



World Christian Fellowship

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Marks of a False leaders

Matthew 23:1-4

Mark 12:38-40 & Luke 20:45-47

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

There have always been and will be false spiritual leaders who pretend to represent God but in fact do not represent God in this world.

The Old Testament identifies them and warns people to stay away from them.

The New Testament does the same.

Moses was in conflict with them in Egypt.

Jeremiah was fighting with them in Judah.

Ezekiel faced them and called them foolish prophets that followed their own spirit and saw nothing.

Our Lord warned of them as false Christs and false prophets who shall show great signs and wonders.

The **apostle Paul** struggled against them as preachers of another gospel in Galatians chapter 1.

Paul mentions them as purveyors of the doctrine of demons in his writing to Timothy.

Peter said they were false preachers who secretly bring in damnable heresies, and they are like dogs who return to lick up their own vomit.

John the apostle, saw a coming antichrist and many antichrists already present who denied Jesus as the true Christ.

Jude saw them and called them deluded dreamers who defile the flesh.

Paul may have summed it up well when he said they are wolves whose desire is to enter in, not sparing the flock.

They are always present and always eager to counterfeit the work of God.

In the second coming of Jesus Christ, as the great event unfolds, we see the false prophets amass and congregate

that's portrayed for us in those apocalyptic visions of Scripture that look to that future time.

If there is a time equal to that time for the working of false prophets, it must have been in Palestine during the time of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In His first coming, all hell amassed its forces for a three-year assault on Him and His truth. Therefore, false spiritual leaders take a very high profile and visibility in the gospel record.

Matthew 23 we hear the Lord Jesus Christ confront them with a denunciation that blisters and burns as it comes from His lips.

The scathing rebuke of false prophets, and only in the last three verses of the chapter are there words of tenderness and words of pity.

Matthew 23 can be divided as three sections.

Matthew 23:1-12 spoken to the crowd and the disciples.

Matthew 23:13-36 spoken to the Pharisees themselves.

Matthew 23:37-39 tender compassion over the plight of the lost of Israel.

V 1, Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,

The word “then” just hooks us up with the past.

We know we are on the same day.

It is Monday still, a very long day.

Monday that began in the morning with the Lord coming into the city from Bethany where He had spent the night near or with Lazarus and Mary and Martha.

Along the way, they had passed the cursed fig tree, and He taught His disciples a lesson.

Then coming to the temple, which He had cleansed the day before He began to teach.

As He was teaching the massive multitudes collected for the Passover. He was stopped by the religious leaders, and they began this dialogue, which has gone on now for several chapters.

The religious leaders wanted to know by what authority He did and spoke.

Jesus didn't give them that authority at first but rather gave them three parables, which condemned them and told them

they would be shut out of the Kingdom of God and replaced by others.

They then counter those parables of condemnation with three questions meant to discredit Him.

Each of which Jesus answered in such a way as to discredit them.

Jesus finally asked them a question about the Messiah, which proved beyond shadow of a doubt that the Messiah was both man and God.

At this point they stopped asking anything at all.

The dialogue has ended.

Matthew 23, the Lord gives His last sermon to the people of Israel. This is it.

Jesus ministry to them is over.

This is the last public speech.

This is a denunciation of these false religious leaders and a warning for the people to stay away from them.

It is a very serious presentation but a very necessary one.

They are false shepherds.

They are wolves in sheep's clothing.

They damn people.

They must be avoided.

Our Lord pulls no punches in making that abundantly clear.

This isn't the first time that He has denounced them.

A few months before, as recorded in **Luke 11**, He had said some very similar things to what He says now.

So, Jesus has already confronted them and called them what they truly were, but now he warns the people particularly to stay away from them because they damn men's souls.

The Lord knows that He is about to **die on Wednesday**, and soon after that He will ascend to heaven and the work will be left with His disciples.

It is essential that the people be warned to stay away from the false religious leaders and to turn toward the true spiritual leaders.

Jesus knows that the true spiritual leaders will be His disciples who, after His ascent to heaven, will be filled with the Spirit of God and will go everywhere preaching the gospel.

Jesus wants the people to be ready to listen to them.

Jesus warns the people about the false spiritual leaders so that their hearts will be open to the true ones.

Jesus is setting us His disciples for their ministry.

In verses 8 to 12, He calls His disciples to be distinctly different than these false spiritual leaders.

