



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 23:1–12

Gospel of Matthew

“The Sins of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Christians”

TRANSCRIPT

For the Scripture reading, we are turning to Matthew chapter 23, and reading the first 12 verses, which is the beginning of the last public discourse of our Lord according to the Gospel of Matthew. So Matthew chapter 23 and verse 1 through verse 12:

“Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that do and observe. (Now I have reversed the order of the words in the Authorized Version text because they are reversed in the original text.) But do not after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not ease them with one of their fingers. (I’ve made a slight change there with the verb *kineō* in the Greek text may mean “to move” or it may mean “to remove,” and remove or move in the sense of making it easier, and that may be the meaning of the words here: will not move them, that is, make them easier.) With one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost places at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues. (Chief

seats in the synagogues were those seats that were along the front of the platform which enabled the Pharisees to look out on the audience, such as Mr. Prier and I sit up here on the platform and Mr. Roberts, and we're able to look out and see you. They are the like the chief seats in the synagogue. Let us hope the likeness stops there.) And greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, and all ye are brethren. (If you have, again, an Authorized Version I have omitted the words, even Christ, because they are not found in the most ancient manuscripts.) And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters or professors: for one is your Master or professor, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. (And then our Lord moves from the second person to the third person, making verse 12 something of a proverb or a proverbial statement, repeated a number of times in the New Testament and in different words but essentially the same thought.) And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we give Thee thanks and praise for the privilege again of gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus of listening to the Word and responding in praise and thanksgiving and worship to the things that we have discovered through ministry.

We pray, O God, that Thy blessing may be upon us in the singing of the hymns and in the exposition of Scripture to the end that Thy name may be exalted in our hearts and lives.

We acknowledge Lord that the kinds of sins that our Lord refers to here are the kinds of sins into which we are so prone to fall: ostentation and show and arrogance and pride and hypocrisy.

Deliver us, O God, from these, not only as a group of believers and as a congregation, but as individuals. May something of the humility of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be seen in our lives by his grace and enable us Lord to be servants to desire to serve and not to be served. We know these things Lord are contrary to our nature and very difficult, but we know that Thou art able, and so Lord we pray that Thou wilt minister to us in our need.

We pray for the whole body of the Lord Jesus Christ today, that it may be that the body may be characterized by true humility and true gratitude for all that has been done for us through him. Enable us, O God, to turn to Thee constantly for the help and enablement that we so desperately need in our daily lives.

We pray for the sick in our midst, and pray, O God, that Thou wilt minister to them and give them healing in accordance with Thy will.

We pray for the discouraged, and pray that Thou wilt encourage them and strengthen them and give them new hope, and for those with perplexing problems, we pray, O God, that Thou will give the solution, for we know in the ultimate analysis of things that all our solutions that are worthwhile come from Thee. And so Lord meet the needs of those who are perplexed.

And for those who are weak in faith, O God, strengthen them and give them motivation to look into the Scriptures, and through fellowship with the Lord in them have their faith strengthened, for faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

We pray for the elders of this assembly and ask that Thou wilt give them wisdom and guidance. We need, O Lord, Thy counsel and Thy direction. We pray for the deacons and ask that Thou wilt bless them richly and supply their needs.

May the outreach of the congregation Lord be blessed by Thee and may many who listen to the Word through the cassettes and through the radio ministry receive a rich blessing in spiritual things and be built up in the faith. We are so grateful for the many who do and Lord, wilt Thy bless richly.

Now may Thy blessing be upon us in this hour and in the evening hour, for we pray in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and men. Amen.

[Message]] The hymn reminds me of something that I was reading just yesterday, a quotation from a rabbi who was making some comments concerning the distinctions between Christianity and some of the other religions. And the Rabbi went on to say that you will never hear of Mohammedans singing hymns Mohammed, I love Thee. Or he said, you will never hear or listen to any Jewish people singing, Moses, I need thee every hour.

And he went on to say that the unusual thing about Christianity is the fact that Christians have the conviction that the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived thousands of years ago, is still with them moment by moment, and that distinguishes Christianity from the religions that he mentioned. That is one of the distinctive things in Christianity: the conviction that the Lord Jesus is still alive and that one may have vital relationship to him today.

