

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

## **Confronting Error with Condemnation, Not Conversation**

Scripture: Luke 20:45-47

Code: 42-250

And now we come to the Word of God again, and Luke 20 is our text, Luke 20. We have arrived at the end of this chapter and we'll look at the final three verses: Luke 20:45-47. Let me establish them in your mind. Follow as I read. Luke chapter 20 beginning at verse 45.

“And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”

Strong words. Unmistakable words. Backing up a little bit from this text and approaching it from afar off, we need to be reminded that the Bible warns us about false teachers from beginning to end. There have always been and there always will be false religious leaders who operate for Satan. They operate out of the kingdom of darkness, but they operate as if they are messengers from God.

In the 20th chapter of the book of Acts, the apostle Paul met with the Ephesian elders and he said to them this, “I have not ceased to warn you night and day with tears for three years.” Warning you about what? “Savage wolves who will come in, not sparing the flock; and of your own selves perverse men who will arise to do destruction - ” with their heretical teachings is the implication. Expect it from the outside and from the inside.

In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, the apostle Paul said that “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” That is to say he comes as if he represents God. So don’t be surprised if his messengers are also disguised as angels of light.

False teachers robe themselves in the garments of God. They want people to believe that they represent God, that they know God, that they have insights into spirituality and divine truth and divine wisdom, even though they are the emissaries of hell itself. The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy, helping him to understand ministry in the church said this in 1 Timothy 4, “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times - ” these times “ - some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars.” Demon doctrine energized by demon spirits in hypocritical false teachers who lie.

Peter - 2 Peter 2:1 says, "False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies. They will bring swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, because of them the way of truth will be maligned; in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, their destruction is not asleep."

And you remember, of course, the words of Jude. "I make every effort to write to you about our common salvation, but I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith." Why? "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Beware, beware, beware of false teachers. As we read in 1 John chapter 2, there are many antichrists. They are everywhere and you who know the truth must protect yourselves from them.

Never were false teachers more aggressive than during the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was as if hell amassed its heaviest assault on any one person on the Lord Jesus during those three years. And we would understand that. We would understand that. To thwart the gospel purposes of God, Satan unleashed everything he had on Jesus Christ. And when we ask who were the agents of hell? Who were the agents of Satan who attempted to thwart the purposes of God? Were they the criminals in the culture? Were they the tax collectors, the traitors? Were they the prostitutes, the thugs, the thieves? No. The emissaries and agents of Satan were the most devout, the most religious, the most respected religious leaders in Israel: The scribes and the Pharisees, along with the Sadducees and the Herodians.

They all came together against Jesus Christ. They amassed all their ability, all their demonically designed spiritual ability to attack Him, to bring Him down, to thwart the purposes of God. Keep it in mind the enemies of the gospel were and always are most formidable when they are religious, especially the Pharisees and the scribes because they controlled the dominant religion of Judaism at the time. They are relentless in their assault on Jesus.

They didn't get along with the Sadducees because they had very different theology. They didn't get along with Herodians because the Herodians were political and they were attached to Herod, who wasn't even a Jew. They had great differences with one another, did the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians, but on one thing hell brought them all together, and that is on getting rid of Jesus. And on Friday of passion week, they succeeded by the purpose of God. They succeeded in having Him crucified.

As we come to Luke chapter 20, however, it is Wednesday of passion week. It is Wednesday. It's been a long day, a long day in which Jesus has been in the temple moving in and around the masses

of people in the temple. He has been teaching the crowds. And He has been engaged in confrontation with the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the Sadducees, and the Herodians, who all have made their assaults on Him trying to discredit Him publicly so they would have a just cause to have Him executed, because He was such a threat to the kingdom of darkness and to their own earthly position. They've tried everything they know and they have not succeeded.

