people away from the scribes and Pharisees and to those who manifest the truth in life and message.

His own apostles being obviously the object He wanted to draw His people to.

Jesus knew He was going away, and He wanted to be sure these people moved away from the influence of these evil men to hear the message of His apostles.

We must be warned today that we must follow true spiritual leaders who seek not to be served, but to serve.

- Who seeks not to fleece the flock but feed the flock.
- Who seeks not the highest honours, but no honour.
- Who does not scatter the flock but gather the flock.

Who like David know that it is the goodness of God that has made them great. Like Jesus "do not break a bruised reed and do not quench smoking flax."

We must follow true spiritual leaders who know that the sheep are God's not their own for their own purposes and their own ends.

Jesus having warned the people, He turns to these leaders and from **verse 13-33 He gives them Eight woes.**

It is an unbelievable passage.

If we could only have reconstructed on our mind the drama of the moment, because this in front of the whole crowd at the Passover season is an absolute devastation and condemnation of all the religious leaders to their faces in front of the whole crowd.

This kind of confrontation seems to be foreign to us today. We seem to be resistant to that.

It appears if you speak against any false system, or any false religious leader or spiritual leader, people pounce on you as if you don't know the meaning of graciousness, love, and kindness and all of that. But that is a very warped perspective.

This text ought to show you why it is so.

This is the Lord Jesus.

Liberal theologians have decided that He wouldn't say these things, so they would just eliminate them.

The Jesus that they liked wouldn't say this. They simply say it isn't so. He didn't say it, but He did.

Out of His mouth comes the most fearful, the most terrible profusion of words that He ever uttered on this earth.

They fly from His lips like claps of thunder and spears of lightning. The rejection of Him by these leaders with their hearts that has led astray the people is cause for divine judgment, and this is it. Pronounced upon them.

It's a serious passage.

Seriousness can be seen, the tone of it can be revealed by the terms that He uses.

Verse 13, hypocrites.

Verse 14, hypocrites.

Verse 15, hypocrites.

Verse 15, He calls them children of hell.

Verse 17, fools and blind.

Verse 23, hypocrites.

Verse 25, hypocrites.

Verse 27, hypocrites.

Verse 29, hypocrites.

Verse 33, snakes and vipers set for the damnation of hell.

Very strong language.

Jesus is definitely not tickling their ears.

Jesus is not saying what they wish to hear. He says it with a deadly calm and a crushing power.

Yet there is mingled in it a certain sense of sorrow. It is not just a scathing rebuke of judgment apart from any emotion. It is filled with a certain melancholy.

A certain pathos that ultimately breaks forth in **V 37** as Jesus says, *“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!”*

There is pathos in that.

Luke tells us that on the day in which He rode into the city and knew of its coming judgment, when He came near, He beheld the city it says and He wept over it.

So, there was pain involved with this judgment. It is just a passionate cry, it is a very passionate, sorrowful cry.

We must see a balance.

- We see on the one hand the fiery righteousness of God.

- We see on the other hand, the sympathetic love as He sees the curse coming.

He knows it's inevitable, gives it as it must come and yet His heart is aching because of the doom of the people.

There are two key words that will help you with this section.

The word **woe**, which appears eight times and identifies each of the distinctive thoughts.

The word woe in the Greek is **Ouai**, which sounds more like a painful guttural cry. It is a word that just utters similar to the Hebrew word to howl, which is the word hoi.

It's a word used, for example, in Septuagint to express grief, despair, sorrow, dissatisfaction, pain, and the threat of losing your life. It's used in the New Testament to speak of sorrow, to speak of judgment. It's the mingling of punishment and pity, cursing and compassion.

We could almost translate with the word **alas!**

We found in **Revelation 18** talking about Babylon.

To say inevitable judgment is coming, but oh how sad is that inevitable judgment. Judgment then is mingled with pity in the word woe.

Another word that dominates the text is **hypocrite**.

The Greek word *hypokrites* a term which mean actor. Someone who played a part on a stage. Someone who pretended to be something he wasn't.

One who pretends in an evil sense, who acts evilly.

To describe someone who manifests theatrical goodness who parades an outward goodness but inwardly is evil. Who wants people to see him give.

