

ISSUE

21.47

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

November 24,
2019

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



The Pitfalls of Leadership (Matt. 23:1-39) By Kyle Pope

Matthew chapter twenty-three is a scathing rebuke of the Jewish leaders Jesus identifies as the **“scribes and Pharisees”** (Matt. 23:2), yet it is prefaced by a surprising instruction to the people about these leaders He is about to rebuke. Jesus declares, **“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do”** (Matt. 23:2-3, NKJV). Jesus acknowledges the important role they played in directing people to God’s word in spite of their personal shortcomings in many areas of faith.

Today, those who lead in the church, like the scribes and Pharisees, are in a position to direct people to the teaching of God’s word. As they do so those who follow them should likewise submit to their guidance, while avoiding any hypocrisy they might practice. This reality calls our attention to a number of challenges that Jesus’s rebuke indicates regarding the responsibility of leadership.

Challenges in This Responsibility

1. Binding Where God Has Not. One of Jesus’s first rebukes concerns the burden leaders place on others in their efforts to follow God’s word. He warns, **“For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers”** (Matt. 23:4). Later He will say, **“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in your-**

selves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matt. 23:13).

Jesus was not teaching that it is acceptable to neglect any command of God. Yet, from what we understand regarding the practice of the scribes and Pharisees, they were not simply teaching God’s word, they were binding their own system of manmade rules on top of God’s word. Certainly, there are difficult things that are required by the gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.7:14), yet Jesus Himself declared, **“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”** (Matt. 11:29-30). So, while leaders must teach

and encourage all that is in the gospel, they must never become guilty adding to it responsibilities or requirements that God has not bound.

2. Acting to Be Seen. Jesus’s rebuke continues, **“But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments”** (Matt. 23:5). In this vein, He would later rebuke the fact that **“for a pretense”** they **“make long prayers”** while being guilty devouring **“widows’ houses”**—a likely reference to taking property from those ill-equipped to give it as charitable donations for their own support (Matt. 23:14).

In Christ, disciples are taught, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”** (Matt. 5:16). It is a delicate balance to live in such a way that our lives may influence and glorify God while avoiding the appearance of self-exaltation. The issue appears to be the problem of hypocrisy. Jesus compared these leaders to dishes clean on the outside but filthy on the inside or beautiful tombs holding dead man’s bones (Matt. 23:25-27). Leaders must continually test their lives and hearts to make certain that they do not just **“outwardly appear righteous to men”** (while internally harboring **“hypocrisy and lawlessness”**) but are consistently living what they are trying to influence others to become.

3. Loving the Honor of the Role. Although modern scandals have tainted many people’s views of religious leaders, nonetheless, those in a position to lead others in matters of faith still receive great respect, appreciation, and honor from the roles in which they serve. In the New Testament, Jesus addressed this problem, warning, **“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’”** (Matt. 23:6-7). To avoid this, Jesus prohibited religious titles among Christian (Matt. 23:8-10).

In the church, we may avoid the titles the denominational world uses but still stumble at this pitfall. All of us like encouragement. All of us like praise for a job



well done. Yet service in the kingdom of God must never be about how it makes us feel. It must never be about the acknowledgment we receive from others. Those who are blessed to act as leaders in the Lord's church must view themselves as servants whose greatest concern is pleasing God not receiving personal honor (cf. John 12:43).

4. Exalting Our Own Opinions. From the rebuke Jesus offers we learn a strange view that some of the scribes and Pharisees held that was not taught in Scripture. Mosaic Law taught, **"You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name"** (Deut. 6:13). When the temple was dedicated, as Solomon prayed that God would hear prayers that were directed toward God's presence in the temple, he prayed, **"When anyone sins against his neighbor, and is forced to take an oath, and comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this temple, then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked, bringing his way on his head, and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness"** (1 Kings 8:31-32). Perhaps because of this, apparently some had come to evaluate different degrees of obligation to fulfill oaths based on some very materialistic factors. Some believed swearing by the gold of the temple was binding, but simply swearing by the temple itself was not (Matt. 23:16). In a similar way, some thought oaths made by the gift on the altar were binding, but those made by the altar alone were not (Matt. 23:18). Jesus rebukes both opinions challenging them to recognize that all oaths are ultimately made before God (Matt. 23:17, 19-22).

All of us have opinions. Sometimes they are very good opinions, but how important it is for us to clearly define exactly where the teaching of God's word ends and our personal opinions begin. When a Christian serves in a position of leadership it is in part because he has shown himself to have good judgment (1 Tim. 3:6-7, 10, 13). How easy it can become to emphasize one's own opinion with the same zeal and confidence we have in

God's word. Leaders must share their good judgment, but they must never treat personal judgment as Divine Law. This can easily lead to...

5. Tunnel Vision When It Comes to Priorities. When we speak of someone having "tunnel vision" we are talking about the tendency to focus in on one thing to the exclusion of other things. Jesus rebuked this in the leaders of His day. He said, **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"** (Matt. 23:23-24).

Leaders are often "detail people." They understand the fine points of different doctrines, arguments, and practices, and that's a good thing. However, if they are not careful, like the scribes and Pharisees, in their effort to encourage soundness and care in the details they can miss the big picture. A new convert might not yet understand some details. We must never run over



their faith trying to emphasize a fine point they are too immature to grasp.

Overcoming These Pitfalls

Each of these challenges can be devastating to one's faith and ability to lead, yet these challenges can be overcome. Jesus taught leaders to recognize two things:

1. Leaders are servants. Jesus taught, **"But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant"** (Matt. 23:11). Leadership is a stewardship, and a steward is a servant. The leader

who sees his role as a servant to God will guard his heart against the challenges discussed above.

2. Leaders must serve with humility. Jesus said further, **"whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"** (Matt. 23:12). The leader in Christ is still a sinner forgiven by a merciful God. He has stumbled in word or deed in the past and will do the same in the future. The wise leader will recognize this and that recognition will produce genuine humility, which will help safeguard against the dangers discussed above.

It is a humbling realization to recognize that even though leaders of faith exert such influence that the Lord charges people of faith to follow them, that doesn't mean that they are invulnerable to sin, hypocrisy, and even condemnation. In their hypocrisy, Jesus called them sons of hell (Matt. 23:15), describing them as **"sons of those who murdered the prophets"** (Matt. 23:31), asking, **"How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"** (Matt. 23:33). The Lord's church is blessed with great leaders who serve with great humility and a commitment to service, but may God help those who lead within His church to avoid these pitfalls as they fulfill this crucial and important work in His kingdom.



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