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

Exposing the Marks of Counterfeit Authority
Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12
Code: 90-353

Well, over the last number of weeks, we have been talking about the necessity of authority in the church in a time when authority is not popular, and even authority from the pulpit is not popular. I can tell you from personal experience that I am the subject of much blogging and have been for many, many years and perhaps it's escalated in more recent years since I wrote the book The Truth War and I am accused, as I have in the past, of being far too authoritarian, far too dogmatic, far too narrow, far too absolute in the things that I say, that I somehow have become quote/unquote non-Christian in my advocacy of the Christian faith because I am not tolerant, I'm not accepting a wide variety of opinions and viewpoints.

I have no personal authority. We have pointed that out in this series. I have no ecclesiastical authority. We have addressed that. There is no human level on which I possess any authority. I have no authority from my education. I have no authority from my office as a pastor. I have no authority from my experience years as a Christian, years in ministry. The only authority that I have and the only time that I am to be heard as an authority is when I rightly proclaim to you the truth of the Word of God. For only the Word of God is the authority.

And so we have talked about how important it is to recognize that God speaks authoritatively. We began in our study to consider Titus 2:15 where we are reminded by the Apostle Paul as preachers and as those who proclaim the gospel to speak, exhort and reprove with all authority. In fact, "Let no one disregard you, no one evade you," the Greek means, no one try to get around you. We are to speak with an authority that is binding on everyone, that no one can allude or evade.

We then move to Paul's instruction to Timothy...from Titus to Timothy and Paul told Timothy to preach the Word and do it all the time, for the Word of God is the authority of God revealed. And so when we talk about ministry, we're simply talking about human beings called by God and given the responsibility from God to proclaim His Word and His Word is authoritative by nature.

Now when we talk about authority, we could probably have a fairly broad understanding of the word. There are people all around us who have authority over us. People where we work have authority over us by title. There are people in our society such as teachers and policemen and government officials who have authority over us. They have been given by our civil society the right to demand certain things from us. They can demand our money. They can demand our conformity to civil law. They can command a certain kind of behavior, and if we don't give that kind of behavior, they have

every right to press in upon us and bring about some severe consequences. We understand that kind of authority, the authority given within civil government to create order in society.

That kind of authority does not exist in the church. When we talk about authority in the church, we're not talking about some power wielded by people because of official status or because of canon law, church law, the traditions of men, as Jesus referred to them. When we talk about authority in regard to the church, or authority with regard to Christian ministry, we're talking about the truth, we're talking about the truth. And in society we use the concept of authority in that way. In fact, you will often hear, for example, if you're watching a documentary on any kind of subject, someone will say, "Let's talk to Mr. So-and-so, he is an authority on this subject." Or if you're working in college on a certain project in a certain course and you have to write a paper, you go the library and you find the authorities on the subject that you are endeavoring to understand. We understand that.

It's authority that comes not from title, it's authority that comes not from grant, but it's authority that comes from having the salient information. That is an inherent kind of authority. And that's what we're talking about when we talk about authority in the church. The authority in the church, the only true authority in the church is the authority that God brings to bear upon His people, and frankly, extended beyond His people to the world that comes from His own demands. The Law of God is an authority. The gospel of Christ is an authority. Everything that God has said in the Word of God is the final word and that bears authority. It's the authority that is consistent with the truth. And that's the only authority that is valid in the church.

Again I say, there is no other authority. You don't get authority by wearing a robe and putting a funny hat on your head. You don't get authority by some education, some degrees after your name, some status, not even from your experience or your personal intuition or insights, not even from your own personal accomplishments and achievements, having ascended some imaginary hierarchical ladder. The only valid authority in the church comes from the truth of God. And those then that speak the truth of God are the authorities. If you know the truth and you provide the truth, you are the authority.

No one ever walked on this earth who had more authority than Jesus Christ. While as far as God was concerned, He had the highest of all titles, Lord and God. As far as men were concerned, He had no title. He had no office. In fact, He was basically demeaned because He came from a nondescript area, Galilee, and even more nondescript town, Nazareth. He had no education. He had no granted titles. He had achieved nothing in the religious world. He was not commended by any of the sects of religion in Judaism whatsoever. He had no authority in terms that people view authority.