The decisive contrast between the scribes and the Pharisees and the believers finds some illustration in that fact. The scribes were men who were devoted to the study of the law of Moses from the time of the great synagogue and the days of Ezra, and the Pharisees, the name of whom means “separated ones,” were ones who had devoted themselves from the days of Antiochus Epiphanes almost a couple of centuries before the time of Christ, to the meticulous observance of the law. And they were so interested in the observance of the law in the meticulous fashion that they sought to observe it, that by the time of the days of the New Testament there were literally scores of books of regulations that had developed which were traditions that were added to the Word of God.

The thing that ultimately came to be characteristic of the system of the scribes and the Pharisees was legalism. Legalism breeds in unregenerate hearts. It is natural to men who do not understand the nature of the human heart and who seek out of that misunderstanding, to obtain redemption by their own self-effort. Pelagius lived many hundreds of years ago, but Pelagius’ doctrine was simply a manifestation of legalism, and the Pelagian hope of redemption by self-effort is something that characterizes all peoples who are not in the family of the Christian faith.

We all know who know anything about the Lord Jesus Christ that redemption by self-effort is hopeless, and that kind of legalism will disintegrate like the Tower of Babel when the judgment comes. I studied under a man in Scotland many years ago who said, “No man can save himself. A drowning man does not want a lecture on the art of swimming; what he wants is a rope.” And when we learn that we are drowning, when we learn from Scripture that we are under condemnation, that we are guilty and need a redeemer, then we do not want any lectures on how we should be good. We want someone to deliver us from our hopeless state.

These men the scribes and Pharisees are men against whom the Lord Jesus spoke his sharpest language. I think in many ways they are perfect examples of what we mean by total depravity. We are inclined to think when the term total depravity is used of someone who is languishing in one of our prisons for having committed murder or rape or having been an habitual criminal. But the term total depravity does not refer to an individual who is as evil as he possibly can be. We do not mean when we say a man is totally depraved that he is as evil as a man can be.

In fact we don't even refer necessarily to evil in the sight of men, because a man totally depraved may be a man who is very religious, very honorable, very well-respected in the eyes of men, and what we mean when we say that a man is totally depraved is simply that all aspects of his being: his mind, his will, his emotions—are all touched by sin. That is, he's out of joint. He's warped. But men may look upon him and think of him a very religious man.

A totally depraved man is a man, the whole part of his being, every part of his being has been touched by sin. He's not necessarily as bad as he could be in the sight of men, nor even bad in the sight of men. So these men who were religious, who paid great attention to the Word of God, who were the preachers and teachers of the Word of God, beautifully illustrate total depravity, because in the eyes of many they were looked upon as very righteous, but sin had touched their minds and had touched their hearts and had touched their wills, and the proof of it was that when the Lord Jesus came, it was they who took the lead in the crucifixion of Him who is the truth of God.

Now we must not then, because we look at the scribes and Pharisees, look at the Christians and say well they are the righteous ones. Luther was right when he spoke about a justified man as *semper justus et peccator*, at the same time just or righteous and a sinner, because it is true when a man comes to be justified by the objective work of the Lord Jesus in atonement, that does not mean that he is still not a person in whom dwells the principle of sin. And a Christian is not a person who parades his practical righteousness.

As a matter of fact, that’s why we have in the Bible the doctrine of sanctification. He begins to become in his daily life what he is in the sight of God the moment that he believes on the Lord Jesus: a righteous person, justified not because of himself, but justified because of what Christ has done, and then begins the process of sanctification—the impartation of practical righteousness. That’s why you come to hear the ministry of the Word. That’s why you read the Word. That’s why you seek in prayer to become more conformed to the will of God. It is that you might grow and become what you are called: saints, righteous people, men of God.

Well now the Lord speaks in chapter 23 of the Gospel of Matthew of the scribes and Pharisees and has sharp words to say against them. We’ll save the sharpest of the words for next Sunday, but he begins speaking in anger and wrath in unsparing accusation of these men.

Now they had already made their choice. It is evident from the book of Matthew that a long time ago they had decided within their hearts that they would like to get rid of this man Jesus of Nazareth. And the culmination of their planning and plotting is fast approaching. Now of course God is planning and plotting, too, but his plans and plots include the redemption of men, and so he uses these men in order to accomplish his own purpose.

