

Aletheia Christian Fellowship
November 22, 2020
“Hypocrisy”

Sunday school at 8:30, Service at 9:15, Service at 10:45 with King's Kids.

NEWS

Be respectful of others by allowing them to deal with COVID 19 in their own way.
 Wednesday Night Activities at 6:30 PM

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MATTHEW 23:1-12

This entire chapter is a polemic [πολεμέω (pō-lē-mē-ō) to make war] against the Scribes and Pharisees in general, yet it starts with Jesus telling the people to “Do and observe,” “All that they tell you.”

1) Jesus used hyperbole [ὑπερβολή (hū-pēř-bō-lā) to exaggerate] in order to get the audience’s attention and ensure that they get the point.

That means that Jesus wasn’t being completely literal.

If, as we assert, the Bible was written by God Himself, authorial intent is all that matters. What did God mean?

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

2) Jesus was addressing the crowd (Mark 12:37), and His Disciples, but not really the Scribes and Pharisees... Why?

You must willingly give up everything you think you have to follow Jesus.

To refuse to believe is bad enough, but to deny the faith by hypocritically pretending to be devoted to God, is far worse (I Timothy 5:8).

The way we ensure that we stay the course, is to practice being the opposite of a hypocrite... To be genuine. The best tool we have to help us with that is transparency.

If you are a hypocrite, you need to immediately repent in sackcloth and ashes. You can fool people... You can never fool God (Hebrews 10:31).

For such people there is no hope (Hebrews 6:4-8) and that they were never really part of us anyway (I John 2:19).

Please ensure that you are in the Faith... Diligently seek the face of the Only Savior daily. Godliness is not necessary for salvation, but it is a byproduct of it...

The "Chair," is the Greek word καθέδρα (kätth-ë-dräh). Is there something about God using particular men to convey His Word? Men who are in the Seat of Moses because He put them there, even if, they themselves will be lost?

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 23a ~ 112220

“Hypocrisy”

Good morning my friends, I'm disappointed that I can't be there with you fellowshiping in the House of the Lord today. I've been feeling poorly. Many different symptoms. Probably some run-of-the-mill cold, but in an abundance of caution... Don't you hate that? Did you ever thing the words, “In an abundance of caution,” would make you cringe? Anyway, just to be safe, I didn't what to expose everyone to whatever it is that I have... I'm hopeful for a speedy return.

I'm pretty sure were still in Matthew's Gospel, but guess what? The 23rd chapter. Let's read God's word together... Matthew 23:1-12, 1Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. 4“They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. 5“But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. 6“They love the

place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, 7and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. 8“But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10“Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11“But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12“Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

This is just the beginning of an entire chapter that is a polemic against the Pharisees in general. A polemic is a strong verbal, or written attack on someone, or something. It derives from the Greek πολεμέω (pō-lē-mē-ō) armed conflict, to make war, or to fight. This is a harsh criticism of the Pharisees and yet it starts with Jesus telling the people, along with His Own Disciples to “Do and observe,” “All that they tell you.” That seems odd.

It’s bad enough here, but by the time we get to the “Woes,” in verses 13 to 33, it seems as though every one of the Scribes and the Pharisees was such a “Hypocrite,” such a “Serpent,” such a “Viper,” such a “Son of Hell,” to use Jesus’s Own Words, that to “Do

and observe” anything they said, would be crazy insane.

Beyond that seemingly strange reality, there are some other things, especially later in this chapter, which are extremely confusing and have caused Christians to come up with all sorts of ridiculous rules and standards of conduct over the centuries.

Like everything in the Bible, there’s an answer. As is also typical the answers are not all that difficult to discover or to grasp, but it does take more patience, care, concern, and effort, than most people are willing to invest. Not us though, not us.

1) First, this is, as I said, a polemic. It is its own genre to a degree. The most obvious difference between this type of speech and general discourse is the hyperbole involved (hyperbole is from the Greek ὑπερβολή [hü-pěř-bö-lā] to cast above, as in an extraordinary degree of excess. It means to exaggerate, or talk in extremes, in order to get the audience’s attention and ensure that they get the point.

So, in this case, grand sweeping statements are made in order to dramatize and drive home the importance of

the rebuke. It is partially to get the subject of the attack, that's the Scribes and Pharisees, to change, but, as noted, it is far more, a warning to the others not to be like them. What does that mean to us? That means that Jesus isn't being completely literal. Well, we don't like that, because we are literally minded people.