But, when He spoke, even after the first great sermon in the book of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, the people were stunned because He spoke as one having authority and not as the rabbis. He came with an authority that was way beyond anything people had ever experienced. Every single thing that came out of His mouth was absolutely true. He spoke only what the Father told Him to say,

only what the Father showed Him and only what the Father said. That's what He says, "I speak only what He shows Me, only what He tells Me, and only what I have heard the Father say." And thus He spoke with authority.

He went on beyond that to say that the Father had committed into His hands all authority in heaven and in earth. The day will come when He will exercise the authority that goes with the title King of kings and Lord of lords, an authority in title consistent with His authority in truth.

Those then who are in the church proclaiming faithfully and accurately the Word of God are speaking authoritatively. We're not usurping authority. We're not taking it personally. We're simply speaking the truth of God which in and of itself bears the full authority of God. That is why believers are told, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 5, "Brethren, appreciate those who diligently labor among you and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, esteem them very highly in love because of their work." Or in Hebrews 13, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you and considering the result of their conduct imitate their faith, obey your leaders and submit to them...verse 17...for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account."

Yes, we bring the Word of God, the authority of God to bear on your life, and yes, you are to obey and submit. That is just so hard for a post-modern church to swallow. They think the preacher should be a comedian, story teller, guy with a lot of insights, that he should make some interesting talks with some good kind of intuitive perspectives, throw in a few personal illustrations, and that's about it. But the idea of standing in a pulpit and saying, "Thus saith the Lord..." and speaking with absolute authority the Word of God and making it binding on every person steps over the bounds and the tolerances of a post-modern world. In fact, having written the book The Truth War, I'm now starting a sequel to that which is going to ask the question that I posed earlier in our study of Luke, "Did Jesus have a conversation with His enemies who disagreed with Him? Did He try to find common ground with them? He did He try to see where they could agree? Or did He flatly condemn them?" And the answer is very clear. In every volatile confrontation that Jesus had with His enemies, He never identified any common ground. He upheld the truth and inevitably condemned those who were purveyors of error.

Sadly, the world has always been full of counterfeit authority. And that's what I want to talk about tonight, let's look at Matthew 23. There has always been a lot of counterfeit authority. You know, on the other hand, just as a footnote to what I've said, I believe that true Christians, real Christians are looking for an authoritative ministry, not an authoritarian one, not demagoguery but I believe true Christians want to understand the authoritative truth of God. I think one of the amazing phenomenons of Grace Community Church is the percentage of our congregation that are college and university students. It's a very, very high percentage. In fact, as we have been charting the growth of our church over many years, and what did we have last Sunday night? A hundred and thirty people joined our church last Sunday night and every month we have another group of people joining our church and

about 85 percent of these people month after month, year after year, are young people thirties and down. And a majority of them are college and university age students. They are the people who are in the antiauthoritarian generation.

But, they're Christians. And they're looking for a true word from God. And it attracts them. I think there are so many people who feel that if you teach with authority the truth of God, you drive people away. Yes, maybe you drive unbelievers away, but you attract the people of God. And that's what a church is, it is an assembly of the people of God who want to know God through knowing His Word. But there are always going to be counterfeit authorities. And in the time of Jesus, they were basically the scribes and the Pharisees, Matthew 23. "Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying this, 'The scribes and the Pharisees.'" They are the subject, they are the subject of our Lord's words in this chapter.

Now you remember in the bigger context, this is during the Passion Week of Jesus. This is His final message to the Jews in the temple area, on His final day there on Wednesday of Passion Week. His last words are words that warn people about counterfeit authority. And this is the full revealed text of what He said. Mark refers to what He said, Luke refers to what He said but Matthew gives us the full account, at least the full revelation that the Spirit intended for us to have contained in Matthew.

Now, the first thing you want to notice about the scribes and Pharisees can be seen by the repetition of one word as you look through the chapter. Verse 13, "hypocrites," verse 14, "hypocrites," verse 15, "hypocrites," and it doesn't stop there. Verse 25, "hypocrites," verse 27, "hypocrites," verse 29, "hypocrites, phony, fake, frauds, counterfeit," they are therefore insidious and extremely dangerous...extremely dangerous. They have a deadly effect on the people who follow them. They lead them right into the mouth of hell. Verse 15, "You travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." Counterfeit religious authority, making sons of hell, that is why they are cursed. Verse 13, "Woe to you," verse 14, "Woe to you," verse 15, "Woe to you," verse 16, "Woe to you," and then verse 23, and verse 25, and verse 27, and verse 29. This is damnation pronounced upon religious hypocrites.

