

# *Matthew 23:16-22*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 9/16/2012*

## **What is Jesus' View of False Religious Leaders? – Part 2**

### **Prayer**

Father, we are so thankful for Your Son Jesus who died for our sins, who gave Himself willingly, who suffered and bore our sins in His body on the cross and died. And we are so thankful that death could not hold Him; that He rose from the dead and He has ascended to Your right hand. And Father, we are so thankful that You are faithful; that Your Son is faithful. And I pray that we would trust You; that we would depend upon You; that we would be those who truly walk by faith; that we depend and rely completely on You. I pray we would realize, day in and day out, that we are not adequate to consider anything as coming from ourselves but our adequacy is from You; that we would not in any way, shape, or form rely on our own wisdom or strength, but we would allow Your wisdom – from Your word – to renew our minds that we would prove what is Your will, what is good and acceptable. Father, thank You for Your word today and I just pray that You would use it in our hearts; that You would convict anyone here who does not know You; that You would pierce through the heart of stone, the heart of sin – the deadness – and You would pierce through and open their hearts to see their sin and to see Christ your Son. And Father, for those of who know You, that we would humble ourselves before You; that we would confess sin knowing that if we confess our sin, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness; and that we would receive Your word implanted and allow it to do its work in our hearts. Lord, we thank You for this time, and we praise You for it now. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **Sermon**

Well, I find it amazing how at different times through the last twelve years of us gathering together as a church that God brings different people at different times. It was quite interesting – in the last two weeks, we have had over four blind people come and I thought, “Well, praise the Lord.” It is wonderful. We have only had one blind person beforehand and it was wonderful to see the Lord drawing blind people. And it caused me to ponder and to speculate as I saw them coming in the door (we had them coming in), it caused me to speculate how many people here are spiritually blind coming in the door. How many people are walking in here blind to the reality of their sin? How many people are walking around and cannot see that reality and are blind to a true relationship with God because of sin? You see, spiritual blindness is much more difficult to observe, is it not? And if you are spiritually blind, you cannot recognize it unless God convicts you with His word.

Now we are going to see, unlike physical blindness, spiritual blindness is related to sin. We are going to see that today very clearly. We are going to see today that our Lord continues His eternal condemnation on those scribes and Pharisees during the last week of His life. We are going to see how He characterizes them as spiritually blind guides, those who are blind, spiritually speaking, leading others who are blind. We are going to see that they are leading them all the way to hell; and we are going to see that the Lord

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God, in human flesh, does not have a very good view of them. And for us, we might be convicted and corrected concerning our view of false teachers in the body of Christ. We need to recognize that they will come; that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and it's no wonder his servants do, Paul says in Second Corinthians 11. Second Timothy, chapter 3, Paul says that evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse. We saw the Lord Jesus say in Matthew, chapter 7, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothes." All throughout Scripture, we have these warnings of these blind men in their sin who are leading others to hell. And today we are going to continue to see the Lord Jesus' view of false religious leaders. And we are going to see clearly today, I believe, a "woe" to those who teach and their teaching is designed to cover up sin rather than to allow the Word to expose it.

Would you turn in your Bibles with me to Matthew, chapter 23? And we have been going through this wonderful book of Matthew. We are going to see very clearly in this portion these blind guides and how they lead people in their spiritual blindness all the way to hell. Now my question will be here, have your eyes been opened to the reality of your sin and the Savior Jesus Christ? Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 23. We are going to be looking at verses 16 to 22. And again, the brief context of the book of Matthew - I am going to just whiz through it. If you have been here with us, you should know it. You should be able to explain what has been going on in the book of Matthew. And I find it so amazing to study this book in its context. If you are a believer in the Word, you should be knowing these passages but yet to study it in its context, what a blessing that is! We have seen King Jesus introduced; He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the Lord who is salvation – *Jeshua*. He is the One who has come to save His people from their sins. God has taken on human flesh to bring salvation. We have seen the way prepared for Him by John. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We have seen Jesus Himself also come to those (come to His own) those sitting in spiritual darkness in the shadow of death. And it is so important to recognize that Jesus came to a people who named the name of the Lord, but yet they were in sin; they were on the precipice of eternal damnation. They were in darkness although they named the name of the Lord. We see that very clearly.

They came to Him. And we saw the response of those. Jesus taught; He preached and shared the gospel. We see very clearly His teaching and preaching. We saw the miracles that affirmed the reality of who He is. And we saw the rejection of the present generation, an evil and adulterous generation that did not repent. They were still marveling, but they did not repent. They preferred the miracles over the One who would save them, we see.