So we read in 20:40, "they didn't have enough courage to question Him any longer about anything." They were done. They had exhausted all their options. It was over. They asked Him no more questions. And then we said in verse 41, Jesus begins to ask the questions, and mercifully, compassionately, kindly, He brings up the issue again of the identity of Messiah as not just a Son of David but a Son of God, the Son of God.

In verses 41 to 44, you remember from last week, He takes them back to Psalm 110 in which David calls Messiah, "My Lord." So Messiah is both David's Son and David's Lord, and therefore He is a man yet to be born, but He must also be God who was alive at the time David spoke.

So in one more compassionate effort, Jesus affirms again His deity and the necessity of Messiah being both God and man. That is an act of compassion. In a sense, it's a final act of compassion, one more time to speak of His identity as the true Messiah, Son of David, Son of God.

And now He is done. He's done talking to the scribes, and Pharisees, and Sadducees, and Herodians, except by necessity at His trial. He is done speaking to the crowds, the people and verse 45 says, "While all the people were listening, He said to His disciples - " This is a transition. People are still listening, but He turns to speak to the disciples. This is what He will now do from here on. No more messages to the crowds. From now on, He speaks to His disciples. Very important transition.

He said all there is to say, nothing more can be said. He's answered every question that could be raised. He will turn and give instruction to those who are still following, still showing interest, still wanting to learn from Him, still following Him. The attackers are gone and the crowd fades away.

But there's one final message for everybody to hear, disciples and people. And it is the message of verses 46 and 47, "Beware of the scribes." He goes out with a warning. The final message. Any time somebody gives a final message, it's got to be an important one. What is the last thing Jesus has to say to the crowds? We want to know what that last word is. It is a word of warning. Not only a word of warning, but a word of condemnation. Beware of them. They are dangerous and "they will receive greater condemnation." End of verse 47. So He warns the people about them and He pronounces damnation upon them. Very strong words.

Now before we look at this, let me frame the importance of this text in a current context, okay? Some months ago I wrote a book called *The Truth War*. It is the latest in a series of books through the years

that I have written to address what I think are dangerous errors that exist in the church. I wrote the book, *The Truth War*, to expose and to bring the judgment of the Word of God on the aberrations and the dangers of a new movement called “The Emerging Church,” or “The Emergent Church Movement.”

It is really post-modern relativism corrupting the church. It has moved in among so-called evangelicals who now reject doctrinal certainty, Scripture clarity, and gospel exclusivity. I’ll say that again. The mark of this movement is a rejection of doctrinal certainty, Scripture clarity, and gospel exclusivity. It is neo-liberalism. It’s just the old liberalism that destroyed the major denominations in this country, the old higher critical theory, it’s the old liberalism back in a new dress, if you will, calling for camaraderie, collegiality, tolerance with those who do not believe the gospel, do not even believe Christianity is the true religion.

Extols the virtues of generous, open dialogue rather than dogmatism. Calls for respect, tolerance and diversity. And just to pull it all down, they have found a buzzword to define what marks the movement of the emerging church, it’s the word “conversation.” That’s their word. They want to engage everybody in a conversation so that we can all contribute our spiritual insights.

One of the leaders of old liberalism was a man by the name of Harry Emerson Fosdick. In 1928, Fosdick said this, “Many preachers indulge habitually in what they call expository sermons. They take a passage from Scripture and proceeding on the assumption that the people attending church that morning are deeply concerned about what the passage means, they spend their half hour or more on historical exposition of the verse or chapter, ending with some appended practical application to the auditors.

“Could any procedure be more surely predestined to dullness and futility? Who seriously supposes that as a matter of fact 1 in 100 of the congregation cares to start with what Moses, Isaiah, Paul, or John meant in those special verses, or came to church deeply concerned about it? Nobody else who talks to the public so assumes that the vital interest of the people are located in the meaning of words spoken two thousand years ago.”

So Fosdick makes a prophecy in 1928. “The future,” he says, “belongs to a type of sermon which can best be described as an adventure in cooperative thinking.” Conversation, an adventure in cooperative thinking, 1928.

