

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 20- Luke 20:45-47**

311- Jesus Condemns the False Religionists

April 24, 2016

Luke 20:45-47

45 And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples,

46 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets,

47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

To the Glory of God

I just received the latest edition of the magazine from a national organization that, according to them, is trying to "Reclaim the Culture". And in this edition, it has a story about the late Supreme Court Justice, Antonin Scalia. And the article went into great detail about how God moved in Justice Scalia's life and how his great love for God and his relationship with Jesus Christ motivated his rulings.

Now, before I get too deep here, I need to say that I was a fan of Justice Scalia. I agreed with not only his rulings, but also his judicial philosophy as well. As far as I am concerned, Justice Scalia was the model that *all* Supreme Court Justices should be like.

But this article was not about his rulings or his judicial philosophy; it was about his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that takes it out of the realm of Government and Politics, and puts it into the realm of Salvation and of Christianity. And several times in the article it mentioned that Justice Scalia was what they called a "devout" Roman Catholic.

Now keep in mind that it didn't say he was a devout Christian. It didn't say he was Bible believing. No information was given about

whether he was born again. It really didn't give any information about what he believed at all; the article merely said that he was a devout Roman Catholic and that he had a strong and vibrant "relationship with Jesus Christ".

Now, before I get too far into this, you need to know that I don't have the ability to know another person's heart. And I am not able to even judge somebody else's motives. And so I'm not going to do that here. So this Sermon is not about condemning or bashing Justice Scalia; I have no idea whether Justice Scalia was saved or not, I certainly hope he was.

But there are few things that deeply and profoundly trouble me about the way that organizations like this discuss a person's so-called "relationship" with Jesus Christ. I assume that when organizations like this say that somebody has a "relationship with Jesus Christ" that this means that the person is saved. So, if that is true, I have a few questions.

Now to be fair, I went to their website to find out what their doctrinal Statement was. And this is what this organization says they believe about Salvation:

We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

... which is absolutely true. But it is very vague and horribly incomplete. For example, does this organization believe that Justification is by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone, absent any and all human works, or do they believe that people are saved through their participation in Church Sacraments? Do they believe that Salvation is an "event" or a "process"? And by saying that they believe that for Salvation to take place for lost and sinful people, that regeneration by the Holy Spirit is essential, do they mean to say that they adhere to Sovereign Election or do they promote Human Determinism?

I mean, by calling this man a "Christian" does that mean that they consider devout Roman Catholics to be saved and to be brothers and sisters in Christ? And, if so, why do they not allow Roman Catholics to hold any position of authority in their organization? Does

this organization see any conflict at all in what they say they believe about Salvation and what Rome teaches?

So my next question would be:

How many different ways are there for a lost person to be saved?

... because what Rome officially and formally teaches about how lost people arrive at being in right standing with God is radically different from what the Protestant Reformers taught 500 years ago. But we must go on to say that what Rome teaches today about Salvation is also radically different from what the Puritans taught, all of them. And it is radically different from what Martin Luther taught and different from what John Calvin and William Carrey and Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon and Dwight Moody taught.

But what matters most is that what Rome teaches about Salvation is radically different from what the Holy Bible teaches. Their doctrine of Salvation is different from sacred Scripture. Now look, I wish it wasn't different. This sermon is not about bashing Rome. I wish they would repent of teaching contrary to Scripture and simply believe and teach what the Holy Bible says. But so far, they have refused to do that.

So what are we to say about that? Is Salvation a matter of opinion? Does it matter that Rome teaches diametrically different from the Scriptures? So, is it true that we are saved by partaking of the Sacraments? Is it true that we are saved by being Baptized or by taking Communion or by attending the Mass or by going through the Rite of Penance? Do those Sacraments have the power to forgive us and make us Righteous? Well, the Bible says, "*No!*". The Bible says in **Ephesians 2:8-9** that there is *one* method, *one* way, *one* avenue of Salvation:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

And that makes Rome to be in error about the only thing that really matters, how patently sinful human beings are going to be able to stand before a holy God and pass through His Judgment on their lives.

But it isn't just Rome. What the Mormons and Christian Science and the Jehovah's Witnesses teach about Salvation is *also* radically at odds with Scripture. And what both the Qur-an and the Baghad-vah-Gita teach about Salvation is contradictory with what the Holy Bible teaches as well. And that makes Biblical Christianity to be different and unique from all of these other religions.

