Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Condemnation of False Spiritual Leaders, Part 4
Scripture: Matthew 23:16-33
Code: 2363

Let's open our Bible together to Matthew Chapter 23. In the word of God, no one is so honored, no one is so respected, no one is so dignified as to the true and faithful man of God. In other words, the genuine spiritual leader who rightly represents God is the single most celebrated individual Scripture apart from God Himself. God lifts up faithful, true servants of His name. And throughout the pages of Scripture we read of the wonderful testimony of these individuals and God calls us to give them honor and give them respect. The apostle Paul went so far as to say that people treated him as though he were an angel or even as Christ Himself, he said in Galatians 4:14.

And speaking of his dear and beloved companion in service, Epaphroditus, he called upon the Philippians in Chapter 2 to give him great respect, to hold him in great reputation because for the sake of the service of Jesus Christ the man was near unto death. And Paul writing to the Thessalonians says those who are over you in the Lord are to be esteemed very highly in love for their work sake. And it tells us in 1 Timothy 5:17 that those who rule well, who feed our souls well are to be worthy of double honor. And in Hebrews Chapter 13, we are told that we are to follow the faith of those who are over us in the Lord. We are to submit to them as those that must give an account so that they may do their work with joy and not with grief. Scripture extols the blessedness of those who are faithful. It speaks of the reward of those who are true spiritual leaders. And on the other hand, no one is so severely condemned, no one is so consummately damned as false spiritual leaders are.

The most furious, vengeful words of judgment, condemnation and wrath are reserved for those who parade themselves as if they are true spiritual leaders, who represent God, but in fact are liars and deceivers and hypocrites. Scripture repeatedly warns about teachers who are void of the knowledge of God. They say they offer to others. Who are strangers to the salvation they claim to proclaim. Who are starving while supposedly offering true bread. Who are warning men of a hell that they themselves will populate.

Richard Baxter, who preached in the 1600's, wrote "many a tailor goes in rags that maketh costly clothes for others and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers when he has dressed for others the most costly dishes." Such false leaders who were supposedly clothing others with righteousness and feeding others the sustenance of God, but in fact, themselves were naked and starving and had no clothes to offer and no food to feed are the scribes and the Pharisees of our Lord's time. And in Matthew Chapter 23, Jesus rebukes them as perishing in the midst of plenty. Starving with the bread

of life in their grasp and leading others to the same damning destiny.

Matthew Chapter 23 stands as a peak above all other peaks in Scripture insofar as its condemning terms. Its unmitigated condemnation extends right down through verse 36. And to be honest with you, it's not easy to preach the passage because of its relentlessness in condemning these false leaders. But we must because its here and because it stands as a warning. But the scribes and the Pharisees while they stand alone and should be condemned alone and were condemned alone and suffer alone for their misappropriation of truth, for their misconceptions, for their misleading heresy, nonetheless stand as models of all other false spiritual leaders that existed before them and since them. And consequently, we find ourselves instructed for our own day by learning what it was about them that was condemned.

And so as we look back in history relative to this passage and as we are brought to understand what it was that Jesus condemned in them, may we somehow transport that message to the contemporary setting and make some application to the false spiritual leaders of our own time. And I'm going to leave that application to you. I'm not here to name names. I'm not here to name religions or denominations or movements or whatever, but to give you the criteria out of the word of God so that you can make those kinds of judgments on your own. But you need to be discerning. You need to give respect and honor to those who are true spiritual leaders as Scripture leads you to do and you need to condemn and avoid those who are false as Scripture enjoins you to do as well.

Now you'll remember the setting want you? It is Wednesday of Passion week, two days from the crucifixion. The mounting hostility to Jesus Christ has reached a fever pitch. Jesus rode into Jerusalem and was hailed as the Messiah and the religious leaders panicked instantly. They despised Him. They hated Him, because He taught so contrary to their own doctrine. And because He lived a life they couldn't live and because He had a popularity they couldn't attain and because He could do things they couldn't do and say things they couldn't say and didn't know.