This isn't just a denunciation of the leaders, or a warning of the people, it is both of those with a purpose, that the people might listen to those who are true spiritual leaders, who manifest in fact the very opposite kind of characteristics to the ones that He will denounce in the false leaders.

Jesus succeeded in calling the people away from them to some degree and to His disciples because you will remember the very first day they preached on the day of Pentecost, three thousand people believed and were baptized. **Acts 2.**

In the book of Acts we see even greater things occurring, thousands more coming to embrace the Saviour.

Acts 4, there are as many as twenty thousand who have heard and believed in apostolic preaching.

Acts 5:28, *saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"*

The Lord paved the way here for the true spiritual leaders, His own disciples, to do their work and call the people away from the damning doctrines of the false leaders.

V 1, *Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples,*

This doesn't mean that the scribes and Pharisees didn't hear because they did. The religious leaders were all gathered.

They were there because they had been there for the whole questioning process. They heard, but the message was directed to the multitude and the disciples.

Primarily the disciples are in view in verses 8 to 12, but they heard.

V 13, when He directs His words eyeball-to-eyeball to these false leaders, the rest of the crowd heard as well.

So, they are denounced publicly in the presence of the multitude and in their own presence also.

This is an electrifying scene.

Again, it helps us understand why they had to get rid of Jesus, why they had to have Him killed by the Romans, especially after such a blistering public denunciation, which threatened their own credibility and career.

V 2, saying: *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.*

Religious leaders are the subject of these first remarks.

Not all the scribes were equally deserving of this rebuke, there may have been some scribes that had some integrity.

Not all the Pharisees were, either there must have been some of them that had an honest heart toward God like Paul the apostle who was a Pharisee and who had some genuineness and did what he did ignorantly in unbelief.

But for the most part, they are generally characterized by the words of our Lord. There were some exceptions.

There were various sects in Judaism, but the dominant sect was the **Pharisees**. They were the religious spiritual leaders.

The **Sadducees** were primarily into politics and in amassing fortunes. They weren’t really involved in the theology and the spiritual leadership, though they had some positions of authority in the hierarchy of the temple. Theirs was pretty much a political and economic operation.

There were the **zealots** who also were political nationalists.

There were the **Essenes** who were monastics, and they never really had an impact on society because they utterly separated from society.

There were the **Herodians**, and they were a political party that was pro the Herod's.

That leaves the bulk of spiritual leadership to this group called the Pharisees, of which some say there were no more than **6000**, but highly influential.

Pharisees were the ones committed to the law.

586 BC when Judah was taken into captivity to Babylon. They were there for seventy years. They came back from Babylon and started to reestablish life in the land.

Nehemiah and Ezra brought the Scriptures to the people again, and the Scriptures were discovered. In **Nehemiah 8**, there was a standing and a reading of the Scripture.

After all these years of not having that, and the people all stood up and heard the reading and they swore to obey the Scripture, and they swore to be committed to God's authority and God's Word.

The law was put back in the center of their life.

The law was put back in clear focus for them.

They were committed to it.

A group of people then became committed to studying and teaching the Scriptures. Out of this group grew this Pharisaic mentality where the Scripture was everything.

From **Nehemiah chapter 8**, until the time of our Lord, these people had studied the law and interpreted the law to the point where there were more than **50 volumes** of their commentary on the law.

They had added all kinds of things, ceremonies, rituals, regulations, ad infinitum, ad nauseam, myriads of them, and they had enjoined them on people. For them, life was all about the law.

Not all Pharisees were scribes, but within the group of Pharisees were a group of scribes who were among the Pharisees the experts in the law.

All the Pharisees were committed to law keeping, but the scribes were the experts. They were the ones who cared for the law, they were the ones who dispensed the law.

The old Jewish saying was that God gave the law to Moses.

Moses gave the law to Joshua.

Joshua gave the law to the elders.

The elders gave the law to the prophets.

The prophets gave the law to the men of the synagogues.

The men of the synagogues were the scribes who were a part of the Pharisaic whose job it was to interpret and bind the law to the hearts of the people and that was their task.

So, they were the spiritual leaders.

They had the law.

It wasn't just the law of God, it was the law of God and all the rest of that stuff, and they bound it on the people.

There were seven kinds of Pharisees, and he described them with these terms.