There is a word of introduction in the 1st verse of this 23rd chapter, and I want to make just a couple of comments before we launch into the warning to the multitudes and to the scribes and Pharisees in verse 2 through verse 7. This is the last public discourse of the Lord, and it begins, “Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying.” That, then, is related to the preceding context which means that this message that he gave against the scribes and Pharisees was

delivered on the conclusion of the day of questions, and it apparently was delivered in the temple, because in chapter 21 verse 23, reference is made to the fact that the Lord Jesus was asked these questions in the temple and then in chapter 24 verse 1, as we begin in this very next chapter, the reading of the Olivet discourse, Matthew writes, “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple.” So evidently, these words these strong unsparing words against the scribes and Pharisees were spoken in the temple.

The Lord Jesus was not the kind of man to avoid a confrontation when it was necessary, and it is not out of character for him to beard the lion in his den. So he does not behind the backs of the scribes and Pharisees condemn them, but he assumes the most public religious place in all the land, and there speaks these words against them. The hostility to him had been growing, and it’s not surprising that his attack should now take place. I think as you read through this, you wonder how our Lord was able, in long-suffering, to keep from pouring forth an attack like this in the light of the wickedness of these self-righteous men.

Now let me say, right at the beginning, that not all of the Pharisees were Pharisees such as the ones referred to in the New Testament. And as a matter of fact, the New Testament itself, if you discover, if you will search it carefully, you will discover that it does not say that all the scribes and all the Pharisees were wicked men.

We have for example Simon the Pharisee, who was friendly enough and courteous enough and desirous of knowing something enough that he invited the Lord Jesus to his house. Some of them were very solicitous for his personal safety and some of them sent word to him, warning him to avoid Herod, because Herod was out to put him to death.

And then there were others who admired him for his spiritual understanding, such as the lawyer in the preceding context who asked the question and then admired his answer. And the Lord Jesus said of him that he was not far from the kingdom of God. That lawyer was a scribe. Scribes were those who handled legal questions touching the Word of God. So we know that not all scribes who were unbelievers were evil.

And then there were some who came to faith, such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. So we must not think of the scribes and Pharisees as being altogether evil. Jewish people, hearing Christians speak about the scribes and Pharisees, have often gained the impression that we are saying that every one of them was evil, when history records the fact that there were many of the scribes and Pharisees who were very gentle and good men according to human standards.

In fact, the Talmud itself distinguishes seven different kinds of Pharisees. But you know, you could take these seven different types of Pharisees and transfer them to Christianity, because they tell us about certain kinds of people really. There was the shoulder Pharisee, according to the Talmud, who was meticulous in his observance of the law but wore his good works on his shoulder. He let everybody know about them.

Then there was the wait-a-little Pharisee who could always produce a good excuse for procrastination—that’s the Pharisee group to which I would probably have belonged. Then there was the bruised, or bleeding Pharisee, who was so strict in his fear of having contact with women, that he would shut his eyes walking down the street when he saw a woman coming, and in avoiding looking at a woman, he would naturally bump into walls and buildings [laughter] and bruise and wound himself, and so they became known as the bruised and bleeding Pharisees.

Then there was the pestle and mortar Pharisee, or the hump-back Pharisee, who walked in such ostentatious humility that they were bent like a pestle and mortar. And the ever-reckoning or compounding Pharisee who was always calculating his good works, and figuring out how much God was in debt to him. And there was the timid or fearing Pharisee who was always in fear of divine punishment.

And then the Talmud, in the last division, speaks of the God-fearing Pharisee, the Pharisee who truly loved the Lord, and who was desirous of obeying the law of Moses. What is interesting about this to me is that the Talmud itself, a Jewish product, says that out of the seven different types, there is only one that’s really good. So the New Testament picture of the scribes and Pharisees is not entirely wrong. As a matter of fact it would seem to agree with their general judgment. too.

Well the Lord, in addressing these men, first of all, speaks about their attitude. He says, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Now Moses’ seat was evidently an expression used to refer to the seat at which the most prominent Pharisee or scribe sat in the meetings in the synagogue. We’ll say scribe because it was the duty of the scribes to settle questions of law and the Word of God. So there would be in one, incidentally, there were many synagogues, but in the synagogue there would be one place where the chief teacher would sit and that came to be called Moses’ seat, because Moses had sat and judged the children of Israel according to Exodus chapter 18.

The Lord Jesus makes reference to that custom, and he does not say anything pro or con. That question, he says, all therefore, that is, under the circumstances described, all whatever they bid you observe, that do and observe. Now that I think does not mean that the Lord Jesus is saying to them, all of the traditions as well as what the Scriptures teach you are to follow. No he means simply in the light of all of his other teachings that as long as they agree with the law of God, you are to do what they teach. But he adds, do not do after their works, for they say and do not.