We are so literally minded that we are constantly saying the word, "Literally," even though we don't seem to know what it means. "I blew my nose so hard my ears, literally, exploded." Well, no they didn't. "I am literally glued to my seat when Scott preaches." Would that be Elmer's, or Loctite... Perhaps Gorilla Glue?

Jesus said in verse 2, "The scribes and the Pharisees," and then went on for a whole chapter railing against them. His actual, literal, words, mean every Scribe and every Pharisee, all the time, and in every circumstance. There were not any Scribes or Pharisees excluded from His comments if we take Jesus literally. But we know for sure, that there were Scribes and Pharisees that were excluded.

In verse 3, Jesus said "All that they tell you, do and observe." Literally, everything, no matter what it would be, that any Scribe, or Pharisee, at any time, for any

reason, tells you to do, you must do, no questions asked. That's the literal meaning of Jesus' words and we know that it was definitely not what He meant.

In verse 4, Jesus said, "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders." There is not one record of any Scribe, or Pharisee, loading up a person as they would a donkey to transport a "Heavy load."

Jesus said in verse 9, that we should literally, never call anyone "Father," except for Father God. Did He mean for His words to be taken literally? Of course not, but that's what His Words would indicate.

If we, Western Culture people, really want to take the Bible literally, we need to take the words the way they were literally intended by the speaker, or author... In this case, as God intended. We will run astray if we always take words completely literally, or take them the way we ourselves would mean them, if we spoke them, or take them as the words resonate with us.

If, as we assert, the Bible was written by God Himself by way of human authors inspired by His Holy Spirit, then authorial intent is all that matters. What did God mean? What did Jesus' attack really mean and what

did the Holy Spirit intend for us to get from it today? So, why did Jesus say it and why did the Holy Spirit record it and preserve it the way He did?

2) Second, the Bible tells us that Jesus was addressing the crowd of people who had been hanging on His every word so far. They were enjoying Jesus' teaching says Mark 12:37, and they were still open to Jesus. Along with those people, Jesus was addressing His own Disciples. That's the people firmly in His camp. We have clues that some Scribes and Pharisees were still in the audience as well. While they are the target of Jesus' polemic, they are not specifically addressed.

Why? For them, as the poster boy example, it's too late. The average Jew holding some degree of religious power has already made up their mind and will not change. Somewhere, somehow, they had calculated the price of following Jesus was too high. They have their place in the hierarchy and in the state religion. Life was working for them to some degree. They weren't going to jeopardize what they already had, for something potential that, to them, seemed like a long shot.

See what I mean? They wanted their cake and they wanted to eat it as well. Nothing has changed. We want to live the life we want to live, and we want to have Jesus as well. It does not work that way.

You must willingly give up everything you think you have to follow Jesus and in general the more you have to give up the harder it is to do it, but do it you must. Not your health, not your relationships, not your livelihood, not your hobbies, not your politics, not your patriotism, not your ego, not your opinions, nothing, absolutely nothing can be more important to you than following Jesus wherever He says go.

Please hold what you think you have loosely enough to be open to God. He will surprise you. He will take you out of your comfort zone. He will reveal Himself to be different than your preconceived idea of Him, bigger than the box you have put Him in, but not, if you have already made up your mind, because you're afraid to lose what you think you possess.

Using hyperbolic, dramatic speech, for an effect, Jesus pointedly tells His target audience that the general way the typical Scribe and Pharisee conducts himself is all wrong - in fact it is worse than unbelief (I Timothy 5:8).

To refuse to believe is bad enough, but to deny the faith by hypocritically pretending to be devoted to God, but really only being devoted to yourself is far worse.

Most of us know of people who put on a wonderful Christian show, perhaps for years, or even decades, only to repudiate Christ Jesus through their horrific hypocrisy.

I knew a young pastor, who worked for years in the ministry, even planting a church, doing missionary work, and preaching powerful sermons on faith... He moved in with his girlfriend before he divorced his wife and left his kids, abandoned his church, and rejected Christ.

I have far too many such stories and I'm sure you've got some that I haven't heard before. It breaks my heart, as I'm sure it breaks God's heart (I Timothy 2:4, II Peter 3:9). Not just for the people who played everyone for so long, but for all the Christians who are buffeted by the betrayal and all the non-Christians who just got another excuse not to believe.