1. The shoulder Pharisee.

Because they wore his good deeds on his shoulder. He paraded the good that he did. When he prayed, he would put something ashes on his head and he would look sad so everyone would know how pious and spiritual he was. He was the shoulder Pharisee.

2. The lingering Pharisee.

This was the Pharisee who could always come up with a spiritual reason to put off doing something good. He always had excuses, but they sounded very pious.

3. Bending Pharisee.

They thought it was a sin to look at a woman, and so whenever women were around, he bent over and closed his eyes, and he kept running into walls. According to the Pharisees, the more bruises you had from walls, the more holy you were.

4. Humpback Pharisee.

Pharisee was called that because he wanted to demonstrate his humility.

So, they would slouch way over and bent his back and walked around all day in that humble position and thought it was wrong to lift his feet, so he shuffled his feet, and he kept tripping on things and tumbling, and he was called the humpback-tumbling Pharisee.

5. Calculating Pharisee.

He was the Pharisee who kept count of all of his good deeds so he does know what God owed him in terms of blessing.

6. The fearing Pharisee.

All they did all that stuff because he was scared to death of going to hell.

7. The God-fearing Pharisee.

He did because he thought it was right to do it, and he had integrity to some extent. He was the one out of the seven who was a good person.

This category was done by William Barclay.

To this group to whom our Lord speaks in this chapter and of whom he warns.

There are five elements that false spiritual leaders lack according to our Lord gives them here.

They lack

- 1. Authority,**
- 2. Integrity,**
- 3. Sympathy,**
- 4. Spirituality, and**
- 5. Humility.**

Those are things where true spiritual leaders possess authority, integrity, sympathy, spirituality, and humility.

A study in contrast.

This is a historic description of false spiritual leaders in that time and that place, but you can take the principles right out of here and apply them today as if our Lord was standing here and saying it in relation to our time.

They are truly the marks of false spiritual leaders.

They are important for us to know so that we can identify these people.

1. They lacked authority.

V 2, saying: *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.*

In the synagogues there was a special seat. It was called Moses’ seat. It was the chair of Moses, and in that chair, which may not have been a real chair but stood for a place of authority, was the leading teacher, the leading Pharisee, the leading scribe.

If you had the seat of Moses in your synagogue, you were the chief teacher, you represented the authority.

In fact, the word “seat” is the word ***kathedra***, from which we get “cathedral.”

The Latins took that Greek word ***kathedra*** and made a phrase out of it, ex cathedra - out of the place of authority. They said in the Roman Catholic system that when the pope speaks, he speaks ex cathedra. It is then binding on the conscience.

It is binding on life because it’s out of the throne of authority or out of the seat of authority.

kathedra has to do with the seat, Moses has to do with the law, and so they spoke as the law authority.

They were the authorities.

Like our modern universities have a chair of philosophy or a chair of history or a chair of whatever, so the synagogue had a chair of Moses, a seat of Moses, a place of authority.

A person occupying that seat would have great weight and great authority.

However, there is nothing in this verse to indicate that they had a right to sit there, that they had a right to preach about what the people should do, that they had a right to represent God in that place or the law of Moses.

There is nothing to say they had earned it, that it had been given them by God, that they were qualified to take it.

All it says is they sat in it. They took it.

In fact, they did everything they could to try to keep Jesus from taking it from them, and when He did go into their synagogue and teach, they were infuriated, just as they were when Paul did that.

John 16 says the day is going to come when men think they do God service by killing you. They are going to throw you out of their synagogues because a truth teacher who has real authority is always a threat to someone who is a usurper.

These supplanters had gone in and occupied the chair of authority when in fact they did not delineate the divine authority but gave their own tradition and their own ritual and their own routines that they themselves through the centuries had invented and did all they could to keep others out.

They are parallel to some men identified in the time of **Jeremiah**.

Jeremiah faced the same kind of situation. Jeremiah was a true prophet. He was really a lonely prophet. He was crying out one message when all the other prophets were crying out a lie. He was telling the truth, and all these other prophets were lying.

They were all saying it will all be well. Everything is fine. Jeremiah was saying, "It isn't," and the people would go to the teachers that said what they wanted to hear.

Jeremiah 14:14, *And the Lord said to me, "The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.*

He goes on to describe what He's going to do. He sent them not.

Jeremiah 23:21, *"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran.*

I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.