That is, they really tell you a whole lot about what you ought to do, but they themselves do not do it. There was a wall between their words and their works. The voice was the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau. They tell you what the Word of God says, but they themselves do not do it.

On Wednesday night we have been studying the book of Amos, and chapters 4 and 5 of Amos are some of the most interesting chapters in the Old Testament. Amos was a prophet to the northern kingdom. He was from the south. So he was a southerner who had gone to the north, and he was preaching to the Yankees—I mean the ten tribes to the north. [Laughter]

Now then ten tribes to the north had divided from the kingdom and had set up their own worship. It was an illegitimate worship. When Jeroboam separated from the tribes, he set up worship in the north and in the south, and he set up these places of worship which were illegitimate—they should have gone to Jerusalem—in order to keep his followers from going to Jerusalem and being won back to the kingdom of David.

Now in the course of time in the north, they followed this heretical form of worship. So Amos in the 4th chapter of his prophecy, turns to the Bethelite heresy, for they met in Bethel and Gilgal in worship, and turns to condemn this self-made religion. They invented the use of leaven when certain sacrifices in which the Bible spoke specifically against it. And biting sarcasm, Amos assumes the position of a priest and gives them exhortation, but his exhortation is a parody, ecclesiastical parody, of the foolishness of the worship of the people.

He said, “Come to Bethel to the place of worship,” and then instead of saying, and worship God, he says, “and transgress. At Gilgal multiply transgression.” Bring your sacrifices every morning and your tithes after three years and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven and publish far and wide your free will offerings. He is speaking in tremendous ironic sarcasm. Bring your free will offerings and publish and proclaim them, for this you love to do. So he’s talking about the fact that they have a well-developed worship, a well-developed ritual, a well developed pattern of religion, but it’s all contrary to the Word of God.

And then in the next chapter he gives God’s words concerning these things that they were doing. He said, “I hate speaking for God. I hate your feast days. I despise your feast days. I will not take delight in your solemn assemblies, though you offer me burnt offerings and your meal offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of thine harps. What does the Lord require?”

Well then, these Israelites thought they knew, and the thing that they thought that the Lord required was the same thing that the Egyptians thought that the Lord required, the same things that the Babylonians thought, the same things that the Canaanites thought, and the same things that most Americans think God requires. What were the things that they thought God required? Well the things that they thought that he thought that he required were meetings, ritual, music—these are the things that they thought that God required.

And so they had the things that would correspond to our church calendar days. They had their seven feasts, and they observed these feasts religiously. Now mind you the Old Testament said

that they should, and Amos is not speaking against the observance of the feasts, he is speaking against the observance of the feasts in the spirit in which they did it. And he is not speaking against the use of music or against the sacrifices, he’s talking about the spirit in which they were done. If he were here today, he would speak about our meetings our church calendar days, how on Christmas we have special services but often there is no real heart in them. Easter. Lent Sunday. Advent and all of the rest of the days of the church calendar which have become festivals, but often no reality at all.

And then, ritual. Candles. Images. Processions. Genuflections. And all of the other things that characterize the most ritualistic expression of Christianity. And choirs and music. Who could ask for anything more than this? God. He asks for more than that. He asks for more than meetings. He asks for more than ritual. He asks for more than music. As a matter of fact, he asks for worship from the heart and even designated, divinely ordered worship is something that God hates and despises if there is no reality in it.

I hate it. We have many meetings, and if we participate in these meetings in a spirit in which there is no relationship to the Lord, he is not pleased by the fact that we are here. He’s not pleased by the fact that we stand up and sing hymns if our heart is not in it, if there is no relationship to him in a personal way. He said he hated their feast days. He said, you offer me burnt offerings; I will not accept them. I will not smell a sweet savor from them. And if you’ll pardon the expression, he said to them, your offerings stink to him. And when you sing your beautiful songs, what do I hear? Not music. He says, take away from me the noise of your songs. That’s all it is to him when a man sings, and he doesn’t sing from the heart. It’s just noise to the Lord. It may be beautiful to our ears. But it’s noise in his ears.

Now I would love to have heard Amos preach. In fact, I think I would relinquish the pulpit for a Sunday [laughter] to have him preach in Believers Chapel. I would like to hear what he would say. If he could come back, I can assure you, I’d be sitting right down there and not in Moses’ seat. I would like to hear what he would have to say about our professing Christianity in the United States. I wonder what he would say about that pious-appearing Anglican, who with his prayer book in his

hand, and proud words for it, doesn't really know what it is to offer a prayer to God from the heart at all.