It is a tragedy. Statistically speaking I'm certain that you know such a person right now who seems like the

model Christian, but who is really an agent of Satan. What's so crazy is oftentimes they don't know that they're hypocrites... And even if they do, they rationalize their behavior to ignore any Holy Spirit conviction or feeling of guilt.

On that note. I feel that it is necessary to bring something to your attention. Back in the early spring of 2019, so a year and a half ago, I gave a lengthy description of a miraculous healing, and souls saved, during my sermon.

The subject person was a young mother who was a member of a local church. Her pastor is a friend of mine. He and I, along with some other pastors, have a Monday meeting time. Our primary purpose is to pray for revival in the Flathead Valley. Of course, we pray for a whole host of other things and of course we talk about the bigger issues each one of us is facing as we do pastoral ministry together in our community.

We started praying for this young mom nearly 4 years ago. Her pastor would give us an update, and we would pray. I got the Elders of our church praying early

on and eventually asked everyone at Alêtheia to pray for her.

In March of 2019 she was, by all accounts, supernaturally, miraculously, completely, healed. Her pastor and his wife, were, by that time, deeply involved on a daily basis with her. He was exuberant, as you can imagine. Our pastor group went on our annual retreat for a couple of days at that time and were filled in on all the details of the miracle and the salvation of others, through it all.

The story didn't end there... As it progressed. Some of us began to question things more and more. We were assured, and we felt bad about our cynicism and refocused on praising God for what had happened and praying for what still needed to happen.

Anyway, it now appears that the entire four-year odyssey was a scam. Evidently, she perpetrated such an elaborate hoax that will probably be made into a docudrama. Again, it is sad for the person who would pretend one thing but be another. It is heartbreaking for all the Christians who will be jaded by this and it is a tragedy that non-Christians will use this against us and against God.

But here's the absolute Truth of it my dear, precious brothers and sisters... Nothing has changed. God is still on His throne. His true children are still His children, the Christian church can endure the ridicule, the hard-hearted don't need another excuse and those who will turn, will turn, and this young woman still needs your prayers... In fact, she needs your prayers more now than before. Before the worst thing that could happen was that she would die and go to heaven. Now it seems that there is a far worse possibility.

Pray for her - she is extremely ill. It's not cancer and it's not a heart problem, it's something doctors cannot fix - only God can truly heal a person's broken spirit and fallen nature.

We did everything exactly right. We heard that there was a need and so we prayed. We heard that there was a healing and so we praised. It is irrelevant what she did, what's relevant is what you did. "Let everyone be a liar, but God be true" (Romans 3:4).

Naturally, you wonder how it's possible and want more details. That's human to want to figure it out. Resist the

urge to know the gory details and just trust God by continuing to do what's right. There are legitimate concerns for the future.

The way we ensure that we stay the course, is to practice being the opposite of a hypocrite... To be genuine. The best tool we have to help us with that is transparency. Being open about your thoughts and your deeds. Freely admitting your faults and your failures. Bring everything into the open. Evil flourishes in the dark.

I've never been a fan of the "Accountability partner" phenomenon in Christianity. To have an accountability partner means that you have things you're hiding from everyone else. Don't be that person. Have no secrets. Of course, like Jesus, I don't mean, have no secrets at all, I just mean the more open our lives are to the light, the less we can be tempted and the less we can be extorted.

In that vein, I will share all that I know about the situation, but this is not the time, or forum. In the meantime, I am asking you to realize that it didn't catch God off guard. I am asking that you react to it as the mature Christians that you are. I am asking that you

pray for this woman, her kids, her pastor, his wife, and their congregation. While you're at it, pray for revival in our valley.

On the flipside of all of that, let me bluntly say that there are people who will listen to this message who are in the same boat as this woman. People who need to immediately repent in sackcloth and ashes. You can fool people... Big deal, an ant can fake out another ant... You can never fool God. He sees all, He knows all, and He cannot be bribed in His Holy Judgment.

“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God” (Hebrews 10:31). God will not be mocked. There is coming a time when He will vindicate Himself, His Christ and His children... You don't want to be on the outside of that group.

Take Almighty God as seriously as He deserves to be taken. We started this foray with the reality that it is far worse for people who have been exposed to the things of God and who pretend to embrace them, but then to fall away. The Bible tells us that for such people there is no hope (Hebrews 6:4-8) and that they were never really part of us anyway (I John 2:19).