Just recently, 2005, Doug Pagitt, one of the leaders of the emerging movement says, “Our sermons are not lessons that precisely define belief so much as they are stories that welcome our hopes and ideas and participation.” Let’s have a conversation. Conversation with those who disagree, conversation with those who have another religion. No more dogmatism. We set aside condemnation for conversation.

Brian McLaren, who is one of the leading, if not the leading, writer in the Emerging Movement has a new book called *The Secret Message of Jesus*. That's always scary. Jesus doesn't have a secret message. He revealed His message. But anyway, he says in *The Secret Message of Jesus*, "In an age of global terrorism and rising religious conflict, it's significant to note that all Muslims regard Jesus as a great prophet, that many Hindus are willing to consider Jesus as a legitimate manifestation of the divine, that many Buddhists see Jesus as one of humanity's most enlightened people, and that Jesus Himself was a Jew." Hey, he's saying, "Isn't it great? We all like Jesus. Let's start the conversation."

He goes on, "A shared reappraisal of Jesus' message could provide a unique space or common ground for urgently needed religious dialogue. And it doesn't seem an exaggeration to say that the future of our planet may depend on such dialogue." So we'll set aside all our doctrinal differences to save the planet, let the people go to hell.

His last comment, "This reappraisal of Jesus' message may be the only project capable of saving a number of religions, including Christianity." So we all have to find the secret message of Jesus, which no doubt is hidden in our spiritual psyches, and have a conversation. Instead of condemning these other religions, we need to sit down and have a conversation and learn from their spirituality, learn from their spiritual experience, learn from God in them.

Another prominent advocate in the Emerging Movement is a somewhat familiar name, Tony Campolo, who is a very popular speaker. Here are Tony's own words that give you some idea of where this movement's going. I don't normally read these kinds of things but I think it's very helpful to know what's happening. This is what he says. "What we have to do is show respect to one another and to speak to each other with a sense that even if people don't convert, they're God's people, God loves them, and we do not make the judgment of who is going to heaven and who is going to hell.

"I think that what we all have to do is leave judgment up to God. What Muslims will not do is condemn Jews and Christians to hell if, in fact, they do not accept Islam. Islam is much more gracious toward evangelical Christians who are faithful to the New Testament than Christians are toward Islamic people who are faithful to the Koran." Now there's an interesting spin. Obviously, he hasn't been reading the papers about the massacre of Christians in Islamic environments.

But the idea is we just have to be generous with everybody. He goes on to say, "Mohammed was very understanding that there was great truth in Christianity. He differed with us in that he felt he had a more complete truth and Islam would hold to that. But Mohammed contended that we would ultimately be judged in terms of the truth we had at our disposal. I think there are Muslim brothers and sisters who are willing to say you live up to the truth as you understand it, I will live up to the truth as I understand it and we'll leave it up to God on judgment day. I've got to believe that Jesus is the only

Savior, but being a Christian is not the only way to be saved.”

Further he says, “Our Muslim brothers and sisters can say Islam is the only true faith, but we’re not convinced that only Muslims enjoy salvation. I’m not convinced that the grace of God doesn’t go further than the Christian community.” Here’s another sentence. “What we have to do is say that we believe different things. But there’s so much goodness in the Islamic community, it cannot be ignored. It seems to me that when we listen to the Muslim mystics as they talk about Jesus and their love for Jesus, I must say it’s a lot closer to New Testament Christianity than a lot of the Christians that I hear.”

In other words, if we’re looking for common ground, can we find it in mystical spirituality even if we can’t theologically agree? Can we pray together in such a way that we connect with a God that transcends our theological differences? This is the conversation. You can have it with anybody and everybody because we don’t have doctrinal clarity. We don’t know what the real interpretation of Scripture is.