He intimidated them every way possible and they wanted to eliminate Him and then when the whole city seemed to be swept up in the fact that He might be the Messiah, their anger was even raised beyond what it had been before. And then when He came in on Tuesday and cleansed the temple, it became a rage. And then when He came back on Wednesday, this day where we find Him in Matthew 23 and pronounced three judgment parables against the religious leaders and told them they would be shut out of the kingdom and somebody put in their place, and then when He shut their mouths with divine answers to stupid human questions. They were at the point of frenzy. And we can understand why it's only two days before they have Him hanging on a cross.

But to cap off the Wednesday dialogue with them, He gives the sermon in Chapter 23. Chapter 22 ends with the thought that they no longer asked Him any questions. He had made them look like fools every time they did, so they silenced themselves. And that leaves Him free on this Wednesday

to preach a final sermon. It is the final public sermon our Lord ever preached. And its subject is false spiritual leaders and it is a warning to the people to stay away from them, that's verse 1-12 and then it is a condemnation of them themselves from verse 13 on and ends with a lament over the consequence of the unbelief of Jerusalem, which unbelief was the product of false spiritual leadership.

And so this is a blistering rebuke. In the first 12 verses He warned the people to stay away from them. He showed them that they lacked authority. They lacked integrity. They lacked sympathy. They lacked spirituality and they lacked humility. And having warned the people then, He turns to the leaders, all of whom are gathered around He and His disciples in the temple court at Passover season and face to face in a confrontation He pronounces doom upon them.

Seven times He uses the word woe. Why, which is a very guttural cry in the Greek that's almost impossible to translate. It's nothing more than a onomatopoetic sound uttered from deep within in a moment of pain and grief. He pronounces this kind of curse on them and it is not wishful thinking. It is a divine teat. He isn't saying damn you or curse you the way we might say it to someone we're angry with in our civilization. It is not a wish. It is a divine judgment. And He pronounces the final judgment on the religious leaders of Israel who have rejected Him and led the people in an equal rejection.

Now the seven curses that come upon them are specifically identified down through verse 33 and we're going to look at them. Follow very closely. Let me remind you that verse 14 does not appear in all of the old manuscripts and so we believe that it was added in at a later time by a well-meaning scribe who borrowed its thoughts from Mark Chapter 12, verse 40 and Luke Chapter 20, verse 47. The statements of verse 14 are indeed true and come from those other texts, but do not appear in the original texts of Matthew.

And so we're left with seven curses. First of all, false spiritual leaders are cursed for exclusion, for keeping people out of the kingdom, verse 13. "For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men for you neither go in yourselves, neither permit them who are entering to go in." What does He mean by the phrase "them who are entering?" It has the idea of people who are continually endeavoring to enter. John the Baptist had come and prepared a population of people for the arrival of Messiah.

All of Jerusalem and Judea was going out to John and they were confessing their sins and repenting of their sins and being baptized as an outward symbol of an inward desire to be pure, to be ready when the Messiah arrived. And here were these people ready to move, as it were into the kingdom and along came the scribes and Pharisees and shut the door in their faces. False spiritual leaders are not to caudled. They are not to be thought of as nice people who are leading people into moral kinds of behavior and consideration. They are those who shut the kingdom of heaven in the face of people.

Theirs is a damning heresy. And they must be treated in a manner consistent with the damage they do. We considered that one in detail last week. Secondly, verse 15, false spiritual leaders are cursed not only for exclusion, that is excluding people from the kingdom, but perversion. They pervert the people who come into their influence. They not only shut them out of heaven, they usher them into hell. Here come along some people seeking religion, here come people seeking some kind of moral change in their life, people with some kinds of emotional, psychological need, some kind of spiritual desires, and they not only shut them out of heaven, but they pervert them into children of hell. Verse 15 says, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte." That word originally meant and immigrant who came into the land of Palestine to live with the Jews, later came to mean a Gentile who embraced Jewish religion.

You go everywhere you can go to make some convert, not just a proselyte of the "gate," which was a Gentile who just kind of got in the gate. He just took on a few of the elements of Judaism, but a proselyte of righteousness. What William Hendrickson calls a full fledge, legalistic, ritualistic, hair-splitting Pharisee filled with fanatical zeal. You want to make him every bitwhat you are and you'll go every where just to make one of them and when you've done it, you've made him a double son of hell beyond yourself.