I grew up in a community in which many of my relatives were Episcopalians, and the great mass of the people in the part of the town in which I lived were Episcopalian. I've heard them over and over again say to me that the prayer book is almost entirely Scripture—and it is a beautiful book I grant that—but often my friends didn't know what it was to offer a prayer to God at all, though they had a lovely prayer book which they could read.

I have a friend who was the president of a Bible college. And he was in Canada in a meeting and in the course of the meeting the public servant who was on the platform—it was a dedication of a large building—was an Anglican, and he was a professing Christian by his own profession though my friend really didn't know the status of his relationship to the Lord. But in the course of the meeting, thinking it would be nice, he called upon this public servant, the mayor or some official like this, to lead in prayer without telling him beforehand. And he got up and he stumbled through a few words and closed, ignominiously, the prayer and sat down. And after the meeting went over to my friend and said, “Dr. Gannett I want you to know that today was the first time in my life I've ever been embarrassed that I was an Anglican.” He was called upon to pray without his prayer book, and he had no words of personal relationship to the Lord.

Now I know that that is not true of all of our Episcopalian friends, but I'm sure that they will recognize that the words that I'm speaking do have application. And what shall we say about our Presbyterian brethren, who, while glorying in their great tradition of the centrality of the Word of God in witness and worship, build sanctuaries with divided chancels. And in keeping with the implicit witness given relegate the Word of God to a less than central position, which it has always had in those Reformed gatherings. For the idea of one pulpit in the midst of a congregation had as its origin the fundamental conviction that the Word of God was the foundation for the life and worship of a local church.

Now I know you think I’m attacking all of the denominations, and I don’t intend to do that at all, so I must have a few words for our independent brethren. I leave out the Baptists. We’ll save them for later. [Laughter] But the independent brethren, what about them?” I wonder if Amos would have anything to say to us. Well I think he would. I think he would have a great deal to say to us, too, because the living, spreading, virus of hypocrisy and arrogance and pride knows no destroying medicine but a personal relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I can see Amos and the Old Testament prophets inveighing very strongly against the legalistic taboos which make up a great deal of the preaching of evangelical churches today. And the grace of God and the great principle of the grace of God is lost in the legalistic taboos that we often have to listen to.

There’s a little village in Scotland. It’s very famous in Scotland, because it’s the way that they test a foreigner in his pronunciation of the kind of language that the Scots speak—some call it English—others question that. [Laughter] Incidentally, the Scots write back to our tape ministry and say they especially like to hear Dr. Johnson, because his tongue is understandable by them. And I’ve wondered why that is, because it surely is different, a different tongue that they’re hearing, and I finally have gathered that the reason is that I speak slow enough for them to think, now what did he really say, and they can finally figure it out before I get to the next word. [Laughter]

But anyway, the Scots have a little village, and this village, its name is used to test a man’s pronunciation. And if he can pronounce this little village, pronounce the name of it, then well he can pass the test. It’s a kind of shibboleth for them. And the village’s name is [Johnson speaks a word using sounds that appear as if he is clearing his throat], and you have to be five or ten feet away to really appreciate this. [Loud laughter] [Same word used; more laughter]. Thomas Carlisle once said that what the village of [Same word; more laughter] needed was a minister who knew God other than by hearsay. Well that’s what every place needs. Needs a man who knows God other than by hearsay. And it’s really what we need to know God other than by hearsay.

So the Lord Jesus then says, they say and do not. Does that have any application to you? Does it have any application to me? Why it certainly does. He says also that they bind heavy burdens

and grievous to be borne and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Now it’s possible that he’s speaking about the legitimate teachings of the law, when men try to uphold in their own strength and cannot do it, for Peter speaks along those lines in Acts chapter 15. Or it may be a reference to the unauthorized editions, and their unwillingness to lighten the burdens of these many restrictions on the people. But whatever it means, both of these interpretations lay stress upon the fact that the law is something impressed upon us which we cannot keep. Either the law simply in human strength, or the law burdened with all of these human traditions. We cannot keep them. And legalists love to put us under the law and make us feel bad, so that we will feel guilty and become their disciples, Paul tells us in Galatians.