We saw the hatred of the religious leaders plotting to "trip up" and kill the Lord Jesus. We saw Jesus retreat from ministry at large to instead share with His disciples. We saw Him speak in parables to hide (to veil) the truth from those who had closed their eyes and shut their ears. And we saw now at this point Jesus come to the last week of His life – three years of ministry on earth. We saw the not-so- triumphal entry as the Lord Jesus came as a humble servant, not a triumphing king, but a humble king on a colt. We saw Him weeping as He was coming into the city because of the rejection of Him. Luke 19:41 – He was weeping because they did not see and recognize their day of visitation. The living God had visited them and called for their repentance and faith in Him; and they did not see it. They rejected Him. As they were yelling, "Hosanna in the highest," within a week they would be yelling, "Crucify Him."

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We saw Jesus symbolically curse Israel for their beautiful appearance on the outside but their wickedness (no fruit at all) as He cursed the fig tree. He came to the temple that week and on Tuesday He cast out all the wicked leaders who were using it as a den of thieves. They were using it as a place of merchandise. We saw Him take out those evil people and then start to teach and preach and receive worship. And we saw the crowds hanging on every word. We saw the authorities challenge Him, the spiritual authorities of the day challenge Him. And we saw the Lord Jesus respond with three parables of condemnation for Israel's leaders. God had reached out all day long to them and offered this salvation. They had rejected this truth and they desired to kill Him. And we saw them come back with three questions to trip Him up to try to deliver Him up to the Gentiles so they could kill Him.

And lastly, at the end of chapter 22, we saw the Lord Jesus ask them the most important question concerning His nature. "Who do people say or who do you say the Son of David is?" Who is He? We see very clearly that He is Lord. How could He be Lord if He is human? Obviously God took on human flesh. And then we came to chapter 23. This is the Lord Jesus' last public (a final) condemnation of the religious leaders. And if you have been with us so far in chapter 23, we have seen in the beginning He speaks to the disciples and the multitudes. And He shares the nature of these religious leaders. They were extremely prideful; they were hypocritical. They loved and were motivated by the approval of men rather than the approval of God. They did every deed to be noticed by men. And then on the heels of that, the Lord Jesus shared to His disciples, I believe, what leaders should not be. They should not be like the glory-loving, self-seeking, prideful, false leaders who usurp God's glory and authority. Instead they are to be genuinely humble servants.

And at this point, we jumped into a very serious passage last week where we have seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees – this final condemnation in the last week of the Lord Jesus' life. And we came to the first two woes last week. We saw the first and most important woe to these leaders because they keep people from entering the kingdom of heaven. And woe to them because what they do is they cause those who are trying to enter to be inhibited, making them twice the sons of hell. There is nothing more wicked than getting in the way of someone getting saved. And these false teachers were doing that.

And then we come to our passage today where we have the third woe in verse 16. So then, turn with me in your Bibles and we are going to see ultimately Jesus' view of these false religious leaders. Verse 16 of Matthew 23:

***<sup>16</sup>“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’ <sup>17</sup>You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? <sup>18</sup>And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’ <sup>19</sup>You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? (Verse 20) <sup>20</sup>Therefore he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. <sup>21</sup>And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. <sup>22</sup>And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. [Matthew 23:16-22]***

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Now this seems kind of interesting that His third woe has kind of this interesting element that the Lord Jesus brings up here - this idea of oaths, and we will look at this in a minute. We need to recognize the Lord Jesus is in *His* temple. He has denounced these religious leaders and now He is giving His final condemnation of those religious leaders – those who control the temple, those who were in control of Israel. And He gives His final denunciation of those who had placed themselves in the chair of Moses, those who were the official interpreters and teachers of God’s Word. We have this final denunciation.

Now remember we saw, as I alluded to last week, what Jesus said in the first woe. Verse 13:

***13”But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” [Matthew 23:13]***

Now just a reminder, this term *woe* was a verbal statement of eternal condemnation. It was a reprimand; it was a reproach from the living God. We saw it back in Matthew, chapter 11, very clearly when Jesus reproached the cities for not repenting at the miracles they had seen which affirmed the teaching which He had brought. It is a reprimand; it is a statement of condemnation. You do not want God saying, “Woe” to you. And we saw very clearly, although Jesus is a gentle, gracious, humble God, He is God. He is a holy God and He declares woe upon them who put themselves in the way of those entering the kingdom. And we looked at examples how they twisted the words of Christ. They attributed the things He did to Satan rather than to Him. They got in the way. They took away, as we saw in the book of Mark, they took away the key of knowledge. They took away the truth concerning Jesus to keep people from coming in. False teachers twist and pull people away from Christ. And there is nothing worse than that! These denunciations are directed again, in these seven woes, to the Pharisees and scribes. And the Pharisees were the strictest religious sect of the time. They were the separated ones. They were the self-righteous, legalistic, nationalistic, isolationists who were on their way, as Jesus would say, to hell. And the scribes – they were the experts in the Law, but they were equally evil as these Pharisees. They had rejected Christ and desired His death. Now Jesus unveiled these religious hypocrites and in this first woe, we see that they are those who blocked people from entrance to the kingdom. They blocked them from entrance into the kingdom. There is nothing worse than blocking someone from entering into eternal life! Through their false teaching, they came between those who needed to be saved and the truth concerning and Christ and Christ Himself. And that is the most heinous wickedness deserving of the greatest woe and condemnation. The pinnacle of wickedness: blocking or shutting the door of heaven from men by twisting, perverting or omitting truth concerning Christ.