It is the man who is the deceiver, the actor who plays outwardly as if he is pious and inwardly is not.

So here you have a rather pitiful pronouncement of doom on spiritual phonies who masquerade as if they are spiritual leaders when they are not at all spiritual leaders.

When Jesus says woe, woe, woe all these times, this is not a wish, this is the statement of a fact.

His condemnations here are factual, not wishful.

It isn't like people today might say well damn you which seems to be a rather popular phrase. It is not just a wish that you be damned, it is a fact. It is a statement of absolute fact.

Divine judgment is set in motion when Jesus says you are cursed. This is not a wish, that's a fact.

This is indeed a curse that worked its way out in reality and the death and eternal damnation of these false religious leaders.

False spiritual leaders are condemned by God in the same way, and we need to deal with them in the same way. We need to be warned about them in the same way with the same kind of strong language and the same kind of confrontive that Jesus confronted them and warned the people, so do we need to confront them and warn the people today.

1. Cursed for keeping people out.

They are cursed for exclusion.

They keep people out of the kingdom.

That is a definition of false religion.

That is a definition of false spiritual leadership.

It does not help anybody. We can't say oh they are nice people and they are doing what they think is best. They are helping some people over their trouble. They are giving them some moral standards to live by and so on.

False spiritual leaders keep people out of God's kingdom. Very strong.

V 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.*

Names them hypocrites.

He starts out by telling them they keep people out of God's kingdom.

Of course, they believe that they were the ones who operated the door.

They believed they were the ones who let people in.

They believed they had the keys to the kingdom.

They knew the way in.

He says, you keep people out.

It is very much like the words of the apostle Paul in Romans condemning the Jews.

Romans 2:17-24, *Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.²¹ You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a*

man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law? ²⁴For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.

They lived under the idea that they could let people into the kingdom.

- They knew the truth,
- They knew the law,
- They knew the entrance,
- They were the light in the darkness,
- They were the guides of the blind.
- They had it all and the truth was they kept people out.
- They never let them in.

Now the kingdom here, "you shut up the kingdom of heaven?" The kingdom of heaven is this sphere of salvation. The place where God rules and God rules His redeemed. God rules those who belong to Him, who enter by grace through faith.

They shut up salvation. They keep people from getting saved.

V 13, "against men."

It is very vivid because it's literally before men.

So that it says you shut the doors of the kingdom of heaven before men.

The picture is that men are moving in that direction and right in their faces you slam the door, very vivid.

Also, it is supported by the fact that the end of the verse says neither permits them that are answering to go in or that are endeavoring or continuing to enter.

The idea is here are people going that way, entering in, even continuing to enter in, and right before them, you shut the door.

These people aren't running away.

These are people coming in that direction.

To put it in its historical context, Jesus came into the world to announce the kingdom and to bring the kingdom. to bring salvation.

But before Jesus came, He had a forerunner whose name was John the Baptist. John came to prepare the way of the Lord.

John the Baptist's message was repent.

Turn from your sin for the kingdom is at hand. The king is coming. Get ready for the kingdom. All Israel went out to the Jordan River, and they were there being baptized. They were

there confessing their sins. They were there getting their hearts ready for the Messiah.

Mass of people in Israel were moving toward the kingdom. They were starting to make steps toward the kingdom.

Repenting of their sin and trying to get their lives right and listening to the preaching of this prophet who confronted their evil lives and called them to obedience.

Matthew 3:5-8, *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,*

Very confrontive preaching.

But He knew why they were there.

Here were all these people getting ready to move toward the kingdom. The very people who would slam the door in their face. The false religious leaders. So, the picture is one of movement of flow toward the kingdom and these people slammed the door in their faces.

This is the pursuit of the person who is looking for religious answers, searching for God, searching for some spiritual reality. They shut up the kingdom.

How would they do that?

- By denying the word of God,
- Misinterpreting the word of God,
- Denying that Jesus was the Messiah.
- Denying His deity.
- Denying salvation by grace.
- Denying the need for repentance.

They shut it in the faces of the people with a works righteousness system that had no place for Jesus Christ.

The false spiritual leaders' damn people's souls to hell.