There's nothing in this text to indicate that Jesus was trying to find common ground with counterfeit religious authorities when trying to find a place where they agree on something for the good of civil morality. They are a collection of hypocrites who are damned, a collection of false spiritual authorities. Now remember, this is the Lord's last public sermon and the final words of Jesus matter and His last word is, "Beware...beware of these spiritual counterfeits."

Now there are some things that mark them, okay? And I want to show you what they are in this text. There are things that are evident in the words of our Lord that mark counterfeit religious authorities. Number one, they lack authenticity...they lack authenticity. The words of our Lord are very explicit. Verse 1, "Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees

have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.'"

Each synagogue and the synagogues, by the way, were where the scribes and the Pharisees basically articulated their system of religion, they took it down to the local level. There were synagogues in every town throughout the land of Israel. And in these synagogues there was always a special seat called "Moses' Seat," and it was the place where the leading expert in the Law and religion sat to teach. You remember that the Jewish teachers sat down to teach. This is the seat of authority, the seat of instruction, the seat of knowledge. We even use that today. When you talk about a university education you say someone is the chair of the philosophy department, or the chair of the religion department, or the chair of the science department, or whatever department it is. That basically comes down to us from ancient times. The seat here, the word "seat" is *kathedra*from which we also get the word cathedral which became the seat of the reigning authority in religion in a given city or a given country. When the Pope speaks and pontificates and speaks as the Vicar of Christ, it is said that he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is out of the official seat of authority.

The scribes and Pharisees please have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. The point is, they put themselves there. They were not put there by God. They lack authenticity. They are self-appointed usurpers who took the place of authority as it if belonged to them by divine right. In fact, Jesus warns His own Apostles that the day will come when the Jews will throw you out of the synagogues. This will be led by those who have usurped the seat of authority there and see you as preachers of My gospel as threats. That's what they did. Persecution first broke out in the synagogues, not only in the land of Israel but even in the Gentile world as Paul went from city to city, he would go first to the synagogue and then the persecution would begin. False spiritual leaders are always self-appointed experts. They are not placed there by God, not called by God, not confirmed by godly leaders, not faithful to the truth, self-appointed.

Now there's a reason for training. There's a reason that serious minded Christians throughout history have designed ways to train men before they place them in positions of leadership. There's a reason for that because if you're going to take the place of authority and you're going to say "thus saith the Lord," you better have the skills to know that your interpretation is correct. I don't want to do two things for sure in life, one, say God said something He didn't say, and not say something that He did say. I don't want to put words in His mouth, I don't want to take words out of His mouth. Therefore, if I am going to say I speak the Word of God to you, I bring to you the authority of the revelation of God, it's incumbent upon me to have the necessary tools, spiritually and mentally, experientially and to have the affirmation of men far wiser than myself that I am ready to take on this formidable task. There's a reason for that. There's a reason for ordination. There's a reason for counsel of wise, mature, godly men who are sound in theology and know the Word of God to test and approve another man. It's not because we want to have a hierarchy. It's not because we think they ought to go through the same grind we had to go through to get here. It's because we understand the severe and serious nature of what we do.

In fact, if you were here during the time of the Reformation, caught preaching without ordination, you would be put in jail. Not a bad idea. I remember being on NBC television one time, talking with, at the time, Paul Moyer who was a local anchor, has been for many years. And He looked at me and he said, “You don’t say the things that we hear so many others say, who polices your movement?” Even an unbeliever on the outside wondered why there was no standard for preaching that was evident to him. No standard for truth. You couldn’t get away with that in the medical world. You couldn’t get away with it in the business world. You’ve got to do all your accounting according to government standards in business. But you can get away with it in the church.

There’s a reason why we want men to have affirmation from a collection of elders so that there’s accountability, so that no man is an island who just runs off and does his own thing, doesn’t have to answer to anybody. There’s a reason why godly men when they establish a ministry have a constitution and they fill that constitution with those things that biblically define the doctrine and the life of the church because that then becomes the standard that is established to which all men must be held. There’s a reason for that.

We live in a time today when anybody who wants to can open a church...no doctrinal statement, no board, no accountability, no training, nothing, and go off willy-nilly and say whatever he wants to say in whatever way he wants to say it and become a self-appointed, self-established, self-motivated, self-controlled entrepreneur.