January 2006, the Emergent USA group met with Synagogue 3000, 24-hour inter-religious conversation centered on themes of sacred community, learning, and worship. A Jewish blog called Synablog - sounds like a bun you buy at the airport - Synablog reports on what happened.

“Synagogue 3000 has identified a contemporary Jewish religious phenomenon that is called ‘Jewish Emergent.’ This week Synagogue 3000 convened for the very first time a working group on emergent sacred communities, visionary Jewish leaders committed to the establishment of transformative sacred communities unbound by conventional expectations about what a synagogue is supposed to be.” So the Emerging Church, that’s their motto, that they’re going to come up with churches that aren’t bound by the conventional idea of a church. Now the Jews are joining. They’re not going to be bound by conventional ideas of the synagogue.

“To enrich the conversation, Synagogue 3000 invited members of the working group to exchange ideas with forward thinking Christian leaders from Emergent US, meeting of the working group on Emergent sacred communities mark the first time ever that Emergent US had met with any religious group outside the Christian faith. It was exciting, inspiring and historic.”

And emergent people, it’s a perfect environment, you go there, you learn about their spirituality and their knowledge of God. And you have a conversation. And out of that conversation comes some kind of enlightenment with those of Judaism, or Islam, or Mormonism, or Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodox religion, or Jehovah’s Witnesses, whoever.

Now all that to say this. When I wrote *The Truth War*, the book, I was curious to see what the response would be. The response from the Emerging Church people was they did not like it. I was not

shocked. And the response was this. "The book is divisive. The book is unloving. The book is intolerant." And they said, "If I really cared about people and if I really had the Spirit of Jesus, I would humbly join the conversation and openly embrace the useful spiritual insights in other religions."

Conversation, huh? Not condemnation. And besides, as is becoming very, very popular nowadays, Jews don't have to believe in Jesus anyway, they have a different way of salvation.

Well, in response to this criticism, why don't I join the conversation, I only have one question to answer. It's this. How did Jesus deal with those who didn't believe the truth? How did Jesus deal with those who didn't believe the truth who were totally religious, who set spirituality at the pinnacle of human experience? How did Jesus deal with people in religion, religious leaders? Did He have a conversation? Or did He issue a condemnation? Because I just want to do what Jesus did.

Well, clearly Jesus did not engage in post-modern conversation. He did not deal in some abstract relativistic dialogue on the themes of spirituality, throwing around ideas about God and ideas about Himself as Jesus that were as flexible as rubber. Here are our Lord's final words about religious leaders - not irreligious, religious, Jewish religious leaders.

And what He says here frankly is not new. Go back to chapter 11 of Luke, it's not new. Verse 37, "When He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him." Now there's a perfect opportunity to have a conversation. This isn't even a formal setting. This isn't even a synagogue, or a sermon, or public meeting in the temple. This is lunch at the Pharisee's house.

"So He went in and reclined *at the table*." And the Pharisee would have had a lot of other Pharisees there, as well. "And when the Pharisee saw it he was surprised that He hadn't first ceremonially washed before the meal." He didn't follow the Pharisaic prescription for some ceremonial washing. He just sat down and ate. And here was the Lord's word to him.

"Now the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but inside of you, you're full of robbery and wickedness.'" That is a short conversation. That is a go-nowhere conversation. And then to make it worse, verse 40, "You fools, did He not who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you.

"Woe to you - " that's damnation, curse you " - Pharisees! You pay tithe of mint and rue and every *kind of* garden herb, and *yet* disregard justice and the love of God; these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! You love the front seats in the synagogue and the respectful greetings in the market place. Woe to you! You're like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over *you* are unaware of it." You're being defiled. That is some kind of conversation.

Luke 12:1, when this massive crowd comes together, so many that they were stepping on one another. "He began saying to His disciples, first *of all*, "Beware of the leaven - " or the influence " - of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. And know this, there is nothing covered up - " hypocrites cover things up, nothing they cover up " - that will not be revealed, nothing hidden that will not be known." I'm going to unmask their hypocrisy.