And then we saw the second woe which relates to the first woe. Verse fifteen. Now remember there is verse fourteen. You say, “Why is he saying ‘verse fourteen’?” Well, remember last week, it is in italics there and what I believe is that although it is in other passages and the truth is in the Bible (we will look at that when we look at Mark and Luke), I believe it is not really in this text. Some over-zealous scribe added it in there. You will see it; you will see notes on it. But it is not that it is not true; it is in Mark and Luke, and when we study those passages, we will study it. So we went to the second one, I believe, here in verse fifteen.

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***<sup>15</sup>“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisee, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” [Matthew 23:15]***

They keep people from the kingdom and they cause them to be twice as wicked on their way to hell. What an awful thing! Here we see God’s view as we looked at it in depth last week. Two woes: statements of condemnation on false teachers who prevent people from entering and condemnation concerning the fruit of their wickedness which are converts that are twice the sons of hell. And we saw that so clearly. We see that in the churches these days. Those who fall under the ministries of wicked men become as staunch and strong for those ministries – twice the sons of hell.

And now we jump to our passage today where we are going to see Jesus condemns these false religious leaders because they use their teaching to cover up sin. It is the first and foremost thing they do; and we will see it in an example that is not familiar to us, but would be familiar to the Jews of that day. So we will need to see it in its context. Again, here is our passage: <sup>16</sup>“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.’ Now obviously, this foreign to us, is it not? Do we swear by the temple or the gold? We do not, right? We do not make statements like this so it is totally foreign to us. So we need to know the context. It is really important because those listening that day would know exactly what the Lord is talking about. He says, <sup>17</sup>“You fools and blind men; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? <sup>18</sup>And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’ <sup>19</sup>You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? <sup>20</sup>Therefore he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. <sup>21</sup>And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. <sup>22</sup>And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.”

You are probably saying, “Okay, I hear what you are saying but what does that mean?” Hopefully we will see today what the Lord’s intent was and how that applies to us. Notice again the Lord Jesus first and foremost in verse 16 says, “Woe to you.” He says it again, “Woe.” And He is going to explain another reason why they are eternally condemned. First two reasons: they blocked the kingdom of heaven; their converts are twice the sons of hell. Here is another reason why “Woe to you.” And notice how He describes them: blind guides who say... He is going to talk about their speech. He is going to talk about what they say. And that is important to realize. “Woe to you for what you say,” and He is going to share it. Notice He says, “Blind guides.” It is a reprimand. It is an eternal condemnation. What is interesting if you have been studying this book, He does not say “hypocrites” here. There are other places where He says, “Woe to you, hypocrites. You got one thing on the outside; another thing on the inside. Woe to you.” But here He says, “Woe to you,” and He describes them as blind guides.

And then in verse 17: “You fools and blind men.” Verse 19: “Blind men.” He is trying to make a point here, is He not? We need to see it. He is not talking about hypocrisy at this point even though there is hypocrisy which we will see; but that is not the point. He is talking about their spiritual blindness in which

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they guide others who are blind and their foolishness as we will see. He is revealing their true nature. They are blind guides, fools, and blind men.

Remember in chapter 15 when the Lord Jesus after confronting the Pharisees concerning their hypocritical tradition which invalidated the word of God, remember what He said in that? Chapter 15. Let's look back. Chapter 15, verse 7. These hypocrites were all into the externalism of washing their hands – all that stuff – and Jesus basically denounces their wicked teaching as tradition. Matthew 15, verse 7:

***<sup>7</sup> "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, <sup>8</sup> 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. <sup>9</sup> But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'" <sup>10</sup> And after He called the multitude to Him, He said to them, "Hear, and understand. <sup>11</sup> Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." <sup>12</sup> Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?" (They were offended that Jesus had called them on the reality of their false teaching. And notice what He says to them.) <sup>13</sup> But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. (False teachers – they are not going to get away with it. God did not plant them. We saw in chapter 23 that they were self-appointed. They seated themselves in the chair of Moses. Everyone that He did not plant is going to be uprooted. He says,) <sup>14</sup> Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." [Matthew 15:7-14]***

Let them alone! That is good advice for us. Do not try to change false teachers. Let God uproot them. Get away from them. Let them alone. They are blind men leading blind men into hell, as we see. And that is what Jesus is saying back in our passage. "Woe to you, blind guides. You are blind and you are leading people." And we are going to see Jesus reveal their blindness in what they say. It is their teaching that reveals they are spiritually blind. "Woe to you, blind guides, who say... (back in Matthew 23). Who say..." They are spiritually blind. Then in verse 17, He calls them the Greek word *mōrós* – fools. We have the same word *moron*. You are dumb; you are stupid. Sounds like not a very nice thing to say, does it? But what He is saying to them is true. They are eternally foolish. They are on the way to hell. It is wicked what they are doing. "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, who say..." It is important we see that.