There’s a reason why there’s a stringency before you go out into ministry. There’s a reason why you need approval. Not everybody needs to go to seminary, but everybody needs to be affirmed by those who are in a position to know your suitability and preparedness to handle the Word of God before they launch you out. But today you don’t have to know any theology. In fact, now it’s kind of popular to say, “I don’t know, I don’t know, I don’t know...I don’t know about that.” And that’s kind of the whimsical new way to minister.

In Jeremiah chapter 14, and I can tell we’re not going to finish this, but that’s okay, in Jeremiah chapter 14, because I do need to show you these texts...in Jeremiah chapter 14 and verses 14 and 15, the Lord said to me, “The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them, nor spoken to them.” I didn’t send them...I didn’t command them...And I haven’t given them what to say....they’re prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. You think that’s gone away? That hasn’t gone away. Therefore, verse 15, “Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them, yet they keep saying there shall be no sword or famine in this land, by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end.”

They're giving you a message that everything is fine and there's not going to be any sword, that is indicating that an enemy would come in under divine compulsion and for divine judgment, a famine would ensue again under divine judgment. They're not going to tell you the truth about that. I didn't send them. I didn't give them a message. They speak on their own a false vision. That's still around, as you well know.

Jeremiah again addresses false prophets in chapter 23 and a couple of verses there. Chapter 23 verse 21, "I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. If they had stood in My counsel, then they would have announced My words to My people and would have turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds." If they had come from Me, they would have spoken My words and there would have been a real turning, a real revival.

Verse 32, "Behold, I'm against those who have prophesied false dreams, declares the Lord, and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting. Yet I did not send them, or command them, nor do they furnish these people the slightest benefit, declares the Lord." Self-appointed, self-styled, independent prophets saying whatever they want to say, passing it off, having been deceived in their own hearts, they deceive others with their empty imaginations.

Verses 15 and 16, by the way, of that same chapter give you some idea how the Lord feels about them. "Therefore, thus says the Lord of host concerning the prophets, 'Behold, I'm going to feed them worm wood, make them drink poisonous water. For from the prophets of Jerusalem, pollution has gone forth into all the land.' Thus says the Lord of host, verse 16, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you, they're leading you into futility. They speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord.'"

You'll read this again in chapter 27 of Jeremiah. Again in chapter 28, again in chapter 29, very similar passage in the thirtieth chapter of Isaiah, self-appointed.

In contrast to that, someone who comes with true authority, has been called by God, gifted by God, confirmed by the leaders of the church and faithful to the Scripture, that's where true authority comes from. False authority, counterfeit authority inevitably self-appointed, and when you try to hold them to a biblical standard, they will scream that you are intolerant and narrow minded and bigoted and judgmental and divisive and condemning because that's their only defense to back you off. And by the way, that defense has worked wonderfully in contemporary evangelicalism.

So counterfeit authority lacks authenticity. Secondly, counterfeit authority, and this is an important one, lacks integrity...lacks integrity. Verse 3, "They're in the chair of Moses, therefore all that they tell you either do and observe, or you do and observe," and that simply means this, when in fact they do, tell you what Moses said, when they do tell you what the Law of God said, then they're correct.

And they certainly do that. They're like the clock that doesn't run, it's right twice a day. That's...you know, false religious leaders have to be right some of the time about some things, or they gain no audience.

So, there are things that are a true representation of Moses. They tell those things to you and you do them. Or, perhaps in the imperative, do them and observe them but do not do according to their deeds for they say things and do not do them. In other words, when they do reflect the Law of Moses and they try to press it upon you, it is something they themselves do not even obey. They lack integrity.

They're always corrupt on the inside. False teachers are always corrupt on the inside because counterfeit religious authority like all counterfeit religion cannot restrain the flesh. That is such a basic principle. Through the years we've tried to get you to understand that. No false paradigm of spirituality can restrain the flesh. If you're not a true Christian but you're a false one, there is nothing in your false religion to restrain your flesh. You might be able to on the surface, on the outside have control as Paul did even as a Pharisee, being so zealous for the Law was measured by the Law externally blameless. As far as people could see, he lived a blameless life. But the truth of the matter is, his heart was wretched and rotten. And as he came to understand the reality of that, it led him to Christ. There is no integrity. They're always corrupt on the inside. The flesh is only being capped and building and building and building pressure.