Now the text before us in Luke 20 has a parallel in Mark 12, also a brief text. But it has another parallel in Matthew 23. Only in Matthew 23, it takes up an entire chapter. The full text of what Jesus says about the Pharisees and the scribes is in Matthew 23. And you can read it on your own. We're not going to go through it today. But it is the full text of what Jesus said on that Wednesday of which Luke only gives us a small portion.

It is a blistering denunciation, a blistering diatribe on the false religious leaders. No conversation, no collegiality, no dialogue, no cooperation; confrontation, condemnation. Without compassion? No. Remember 19:41, when He came to the city, what did He do? He wept. And we just heard again that He declared to them that He is the Messiah, Son of David, Son of God. That is a merciful effort again to declare who He is. These days are full of sadness on His part, and full of compassion, as He gives invitation to them to believe. But when compassion is exhausted and invitations have ended, you have condemnation.

Now let's look at the text. Three points: A caution, characterization, condemnation. Anyone with a corrupted view of Jesus Christ and the gospel is under condemnation. Anyone who doesn't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't know the Father. If you don't know the Son, you don't know the Father, 1 John 2. Let's look at the caution.

Very simple, "Beware of the scribes." Beware of the scribes. In Matthew's lengthy record of the Lord's denunciation, it is "Beware of the scribes and Pharisees." Scribes were Pharisees. Scribes were Pharisees. They were the law experts. Not all Pharisees were scribes, but scribes were Pharisees. There were non-scribal Pharisees, but scribes were Pharisees. They were the experts in the law. They were the legalistic, self-righteous sect.

In fact, the Jews had a saying. The saying went like this, "Moses received the law and gave it to Joshua. Joshua received the law and gave it to the elders. The elders received the law and gave it to the prophets. The prophets received the law and gave it to the Pharisees and the scribes." They were the treasurers of the Law of God. They were the ones given the trust. They were experts. They were the lawyers of Israel.

Now remember, you've got a theocratic kingdom where all law is viewed as God's law, not just biblical law, but the law of tradition, the laws that had grown up through the years. All that composite



of law was viewed in a theocratic way. It was all the law of God.

So, those who knew the law of God, interpreted the law of God, and applied the law of God were the lawyers in Israel. They were not just giving Pharisees, and rabbis, and priests, and others insight into the meaning of Scripture, they were also interpreting all the law, not only in its interpretation, but in its application. They were the lawyers in Israel. They cared for all matters legal. They were the dominant force in Judaism, not only religiously, but socially. They handle all legal matters for people: Property, estates, contracts, resolutions. All those things fell into the hands of these lawyers.

It was no different then than it is for us. All legal matters ultimately end up in the hands of lawyers. And so it did end up in the hands of the scribes. But from their viewpoint, everything was sacred. And every adjudication that they rendered, and every position that they took was, in fact, supposed to be a representation of God and what God willed; a stewardship, if you will, from God.

Because they then were the agents of God, they carried with them tremendous weight and trust. People had nowhere else to turn because there were no others than the scribes to handle all their matters. He warns everybody, both the crowd and the disciples to beware, *prosechete apo*, “take heed, guard yourself against.”

How you going to do that? How you going to do that? Because they are in to everything. How are you going to extract yourself from this theocratic environment where everything falls into the lap of the scribes and they render their will on everything? The last thing that Jesus would say to them is, they're basically good guys, they have religious intentions, they have some spiritual insights, let's have a conversation with them. Push them away, get away from them. Like Jude 23 talks about, you're going to get your garments stained, or you're going to get burned if you get too close.

Why are they such a threat? Because they are not godly. They do not know God. They do not have spiritual wisdom. They are destructive. They are agents of Satan sent to fight the purposes of God.