Jeremiah 23:32, *Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the Lord, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the Lord.*

Jeremiah 27:15, *for I have not sent them," says the Lord, "yet they prophesy a lie in My name, that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you."*

Read **Jeremiah chapter 28 and 29**.

Isaiah 30:10, *Who say to the seers, "Do not see," And to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits.*

Don't tell us the truth.

We don't want to hear what God wants us to know. That's an amazing thing.

One of the reasons people go into untrue religions, go into false religions is because they don't want to hear the truth. They don't want to hear what God really has to say.

There is always an audience for false prophets.

John 10:1-2, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*

The false religious leaders, usurpers who have no right, who have no authority, who speak not for God nor are sent by God, but they take the place of authority. They put demands on people, and they tell things in the name of God that are not the truth of God.

Usurpers quite in contrast to the ones sent by the Lord.

Like **Paul**, made a minister by the dispensation of the gospel, which is committed unto them.

Those like **Timothy** who have been called by God and set apart by the laying on of hands as confirmation.

Those like the **apostles** on whom the Lord Jesus breathed and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” and to whom He said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.”

So, the false spiritual leaders lacked authority.

They had taken self-appointed seats of authority, filled them with their own ideas, own traditions, own regulations in addition to the law of God. Obscuring the law of God, and when anyone threatens that seat of authority, they become instantly hostile to those who threaten.

It is the same today.

There are usurpers all over the place.

There are liars by the multitude, uncountable, fostering their falsehoods, their deluded dreams, making up their supposed visions, saying they represent God, speaking in His name and spewing out lies right out of hell that damn men's souls from one end of this world to the other.

There is only one authority and that is the Word of God, and when they deviate from that, they are usurpers as were these.

2. They lacked integrity.

Lacking authority, they were usurpers, they were hypocrites.

V 3, *Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.*

Jesus says all that they bid you, do it. Now, you could stop and say wait a minute, how comprehensive is the word all?

Obviously, this can't be a general comprehensive command to absolutely obey everything the Pharisees and scribes say because we have been told not to do that.

That's what this whole speech is about.

When we go back to the Sermon on the Mount from **Matthew 5:21-48**, the Lord was there saying that the rabbis and your tradition and all that says this, but I say this.

You have heard it told this, and I say this!

Jesus says that you are wrong.

- You are wrong about murder.
- You are wrong about fornication.
- You are wrong about divorce.
- You are wrong about adultery.
- You are wrong about swearing.

Matthew 6:

- Your prayers are wrong.
- Your giving is wrong.
- Your worship is wrong.
- Your fasting is wrong.

Jesus condemns so many of the things they taught in chapter 6.

Matthew 15, He indicts them for having taken the commandments of God and set them aside and in their place put the traditions of men.

Matthew 15:6, *then he need not honour his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.*

Jesus condemned much of their teaching.

He can't be giving a blanket approval, whatever they tell you to do, do it.

What is Jesus saying here?

The key to it is to understand what He said in verse 2. They sat in Moses' seat, and listen carefully, insofar as they rightly reflect Moses, you do what they say.

If they read, as they always did in the synagogue, the law, you obey it.

In condemning these leaders, there was always the potential problem that their whole message, and the people would therefore throw the whole thing.

The message from God is still the message from God, even in the mouth of a false teacher.

So it was that when the Pharisees read the Word of God, it was binding on their hearts.

When they said to love God, worship God, love your fellowman, love righteousness and hate evil, they were to do that. Insofar as Moses' law and the law of God was reflected, it was to be obeyed.

The Word of God is not corrupted, even in the mouth of a false prophet. It remains the powerful Word of God. So, if they teach what Moses taught, you must respond.

Jesus says to them observe and do.

The Greek word is **Poieō** means immediately respond, do it.

If it's out of the law of Moses, do it.

Even if it's in their mouth, do it.

Then the second Greek word is the verb **Tēreō**, which means to go on doing, present tense.

Do it and keep doing it.

Do it and keep observing it.

So, Jesus is calling them to an instant and continuous obedience to the law of God, no matter who articulates it.

The Bible and calls people to love one another, that's the Word of God. Even in the mouth of a false prophet, it's still the Word of God. Don't throw that away because you eliminated the false prophet.

Like a clock that doesn't run is still right twice a day, false prophets tend now and then to hit the truth. So as far as they

fulfill the role of representing Moses, you respond. Because the issue is the Word of God and there is no other authority.

