

40-23-01.wpd —The First Two Woes

hypocrisy, religiosity, stumbling blocks, sectarianism

Mat 23:13-15

God gets especially upset when religiosity blocks evangelism.

INTRODUCTION:

–Before going into these "First Two Woes" (**title**), I'd like to list some interesting points about this whole passage:

- 1) Jesus spoke these woes "to the crowds and to his disciples" (intended as a warning for us not to follow the ways of those who are being WOEd...)
 - 2) Jesus began His ministry preaching about blessings on a God-made hillside; and gave His last sermon about woes in a man-made temple.
 - 3) These "woes" were part of Christ's prophetic role [only prophets could pronounce woes, **Isa 5:8-23; Hab 2:6-20**] (He was **Prophet** in His *preaching*, He'd soon be **Priest** through the Cross, and then **King** in resurrection.)
 - 4) Jesus preached these woes at other times in His ministry [**Luke 11:37-54** has six in an earlier context]. Repetition in teaching earmarks importance.
 - 5) In these *woes* Jesus uses the strongest language that ever came from His lips in confronting *religious hypocrisy* and Pharisaical legalism.
- All these points tend to emphasize one thing: *God is seriously upset by legalism and hypocrisy*, and in these first 2 *woes*, **HOM.idea**. The question for us is: "Are we involved in any hypocrisy or legalism that might keep people from the Good News of Jesus Christ?"

I. (v.13) Woe to Religiosity that Blocks People from the Gospel!

A. This was absolutely the case with the Pharisees:

1. As "*teachers of the law*" they adopted and taught many additional customs and cultural requirements to fulfill for gaining salvation, but in so doing they missed God's Kingdom and led others to miss it– **Rom 14:17**. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit
2. Jesus called them "*hypocrites*" because they didn't practice their own preaching– **v.4**, "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them." (Why? Because they couldn't remove them from their own shoulders. And when Christ came to offer that liberation, *they resisted Him*, and tried to prevent others from following Him.)

B. But how can this be true of us? It can and does happen....

1. **If we fail to understand the dynamic extent of God's Kingdom–Psalms 24:1**, The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Nothing created is outside of the dominion of the Creator; every realm of existence is under the rule of Christ).
 2. **If we fail to keep Christ at the center of our faith**, letting our own rules and religious concepts overshadow His work of salvation.
- C. **We can fail Christ in this way by...**
1. **Preaching a Gnostic gospel that detracts from the Incarnation:**
 - a. Making just "*spirituality*" important ["*Get saved–wait for heaven!*"]
 - b. Some unbelievers know more about humanity's nature and the workings of God's creation than Christians do, because we've despised those realms of God's Kingdom as "*secular*" instead of "*sacred*." Such people can easily be turned off by a Gnostic, spiritualized view of reality that the church is often guilty of.)
 2. **Preaching a legalistic gospel that detracts from the Cross:**
 - a. Telling people "*Get Jesus, but you also have to get rid of card-playing, dances, movies, jewelry, alcohol, smoking, long hair on guys, short skirts on girls...*" (Are these familiar?)
 - b. This "don't" list can go on and on, followed by a long "do" list, BUT both are at odds with the Biblical meaning of grace (it's not "faith in Jesus plus human effort"– it's forever Jesus alone!)
 3. **Preaching a cultural gospel that detracts from Kingdom reality:**
 - a. Listen to **Rev 14:6**, Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. (Christ's Gospel is cross-cultural, and God delights in the cultural variety within humanity)
 - b. **BUT "WOE to us!"** if we audaciously make our own cultural styles and practices the standard for other cultures [**After 100 years of missions** there were about a million believers in China. When the Communists took over, Western-style churches closed, missionaries were expelled, and the church in China went into the home, where it finally became truly Chinese. 30 years later there were over 50 million believers.]

TRANS: The religious peculiarities within culture are not **truth**. The spirituality of Gnosticism and the scruples of legalism are not **truth**. They are all *religiosity*. The **truth** that brings salvation is Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life." He alone bring us to God. He alone opens to us the Kingdom of God. Religiosity obscures Christ and effectively

narrows the *height* and *depth* and *breadth* of God's Kingdom. So **God is upset with religiosity**. WOE to us if we have it! For it can block others from having a clear view of Christ, Who alone can save them.

II. (v.15) Woe to Those Who Package and Export Religiosity!

- A. Pharisees were bad, but their converts were worse. [The Book of Acts shows that their proselytes on foreign soil were viciously hostile to the message of Christ, even more than the Pharisees in Jerusalem.]
- B. But how can this be true of us? It can and does happen....
1. If we do as the Pharisees did: teaching that manmade traditions are as authoritative as the Word of God. Jesus condemned this in Mark 7:9. And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"
 - a. *Human ideas* can get into our theology & *cultural ideals* can become a part of what is considered "Christian behavior."
 - b. Denominations can be founded on those ideas and ideals, instead of on *the simple Gospel of Christ* and on *the short list of beliefs included in the Apostle's Creed.*
 2. [When factory machinery is set up in a prescribed way, it turns out a prescribed product.] Religiosity in the church can actually *package* and *export* for consumption a product God has **not prescribed**:
 - a. It can spiritualize our humanity into *a crippling stagnation.*
 - b. It can legislate our Christian liberty into *a yoke of bondage.*
 - c. It can stuff our human diversity into *a box of cultural elitism.*
 3. When religiosity does this, it **contradicts** the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Kingdom, and it is **hellish!** It only gets more *hellish* as it passes hands from one generation to the next.

CONCLUSION:

–*Woe* to a *theology not grounded on simple faith in Christ!* It may bear the name "*Christian*" but it's an offspring of hell. **Woe** to a *code of conduct* that blocks a person's access to the power in the simple Gospel! It's twice as hellish as the original thinking that made it into a teaching.

–**God gets upset** with *religious hypocrisy* and *legalism*, but especially when our **religiosity blocks evangelism.** The pure, simple Gospel, that Jesus *became human* to save us by *His death*, that *He was resurrected* and is *returning as King of kings* and Lord of lords, this is all we need for salvation.

Matthew 23:13-15 (NIV)

13“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

15“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.