The convert to the cult, the convert to the false religion, the duped disciple of the false spiritual leader is more fanatical than the one who brought him in. And the result is a double child of hell. We don't tolerate false spiritual leaders of any kind. They are not to be tolerated. They shut people out of heaven and usher them into hell. Now we spent last week just covering those two points because of the magnitude of their import.

Now I want to take you from there through the rest of these things. The third one, and I want to confess to you folks that I...there's not much I can add to this text. There's not much that needs to be added. You can't guild the lily. And the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are so powerful and so precise and so poignant and so dramatic that anything I say can only detract rather than add to the power of this text.

Thirdly, false spiritual leaders are cursed for subversion, not just exclusion and perversion, but subversion. They subvert truth. They have developed reasoning that undermines truth. It is a mark of one who is in any sense possessing the life of God that truth is important. God is a God of truth. The God who cannot, what? Lie says Paul. God is a God of truth. God says I hate lying in every false way. God is a God who speaks truth. And so any false system is a lying system.

In John 8 our Lord talks about the fact that the devil is a liar and the father of it. False systems are filled with lies, untruths, broken promises and that's exactly what the Pharisees and scribes had developed, a system evade the truth. A system to undermine integrity to subvert truth. Notice how

they did it in verse 16. "Woe unto you," and instead of calling them hupokrites, phonies, deceivers, hypocrites, He calls them blind guides, because they lived under the illusion that they were the guides of the blind. Romans 2 says, "You Jews think you're guides of the blind, light to those in darkness, instructors of babes, you giving wisdom to those that are foolish and you don't know the truth. You're nothing but blind guides. That's what our Lord is saying here. In fact, earlier in Matthew 15:14, He said, "the blind are leaders of the blind and if the blind lead the blind, both are going to fall in a ditch."

So here were the people blind, here were their leaders blind, and the blind leaders trying to guide the blind people; you blind guides. That's a very blistering statement because they prided themselves on their spiritual sight and ability to guide people. "You say whosoever shall swear by the temple it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple he is the debtor." Now what is this? Well, they were liars to start with and all spiritual...all false spiritual leaders are liars, because only one who possessed the life of God can be utterly true. Only God can break down the lying tendencies of fallenness and replace it with truth. And that is a redemptive work, a sanctifying work, a work of regeneration.

So ungodly people and false spiritual leaders are liars. I mean, that's just part of it all. They lie. But in order to cover their tracks and to appear pious, they had developed a system by which they could lie with impunity. And they would promise this and promise that. They would vow this to God, vow a covenant to some person and then in order to affirm that because people didn't trust anybody then any better than they trust people now. They want a contract, maybe they want to seal it in blood. Every culture has its own way of sort of tying you into your word. In that day, you swore by something. It had come to the point where people lied constantly and there was no way that you could protect yourself unless you design some means of making a person verbally bound to keep their word.

And the fact of this is indicated in Matthew Chapter 5, you remember where our Lord says to them, you have been told by those of old that you can perform your vows, keep your word. But you've developed a system whereby you swear by this, you swear by that, you swear by the other and He goes on to talk about all their swearing. I swear I'll keep my word. I swear this. I swear that by this, by that, the other thing. And the Lord says to them, you ought to swear not at all, right, but let your communication be what? Yes, no. In other words, such a person of integrity, such a person of truth that if I say to God yes, God, then that's exactly what I mean. And if I say no, that's exactly what I mean and I don't have to say I swear on a stack of Bibles. And you know, cross my fingers, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye, whatever.

And we've had our little deals too, haven't we. We used to say when we were kids, ha, I don't have to keep my word, I had my fingers crossed. Same thing. A system whereby you could lie, whereby your word meant nothing and they would make vows to God and then they would decide that the money they wanted to give to God originally in a moment of piosity, for example, they would stand up in front

of a group of people and say I want to give all my money to God. I'm so pious. And later on they'd find they wanted something else and they'd say oh well, I only swore by such and such and by such and such doesn't count.