We don't deal with this lightly. Very severe.

The only battle that I see that must be fought is the battle for the clear and popular articulation of the truth as over against the error that's out there.

The human cry of my heart is to get men of God and the people of God to know what they believe and articulate it loudly, clearly, confront error with boldness, and courage.

This is what we need.

This is what the church needs.

The church needs to know the word of God and it needs to take its stand on the truth against false religious leaders. They damn men's souls.

Paul writes to Timothy and says they propagate damnable heresies and doctrines of demons.

Luke 11:52, *“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”*

False religious leaders keep people from being saved. That's what Jesus said. We can't treat that lightly.

We can't treat each other with some kind of indifference. We can't say well, we don't want to say anything. We want to express love. We want to be kind. That's what the liberals condemned Jesus for doing.

If Jesus did it, we have a mandate from Him to act as He acted.

Matthew 16 where Jesus says to Peter, "I give you the keys to the kingdom."

The true teaches, Peter, the apostles, and all who follow in their doctrine, we have the keys. We open the door and let

people in. These people shut the door in their faces by their lies and false religion.

Doesn't it bother you that you never give people the saving gospel of Jesus Christ that can save them from eternal hell?

Men's souls are at stake and these people work for hell, the scribes and the Pharisees did. This is no small issue.

Let us look at how you can characterize them.

John 9th chapter.

Familiar account of a blind man who was born blind for the glory of God's sake. This blind man was healed by Jesus in a wonderful expression of divine power and compassion.

Having been healed by Jesus he then became a very interesting topic of discussion for the religious leaders who needed some way to explain how this person was healed.

The religious leaders called the parents, and they didn't want to get in trouble, so they said ask him. He is a big man.

John 9:20-23, *His parents answered them and said, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹but by what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself."* ²²*His parents said these things because they feared*

the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

Because they feared the Jews. They were afraid. They knew the Jewish leaders hated Jesus.

It doesn't matter who it was. If somebody shows up and says they believe in the Messiah, throw them out.

John 9:24, *So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."*

They called Jesus a sinner.

John 9:34, *They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out.*

You are born in sin.

The implication of that is that we weren't.

Are you teaching us and they threw him out.

They don't want to be confused by the facts.

They are in the business of sending people to hell.

They are in the business of damning the souls of people and they will damn their souls by a denial of the Messiahship of

Christ, the deity of Christ, the power of Christ, the work of Christ, the gospel of grace.

Whatever it takes to damn men's souls, that's what they want to do.

When the early church began to move with power and healing and preaching the gospel, the Sanhedrin got together, and they had to stop the message. They said what are we going to do with these men.

Acts 4:16-18, *saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." ¹⁸So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.*

They didn't want anything to do with Jesus. They just slammed the door.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16, *For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, ¹⁵who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to*

all men, ¹⁶forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

The churches of God in Judea are in Christ Jesus and have suffered from their own countrymen and so forth, even the Jews.

The Scripture says they did.

This was their pattern all along, they killed their prophets. They didn't want to hear the truth.

They are not helping people.

They are not helping people at all.

They forbid us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved.

They are trying to keep people from getting saved is what they are doing.

When you look at the cults, that's what they are trying to do.

Works righteousness systems, false religious systems spawned by false religious leaders always will be the strongest opponents of the gospel of grace.

We have them today in absolutely every place. They are everywhere.

Damning teachers and they come in Protestantism. They come in liberal Protestantism as much as they come in Roman Catholicism or Mormonism or Christian science or Jehovah's Witnessess or World Wide Church of God or Unification Church or Unity or Unitarianism or whatever religion, false religion in the world. We can't be tolerant of those things that damn men's souls.

2. Cursed for cheating Widows.

V 14, *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.*

The older manuscripts of the New Testament do not include verse 14, which is to say that if in the early manuscripts you don't have this verse and it shows up in the later manuscripts, it's usually evidence that it was added later.

What is said in verse 14 is true about the Pharisees and scribes.

The same verse mentioned in both in the gospel of **Mark and Luke**.

Mark 12:40, *who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."*

Luke 20:47, *who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."*

"They devour widows' houses"

Just awful.