False teachers are described in the most...in the most horrific manner in the New Testament, throughout Scripture really. The description of them goes like this, "They are leaven. They are whited tombs, whited walls, graves concealed, broken pots covered with silver, tares, wolves in sheep's clothing, wells without water, they are presumptuous, natural brute beasts to be taken and destroyed, they are filth spots and scabs, immoral, covetous, cursed children, clouds in a tempest to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever, deluded dreamers who defile the flesh, spots on your love feasts, clouds without water, trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots, raging waves of the sea foaming out their own shame, wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness. They are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts, their mouths speaking great swelling words, cloaks over sin, sensual and without the Holy Spirit."

That's a sad state. That's counterfeit religious authority. Why would you be looking for common ground with them? They're always corrupt because there's nothing in their false religion to restrain the flesh, it's only capped visibly, building up pressure. There's no real internal restrain. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 7:16, "You'll know them by their fruit." Time and truth go hand in hand. Eventually the truth will be known. They're full of mass vice. They possess a theatrical goodness, superficial goodness.

And so, Jesus says to them, “Don’t do what they do. They speak from Moses, you follow that. Do not do what they do because they say things and do not do them.” They lack integrity.

So what you want to do when you’re looking at someone who supposedly has spiritual authority is you want to see the life. That’s why, folks, the media is so much a haven for false teachers because you can’t get to them. You don’t know them. You don’t know their life. That’s the curse of the modern technological world. It can also be the curse of a big, big organization where someone is the guru of that organization but is virtually unknown and untouchable. God intended those who are true leaders of His church to live with His people and have their lives under constant scrutiny.

Counterfeit authority lacks authenticity and it lacks integrity. Thirdly, characteristically it lacks sympathy...it lacks sympathy. Verse 4, “They tie up heavy loads and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

This is a very vivid picture to somebody living in the time of our Lord, New Testament time. Pictures of someone who has unmercifully loaded his animal, tied on massive burdens to the back of this poor beleaguered beast. That’s exactly what these counterfeit leaders did. They brought people under a pile of burdens. Rules, regulations, financial demands, impossible rules, they loaded them down with these things. They were incalculable and the people were unable to obey them all. There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of laws that had accumulated by the rabbis, well over 600 of them to which all people were supposed to conform themselves. Impossible.

And then it says, “Having loaded the people with those things, they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.” Literally, remove them. No sympathy, no care, they are heartless, they are loveless, they are abusive. This too is characteristic of false teachers in the past. And Ezekiel chapter 34 mentions this, “Son of Man...verse 2...prophesied against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord God, woe shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves, should not the shepherds feed the flock?’” Oh, that sounds familiar, doesn’t it? You impoverish the flock to feed yourself. That’s part of the burden you place on them. You want to be spiritual, you want God on your side, give me your money. “You eat the fat and clothe yourself with the wool and slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly, you have not strengthened. The disease you have not healed. The broken you have not bound up. The scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost, but with force and severity you have dominated them. And they were scattered for lack of a shepherd and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains, on every high hill and My flock was scattered over all the service of the earth. There was no one to search or seek for them.”

How different when the Lord Jesus came to seek and save the lost. And when He came, to be sympathetic, to heal them, to feed them, to redeem them. Therefore, verse 7 Ezekiel 34, “You shepherds hear the Word of the Lord, as I live...declares the Lord God...surely because My flock has become a prey, a prey to the shepherds. My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd. Because you’re not shepherding My people, you leave them unprotected and they’re consumed by the enemies of the truth. My shepherds didn’t search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and didn’t feed My flock. Therefore you shepherds, hear the Word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I’m against the shepherds and I shall demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep so the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore but I shall deliver My flock from their mouth that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord God, I myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.” Jesus comes and says I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for the sheep.

Go back to Matthew chapter 12 for a moment. There’s a wonderful statement there, one of my favorite comments. Jesus in verse 15 has a whole group of people following Him. And He heals them. And it is said that this is a fulfillment of what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, verse 17 of Matthew 12. And the prophet has said, “Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased. I’ll put My Spirit upon Him, He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles, He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.” And then this wonderful verse 20, “A battered reed He will not break off, a smoldering wick He will not put out.” That is just wonderfully rich language.

In ancient times, shepherds would make a flute. They would make a flute out of a reed and they would for hours play soft music to wile away the time and calm the sheep. When the reed became soft from the saliva, it would eventually bend and wilt and be thrown away cause it could no longer make music.

Also in the ancient world, they had wicks. They had a little container they poured oil into and they just laid a wick floating in the oil and lit the wick. But eventually the wick would burn down and it would just smolder and make smoke and it would have to be thrown away.