That's how they work the system. So they said in verse 16, if you swear by the temple, it's nothing. So they say, I'm going to do this. I vow to do this before God and all of you people. I will keep my word. I will pray eight hours a day, blah, blah, blah. I swear by the temple. And then didn't do it and said, oh swearing by the temple is nothing. If you swear by the gold in the temple that's something. That's what they said. Ridiculous. Just a way of lying. They know what the Old Testament said. The Old Testament said pay your vows. Pay your vows. Pay your vows.

What does that mean? Keep your promise. Keep your promise. Keep your word. God hates lying. So many Old Testament texts in the Psalms particularly. Let me just call your attention to several just as a point of contact. In Psalm 50, verse 14, "Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the Most High." Don't make promises you can't keep. Promise to God, keep your promise. Psalm 56:12, "Thy vows are upon me oh God, I will render praises unto thee. I'm bound by my promises to you oh God. I won't break my word." Psalm 61, verse 8 and these are just samples, "So will I sing praise to thy name forever, that I may daily perform my vows." Psalm 66:13, "I will go into the house with burnt offerings. I will pay thee my vows." Psalm 76:11, "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God." And it goes on like that a lot of places in the Old Testament. Keep your word to God. Keep your word to men.

This is illustrated in Ananias and Sapphira said we're going to give all we receive from the sell of this property to God. Boy it sounded so religious, so pious, so dedicated, so spiritual. They got a lot of money and they looked at it and said we made a mistake. Look at all this. The church budget doesn't even need it. They won't know what to do with it. I'm not sure we can trust them down there. We can't give all this to them. We'll keep part of it. And you know what God did? Killed them in front of the whole congregation. They dropped dead.

I imagine it had a rather great effect on next weeks offering. But the point is they had developed a system where they could lie. And so verse 19, He doesn't even deal with the immorality of it here. He deals with the stupidity of it. It's obvious to everybody that God advocates truth and not lying. He just deals with the stupidity of it. You morons, He says, moroi. You morons and blind. That's what He says.

What's greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? In other words, the only reason the gold could be thought of sacred is because it's in the temple which is sacred because it's where God dwells. What a ridiculous method of cheating and violating your word. And then verse 18, they had another little deal. "Whosoever shall swear by the altar it is nothing." So if you promise by the altar it's nothing, but whatever the gift is on the altar, whoever swears by the gift that's on it, he's bound.

You morons, He says, and blind. Which is greater the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? What's the gift if it isn't on the altar?

I mean, it's ridiculous. It's illogical. It doesn't make sense. The gift standing alone is nothing. It's only when it's on an altar offered to God that it becomes something. The gold standing alone is nothing. It's only when it's in the temple where God dwells that it's anything. In other words, if you think by doing that you're touching something that's not connected to God, you're wrong. You're wrong. It was just a silly way to evade having to keep your word. And you see false spiritual leaders need that because they lie all the time. So they have to cover themselves in a pure pious and develop some kind of system where they can make their pious promises of what they're going to do and still change their mind conveniently.

So He says, in verse 20, "Whosoever therefore shall swear by the altar, swears by it and all things on it. Whosoever shall swear by the temple, swears by it and him that dwelleth in it. And he that shall swear by heaven, swears by the throne of God and Him who sits on it." I mean, everything you touch eventually is going back to God, right? You swear by anything that represents God, a gift, an altar, the gold of the temple, the temple, the heaven of heavens, the throne of God and you're going to touch the God who fills it all.

In other words, have you forgotten that God is everywhere, as creator of all and Lord of all. You better tell the truth. They subverted the truth. They developed reasoning that undermine truth. False spiritual leaders don't tell the truth folks, but they parade piosity. Try to cover up for their lying pretense. We need to be careful of that. They subvert whole houses. They by their great covetousness, says Peter, use feigned words to make merchandise out of you. They lie. They say they need money when they don't need money. They say God told them something, when He never told them anything. They say Jesus led them into something, when He never led them into anything. They lie. Beware of those liars who are false spiritual leaders.