Whereas in Christianity, we are taught how our burdens may be removed by the grace of God, how we may be free, and how someone comes to live within us to enable us to do the will of God in his strength.

Why do men live like this? Why he says, all their works they do to be seen of men. They did them theatrically. That’s why men like to sit in the chief seat in the synagogue often that’s why they like to speak and talk often. It’s because they like to be seen of men. Now he’s talking right to the teachers of the Word of God. Do we do things theatrically? That is, do we do these things in order to be seen of men? But of course, it applies to all of us who are Christians. Is our own Christian profession something that we carry out in order to be seen?

The unconscious spiritual blindness of the person who doesn’t realize that is the worst offense, I guess. Reminds me of the story of a woman who was having her picture taken, and she was not a very good looking woman, but she thought that she was very beautiful. And so when she came before the photographer she said to him, mind you young man, be sure and do me justice. And before thinking, he said woman it’s not justice you need it’s mercy. [Laughter] Oh, the arrogance of the pride that does not recognize that it’s really there. They do these things to be seen of men.

Now their actions are described by the Lord. I don't guess it's necessary to go into great detail over them. We don't have time. But he said, to give you illustration in effect, he said they make broad their phylacteries—these were the things they put on their foreheads with little verses of Scripture sections of Scripture written in little boxes—they bound around their heads particularly at times of prayer. They put one around the arm, and they put it around the arm in order that it might be near the heart [Johnson speaks facetiously, followed by laughter].

And then they also had tassels on their garments, and these were designed to represent their heavenly origin. But in the case of the scribes and the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus said, they make large their phylacteries so you can see the Pharisee his phylacteries larger than anybody else's, and furthermore they enlarged the borders of their garments, and so the tassels were larger on the the garments of the Pharisees and the scribes, so they went out of their way to let people know they really were the teachers of the Word of God, very much like people who go around in clerical garments letting you know that they are the clergy. Incidentally it is possible for a man to be a godly man in such clothes but it's difficult. [Laughter]

Now then, the last part of the section he addresses some words to the disciples only. Notice the 8th verse, “But be ye (great deal of stress on that ye in the original text) as for you don't be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher and all ye are brethren. Rabbi meant “my great one.” There is only one guide in conduct, he is saying. Now he doesn't say the Holy Spirit here, but it might well be that he has this in mind. The Holy Spirit in the final analysis is the one great teacher of conduct. Then he says, call no man your Father upon the earth, for one is your Father—the first person of the Trinity who is in heaven. Father.

Now some have found some difficulty with this, because Paul spoke to Timothy and he said, Timothy you are my son, but he added, son in the faith. But did he not speak to the Corinthians and say, through the gospel I have begotten you? Yes, he did say that, but he added, in Christ Jesus. So in these uses of terms like father and son, the apostle makes it very plain he is not speaking about

himself being the ultimate spiritual authority, for those Corinthians or for Timothy. That I think is the clue to the meaning of these words.

When he says, don't call don't be called by men, rabbi. Don't be called, call no man, father, don't call anyone of the Christians, professor or master—he means in that ultimate spiritual sense. He does not mean that you cannot call your earthly father, father. But he means there is no spiritual father, there is no true spiritual professor, there is no true spiritual rabbi, except the members of the holy Trinity. This is why I think it is wrong for us to call any man father in the spiritual sense. This is why, in my own, according to my own understanding, we should not call anyone “pope,” which means father. We should not call the Italian Pope—they call *pa-pa*—we should not call him father. We do not have any spiritual fathers except our Father in heaven.

Now we may have an earthly father who was the instrumentality of our spiritual Father in bringing us into the faith in that figurative sense, but that is only in a figurative sense and not in the ultimate sense. We should recognize we are all brethren, we are all equal under God. I am not your father in the spiritual sense. God is your Father. I am not your professor, your teacher. The Holy Spirit is your teacher. I am not your ultimate leader. The Lord Jesus is your ultimate leader. I am simply a member of this congregation, and God gives spiritual gifts of teaching or evangelism or pastor-teacher, and these are simply gifts given to men who are equal, and we are all equal, we are all brethren and sisters. We should never forget that.

Now he, after giving these words of instruction, he says, but he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. That incidentally is a sentiment that he has expressed already in chapter 20 and verse 26 and verse 28, because the greatest servant of all is the Lord Jesus. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve—same root word—and to give his life a ransom for many. He that is greatest among you shall be your servant and our greatness is manifested in the degree of our service to our fellow believer. And that pertains to all of us.

