

**Matthew 23:25-28**

- 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.
- 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.
- 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth.
- 28 So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Jesus is getting close to the end of his time physically here on the earth. They are now in Jerusalem and Jesus condemns the scribes & Pharisees by calling them out on their hypocrisy. They love their positions of power and this causes them to lose sight of the actual will of God. Jesus warns them that Jerusalem killed the prophets. He is preaching and teaching to the crowd and cautions them against hypocrisy and instructs them to do what the scribes and the Pharisees teach but do not follow their actions. He lays out a tirade of woes and calls out multiple offenses against God. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees because you are hypocrites. The problem with their religion is that it has allowed human will to rule over God's will. The solution to this comes from the power of God. The power of God is the only thing that is strong enough to fix a corrupt religious system.

Jesus delivers seven woes. Woe to the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, they are full of greed and self-indulgence. On the outside they look good but on the inside they are dirty. The outside looks righteous but the inside is full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Based on ceremonial purity, a supply of water was on hand to purify men's bodies. Jesus contrasts this external cleanliness with the heart and mind of men as it compromises religious integrity with external appearances.

Jesus condemns the religious leaders. Judaism is portrayed as being hopelessly corrupt. Jesus does not condemn the Jews – he came to save them. The scribes and Pharisees do not enter the kingdom of heaven because they do not allow others. The key point is that humans do not determine access to heaven. Attempting to do so is an abuse of power. The lesson is about the failure of religious leaders. He is warning the people to avoid becoming like the authority figures that condemn others while ignoring their own sins.

This is the same problem of contemporary society. Many churches and denominations condemn others while ignoring their own sins. The contemporary lesson for us is to see how the Scripture applies to us as truth in our modern world. People have concern for scruples and righteous conduct but no concern for justice, mercy, and faith. There is a disparity between what we choose to believe and what is real as we preach and teach. The false realism becomes our reality as religion becomes skewed towards favoritism. The more it is skewed to favor one, the more others are rejected and neglected.

I was talking with a man that drove through Virginia and finding out that I am a Virginian we engaged in a conversation. He saw a church sign that stated "This is not a gun free zone." The man questioned, "What kind of church is this? Jesus did not say 'kill your enemies' "

Jesus said ‘love your enemies.’” This is probably my biggest pet peeve. People claim to be Christian but end up following human doctrine more than Christ’s actual doctrine. Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of sacrificing love and care for rules and regulations. The problem is not whether you agree or disagree with gun free zones, the problem is one of distorted doctrine.

There are many reasons for distorted doctrine. There is a trend in our culture that it is enough to attend church without a change of heart and life of devotion. The thought is that their action of attendance is enough but they fail to see their need for God’s grace. There is a legalism of righteousness where following God’s commands of rigid rules ignores the fact that we cannot earn God’s favor. Our hearts need to be transformed by God’s grace. God works in our lives through the gospel even when we can’t feel it directly. When you pursue Christ first, the experience will follow. Divisive social issues serve as a litmus test for the true Christian. Problems develop when the items selected are not in sync with the Gospel. This reduces the gospel to participation in activism. There are also people that know the scriptures and theology well but fail to live out the Christian faith practically. They master the word but do not allow the word to master them. There are occasions where people come to church just for the fellowship in the life of the church. Whereas, fellowship is good, a problem develops when church life becomes a social club that emphasizes relationships over growing in Christ. This is problematic as friendship replaces Christ as the main thing. Perhaps the worst of it all is judgmentalism. The sin that is addressed the most by Jesus is to see the sin of others and ignore your own self as a sinner. This position sees the sin of another as being a greater sin than your own. Therefore, they fail to seek Christ as our Savior.

The gospel is not a matter of knowing the facts, having Christian friends, or saying and doing the right things. The gospel is the salvation of Jesus. It is his death and resurrection that reconciles us to God through faith in Christ. We avoid distortions to doctrine when we acknowledge the fact that we struggle with one or more distortions. The solution is to fight against distortion and not lose sight of God’s grace. Keep the gospel in perspective and pray that we are shaped by the true gospel. When Jesus says “Woe to You,” he is not addressing the sins that are hot topics for people to condemn, he is addressing hypocrisy.