Fourthly, false spiritual leaders are cursed for inversion. Not only subversion, that is undermining truth, but inversion. That is reversing values, reversing divine priorities. This in verse 23 is most fascinating. "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees," hupokrites, spiritual phonies, "for you pay tithe," that's ten percent, "of mint and anise cumin." You say what is that? Well, you know what mint is. The Greek word is sweet smelling. It's a little leaf, little mint leaf. And do you know what anise is? Well, actually it's dill, used like with dill pickles. Cumin was a little tiny herb used in the kitchen. All three of these are kitchen items, mint, anise, cumin; mint, dill, and this little herb all used for flavoring food.

Now the Old Testament law, God instructed His people to give one-tenth of all their crops and all their products to the treasury in Israel. In other words, the government was supported by taxation and one of the forms of taxation was ten percent tax on all the product of the land. So every year when you

got your crop, ten percent of it went to the government. That's how the priests were supported because the government was a theocracy run by priests. So their sustenance came from the part that you put into the government. There also was another tenth paid and there also was a third tenth paid every third year for welfare, for strangers and so forth. The second tenth was for ceremonies and national festivals and so forth. So you were giving usually about 23 percent a year that you put in, not far off our tax base today.

So they were used to that. And the Old Testament text said in Leviticus 27:30 and Deuteronomy 14:22, that this included "all the increase of thy seed;" all the increase of thy seed. Now what that meant was, you plant your seed and whatever you get of the increase, you tithe that. But these wooden literalists had taken that to the absolute ridiculous extreme. And in the little kitchen pots, they would grow mint and they would grow dill and they would have these little herbs called cumin and that was just a kitchen deal. And when it came time to sort that out, they'd go here's ten little tiny herbs, one for God, nine for me. One for...I mean, it was ridiculous. Absurd. God wasn't saying that when He said the increase of your seed. He meant you tithe the grain and the wine and oil product.

But they were down to this minuscule...you say why were they doing that? Because it made them feel so pious, so righteous, trivia, minutia. They were real good at that, real good at counting out seeds. But they were bad at, and you'll see in the rest of the verse. "You have omitted the weightier elements of the divine law," implied divine, "justice, mercy, and faith." Oh is this amazing? You're real good at counting mint leaves, great fooling around with dill, but bad when it came to justice, mercy, and faith.

False religious leaders get wrapped up in inconsequential minutia and have no capacity to deal with the weightier matters. And the weightier, that word is a rabbinical word. Jesus borrows it from the tradition of the rabbis who believe there were light elements to the law and weighty elements and here He says the weighty elements are justice, mercy, and faith. Spiritual realties, not feeds. By the way, this is a direct parallel from Micah. Our Lord here is not just grabbing three things out of the air, justice, mercy, and faith. The Jews had been taught in Micah 6:8, "He hath shown thee oh man what is good and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." That's faith. The walk with God in faith.

To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly. Listen the Pharisees and the scribes didn't do justly, they were inequitable. They were unfair, unjust. And they were merciful, brutal, unforgiving, unkind, ungenerous. They abuse the people. Piling, as it says in verse 4 of this chapter, heavy burdens on them, grievous to be born and not even moving one finger to help lighten the load. And they had no faith. They walked by sight. They walked by works. They walked by law. They walked by their own efforts. And so He says you're real great at counting out kitchen seeds used to flavor food and you've missed the whole point of what is really important, justice, mercy, and faith.

Spiritual matters you've lost. False religious leaders, listen, can get all wrapped up in the minutia of their system. It's just the real spiritual stuff they don't have. At the end of verse of 23 He says, "these ought you to have done and not to leave the other undone." In other words, "these ought you to have done," justice, mercy, and faith. And I'm not saying that you should leave the other commands undone. And I don't think He means you should keep counting your seeds. He means you should take care to attend to the matter of the tithe as well. It isn't that I want everything to be concentrated on justice, mercy, and faith so that you fail to obey those other commands. I don't think He's saying necessarily you have to count out all the seeds and the herbs. He's saying, you should have kept these weightier matters and also give attention to the matters of tithe; the proper matters of tithe.