Remember back in verse 2. They had placed themselves in the chair of Moses. They had seated themselves as the official leaders and interpreters of the word of God, the Law of Moses. And He says, "You guys are blind guides; deadly leadership; fools" - those who had invalidated the word of God by their tradition, as we will see. Chapter 16, those whose teaching was full of deadly leaven as Jesus said. "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the scribes or of the Pharisees and Sadducees." And He said very clearly that leaven was their teaching. Matthew 16, verses 11 and 12. And here, in this third woe, we will see very clearly, these are blind guides who say things that ultimately lead people to hell.

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Now what is the reason for this woe? What is the reason for the woe back in chapter 23, verse 16? “Woe to you, blind guides, who say...” And then He is going to give an example of a couple of oaths. This word *swears* here is the same word that can be translated *oath* or *giving an oath*. “Whoever swears by the temple...” and then He goes, “...whoever swears by the gold of the temple...” And He says, “Whoever swears by the altar... whoever swears by the offering upon it...” So what is He talking about? We need to understand very clearly some background here or we will not understand what Jesus is saying. An oath is a vow or, biblically speaking, is swearing or is affirming or confirming something. The term *oath* in general spoke of calling upon God to affirm or attest the truthfulness of something; invoking, in a sense, a curse from God if you were not telling the truth. Although we do not have many oaths in our society, we understand that concept basically, right? You know when you go into a courtroom, you say (I think you still do; I have not been in court lately), you say, “So help me, God.” (Bob is saying, “No.” Well, that is a shame, right?) Well, there used to be a time where you would take an oath saying basically that you are going to “Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me, God.” That is an oath. Or you would take an oath in the sense when you got together in a marriage; it is a vow. “I vow to be faithful to this woman or man.” And we see here, very clearly, He is talking about oaths here.

Now in our culture, oaths are not that serious, I guess, except for those situations. We do not see it this way. Their culture was different at this time. They were giving oaths all the time. Take a look at an oath that God gives. Turn with me to Hebrews, chapter 6. Hebrews, chapter 6. We have a wonderful description of an oath from Scripture concerning a promise that God made to Abraham which benefits all true believers. Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 13:

***<sup>13</sup> For when God made the promise (now He is affirming the promises to true believers that they will inherit through faith here and we are going to see it here. Hebrews 6, verse 13) to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply you." <sup>15</sup> And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. <sup>17</sup> In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup> in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. [Hebrews 6:13-18]***

God imposed an oath and He swore by Himself. There was no one greater than Him. And you see, oaths are to take something greater than you to say, “By that, I am going to keep my word. I am going to do what I say.” It has to do with the veracity or truthfulness of what you say. That is important to see. And so back here, we see very clearly that they are taking oaths – pretty simple – swearing by something greater than oneself.

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Now to gain a better understanding, we need to know also what these Jews were taught at this time about oaths. They had teaching and we need to understand that. Turn back to Matthew, chapter 5. And we looked at this in depth and so we are not going to get into it right now; but Matthew 5, verse 33. Now in Matthew 5:33 and in James 5, we have the Lord condemning oaths as it would appear. But He is really, in the context of the rest of Scripture, condemning *evil* oaths because we see all throughout Scripture godly men actually taking oaths and we will look at some of those. Matthew 5:33:

**<sup>33</sup> "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, (Jesus is saying, "This is what you heard. This is the teaching." And remember, the scribes and the Pharisees would say, "Here is the teaching of the Ancients. This is what it is." And they would present it to them. They did not do it with authority because remember when Jesus taught, they were amazed He was teaching with authority. But He says here "...that you have heard; the ancients were told; this is what you have been taught...") 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOW TO THE LORD.' <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. <sup>36</sup> Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil. [Matthew 5:33-37]**

And we look at this passage, He is not saying you cannot have a n oath. The point He was making was it has to be truthful. Your yes needs to be yes, and your no, no. Anything else is evil and we will look at that. And so we have this teaching that they had; that they, very clearly, were to make no false vows but were to fulfill their vows to the Lord. Jesus says, "Hey, that teaching is twisted." And we will see that in a second. On the surface, it sounds pretty good. "Do not make false vows, but fulfill your vows to the Lord." But they had twisted the truth of God (as we looked at it clearly) so that they could get away win sin. False teachers twist God's Word to subtly make it say something that is totally opposite of what God intends. "Now what do you mean by that," you are asking. "I do not understand yet." Again look at this passage. Again Matthew 5:33: <sup>33</sup> "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'"

Now with all bad doctrine there is some truth based in it. Jesus reveals what they had been taught; but I believe they were leaving out crucial elements. They were eliminating certain truths which is just as bad as twisting it. Very clearly God's law shared a few things about oaths. Let's review this very quickly. Deuteronomy 6:13:

**13 "You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him, and swear (the word is oath) by His name." [Deuteronomy 6:13]**

If you make an oath, it is to be by God. Deuteronomy 10:20:

**<sup>20</sup> "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name." [Deuteronomy 10:20]**

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They were to swear by God alone. That was the first thing.