Do you understand? And this is such a basic thing and I've said it many times through the years, false religion never restrains the flesh. So these people all operate like the worst of the unregenerate, except it isn't apparent on the surface. False religion can't subdue the wretched heart. That can only be subdued by regeneration, and that only happens by means of gospel truth. So they are always going to be one thing on the outside and something else on the inside. Beware of them. They are not godly. They don't have anything spiritually to offer. They can't give you anything beneficial. They are destructive. They are deadly. They are dangerous. Don't get near them, you'll get singed, stained. Stay away.

That's why Psalm 1, something as basic as Psalm 1 says this, at the beginning of the Psalms, lesson one, “Blessed is the man that doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, who doesn't stand in the path

of sinners and sit in the seat of scoffers!" Don't assemble with them.

From the caution comes the characterization. Here's how He characterizes them. Verse 46, "They like to walk around in long robes, love respectful greetings in the market places, chief seats in the synagogues, places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers." Wow. All that sums up in one word: Hypocrites. All people in false religion are hypocrites. They don't know God. They do not know God. You can't get there except through Christ. Our Lord pulls no punches. The main element is that they are all spiritual phonies. They are all spiritual frauds.

Now His audience would be very familiar with these kinds of things that they did. Let's just work our way through six of them. First, they like to walk around in long robes, Greek word *stol*, from which the old word "stole" comes, a robe to the ground. And they began to develop robes that were very different than other people's robes. They were robes that had certain little things on them, markings and fancy things. They became unique, and fancy, and expensive robes that would identify them as the holy people.

They "lengthened the tassels *on their robes*," Matthew 23:5 says. And that comes from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, back in Numbers 15:38-40, God had ordained that the Jews could put little tassels on the bottom of the robe, and it was a really wonderful little kind of symbol to remind them of the law of God. Everywhere you go you see that, it reminds you of the law of God. Jesus had them on His robe, according to Matthew 9:20. It was what they did.

But the scribes and the Pharisees lengthened the tassels, not for the sake of a better memory device, but for the sake of ostentation, appearance. They weren't trying to bring attention to God and His Word, they were trying to bring attention to themselves as if they were holy. It was a way to position themselves, to posture themselves to achieve what they wanted. And what they wanted was to get into the lives of the people and abuse and use the people for their own self will. So they wore special clothes.

I think about that every time I see somebody dressed in some ridiculous religious garment, parading around as if this is some indication of greater holiness. Instead of a little thing on the bottom of the robe to signify submission to God's law, they had developed these kinds of robes that just brought status to them. Still the way it is today. People wearing religious robes.

Secondly, they loved respectful greetings in the marketplace. As they moved in and out of people in the daily life, public life, they expected to be addressed with titles of dignity. Back to Matthew 23 again. In that full treatment of Matthew 23 of our Lord's words about them, He does tell us the particular titles that they liked. It says in verse 7, they want to be called by men "rabbi." We'll use the English transliteration, "rabbi," meaning "exalted teacher, excellency, most knowledgeable one, most

wise." It would be tantamount to, I suppose, calling someone "doctor" today. They were at the top.

In fact, they were so exalted, if you were called "rabbi," you were so exalted that in the Talmud, Sanhedrin 88 is the location in the Talmud, it says that. "It is more punishable to act against the words of a scribe than the words of Scripture." They wanted to be called "excellency, elevated one, most knowledgeable one, exalted one." That's what they sought.

They also wanted to be called "father." Verse 9, "Do not call *anyone* on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." "Father" means "source." Not only are they exalted in their wisdom, but they are the source of spiritual life. They are the source of spiritual truth. They want to be father, progenitor, creator.

So they want to wear fancy robes. They want to take exalted high and mighty sanctimonious titles. And they want to be called "father" as if they are the source of spiritual life. They want to be called "leader," verse 10. "Do not be called leaders, for one is your Leader, *that is*, Christ." Call yourself "servant."

