

On the seven woes (Matthew 23)

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Is it really hard to understand what Christ Jesus really taught? Most of his impressions were focused on not the worldly attributes, but on eternity, on the new heavens and the earth. Matthew 23 is a hard part to most of us since at least one of those woes that he puts on the pharisaic hierarchy seems to fall on our pride. To the seekers of leadership in the community, he puts forward a new ideology – the idea of servant leader – which most of us find difficult to understand (verse 11).

1. Woe one (verse 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." Wow! What a strong statement! When a Judaic believer retrospectively think and reverse himself from his bad ways, his only way to salvation is to offer sacrifices in the temple. He has to be proclaimed clean by the Priesthood in the temple. That's where the problem was. Due to the imminent problems in leadership, especially those who teach the codes of Mosaic Law, the Pharisees had a definite say on that matter. Apart from the written Mosaic Law, the Pharisees had the oral Torah (the lingual version of law transmitted over generations), and their interpretations. The new believer would be caught in the problem of not finding an understandable solution or remedy for his condition. Jesus is rebuking this attitude of the Pharisees. Are we just like them? Do we bring in all logistics and rules in place, when a new believer comes in? Are we making it hard for them to understand what the kingdom is about? Do we exactly know what the kingdom of heaven really means? Since we don't know, we don't inherit it, and we shut it in front of a new comer. Are we knowledgeable of the Kingdom and good enough to preach it?

In the New Testament, 1 John 2:27 says, "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him." It is a personally responsibility of every New Testament believer to seek earnestly for the Spirit of the Lord and receive Him even if it took time. Accepting and acquiring of the kingdom of heaven is personal in NT.

2. Woe two (verse 15): "Woe to you....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." Wow, again! To me it leads to identifying myself on inviting people to the kingdom of God for wrong motives.

Are we making deliberate attempts to increase our congregation in quantity so as to get a title or become a leader without making sure of its quality? Am I a person with quality and equipped with God's power to bring in people into the kingdom of heaven? Or is it that I feel that I am capable based on my professional accomplishments or my familial heritage? Do I preach what I do?

3. Woe three (verse 16): There are three subjects on which swearing has been discussed. 1- swearing by temple, 2- swearing by altar, and 3- swearing by heaven. If someone swore by the temple, he swore not only by the temple, but by everything in it – all sacred things that are made sacred because they were in the temple. If someone swore by the altar, he swore not only by the altar, but by every gift on the altar. Likewise, if someone swore by heaven, swore not only by the heaven, but by the throne and God who sits on it. But Jesus is explaining this much clearly in Mathew 5:33-37, "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." So, this means that swearing is not good, rather it leads to condemnation or judgment (James 5:12). Any kind of oath/swearing, whether it be financial, spiritual, worldly or of any sort is not in accordance with the word of God as clarified by Jesus Christ. Now, this portion has much more spiritual meaning to it. Jesus was correctly putting the importance of temple that makes something (gold) in it holy, the altar that makes every gift on it holy, and God himself that makes Heaven holy. Now, what does that imply to us? As it is said in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in/by/with (Greek – ἐν εν) you? This should be put into the previous context. It is the Spirit of God that makes you holy, your life holy, and everything that comes out of you holy. So, seek the presence of Holy Spirit for yourself. He is the only way that we understand the truth of God, His will, His purpose, and all He has for us. Brother/sister, I sincerely urge to seek the help of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus to help us understand the mysteries of His being.

4. Woe four (verse 23) (to be continued)