Secondly, Scripture reveals that oaths were very serious and they were for very serious occasions. We have this term in the Old Testament: "As the Lord lives." It was when someone would be making an oath. "As the Lord lives." We see it when Gideon kills Zebah and Zalmunna in Judges 8:19. We see it Ruth 3:13 when Boaz promises, "As the Lord lives..." to redeem Ruth if his relative would not. We see it when the people rescue Jonathan from death in 1 Samuel 14:45. We see it when David spares Saul a second time in 1 Samuel 26:10. We see it when David is confronted by Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:5. And there are many examples of very serious situations where they say, "As the Lord lives." As the Lord lives. So then God's law clarified by God alone an oath was made in serious situations, as we see in Scripture. Yet this was in the teaching of these Jewish ancients; the principals were missing.

Notice what they say back in Matthew 5: 33. There is a misplaced emphasis. "YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOW TO THE LORD." The Jews used this teaching in a way that only required their vows that were to the Lord. They had changed the emphasis so that if it was not to the Lord, they did not have to do it. They did not recognize the emphasis of the false vows; they did not see the intent was truthfulness. And so they had a little system in their culture. "Well, if it was not 'quote-unquote' to the Lord, we do not have to do it." "You shall fulfill your vows to the Lord" which means if they are not to the Lord, you do not have to fulfill your vows. That is what Jesus is saying in their false teaching. And what is happening here by this time, the culture had denigrated in Jerusalem where they were no longer saying God's name – they revered it 'quote-unquote' in their hypocrisy so highly - so they would take the things of God (heaven or the temple) and they would see that as to the Lord. But yet they had made a little system of things where if it was not quite exactly that, "we do not have to keep our word." And that is what Jesus is addressing here.

Back to our passage in Matthew 23. Matthew 23: 16: "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing (*this is their teaching*); but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated." "By the temple, Bob, I will give you \$15." You see, I am obligated, right? But if I say, "By the gold of the temple," I do not have to pay him actually. You see, it was a wicked system to lie and to have it in the context of religion. Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing. But whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated. Notice Jesus confronts their perverted spiritual blindness. "You fools (verse 17) and blind men ('Even your logic is off,' He is saying), which is more important, the gold (of the temple), or the temple that sanctified the gold?" He is saying, "Even your logic is messed up." And then He says, "You guys are fools. You are *mōrós*. You fools. Blind men. You do not see the reality of what you are doing. You are blind to the fact you are sinning." Jesus is saying obviously the temple is more important in that context.

But we are going to see He means more than that. Look here in verse 18: "And (you say – it is implied here), 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.'" Again it is this tricky system of a way not to do what you say. It is falsehood. It is falsehood. "Well, I swear by the altar I will be there by 7 PM." I will get there at 10, right? I do not have to keep it up. That is the point. But if I swear by the offering on the altar, somehow that makes it more valuable

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and now I need to keep my word. Do you see the wickedness in this? And Jesus is saying, “You got it all backwards in your stupid, little system.” He says, “You fools. You *mōrós*.”

And then He says in verse 19: “You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?” “You even got that messed up.” Jesus is revealing their wickedness, as we will see. We are going to see in a moment in verses 20 to 22 that Jesus makes it clear you cannot get away from the fact when you speak, it is before God and you are accountable to Him and that is the point. You can swear by this or that; but ultimately you are accountable to God for your truthfulness and your word. The Jews had taken God’s word; they had twisted it to remove the accountability to God for their deceit and lies. You could be religious and follow the Lord of Israel and lie. How wicked is that! How wicked is that to have an officially-ordained way to lie! It is very wicked! “Woe to you. Woe to you who say this.” They put themselves in the chair of Moses; they are teaching this wickedness. “Woe to you. Woe to you.” They had substituted their tradition for the word of God and had invalidated the word of God. They had invalidated it. Matthew 15.

So then what they were teaching was not biblical and what was the result of that? They had propagated a culture of deceit in a religious veneer. You could lie and be religious. “Woe to you, blind guides (Jesus says) who say ‘Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing. Whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.’ You fools and blind men, which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? And ‘Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.’ You blind men, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering?” All this to say, to give the appearance of being godly, they were covering up sin. They had set up a system to be godly “quote-unquote” and to sin. It is very, very evil.