They were supposed to be shepherds of the sheep, and if there's anybody that needs to be protected, it would be widows.

James 1:27, *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

An Old Testament command reiterated repeatedly.

We could take around 25 or 30 Old Testament passages, starting in Exodus 22 and moving right on through Deuteronomy, all the way to Malachi chapter 3. The Old Testament has so much to say about the people of God having responsibility to those who are widows in their midst, to care for them.

Exodus 22:22, *"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.*

Deuteronomy 10:18, *He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.*

Malachi 3:5, *And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien— Because they do not fear Me,” Says the Lord of hosts.*

Scriptures call upon the people of God to care for widows.
God cares for widows.

These scribes devour them.

How do they do that?

They were the lawyers of the system.

So, when a widow needed someone to protect her, she would turn to the lawyer with the idea that he would protect her home, her property, all those things.

Some interesting study has been done on the kind of behavior that was going on.

First, they would take support, money for themselves, from widows although it was forbidden. Knowledge without price. That was the code of a true rabbi, certainly with regard to widows.

They would disobey that and whatever wisdom they would give to widows, they would charge them and do so exorbitantly.

What could a widow do?

Secondly, they would cheat widows of their estate by getting into the legal machinations under the guise that they would provide legal protection. They would literally begin to eat away the estate of that widow.

Thirdly, they would leach on and abuse hospitality. Take advantage of available room, board, and food. There are some stories about gluttony and excessive drinking, taking that from poor widows.

Another way, by mismanaging the property of widows, so that out of complete carelessness a widow was absolutely made destitute. One of the popular ones was to take money from older widows with deficient mental powers, take advantage of those who were unable to defend themselves mentally.

The worst, they would accumulate debts the widow would owe them and be unable to pay. So, they would take the widow's home as pledge for the debt, and thus devour the house. When the widow couldn't pay, they threw her out.

That is why they are characterized in the words of Jesus.

Luke 11:39, *Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.*

Luke 16:14, *Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him.*

Proud and greedy. That characterized them. That's typical of false teachers.

They do what they do for filthy lucre.

They elevate themselves.

They put on a facade of spirituality.

They milk the most helpless defenseless people.

Now there are lawyers who do that. Thank the Lord for Christian lawyers and lawyers with integrity who don't do that. But there are lawyers who do that.

There are evangelists that do that, false evangelists, false religious teachers take money out of people's pockets.

False religions prey on people in third world countries who are already impoverished to start with. As the health, wealth, prosperity purveyors have now gone to Africa with great success.

We have got a population of people who are hopelessly poor, who can't see any kind of a future, who live on a meager amount of money, who are in a sense defenseless, living on the edge of hopelessness, you promise them health, wealth and prosperity. This is so successful.

What do these men do?

They consumed them.

Literally to eat them up.

How did they do that?

A little bit of historical study will provide an answer that there are records about how they did it.

These false leaders would take support, ask money from widows for themselves though that was forbidden. They would cheat widows out of their estate, while they were offering them legal protection.

Their whole system was built on the fact you had to bring your money to the temple. There were **13 receptacles** in the Court of the Women where you dropped your money.

That is how you purchase your salvation.

The rabbi said with alms you purchase your redemption.

The money went in there, it came out the bottom into the pockets of these religious leaders. The more money that was given and the money needed to be given, because that's how

you bought your salvation. People were literally pouring money into those receptacles to buy redemption.

That is why when our Lord came in, He said, “This is My Father’s house, a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of robbers.”

How many false evangelists are doing the very same thing today?

Fleeing widows with promises of health, healing, and prosperity.

Asking people to send their money to them and God will pour out blessing to you. Taking advantage of the weak, the desperate, the despairing, the lonely, and the hopeless. While they are such wretched thieves.

They are hypocrites.

They may do it in different ways, but they are hypocrites.

They are destructive.

Our Lord cautions and characterizes.

Then He condemns.

V14, “These will receive greater condemnation.”

There are people who think that if you are religious, you will receive less condemnation.

I think hell will be the hottest for religious people, especially religious false teachers, agents of Satan, who, sons of hell themselves, produce more sons of hell.

They will receive greater condemnation, not lesser condemnation. Not because they were good, or moral, or religious, will they receive less judgment they will receive more judgment.

