

Sermon Reflections

Woe to the Hypocrites! (Matthew 23)

Summary: Heed these six warnings to keep your heart from drifting into hypocritical worship.

Protections against Hypocrisy

1. Don't Make Worship about You (vv. 1–12)

- In verse 3 Jesus commended the verbal teaching of the scribes/Pharisees while condemning their works. When does a person's actions invalidate their teaching, or are their words and actions always independent of each other? Review James 1:21–27 with Jesus' teaching in mind; what are the implications of ignoring God's Word in one's actions while knowing what the Word says?
- Verse 4 says the scribes/Pharisees laid tied-up, hard-to-bear burdens on people, a reference to their legalism. Why does Jesus particularly address teachers/leaders? What are ways that you differentiate between a true command of God and legalism (define each) so that you aren't caught either in rebellion to God or in puffing yourself up in self-righteousness?

2. Don't Misplace Your Passion (vv. 13–15)

- As seen in verse 15, the scribes/Pharisees were not apathetic. However, they effectively blocked others from entering the kingdom of heaven. Who are modern examples of passionate people and groups locking others out of heaven? How could you also be guilty of doing this?

3. Don't Major on the Minors (vv. 16–24)

- In verse 23, we see the scribes/Pharisees cloaking their selfishness in devotion. What pious actions do you do that stop you from: helping others, evangelizing, etc.? How do you balance serving God and others while keeping the great commandment (Matthew 22:37) of first importance?

4. Don't Emphasize externals (vv. 25–28)

- Verses 25–26 speak of uncleanness; verses 27–28 speak of death. Why are these characteristics fitting pictures of hypocritical deeds? What is the relationship of these characteristics to the Gospel? To life in the Spirit? How can you use these characteristics to evaluate your deeds?

5. Don't Cling to Your Tradition (vv. 29–36)

- Verse 29 mentions traditions by which the scribes/Pharisees hid their rebellion against God. Define what a religious tradition is. What are bad uses of religious traditionalism? Are there any good uses of traditions for spiritual purposes? How do you keep those good uses 'good'?

6. Don't Harden Your Heart to Christ (vv. 37–39)

- In verse 37 we see Christ's heart longing for unresponsive rebels to turn to Him. How can we ensure we do not lose sight of our sin, in order to keep our heart responsive to His will? At the same time, how can we look at our sin in such a way that Christ is seen as our ever greater Savior?

"Extra Credit": What New Year's resolutions have you made, or are thinking to make, that may foster hypocrisy? How will you guard against that while implementing your good intentions?