Tithe does have its proper place still in Judaism in the gospel time. The Jewish people are still a duly constituted people. They were still under the ceremonial instruction of God's law. They were still under the obligation to obey the commandments relative to their national identity and to the funding of the priesthood. That had not been set aside yet until the church was born. And so He says you should do that. You should do that. By the way, the tithe is mentioned six times in the New Testament. Three times in the gospels and each time it is mention in the text condemning the abuse of it by the scribes and the Pharisees. Three times in the book of Hebrews when it simply reaches back and describes its historical reality in the history of Israel. At no time is it ever mentioned in the New Testament as binding on the church. It had to do with taxation of the national government of Israel.

So He says do that, just make sure you do this as well. I'm always amazed at how false religious systems have so much minutia and so little reality. I think about that, for example, sometimes when you see "holy wars." Or you see great groups of nations of people who are so religious, maybe they're Islamic people or maybe they're "Christians and Catholics in Ireland." I don't know what, but they sure have all the nuts and bolts of their little religious deal, but the fact of the matter is they operate as people who have no internal spiritual commitment at all, right?

Without massacring each other in the name of "their religions." And there are many ways to illustrate this. I thought of this the other day as I watched a man giving prophetic charts and all the little dits and dots of all the little prophetic things and you know where this is going to go and who's coming here and what's up here and here's the beast and how many heads and horns and he's got every little deal all along and he's living in adultery. And you want to say to the guy burn your chart man and stop your sin. I mean, get your perspective right. False spiritual leaders deal with minutia.

Verse 24 describes them in a very graphic way. "You blind guides, you strain out," it should be, "you strain out a gnat and swallow a camel." You say what in the world is this? Well, you have to understand something about this. The word strain means to filter, diulizo, filter. In the Old Testament, the smallest unclean animal was a gnat. Leviticus 11:42, it's considered unclean. It's an

insect, not an animal. But the smallest unclean creature was a gnat. The largest unclean creature that was forbidden to a Jew was a camel, Leviticus 11:4.

So the Jew didn't want to get involved with an unclean gnat or an unclean camel. So He says to them, do you know what you're doing? You're straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. You know what they did? This is what happened. They make wine and as they're making, crushing the grapes, a little gnat is flying around, he lands in the grapes, he gets gobbled up in the grapes, winds up in the wine or maybe he just flies in the wine and lands there. So the fastidious Pharisee drank his wine like this. Then he picked the gnat off his teeth, see.

In fact, he didn't even enjoy the stuff. Sucking out the gnats so they wouldn't be defiled and then swallowing a camel, the biggest unclean animal of all. Ceremonial fastidious sucking through your clinched teeth to filter out a gnat and then swallowing a camel. In other words, you are all confused. You're whole priority system is inverted. You're just fooling around with stuff that doesn't matter. And blind to the enormous evil that you're consuming. You're afraid to eat the tenth mint leaf and then you're allowing into your life hypocrisy, dishonesty, cruelty, greed, self-worship; incredible.

It's amazing how fastidious religious people can be and so far from the reality of what God seeks. So many false spiritual leaders reverse divine priorities, substitute insignificant forms and outward acts of religion for essential realities of the heart. You see, that's the point. So the false spiritual leaders are condemned for exclusion, perversion, subversion, inversion, how about extortion for a fifth; extortion.

"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, you clean the outside of the cup and the platter," and platter is an interesting Greek word. It has to do with a plate used to serve delicacies. You clean the outside of the cup and the platter and within they're full of extortion and excess. You're real big at extortion. You have a ministry that looks pious, but the whole thing is based on taking advantage of other people. You use people. You make merchandise out of people.

The idea is this, here comes a guy with...who's going to offer you a lovely meal. He's got a plate, on it are all the lovely delicacies. It's got a cup and in it is the fruit of the vine and he offers it to you and the plate and the cup have been clean ceremonial, they've been ceremonially prepared. All the ritual, all the whole deal is prepared. Only problem is the food on the plate and the wine in the cup were stolen; stolen. Very...oh we've ceremoniously prepared the platter. We've ceremoniously prepared the cup. It all is so religious and everything in it and on it was gained by extortion. How many false religious leaders are there from one end of this world who are offering people their religious plate and in that plate is nothing but the stuff they've stolen from those very people. Milked them for every dime they could get out of them; extortionists.