If you have the idea today that there is good in all religions, and God loves all religions, and we need to find God in all religions, and find the good that is there.

Jesus pronounces a greater condemnation on the religious leaders of Israel who are monotheists, who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the creator God of the Old Testament.

But because they had apostatized from the true religion and come to a self-righteous works system. Because they had rejected Him and the gospel, their hell would be hotter than everybody else.

Hebrews 10:29, *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which*

he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

That's the greatest of all judgment, to reject Christ.
Better you never know Him, hell will be less furious.

Those who are in the wrong religion will receive the far-greater suffering, the far-greater damnation, because of that false religion, they reject the true gospel.

Don't be fooled by them,
Don't be drawn to them,
Be warned!

They are dangerous, and they will be condemned.

3. Cursed for corrupting people.

V 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.*

The false spiritual leaders' corrupt people who come into their religion.

They not only keep them out of the true religion, but they corrupt them in the false religion. It's just two sides of the same thing really.

They pursue converts and make them perverts.

You not only shut him out of the true kingdom, but you turn him into a child of hell.

During the life of our Lord according to Jewish history there was a great effort being made to proselytize Gentiles, that is to bring them in. The word proselyte comes originally from the term, it means a stranger. To take these strangers and bring them in.

It's used only here and three times in the book of Acts. It has to do with converting them to Judaism.

Apparently proselytizing was aggressively being done around the time of our Lord and that's as it should be historically. In the Old Testament, God mandated Israel to go out and reach people. Israel wasn't to be anything more than a channel to reach the world. God revealed Himself through Israel to the world, not just to Israel.

The reluctance of Jonah shows us that clearly. When the Gentile city of Nineveh repented, he wanted to do because he couldn't stand Gentiles getting in on the covenant.

So, they had become very preventive in their thinking. But during the time of our Lord, it seemed as though there was a little bit more aggression in that area.

They were reaching out and trying to bring converts in. We know historically that many of the synagogues were attended by pagans who had turned from their pagan worship and were now coming to the true God and they were going to the synagogues. They were converts to Judaism.

The Lord looks at these Pharisees and scribes and says you are busy at this.

You are compassing sea and land.

You are going everywhere.

You are just surrounding the whole part of the world you live for one convert, for one proselyte, which is to say they were busy trying to add to their numbers.

When you are in a false system it helps if other people join. It sort of gives you a feeling that you must be right, because look at the people that are joining.

People flourish sometimes in cults for no other reason than they think it must be right because of all the people who are in it. The Pharisees in order to sort of stoke the fires of their own doubt turn it into some kind of confidence, were adding people to their movement.

Two things about the proselyte.

One is there was what was called **the proselyte of the gate to the proselyte of righteousness.**

Now the proselyte of the gate was a Gentile who just attended the synagogue. He just barely got in the gate. That's the way they referred to him. He just came into the gate. He stopped worshipping his pagan deities. He started worshipping the true God. He showed up at the synagogue.

He is called two things in the book of Acts.

He is called in some places in the book of Acts a worshiper of God.

Acts 16:14, *Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*

Acts 18:7, *And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.*

He is also called just plain worshiper.

Acts 13:50, *But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.*

Acts 17:4, *And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.*

Acts 17:17, *Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.*

The true God as opposed to his pagan idols. But he never got into the full-blown swing of things.

He was not a proselyte any more than just inside the gate. So, he became known as a proselyte of the gate.

The other proselyte was **the proselyte of righteousness**.

This was the guy who took the whole thing hook, line, and sinker. He bought it all. He became self-righteous, legalistic, tradition keeping, law keeping, and circumcised proselyte. This is what the Pharisees were after.

Now there were many who became proselytes of the gate.

Very few became proselytes of righteousness.

That is why it says you zealously go everywhere you can go making a great effort to get one convert to Pharisaism.

To get one proselyte of righteousness.

To get one guy who joins your movement.

When a person came all the way to that proselyte of righteousness then they even gave him a new Jewish name to cut off everything from his past.

It was the whole thing, circumcision, purification, full ceremony, adherence to the mosaic tradition law and all that.