Let me ask you: have you set up any systems in your life? Ways to cover you sin, religious things you do where you have twisted the heart and intent of the word of God? The Pharisees set up this system to sin and not be guilty. They were blind guides leading others in spiritual blindness on their way to hell. And you say, “Well, this is not too big of a deal, a little white lie here or there. Lying is not that big of a deal.” Lying is a huge deal! It reveals where your nature is. We saw earlier that God cannot lie. And we also see in Scripture that it is Satan’s nature, as he is a liar. Turn with me to John, chapter 8. And I believe that is what is so important about this example which seems so odd that it would be His third woe. But He brings up the issue of lying and deceit. John, chapter 8: 44. So you could read through that third woe - “I do not know; it does not seem like it is that big of a deal.” It is a very big deal because of what it reveals. John 8:44, Jesus says:

***44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." [John 8:44]***

Religious hypocrites are liars. And worse yet, these religious hypocrites were leading others in their lies. In their blindness – their foolish wickedness – they were leading others in foolish wickedness. And Jesus

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condemns it. "Woe to you, who say this!" Woe to you, who say this, this teaching that is wicked. False teachers on their way to hell do not deal with sin. They do not deal with sin. They twist God's word to not deal with it. That is a characteristic we see here. You see, when sin is not dealt with, you are hell bound because the wages of sin is death. And when those who claim to lead you in a relationship with the living God do not deal with sin, you are following them in the same footsteps, in their blindness. They are leading you in your foolishness right to hell because if sin is not dealt with, that is the destiny of every human being. You see, sin is the reason man is condemned to hell. God declares in His word the wages of sin is death. Ezekiel 18:20, "The soul that sins will die." We see it very clearly. These religious leaders and the Jews who followed them were not saved; they were liars. That is one element of their sins. They were liars and their spiritual father was the devil. And folks, you do not want to die in your sins. Revelation 21, let's turn there. You do not want to die in your sins. You see, apart from Christ you have the nature of Satan. Sin, right? Revelation 21, verse 5, and this is in the wonderful realities for those who have been redeemed and those who have trusted in Christ. And yet those who have not overcome to the blood of the Lamb... we will see what their destiny is. Revelation 21:5:

***<sup>5</sup> And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." <sup>6</sup> And He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. (It is free; nothing you can do to be saved. Christ offers salvation freely to you.) <sup>7</sup> He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. <sup>8</sup> But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." [Revelation 21:5-8]***

The wages of sin is death. These hypocrites, these blind guides, these fools had set up a system for people to not be convicted of their deceit. They were on their way to hell and they were leading people to hell. But the good news is that Jesus Christ died for our sins. Everyone here. If I say, "Who has told a lie?" You would all raise your hands. Everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. He went and paid the price on the cross that God demands for your sin. He paid the price as a substitute. He bore in His body our sins. He was the sinless Son of God. He bore our sins in His body. And He died for our sins and He rose from the dead. His once for all sacrifice paid the penalty, and you can be forgiven if you will humble yourself before Him and acknowledge your sin and trust Jesus Christ as Lord, repenting of sin.

And this third woe, I think what Jesus is pointing out is that they do not deal with sin. "You say this. You say this." They are condemned. They are condemned wickedly believing they are okay with God. And again, false teachers do not deal with sin. Let me give you some examples. False teachers do not deal with sin because if they do, then Christ has to be properly proclaimed and the false teachers hate Christ no matter what they say. Jeremiah 23, very familiar passage. We have looked at it the past few weeks, but let's turn there again. Jeremiah 23, verse 21, and we are going to see false teachers do not deal with

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sin. As Jerusalem is on the road to exile for sin and disobedience, Jeremiah is prophesying and no one is listening. We see here in Jeremiah God speaking. Jeremiah 23:21:

***21 "I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. 22 But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have (what?) turned them back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds." [Jeremiah 23:21]***

False prophets do not turn people from their evil way. They set up ways to continue to be evil and look religious. We will see some modern day examples in a minute. Turn to Matthew 7 again, Matthew 7:15. Jesus says you can know them by their fruits. You can look at the fruit of false teachers and see whether they are really of God or not. Matthew 7, verse 15. Jesus says:

***15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, (The term meant shepherd's garb. They are coming as shepherds; they are coming as leadership) but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (You cannot see that part but Jesus sees it because He is God.) 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits. (Now we see in other passages their fruits of their wicked, lustful ways like in 2 Peter, chapter 2, and also in Jude. But here He is going to give some specific fruit that you can know them by. He says here) 21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' (Those are twice the sons of hell, by the way.) 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (You are still in your sin.) [Matthew 7:15-23]***

The fruit of false teachers are those who are still in their sins who think they are saved. These Jews thought they had a relationship with the living God. They were spiritually blind guides leading blind men to hell. Turn to Ephesians, chapter 5. We see another example. False teachers do not address sin. Ephesians 5:3:

***3 But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; (do not even let this be named among you) 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, (it does not fit who you are) but rather giving of thanks. (He is talking about speech now, isn't He?) 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. (You know that someone who is still in their sins, who has not been redeemed, who has not been changed is going to hell. That is what He is saying. And notice what He says next.) 6 Let no one deceive***

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***you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. [Ephesians 5:3-6]***

God's wrath comes upon sinners. Do not let anyone deceive you with empty words. "Ohhh, God loves them. Ohhhh, they are fine." Do not be deceived with empty words, those who are in their sins are going to hell. We see the same thing in 1 John. Turn to 1 John, chapter 2, verse 26. False teachers do not deal with sin. It is one element of what they do. 1 John, chapter 2, verse 26. John says:

***<sup>26</sup> These things I have written to you concerning those who are (What?) trying to deceive you. ("I am writing these things concerning those who trying to deceive you.") [1 John 2:26]***

And if you go to chapter 3, he talks about deception again. Chapter 3, verse 7:

***<sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you; (Evidently there were those who were saying those who were in their sins are going to be fine with God. Evidently they are doing and continually - habitually saying, "They are fine with God." He is saying do not let anyone deceive you. Do not let these false teachers, false prophets, deceive you. What does he say?) the one who practices (the word means literally to do continually. The one who does) righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; <sup>8</sup> the one who practices (or literally does, continually, habitually) sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> (And folks, these false teachers get in the way of that: the exposing of sin and the pointing to Christ. He says) No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. [1 John 3:7-10]***

You see, false teachers do not deal with sin. Do not let anyone deceive you. I was talking to someone about a church they are going to. They said, "Well, they have a homosexual couple that comes and they are welcome there." They should not be welcoming them. They should be sharing the gospel. They need Christ. They are in their sin. They are not welcome. They are going to go to hell. They need Jesus Christ and He will forgive them of their sin and He will change them. He will change them. But false teachers turn the grace of God into licentiousness. We see that. Jude verse 4:

***<sup>4</sup> For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness... [Jude 4]***

That is a license to sin – an "okay" by God to sin. What were these Pharisees doing? They were giving them an "okay" to lie. If you say it this way, you are not obligated. You can lie and be deceitful. You say it this way, you are obligated. You can actually appear to be godly and sin turning the grace of God into

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licentiousness – a license to sin. That is what these Pharisees and scribes were doing with their little systems, perverting and twisting and omitting the word of God. We see it here.

Back to our passage in Matthew 23. “Woe to you.” This is serious. “Woe to you.” You are eternally condemned because you say these things. You are eternally condemned because you say these things. “Woe to you, blind guides.” And He goes to share those things that we saw. You are eternally condemned. Fools, blind men. Any religious system or church or pastor that does not deal with sin as God does in His word, regardless of how much they say they love Jesus, regardless of how much, woe to them. By default, they pervert the gospel because you need to see your sin. We need to see our wickedness before we can be saved by the God who died for our sins. When sin is lessened or left out, the gospel is perverted. Beware of dead denominations that are so accepting of sinners that do not call upon them as the word of God calls them to repent. Dead denominations have people in continual, habitual sin all the time and they say, “Brother and sister.” They are leading them all the way to hell. Blind guides. Beware of seeker churches that do not want to offend you; the soft peddlers of sin, twisting the gospel to meet your felt needs rather than your need to realize you are a wretched sinner and Christ died for your sins. Beware of any church or leader that accommodates sin, accommodates sin in a “biblical” manner. You see, no one can be saved apart from recognizing sin. Woe to them, who say this, leading people to hell. If you are in a church that allows you to feel comfortable in your sin, you will be comfortable all the way to hell. Such people are blind guides, fools, blind men. What is God’s view of false teachers? Woe to them, for what they say.

Well, as we finish here, notice their tricky, little system does not alleviate their accountability before God. Verse 20 back in Matthew 23: “Therefore (*Jesus’ conclusion*) he who swears, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. <sup>21</sup> And he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. <sup>22</sup> And he who swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.” Therefore, in light of your spiritual blindness, here is the reality of what you are accountable for. You think you are not obligated; you are obligated. And that is going to be His point. “Therefore, he who swears by the altar...” You have got your little trick: “I did not swear by the sacrifice; I swore by the altar.” You are accountable by the altar and everything on it. That is His first point. You cannot parse your words to alleviate your responsibility. You are obligated. And then He says – notice He brings this reality to who you are responsible to in verse 21. “And He who swears by the temple...” - that is the other example that they had. Remember they said the temple, that is nothing; but by the gold, that is something. He says, “...he who swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.”