Extortion, by the way, is the word harpage. It means to plunder or rape; they are rapists. That's why I get so angry with false spiritual leaders, because I see them raping people, don't you? You see them

just plundering people. Just making merchandise out of people for their own gain. And they...it says they are full of extortion, and notice this word, excess. That means unrestrained desire for gain; acarsia. And unrestrained desire for gain; a lack of self-control. So the Lord is saying they appear so scrupulous. They appear so religiously meticulous. They appear so pious in their system and everything they serve you was gained with their filthy desires. Gained by the abusive people. They are greedy rapists and robbers who steal and plunder the souls and the money and the hearts and the minds and the goods of everybody they can touch.

So He says in verse 26, "You blind Pharisee," He personalizes it, "cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter that the outside of them may be clean also." You better have more than your form. You better be sure that what's on your plate is as clean as your plate. And no dish is clean, which holds unclean food gained dishonestly. So prevalent today, the false spiritual leaders become rich, they become fat, they become wealthy with their paraded piosity and they have the heart of a thief.

Sixthly, false spiritual leaders are cursed for deception. This is unbelievable. Deception and we're going to cover these very quickly as we close. Deception, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees," verse 27 says, "hypocrites, for you're like whited sepulchers which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead bones and all uncleanness." Now follow this. He says you are guilty of deception. You contaminate people. You aren't what you claim. You look like oh every time I see this guy, Sung Yun Moon, who's supposed to be the Messiah to lead everyone to God and people flocking around him and you see him with his arms open and all these people. And everybody touches that man is contaminated.

He offers himself as one who will purify the impure and he contaminates everyone he touches. And that's the way it is with false spiritual leaders. And he pictures it so vividly. On the 15th avadar, which is the month of March in Israel in the time of our Lord, there was a very unusual custom. It was right after the spring rains and the rains that came washed away many things. One of the things they washed away was white-wash. You say where was white-wash used? It was on walls, it was on houses sometimes, but most specifically the Jews used to white-wash the tombs. They would white-wash those limestone caves and limestone tombs where people were buried, the more prominent people were buried that way. And the reason they did that was because in preparation of Passover, along the roads and the hillsides where people would be traversing, they feared that people might inadvertently touch a tomb and thus be defiled. And because of the ceremonial cleansing process necessary, they could void out certain activities in the Passover season.

And so to accommodate the Passover visitors who might not know where the tombs were and also just to keep the rest of the people clear of them, they went around the city of Jerusalem with white-wash. In some cases, they white-washed the entire tomb, historians tell us. In other cases, they just painted white-washed bones on the outside so that people wouldn't touch them lest according to Numbers 19:16, they'd be ceremonially defiled.

And so as you came into Jerusalem, you'd see these beautiful clean white tombs everywhere dazzling in the sun. But they weren't what they appeared to be. They were so beautiful and so pure and so white, but they were tombs. And anybody who touched them would be contaminated and Jesus says that's what you are, verse 27. You're whited tombs. The word taffos, it means graves. Which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and omnomia, lawlessness. Disregard for the law of God. And anybody who touches you, you look so white and so pure, is contaminated, is defiled. So you pollute, so you contaminate everybody who touches you.

Then the last one. The last one, false spiritual leaders are cursed for pretension. For pretending to be so much better than everybody else. Verse 29, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," may I inject here? Nothing God hates worst than pride. "You build the," the memorials literally, "you build the mnemeion, from the verb to remember. "You build the memorials of the prophets and you decorate the tombs of the righteous." You're really in to memorializing the saints. You're really big on lifting up the heroes of the past. Oh we honor saint this guy. Oh we honor saint that guy. Oh we remember this man of God, this great prophet, this great worker of miracles of the past. God's great man of this era and that era. You lift them up, you exalt them with your memorials and your monuments.