There are on the earth today about 8,000 different religions and human philosophies. But, in reality, there are only two. Because 7,999 all teach a variation of the same thing, that sinners have to do something to earn or deserve God's Favor. And the only difference in all of them is in the details of what sinners have to do. For example, some of these false, man-made religions teach that you have to speak in tongues to be saved. Others teach that you have to be baptized, while still others teach that if you die a martyr's death in a legally declared jihad, then you can earn Favor with God, while another one teaches that being justified before God is a long process that begins at infant baptism and that extends out over your entire life, up to an including a few thousand years in Purgatory.

But Biblical Christianity alone teaches that Justification is an "event" and *not* a "process". Biblical Christianity teaches that there is nothing that sinful people can do to earn or to deserve Salvation, and so God has to do for us what we *cannot* do for ourselves. And so Biblical Christianity is the only religion in the history of the world that says that in order to save lost and sinful people, God had to do everything, all by Himself, and at great cost to Himself.

And so, God became a Man. God Almighty took on human flesh and inserted Himself into His Own Creation to live and be with the sinful creatures that he chose to save. And Biblical Christianity teaches that this God/Man lived a perfectly sinless life for 33-1/2 years, and went about "doing Good" and teaching perfect Truth. And then this God/Man voluntarily took our place underneath the infinitely horrific Wrath of God that was against our sins, and Jesus died screaming in great agony as He absorbed all of God's Vengeance for all of our sins.

Biblical Christianity goes on to teach that three days later this God/Man rose up from the dead and walked and talked on the earth for forty days before ascending back up into Heaven in the sight of over 500 people. And Jesus is sitting, right now, at the Right hand of the Father

making constant intercession for all of God's people 24 hours every day and 7 days every week.

And so Biblical Christianity is the only religion that teaches that since human beings are lost and fallen- that if any of them is going to be convicted of sin and repent and trust in Jesus, then God Himself has to give them everything they need, and everything they lack. And so it is God, and God alone that:

- ✓ Chooses those whom He will save from before the foundation of the world
- ✓ Secures the Salvation of all that He chose by living and dying and rising again
- ✓ Effectually draws them to Jesus
- ✓ Indwells them with the Holy Spirit to give them new eyes and new ears and a new heart, radically transforming their natures
- ✓ Gives them the gift of "Saving Faith"
- ✓ Grants them the gift of repentance
- ✓ Gives them both the "Will" and the "Power" to believe and to love and serve Him
- ✓ Adopts them into His family
- ✓ Begins the sanctification process that will make them able to share in His Holiness
- ✓ Intercedes for them faithfully
- ✓ Sovereignly keeps them
- ✓ Gives them a glorified body

... and since God did all of this, all by Himself, then God alone receives all the Glory for the Salvation of His people. But that means that all of these other religions are wrong and false and are in error.

So are we supposed to just ignore that so we can maintain a relationship with those people? Or are we supposed to follow Jesus's example right here in this Passage and condemn any religion, any teaching, any belief, any doctrine that is opposed to what is taught in the Holy Bible?

Because if people who admire and respect Jesus Christ on some level are all saved, if all of the people who alter some area of their lives in response to the Bible are saved, then all of these groups I just mentioned to you are Christians. And the people who say, "That it

really doesn't matter what we believe as long as we love Jesus" are correct.

But is that true? Is that what Jesus Himself taught? I will be faithful to tell you that Jesus categorically and repeatedly *condemned* every single person and every single group who believed differently from the way He taught. And that is because Jesus was God and had the Divine Authority to establish the parameters around what Divine Truth is. The Passage that Brother Andy just read to you shows us that the sinless Lamb of God did *exactly* what so many people in the modern Church teach that we are *not* supposed to do; He didn't merely *disagree* with the false religionists of His day and put forth a different and competing philosophy, He *condemned* them.

Now we must understand *why* it has gone so out of style to follow Jesus and condemn false religions. Why is it that it is so hard today to maintain that if Christianity is true, then by default, all other religions and human philosophies are false? Because that has always been true. And there are some very serious reasons *why* it is looked at as being barbaric to do exactly what Jesus did here, but there is really only one foundational *cause*:

A Rejection of the Concept of Eternal Absolute Divine Truth

Because without there being an Objective, Propositional Standard about any subject that is of any eternal importance, then anybody's opinion will do. Unless there is Absolute Truth, that cannot be altered, then people are free to do what is right in their own minds. And it is precisely because people look at Truth today as being relative that allows for so many radical changes that are going on.