Now, of course, God did not physically dwell in temples made by human hands. He said that was a visible representation of His presence with Israel. It was a picture of His heavenly dwelling. The Lord’s point is clear: no matter who you are swearing to, you are actually swearing by Him. You are obligated to the living God. You are obligated to hold to the truthfulness of what you say. We are to hold to it; to be truthful. And it is a simple point; you are accountable for your words. There is no little system that can get you off from that. There is no room for lying. There is no room for deceit. You are blind guides, fools, blind men; you are obligated for every word. And thus, woe to you; you are condemned. Thus you are condemned. No tricky system is going to alleviate your eternal accountability for your words and deeds.

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Turn to Matthew, chapter 23, verse 33. God sees everything. He will hold you accountable for every word and you are in trouble if you do not know Christ because our words are not right. Matthew 12:33:

**<sup>33</sup> “Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. (Jesus is talking to these Pharisees, these Sadducees – Hey, just be who you really are! You are wicked! Just manifest it. Pull off the guise and the guile. He says,) <sup>34</sup>You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? (And then He is going to say the reality of what is going on.) For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. <sup>35</sup>The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. <sup>36</sup>And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. <sup>37</sup>For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.” [Matthew 12:33-37]**

You cannot get away with your lying within a religious system. “Woe to you, who say...” False teachers who twist God’s word and omit truth to cover up sin and those who place themselves under such wickedness, you all are in eternal peril. You are on the verge of being twice the son or daughter of hell. This is why I am so firm about wicked, evangelical pastors (so-called pastors) who do not address sin in their churches. There are tons of people there who think they are saved still living in sinful lives all the way to hell. And it is evil. It is evil.

What is your speech like? Are you a liar? Maybe this describes some of you. When you are around church, maybe you tell the truth; but when you go to work, you stretch the truth here and there. You cheat in school – whatever it might be. You lie to your parents. You may look righteous or you may appear to be righteous, but you are a whitewashed tomb: the outside looks clean because you are doing the things that God would say you would do but yet from a heart that is not redeemed. You are full of dead men’s bones. You are a liar. From out of the mouth the heart speaks. But God is a gracious God. He sent Jesus to die for our sins. He will forgive you. He will forgive you. If you are not redeemed, you will go to hell. You will pay the penalty. But Jesus died for sins; He paid the price. He paid the price.

Today we have seen Jesus condemn the religious leaders. Woe to these blind guides, these fools, these blind men because they are deceitful liars guising their teaching that would permit others to stay in sin which ultimately as we saw in the first two woes prevented people from coming to Christ. You see, if you do not think you are sinning and you think it is okay with God, then you are not going to come to Christ. How wicked is that? If you have a religious way to feel good about yourself and you think you are not sinning, then you will not come to Christ. These people were trying to look righteous; but at the core, they were deceitful liars. And we saw God’s view of false teachers: woe to them. Where are you today? Are you spiritually blind? Has God revealed to you from His word that you are a sinner? Have you recognized your sinfulness before Him? That the wages of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord?

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One last thing. What does God think about liars? Let's take a few verses in Proverbs and then we will finish up. Proverbs, chapter 6. This is one of the reasons why I think Jesus uses this example here because lying is such a characteristic of our wicked nature. Proverbs 6:16:

**<sup>16</sup> There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, <sup>19</sup> a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers. [Proverbs 6:16-19]**

You see lying in there twice. Proverbs 12:22:

**<sup>22</sup> Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD... [Proverbs 12:22]**

Proverbs 12:19:

**<sup>9</sup> Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment. [Proverbs 12:19]**

Proverbs 19:9:

**<sup>9</sup> A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will perish. [Proverbs 19:9]**

If you are of a sinful nature, the nature before coming to Christ, you are a liar and you are in peril of eternal death, but Jesus died for your sins. Repent today. But what about us, brother and sister? Praise the Lord He has opened our eyes to see our wickedness and the Savior Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord He has revealed Christ. How does this apply to us? We need to see false teachers the way Jesus does. We need to see them this way. Woe to them, those who say things that cover up for sin. Woe to them. We need to have a heart towards those who are entrapped in the wicked teaching of these people, we need to have a heart to snatch them out of the fire; to come to them and share the truth of God from His word that they might be saved from their perilous place following blind men on their way to hell. Brother and sister, along with that there is no place for falsehood in the believer's life. That is from our old nature; do not allow it to happen. It is evil; it is wicked. Let me read one passage. Ephesians, chapter 4:25:

**<sup>25</sup> Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. [Ephesians 4:25]**

## Prayer

Father, You are a gracious God and this example on the surface does not seem to be that serious, but yet it is serious enough for Your Son to say "Woe." It is eternally condemning to say and teach something that would not reveal sin, Lord God, if we did not share Your word. I pray, Lord God, that if there is anyone in here who is still in their sins that they would come to you; that they would call out to Christ repenting of sin and believing in Him for salvation. And Father, I pray for

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the believers here, those of us who know You, that we would see things the way that You see it and we would respond the way You would have us respond in Your word; that we would have mercy on some snatching some out of the fire; that our hearts would be like Yours. Thank you for Your Word now. In Jesus' name, amen.

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