And then you say, verse 30, "If we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." Why we would never have killed the prophets as our fathers have done. Oh we wouldn't have thought of it. We're so much better than they are. You see, we're so much holier than they. We're so far beyond them. This is the ugly pretense of spiritual pride. Great at building monuments, great at honoring men of the past and claiming to be better than their fathers.

Jesus had told them that in the parable earlier in Chapter 21 about how they had...the people of Israel had kill all of the prophets and the messengers from God and the parable of the vineyard and the landowner and the servants and the son. But they claim, oh we would never have done that. And Jesus answered in verse 31 as a direct hit. "Wherefore you are witnesses," right now on the spot, "you give testimony against yourselves that you are the sons of them that killed the prophets." They say oh we would never do that. We wouldn't do that. Oh we raised memorials to the prophets. We would never do what our fathers have done. We're so much more holy than they.

And Jesus says, you are a witness to the fact that you indeed are a son of those who killed the prophets. Why? Why does He say that? Well, what were they right there, right then plotting to do? What? Kill Him. Kill Him. Kill Him. I mean, they were so consumed with their own lying deceit that they didn't even see the reality of the fact that they were killing one greater than the prophets, the son

of God. Verse 32, "Fill up then the measure of your fathers." What does He mean? Do it. Go ahead. You're scheming to kill the greatest prophet of all. That'll fill up the full measure of the murderous attitude of your people against God's messengers. Do it.

You ought to underline verse 32. That's Jesus resigning Himself overtly to the fact that they were going to take His life. Do it. Do it. Fill it up. No, they weren't any better. They were worse if anything. And then He pronounces a curse. "You snakes, you generation of vipers. How can you escape the damnation of hell?" What's the answer to that? What's the answer? No way. He damns them to hell. Snakes, vipers, let me conclude this with these words.

Listen, these false spiritual leaders, listen carefully, were guilty of these things and I want you to listen because I'm going to turn the table on it a little bit. They kept people out of heaven. What does a true spiritual leader do? What? Brings them into heaven. They did all they could to send people to hell. To make them as evil as possible, double sons of hell. What does a true spiritual leader do? He is used by God to make men not hellish, but what? Righteous. They subverted the truth. What does a true spiritual leader do? Leads people into truth. They appeared pious, but only used people for their own gain. What does a true spiritual leader do? He serves people, meets their needs. They contaminate everybody they touch. What does a true spiritual leader do? He makes holy anyone he touches. And they proudly thought themselves to be better than everybody else. What does a true spiritual leader say? I am the least of all the chief of sinners. God help us to be true spiritual leaders and to avoid these false leaders. People beware would you? Beware. Be thankful God's given you true leaders.

Father, we do come to You with thankful hearts this morning as we think about all these false religious systems around the world and false spiritual leaders every place. We'd have to say thank You, thank You for the great grace that redeemed us and brought us into the knowledge of the Savior, brought us under true spiritual leaders who could feed us the bread of life. Through rather than leading us to hell have led us to heaven. Who rather than making our character hellish have been used that we might be righteous. Who rather than undermining truth have lead us to truth, rather than reversing divine values have taught us God's priorities. Who rather than using us for their own gain have served us for our own needs. Who rather than contaminate us have made us to be holy and who rather than exercise pride have shown us humility.

Thank You oh God that we have so been influenced by Your choice servants. And Lord God we pray that any in this congregation today who are under the influence of false spiritual leaders will be delivered from that for Your glory and their eternal blessing. While your heads are bowed in a closing moment, if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, we would offer to you that same Savior. And if the Spirit of God is prompting and pulling at your heart and revealing to you the need for Christ and the reality of who He is, then open your heart to him. Follow not the lying prophets. Come to the truth of Christ.

If you're a believer and you have been less than thankful and less than reflective on the good grace of God, which has bestowed salvation upon you and kept you from the influence of these evil ones, may your heart be filled this day with a new thanksgiving. And if you desire to be a part of the family of God, desire to be one who hears the truth, desires too out of thanksgiving and gratitude serve God with all your heart, I trust you'll make those kinds of commitments in your heart today.

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