V 3, *but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.*

If they recite Moses, do it, but don't do what they do, because they say and don't do. They are hypocrites.

Follow the Word of God, but don't do what they do because they say something and don't do it.

They are phonies without integrity.

They could teach the law of God, worship God, love righteousness, love your fellow men, hate evil, but they didn't live it.

They couldn't live it, because the flesh unredeemed has no internal ability to restrain evil and promote good.

They could be outwardly moral and ethical. They can develop very sophisticated ethics and morality.

The truth of the matter is they aren't even able to do what they were asking you to do because they have no internal power to restrain evil and promote good.

Neither does anybody else who is unredeemed because it is only in redemption that you receive a divine nature!

Only in redemption that you are a new creation.

Ephesians 2:10, *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Born again, entering into new life, which God has before ordained, should be a life which exudes good works.

Paul, in Romans 7, having been redeemed says, “In my inner man, I delight in the law of God.”

Unredeemed people, no matter what their ethics are, no matter what their morality, is cannot restrain the flesh internally and cannot promote good internally because they have an unredeemed, evil, vile, fallen, and vicious sin nature.

Hypocrisy can't restrain the flesh.

Look at false religious systems and see that they look so moral. They look so ethical.

They have all these moral codes and all this morality.

Some cases even their hair is cut in a conservative manner, and they operate their lifestyle very conservatively and they seem so nice and so warm-hearted.

The truth of the matter is on the outside they are making demands on that and even the people who are making those demands on the rest.

But there is no capacity in an unregenerate individual to either confine the flesh or promote righteousness.

Matthew 23:23, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

Why couldn't they handle the weightier matter?

Because they can't handle that.

They can count seeds, and they can push a bunch of herbs around and fool with some little plants, but they can't produce justice, and they can't produce mercy and they can't produce faith.

V 25, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.*

V 27, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful*

outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

V 33, *Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*

V 28, *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

A false spiritual leader tries his best he can outwardly to put a cap on his vice, and it just fills him on the inside. It pushes its way out somewhere. There's no power to restrain evil.

Paul, writing to Timothy, characterizing false spiritual leaders.

1 Timothy 4:2, *speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,*

These false prophets have lived this hypocrisy so long that their conscience is like scar tissue. It's formed a callousness so that they are no longer even sensitive to the hypocritical nature of their existence.

They are just liars who have lied so long, hypocrites who have lived hypocritically so long that they are desensitized to it. The truth is inside wretchedness and rottenness that they can't restrain.

In **2 Peter chapter 2**, you have a description of these false spiritual leaders in terms that are so vivid.

2 Peter 2:1, *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

V 10, *and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries,*

They are presumptuous and self-willed.

V 12, *But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,*

V 13-14, *and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you,¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.*

Even though outwardly they may restrain it, inwardly they are not.

Their hearts are exercised with covetous practice.
They are cursed children.
They have forsaken the right way.

V 17, *These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.*

They are servants of corruption.

V 19, *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.*

Jude refers to them in much the same terminology that Peter does.

He calls them deluded or filthy dreamers. They defile the flesh.

Jude 1:8, *Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries.*

V 10, *But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.*

V 12, *These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;*

These aren't just nice people who have a nice moral approach to life and just happen not to know Christ.

They are on the outside calling for a standard, which their inside can't live up to.

- They say it, they don't do it.
- They can't do it.

Vice is not restrained nor is righteousness promoted in an unregenerate fallen heart.

Look at any of the religious systems that you see around the world that are false systems that don't adhere to the gospel of Jesus Christ and add to the holy Scriptures. We will find people advocating ethical standards and advocating moral standards and binding those standards on people. The truth is in their own hearts, they are filled with garbage that they can't restrain.

There is an utter absence of true righteousness.

The Lord condemns them for lack of authority, and he condemns them for lack of integrity.

3. Lack of sympathy.

For lack of sympathy. They were not only usurpers and hypocrites, but they were also loveless.

V 4, *For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

No sympathy at all.

No love, no care.

Donkey carrying stuff.

This is what the Pharisees do.

They pile on regulations and rules and rituals and traditions. It's an impossible load so that you are totally obscured.

Not only that, the guilt of not making it and the whole of life, the biggest burden of all for them was the works righteousness system. They said God's counting up your bad and good.