They wanted to be "leader." That is the one who determines direction, the one who determines destiny, the one who sets the course. False teachers are never humble. They wear the facade of humility. But keep it in mind. If you reject the truth, that's the proudest thing you can do to set yourself against God and His Word, right? You reject the Bible, you reject the gospel, that's the ultimate act of pride. False teachers are never humble. The proudest thing you can do is reject the Word of God, rebel against it. That's what they do. Then they want to be exalted by title and by garb.

Thirdly, they love not only "respectful greetings in the market places - " same verb, " - they love chief seats in the synagogues." They had elevated platforms on the front of the synagogue. The important scribes, Pharisees would sit up on that elevated platform, recognized as the experts in the law. Visiting scribes coming from their own place to another synagogue would expect to be ushered up to the elevated place.

Starting to get the picture? Now you know why I am not called "doctor," why I don't wear a robe, and don't sit on the platform. It's just a small way to keep from any of this.

And then, fourthly, they love places of honor at banquets. Any kind of a special occasion, they want the place of honor, which is next to the host. They want to be the center of attention, the most honored of all.

This is what they're after. It's all about pride. All four of those things have to do with pride, elevation. That's what they seek, religious leaders are after this, false religious leaders.

It turns a corner with the fifth one. Verse 47, “Who devour widows’ houses.” Now what is this? First of all, let me just tell you, the word “devour” is a very strong word. There is a verb in the Greek, *esthi*. It means “to consume, or devour,” or that’s metaphoric. Literally, it means “to eat,” the word for eating. But metaphorically, “to devour or consume.”

This is not *esthi*. this is *katesthi*. Always when you add a preposition at the beginning, you intensify the verb. This is “to totally consume, to plunder, to eat up.” Hence, “devour” in the strongest sense. They go after the most defenseless. Like the false teachers of whom Paul writes to Timothy, they go after silly women. They go after the unprotected and the weak. They devour widows’ houses. Widows are the easiest ones to get to.

What do you mean? Well first of all, widows were to be protected, right? Back in the Old Testament, pure religion, says James, is to care for widows. Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 10:18, Malachi 3:5, and other scriptures call upon the people of God to care for widows. God cares for widows. These scribes devour them.

How do they do that? Now keep in mind that they were the lawyers of the system. So when a woman who was a widow needed someone to protect her, she would turn to the lawyer with the idea that he’d protect her home, her property, all of those things. Some interesting study has been done, some interesting research on the kind of behavior that was going on. Here’s just a brief look at it.

First of all, they would take support, money for themselves from widows although it was forbidden. Knowledge without price. 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, 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.

And maybe the worst, they would accumulate debts the widow would owe them, and owe them, and owe them, and be unable to pay and 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, I'll read it to you again, Luke 11:39, "You are full of robbery. You are full of robbery and wickedness." Or the words of Jesus in Luke 16, or the words of Luke, I should say, in Luke 16:14, "The Pharisees, who were lovers of money."

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. And they bilk 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. But you know something? There are evangelists that do that, false evangelists, false religious teachers take money out of people's pockets. And false religions prey on people in third world countries who are already impoverished to start with. The newest episode of that is happening in Africa, by the way. As the health, wealth, prosperity purveyors have now gone to Africa with great success. You've 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.

I'll just give you one illustration. In Lagos, Nigeria, there is one church where this stuff is being proclaimed with 54,000 people in the church. And in order to get the health, wealth, and prosperity, you have to give the leader one month's salary. This in the name of Jesus. Fleecing the abused, fleecing the poor, fleecing the defenseless. And this is spreading across Africa. They're building the biggest churches on the planet in Africa in the name of the health, wealth, prosperity gospel, preying on, P-R-E-Y, on poor people who have no hope. It's a scheme that makes the guy at the top rich.

So, false teachers are proud and greedy, not all to the same degree. And then sixth, "for appearance's sake, they offer long prayers." Nothing wrong with a long prayer. I've prayed a few myself. But something wrong with praying one for pretense, praying just to be seen.