It was not very usual that it happened, but now and then it did and so you go to all that effort just to get one in your movement.

What happens when that one comes?

You have made him two times more a child of hell than yourselves.

Have you ever noticed that a convert to a cult is more zealous and aggressive for the cult than somebody raised in it?

Very routine.

Almost true of anything. Can be said of Christianity. Very frequently people saved out of the world and brought into Christ from an ungodly, un-Christlike background are more zealous for their newfound faith than people that are raised up in it.

The euphoria of coming into the movement that gives you a great amount of zeal.

Here this new convert is filled with more fanatical zeal for his newfound system than even the ones that brought him in. Naturally there is an excitement about having discovered what he thinks is the truth and the newness and he's not been in long enough to find out all the problems with it.

He becomes a double son of hell in the sense that he is perverted even beyond his teachers. More zealous even than they are.

So they make a spiritual convert who turns out to be perverted instead of finding God, instead of finding heaven, he becomes a son of hell.

Twice as hypocritical.

Twice as damnable.

When false religions convert people, they are making them double children of hell.

What does it mean to be a child of hell?

It refers to character and deeds which mark one out as belonging to hell.

A hellish person, one who ought to go there because that's his character. A double child of hell would be doubly worthy of hell. Doubly worthy of damnation, very strong language.

What is the word hell?

The Greek word is Gehenna.

Gehenna's is a shortened form of Gebenhenna. But it comes from a term having to do with a valley.

There was a valley near Jerusalem called the valley of Hinnom. In that valley in the Old Testament time the worshipers of the god Molech burned their children alive.

Part of the sacrificial system of the worship of Molech was to burn children.

2 Chronicles 28:3, *He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.*

Jeremiah 7:31, *And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.*

The offering of children to the god Molech in the fire.

That valley then became identified with the worst kind of paganism, with the burning of human flesh of infants.

Later king Josiah declared it unclean.

2 Kings 23:10, *And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.*

It became a dump.

All the garbage, refuse, trash, and filth of the city would go into that place, and it would be constantly burning.

The valley of Hinnom, Gehenna became the symbol of eternal burning where the flesh of children had burned that was desecrated by idol worship, the city dump, the place of constant fire. It became synonymous as it were with what hell is like as a place of continual burning of those who are desecrated, the waste of humanity, the God and Christ rejecters.

Jesus says when you make one of your perverts, you make him twice the son of Gehenna. Twice a hellish person than you yourselves are.

The comparative does speak of degrees of hellishness and degrees of the manifestation of hellish character as well as degrees of the manifestation of a hellish punishment.

People searching for religion, searching for God, searching for answers in life, the kingdom is shut to them, and they are herded in to a damning system.

I trust you have the right perspective on these systems and these leaders who keep people out of heaven on the one hand and usher them into hell on the other hand.

To stand before God having done that is inconceivable to feel the wrath of His fury.

Conclusion:

If you are a Christian, you ought to be thankful that somewhere along the way in your life you met somebody who was a door opener and not a door closer!

Because you are not where you are because of anything you deserve or anything you merit. You are where you are because of the grace of God and so am I and I can tell you right now, I thank God that I was raised in a Christian home with Christian parents who taught me the truth.

I have sat under men of God who taught me the truth and that I have not had the kingdom door slammed in my face and been ushered into hell by some false religious leader.

All of us ought to have that perspective.

Sometimes when you get a little uptight about the church because you didn't get the seat you wanted at the banquet, or you couldn't find a place, or you don't like wallpaper or the men's room or whatever.

Get things from the right perspective, will you?

The one thing you can bless the name of God for is that at this place you are hearing the truth, and you have heard the saving truth.

It may have been not here, but somewhere else that someone gave you the saving truth. You have a tremendous responsibility to offer your praise and thanks to God for the place you are where the truth is preached and taught and lived and believed.

If you are a Christian, you are a kingdom door opener.

Do you understand that?

You have got to be out there calling people away from the closed doors to the open one.

We have the keys to the kingdom.

We know how people are to come in.

We understand the truth of the gospel.

It is our tremendous responsibility to open that door to people and to call them out of those damning systems.

Don't be complacent around the false system. Call it what it is.