If your good gets better than your bad when you die, you are going to get to heaven, and if your bad beats your good, you are going to hell.

There was no way to get rid of the bad pile. The bad pile just stayed there all the time and you just kept trying to get ahead of it with the good stuff.

What a burden?

What an interminable burden?

They just piled it on, piled it on, piled it on, heavy burdens.

The heaviest is works righteousness, the idea that you had to keep piling up your good deeds.

So, religion for them was depressing. Religion to them was a horrifying, impossible life of demands. There wasn't any hope. They never came along with the finger of grace to remove the burden. They never bothered to give the gospel that says there is no bad pile.

That's the good news.

Jesus takes the bad pile away totally.
All that's left is good, that's all.

Even when the apostle Paul preached the gospel in Galatia, he went through preaching grace and forgiveness and mercy. There came these same group dogging his steps and they went in and said, "No you must keep the law of Moses. You must be circumcised. You must do everything Moses said and keep the traditions."

They just wanted to pile it all back.

Paul writes to the Galatians, and he is livid when he writes and he dispenses with any amenities.

Galatians 1:8, *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

Galatians 5:1, *Standfast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

But the Pharisees with all their religious stuff were not interested in talking about grace and forgiveness and mercy.

They wanted to pile people up with this morality and then live under the interminable guilt of not being able to make it.

No sympathy, no love, no tenderness, no caring, no helping to shoulder the burden.

They never heard what Peter said.

1 Peter 5:7, *casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

They didn't know the tender shepherd who carries the little one in his own arms. Nobody ever picked their load up for them.

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

They abused people, they grieved people.

1 Timothy 4:3, *forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

How stupid it is to make men who want to supposedly serve the Lord?

In the Roman Catholic system, swear never to be married all their life long and to add that kind of bondage to them. It's a far cry from what the Lord intended when He said through the apostle Peter, "Marriage is the grace of life."

They make them abstain from certain kinds of foods. They say there are certain things you can't eat.

How foolish?

Who cares whether you eat meat on Friday or not?

God has given us all things to be received with thanksgiving.

They make you part of the building of their empire. You are part of the feeding of their supposed spiritual egos.

Isaiah 10:1-2, *“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, Which they have prescribed ²To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people, That widows may be their prey, And that they may rob the fatherless.*

Fleeing the sheep instead of feeding the sheep.

Jeremiah 7:4-6, *Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.’ ⁵“For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, ⁶if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt,*

Stop devouring these people for your own ends.

Ezekiel 34:2-6, *“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? ³You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. ⁴The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. ⁵So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field*

when they were scattered. ⁶My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them.”

Because of some false shepherds we are criticized so often because religious leaders in the public eye are known to eat people alive, to build great empires, to amass great fortunes, to build great prestige all at the expense of poor unwitting people.

How many people have been ripped off by religious charlatans?

Get everything out of them you can to build your own empire.

Ezekiel 34:7-10, *‘Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ⁸“As I live,” says the Lord God, “surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock”— ⁹therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord! ¹⁰Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”*

God is against them.

Jesus in His day looked out over the multitude, and He saw them as sheep without shepherds.

- There wasn't anybody to feed them.
- There wasn't anybody to pick them up and carry them.
- There wasn't anybody to bind up their wounds, to restore them, to carry them.
- There wasn't anybody to move a finger to ease the load. The Pharisees wouldn't remove the burden.
- They wouldn't preach a grace message.
- They wouldn't act in love.

Some would have delighted when Jesus spoke these words.

Matthew 11:28-30, *Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

This is all in contrast to the horrifying bondage the false spiritual leaders put on the people.

Same today.

These false religious systems bind people with ethical weight, with moral codes, with strictures of life from one kind of demand to another, they must do this.

Some of them tell them who they can marry, where they can live, how many kids they can have.

Some of them say you have got to do this, light these many candles, or go through here on your knees, or crawl up these steps.

Some of them say you have got to come and study so long these kinds of things, you have got to observe these rules, and make sure you do all this.

They bind that on them and never a word of grace and never a word of forgiveness and never tenderness and never a caring to meet the need that can only be met by forgiveness.
Just the same.

The false spiritual leader, they lack true authority, integrity, sympathy.

Do you want to know how to identify a true spiritual leader?

He has true authority.

His authority comes from the word of God.

He has integrity.

Look at his life.

He has Sympathy.

He will God's kingdom not his.