Remember Matthew 6:5-6, where Jesus condemns that kind of praying in the sermon on the mount, which was so characteristic of these false leaders. He says this, "When you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners in order to be seen by men." Spiritual frauds, spiritual phonies taking advantage of people. They do it under pretense.

By the way, the word "under pretense" interesting word, *prophasei* is the word. "That which is put out in front to hide the true state of things." That's what it is. They hide the reality of what they are. It's a specious cloak that they wear, long prayers. It's a game false teachers play. Again in Matthew

chapter 23, the Lord describes this kind of hypocrisy. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees - ” verse 25 “ - hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, inside you’re full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and the dish, that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You’re like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. And even so you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you’re full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

Those are the most religious people in Israel. We have evangelicals today who are saying, “We need to cooperate with Israel. We need to link arms with them because they’re the people of God, and share our spiritual insights.” No. No. Jesus didn’t have a conversation with the most religious in Israel. He issued condemnation. That’s why Matthew 23, again, as long as you’re there, look at it. Verse 15, “Woe - ” that means damnation, cursing, verse 16, “Woe - ” 23, 25, 27, 29, “Woe, woe, woe, woe, woe - ” pronouncing horrendous, horrific judgment on them. Verse 33, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?” That’s a condemnation, not a conversation.

Now let’s go back to Luke, and we see the last words of the chapter. We saw the caution and the characterization. Here’s the condemnation. “These will receive greater condemnation.” The key is greater, not lesser, because they’re religious. The Lord isn’t going to like them all of a sudden because they’re religious, because they’re good, because they’re moral, because God loves all religions, and all religions love God and Jesus loves all religions, and all religions love Jesus. This is wonderful.

No. He pronounces on them a more severer damnation. Greater, *perissoteron*, it’s a comparative, *krima*, judgment. *Perissoteron*, “a far greater, an excessive, a more abundant,” or if you will, “an extraordinary” condemnation, more than the usual. Religious people get a greater damnation, not a lesser one. Far from pleasing God somehow because they’ve lived up to whatever truth they had, they receive a greater condemnation, especially if they’ve trampled underfoot the blood of the covenant and counted it an unholy thing, Hebrews 10:29-31, rejected Christ.

The idea is clear. If you’re in the wrong religion, you’re going to be condemned. If you’re a purveyor of the wrong religion, you’re going to receive a far greater suffering and damnation in hell. They’re dangerous. Be warned. They’re hypocrites. They’re worthy of condemnation. Compassion? Yes. Gospel? Give them the gospel. Pray for their salvation. Have a sad heart. But in the end, we have nothing to learn from false teachers and false religions. And they must know that they are under sentence of divine condemnation. They must know for their sake and the sake of those who need to be protected from them. Let’s pray.

Lord, we can only thank You that this is in Scripture. Were we to speak like this independently of clear teaching of Scripture, it might be more than people could bear. But we know it’s Your mind and Your

will because You put it in Your Word. Yes, we are sad. Yes, we weep over those who are part of these false systems. Yes, we desire mercifully to give them the truth, proclaiming the truth. Even this message is a mercy to any false teacher who hears it. But we must warn them of their coming condemnation and we must warn those who might be seduced by them and fall into that same condemnation.

Thank You for this gracious and merciful warning. And we thank You, Lord, for the truth. We thank You that we who know You have come to the truth because of Your power and Your Spirit. We do want to come together and find out what Moses, and Isaiah, and Paul, and John meant by what they said because it's You speaking in Scripture. We don't want to have a conversation with anybody but with You, and we don't want to even answer, we just want You to speak.

We have nothing to say. We have nothing to offer. We can't improve on Your Word. We're not going to find a better understanding in a conversation with anybody anywhere, especially with those who are dead in trespasses and sins and void of the truth. So, Lord, may we bow only to the Word, and joyfully to the Word, because it is the truth and the truth sets us free. We thank You for it. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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