Some people think if you become a servant or if you become humble, if you are so humble that you minister only to others, that you lose something thereby. The Lord Jesus didn't cease to be a

king because he was like a servant. He didn't cease to be a lion because he came among us as the Lamb of God. He didn't cease to be God because he took to himself human nature and also was man apart from sin, nor did he cease to be the ultimate judge because for a time he was judged by wicked men. A man doesn't lose his honor by humility, but as a matter of fact, he is honored ultimately for his humility. He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.

And then he closes with a proverbial kind of saying repeated all through the New Testament. The apostles picked it up, and they say the same thing: whosoever shall be exalt himself shall be abased (that's a reference to the scribes and Pharisees) and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. That of course is ultimately seen most clearly in the Lord Jesus. He who seeks the loftiest will be the lowliest. The way up is down.

Pride, arrogance, show, ostentation, hypocrisy have made one great pope, and unfortunately a lot of little popes. And this text of Scripture speaks contrary to that.

William Carey was a great linguist, the father of the modern missionary movement. When he left England and went out to India he was so lowly and so unrecognized by his own people that when he arrived in India, which was at that time under the control of the British, he was not even allowed to enter the country. But then finally when he died, in England they came to recognize the greatness of William Carey, so that the flags throughout the whole nation were carried at half mast. This man, who was a simple shoemaker who became so great in his land, was a man who became great because of his lowly service of Jesus Christ.

He was in Britain one time and they were having a a banquet at which he was the honored guest, and in the course of it, on the banquet table one of the English officers who was present, not knowing that Mr. Carey would hear this remark, turned to someone and said, was not your great Mr. Carey a shoemaker? And William Carey heard it, and he turned to the man and said, no sir. I'm a cobbler, which was an even lower description of what a shoemaker was. And one of the reasons for this man's greatness was the fact that he was a man who did not have show.

Well this is the beginning of our Lord's treatise against righteousness in sight only. There is something very unlovely about proud and haughty people. They are unlovely, repulsive, cold. Religious hypocrites are the worst kinds of people to be around, aren't they? I'm reminded of the petition of the little child who prayed, O God make all bad people good and good people nice. What's the cure for externalism? Why the cure is described by the Lord in verse 26: “Thou blind Pharisee cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter that the outside of them may be clean also.” The only way of deliverance for the proud and haughty and arrogant unbeliever is the new birth. There must a change in the inner man in order that the outer man may become pleasing to God.

If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we say very plainly to you that a man cannot of himself please God. Self-effort cannot lead to anything but condemnation. Pelagianism and the legalism of it will never lead to any destination but hellfire and damnation. But God offers to those who have come by the conviction of the Holy Spirit to understand their sin, deliverance, forgiveness of sins, justification, membership in the family of God, as we flee to him in faith and lean upon the Lord Jesus and his shed blood alone for our redemption. May God bring you to him.

And if you're a Christian, pride and hypocrisy and arrogance are the special kinds of sins of which we are guilty. I love the story of the converted Hindu. India as you know has a caste system. He once said, I am by birth of an insignificant and contemptible caste, so low, that if a Brahman should chance to touch me he must go and bathe in the Ganges for the purpose of purification, and yet God, has been pleased to call me not only to the knowledge of the gospel, but the high privilege of preaching it to others. Do you know, he said, my friend, why God has chosen me? Well I think the reason is this. If God has selected a learned Brahman to preach the gospel, then when men brought to the relationship with Jesus Christ that means life, they would say, why it's because of his great learning or because of the depth of his character and the righteousness of it that men are attracted to Christianity. But when they come to faith through the preaching of the gospel by me,

they can only give the glory to God, because they know that I have nothing of myself. May the Lord help us to remember what we really are, and may we seek to cultivate our Lord’s admonition, “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, these is our convicting words that come home to us as sharply and as disturbingly to those who do not know Jesus Christ at all, for it is so characteristic of the saints to become proud and arrogant and hypocritical. O God, deliver us from our hypocrisy and give us reality at the expense of all that might be regarded as glory for ourselves.

Enable us O God to be servants one of another for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Father, if there is someone here who has not yet come to the Lord Jesus, and is resting in the pride and arrogance of self-righteousness, O shake them Lord, vigorously, so that they come to understand their sin and condemnation and flee to the Redeemer who offers everlasting life in grace.

May grace mercy and peace go with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.