The prophet Isaiah says when Messiah comes, He will not do that. Where He finds a battered reed, He won’t throw it away. Where He finds a smoldering wick, He will not discard it. In other words, He picks up the broken. He picks up the bruised, the very kind of people that the Pharisees and the scribes totally ignored. In fact, the Pharisees and the scribes were convinced that they were in the condition they were in because of the judgment of God. They lacked sympathy.

Mark it, my friends, those with counterfeit spiritual authority always abuse people and they will abuse the people who are least able to defend themselves. Spiritual...false spiritual leaders, counterfeit leaders, lack authenticity, they lack integrity, they lack sympathy. Number four, and then I’ll give you

one more, they lack spirituality. They lack spirituality.

Everything is for show. Verse 5, “They do all their deeds to be noticed by men, for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.” Everything is for show. Jude 19 says, “They do everything to gratify the flesh.” Remember back in Matthew 18 where Jesus described them as going in public places, throwing ashes on their heads to appear meek and then praying out loud so everyone could hear them? Doing their alms in public, blowing a trumpet and then doing their giving in the receptacles in the temple courtyard? They are without the Spirit, that’s what Jude says. They are void of the Spirit.

They have no spiritual life. They’re spiritually dead. They’re flesh-dominated spiritual frauds even though they head up churches, even though they head up religious schools and colleges and seminaries and denominations and call themselves pastors and preachers, it’s all for show. It’s all a display of the flesh, like Galatians 6:12, they make a fair show of the flesh. They salve their evil conscience by convincing themselves that public acclaim is equal to spirituality. They are not spiritual. It’s all for show.

And Jesus goes on to describe some of the things they actually did. They broadened their phylacteries. That’s a strange thing to most people. What’s it talking about? Well phylacteries were little boxes, actual little boxes that they placed on their body. And it all sort of started because in the Mosaic Law there was a command, actually repeatedly given, that the Law of God was to be on the hand and between the eyes. “Write My Law on your forehead and on your hand.” That was metaphoric. That was symbolic.

In other words, make sure that everything you think is put through the Word of God. And everything you do takes into account the Word of God. The Word of God to govern your thinking, the Word of God governs your behavior. And that’s how it was understood, that it was symbolic, thought and action. The Word of God dominates your actions. It was not until 400 B,.C., really the end of the Old Testament era, the beginning of the four hundred silent years that the Jews decided that in order to obey that text, they had to actually put the Law of God on their forehead and put the Law of God on their hand.

Now it was not practical to put the whole Mosaic Law in a box, that would be a massive scroll. But they wanted to parade their virtue, so they made little boxes covered with black leather and they strapped them on their foreheads. They basically contained four sections of the Law. They became magic charms to keep away evil, like carrying around a rabbit’s foot, or a lucky charm. In fact, they taught that God even wore little black boxes. I’m not exactly sure where they thought He attached them, since God is a Spirit.

On the arm, they put one. They marked that box with a sheen(??), that's a Hebrew letter. The head strap formed a *dolet*(??), and then the arm band formed a *jod*, and a combination came out *shaddai*... *El Shaddai*, the name of God. And, as time went on, the more spiritual you were, the bigger your box became. And so they broadened their boxes to parade their spirituality, like wearing robes, backward collars, funny cone hats, any kind of garb, any kind of superficial way to call attention to your holiness, I guess.

Furthermore, they lengthened the tassels of their garments. Same idea exactly. Numbers 15...Numbers 15 is...you don't have to look it up, just to comment on it...indicated that they were to have fringes on their robes...just a fringe on the bottom of the robe, which would mark them as God's people. A wonderful distinction. I wish we would do that, it's better than a fish bumper sticker. We could all just have a fringe somewhere that identified us as Christians. They were God's people. It was to remind them that they were separate. It was to remind them that they were different. It was to always remind them that they belonged to God.

Well eventually they started making them bigger so that it would appear more virtuous, more committed to God, more committed to the Law, and so the tassels got fatter and fatter and longer and longer. No spirituality at all, nothing on the inside.

They had no real authority. They didn't recognize the truth. They had no authenticity. They appointed themselves to their position. They had no integrity. They did occasionally speak the things that are written in the Word of God, but they themselves did not even do them. They had no sympathy. They were happy to suck the life out of the people for their own personal gain. And they had no spirituality. Those who have counterfeit authority fit into this category. One final thing, they lack humility...they lack humility.