Please ensure that you are in the Faith... Diligently seek the face of the Only Savior daily.

Am I saying that we need to do in order to be saved? No, I'm saying what God says, those who don't do are not saved in the first place. Godliness is not necessary for salvation, but it is a byproduct of it... Make certain that you are doing the things that Christ did. I am, I am, I go to church regularly, I give generously, I volunteer frequently, I serve willingly, I sing when it's time to sing, I listen when it's time to listen, and I participate when it's time to participate. Nice, but all of that is a hypocrisy if it is not motivated by the Fruit of the Holy Spirit.

It's not a question of going to church regularly, it's a question of love. Do you love those people next to you to the same degree that you love yourself? Are you in church today because it's the thing to do, or because you love the people?

It's not a question of giving generously, it's a question of joy. Are you so certain of God's love for you and within you that you have no fear of the future and can give generously for that reason? Did you give today

because it's what's required, or because you are full of the joy of the Lord?

It's not a question of volunteering frequently or serving willingly, it's a question of patience. Do you trust God to the point that you can be patient with those you serve? Are you doing for the church people because it's part of the program, or because you don't need it to be all about you anymore?

That's some groundwork. In verse 2 and the first half of 3, Jesus makes a statement and then draws a double conclusion. The statement is "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses." What does that mean? The "Chair," is the Greek word καθέδρα (kăth-ě-dřä), from which we get our word cathedral. It's also where the Catholics get the concept of the Pope speaking ex cathedra... Out of, or from the Chair. The concept is simple enough... The Scribes and Pharisees, along with a very few others, like the Essenes, who weren't sharing, were the only people in the world who could read, understand, copy, and explain God's Word.

While many of these guys were corrupt, many of them holier than thou, many of them not really true Believers

themselves, they nonetheless, could be relied on to present God's Word.

Remember the average Jew not only had no access to the Scriptures, if they had, they couldn't have made sense of it anyway. The religious leaders were educated men who were necessary to convey God's Word. God does what God does and He can and does use the most unusual people to do His bidding. Even now, He chooses to use frail, fumbling, human pastors to present His Message.

Don't focus on the messenger - deal with the Message.

Obviously, now the Scriptures are a click away from anyone with a smartphone. Nearly everyone can read, but if not, there are audio Bibles aplenty to choose from. At least in America, no one needs anyone else, to access God's Word anymore. Basically, any person in our country can access and potentially understand the Bible.

Is there something more then? Is there something about God using particular men to convey His Word? Men who are in the Seat of Moses because He put them there, even if, they themselves will be lost.

I will tell you plainly, just as I have from the beginning, I am a huge mess. I make a lot of mistakes. Don't emulate me, don't depend on me, don't honor me. But when I speak from the Chair, as I'm doing now, listen and do. While I am nothing, God has, for His own incomprehensible reasons, anointed me to convey His Message to you today. Listen to God - do what He commands... Regardless of my personal failures as a fellow fallible human being saved by Grace.

Jesus' first conclusion then was, do what they say, when they are presenting God's Word. His second conclusion was, but do not do what they do. Focus on the Message, not the human messenger.

Now, is a human messenger supposed to live the Message? Certainly. In fact, that's Jesus' point. The Scribes and Pharisees didn't, but they should have. Many people get from that the idea that the human messengers must therefore be more than merely human. In other words, we often expect Christian pastors to be perfect. It is that expectation, which leads to hypocrisy. It must. No one is perfect, and if that's the expectation, one must play at being someone they aren't.

Transparency. I am striving to be a better Christian. I deeply desire that more than anything else. I want to represent God well. I want to be the husband, father, pastor, friend that Jesus wants me to be, but I will tell you bluntly, I'm not there yet. I never want to pretend that I'm more than I am. Transparency. Be transparent. open, honest, genuine.

There is much more to say about chapter 23, but for now, realize that while we can fake out ourselves and others, we can never fake out God and He's keeping track.

He has a flawless accounting of our thoughts, words and deeds and our heart intention behind them. He cannot be swayed in His perfect judgment. Guilty is guilty and the only thing that can change that is the Blood of Jesus.

Please repent, please reach out to the Father, please accept the completed work of His Christ, and please act like you're a member of the family.