It's already hinted at in the phylacteries and the tassels, but the Lord gets even more specific, they love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces and being called by men rabbi.

The seat of honor would always be on the right and left hand of the host. That's where they wanted to be, either on the right or the left hand of the host. Chief seats, up front, raised platform at the synagogue facing the people belonged to those who were the revered teachers. They loved honoring titles, respectful greetings in the marketplace means they love the people to greet them with titles. And rabbinic writings give these elaborate directions as to the place and rank and treatment of Pharisees, and equally elaborate punishments for those who fail to do it. The Pharisees considered themselves worthy to be addressed as those who were hirer than kings. In fact, Jewish writings tell of a debate between God and the academy of rabbis which a rabbi was called to settle.

The Mishnah says, “It is more punishable to act against the words of the scribes than against the words of the Scripture.” So they had a greatly inflated sense of their own importance. They loved to be called rabbi, meaning great one, Latin*docere (???),*from which we get doctor, doctor, your excellency.

They loved to be called other things than that. He says they loved to be called teacher, father, leader...teacher, meaning the one with all the truth...father, the source of everything. Always been a curiosity to me that the Church of England refers to a bishop as the right reverend father in God. Counterfeit religious authority feed on titles like this. They piled them up. Our Lord says, “Do not be called rabbi, for one is your teacher, you’re just all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father spiritually...doesn’t talk about your human father...don’t call anyone father. How does the Catholic Church get around that? Everybody’s father. I have well-intentioned Roman Catholics call me father. You only have one source and that’s God who is in heaven, and don’t even be called leaders. One is your leader, that is Christ. They lacked humility. False authorities pumped themselves up with endless titles.

They lack authenticity. They lack integrity. They lack sympathy. They lack spirituality. And they lack humility. Jesus is warning these people about them and He is saying to His own in verses 8 and following, “You be the opposite. You be the opposite. Don’t let anybody call you rabbi as if you are the one in whom all truth resides. For one is your teacher and you’re just brothers. And don’t let anybody call you father as if you’re the source of spiritual truth and life. There’s only one who is the source, the one who is in heaven. And don’t even be called leaders. There’s just one leader and that’s Christ. You’re all brothers. You’re all followers.” That’s why I don’t like to be Reverend Anybody, Doctor Anybody, I just want to be John. If they call Jesus, Jesus and not Doctor Jesus, I don’t need to be Doctor Anybody. As I told somebody, I’m not a doctor anyway, I’m not even a nurse. I don’t need any title, I’m not the source of anything, I’m just the servant. And that Jesus made so clear throughout His ministry, so clear. He said so many times, “He who is least among you shall be greatest.” He said, “The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.”

Repeatedly He told the disciples if you want to be first, be last. True spiritual authorities faithful to the Word of God are called by God, gifted by God, set apart by God, not self-appointed. They seek to serve, not to be served. They are faithful in the stewardship in the sacred trust of Scripture, not inventing their own ideas. They are faithful to feed the flock, sympathize with the flock, not ever fleece the flock. They seek to demonstrate the meekness and gentleness of Christ. Seek no honor for themselves but all honor for Christ. They do not preach what they cannot and will not live. Like Jesus, they don’t break the already bruised and broken. They don’t extinguish the last signs of life. They lift up the broken and the bruised.

It’s a very, very important contrast. They are the true sympathizers. They are the truly humble. And this is where I want you to end with me here. They are those with real integrity. They are authentic

and don’t dismiss those realities because they speak with authority. The fact that they speak with authority from the Word of God is consistent with being true shepherds.

Our Father, we thank You tonight for another rich, wonderful glimpse into this matter of spiritual authority. You’ve helped us so much through the last weeks to understand this. We want to demonstrate humility, we want to demonstrate the meekness and gentleness of Christ, we want to demonstrate compassion and sympathy and tender heartedness. We want to lift up the bruised and the broken and the flickering. But, Lord, all of that sympathy, all of that humility, all of that compassion must be wed to the truth...to the truth. And for those who are authentic because they’ve been gifted and called and affirmed, to those who possess true spirituality because they are genuine Christians, Father, give them greater courage and greater conviction to speak, to exhort with all authority and let no one disregard them. Give us, Lord, Christians in this world who without hesitation in love will speak the truth. This alone saves and sanctifies and thus brings You glory. Help us, Lord, to be faithful to this, we pray in Your Son’s name. Amen.

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