And I will tell you that that is the real reason why so many different phrases have been developed in my lifetime to try to group us all together as one big happy family like:

- ✓ Those who have a "relationship" with Jesus
- ✓ People of Faith

... whatever that means. But we must understand, dear friends, that Divine Truth is a "Fixed Reality" that *transcends* culture or opinion.

Truth is not flexible. Truth is not a matter of one's view. Truth is eternal or it isn't Truth.

Jesus said that the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Herodians and the Essenes and the Zealots were all wrong. And they were all wrong about the only things that really matter:

- ✓ Who Jesus is
- ✓ How lost people are saved
- ✓ How to be Righteous
- ✓ How to please God

And to Jesus it didn't matter how sincere these people were. It didn't count that they were really serious about what they believed. Their sincerity and their passion and their seriousness didn't win them any points with God. Jesus said these people were deceived. And that would be bad enough, but in addition to being deceived themselves, they went about trying to deceive other people as well. And Jesus didn't merely *disagree* with that, He *condemned* it.

Now for anyone today to suggest that somebody else's professed Salvation may not be real based on what the people themselves say they believe, is to be labeled a terrible person. It is to be routinely condemned as legalistic and mean-spirited. Yet, we see here that the incarnate God Himself did just that.

So what we have to be reminded of in our day is that it matters what we believe. Because if it is true that we are saved by what we believe and what we confess and what we trust in, then what we believe and what we confess and what we trust in matters. And, therefore, all beliefs are not created equally. All sincerely held beliefs are not the same, and all passionately held beliefs are not to be given equal respect or allegiance.

There is only one Source for Absolute Truth and that is the 66 Books of the Holy Bible. And the Church that Jesus is building the Church over which the very gates of Hades will not prevail, the Church that will be presented to Jesus at His Second Coming without spot or blemish or any such thing, the glorious Church that Jesus died for and that He bought and paid for, and the Church that belongs to Him and that will give Him the Pre-eminence- that Church will develop all of its Teachings and all of its Doctrine and all of its Beliefs and all of its

Counselling and all of its Corrections from the Bible and from the Bible alone.

Now why is that? Why can't we develop some of what we teach from dreams and visions and angelic visitations or from things that people say the Lord showed them? Why not? Turn to **2 Peter 1:16-21**:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" —

18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,

21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Now if anybody could have used their own personal experience to develop Doctrine, it would have been Peter. After all, he tells us here in verse 16 that he and the other two Apostles:

... were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

These men saw the glorified Jesus. They looked at Jesus as He was transfigured before them. And so they had an experience here that nobody else on earth had. And yet when it came time to develop what they believed and what they taught, what did they use?

we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

And then in verses 20-21, Peter goes on to explain what he is

talking about when he said:

20 But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation,

21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Now, Scripture here is called "the prophetic word". And it is called that because the Scriptures must be proclaimed or "prophesied". In the Bible, there are two meanings to the word "prophecy":

1. Foretelling (predicting future events)
2. Forth Telling (Preaching)

So prophecy is not *always* predicting future events. Prophecy *also* is carried out when the Word of God is being "told forthly". So when Peter calls the Scriptures here "prophecy"- he is referring to them being given by direct inspiration of God. And that is why he says that Scripture is not to be interpreted "privately" or in other words- using one's own ideas and concepts.

We are to interpret Scripture *properly*, always keeping them in their proper context, using a three-tiered method:

1. Literal
2. Grammatical
3. Historical

... where a noun is always a noun, and a verb is always a verb, and who is talking and who he is talking to at what timeframe always matters. Also, I have learned that by understanding the tense of the verbs, you can arrive at whether what is said is an ongoing Truth for everybody or is something only for those spoken to.

So Peter says here that it was the Scriptures that were more "certain", or more "sure", than even his own amazing personal experience. And so, he is, once again, emphasizing the importance of developing what we believe and what we teach from the Scriptures and from the Scriptures alone.

Now we have to know that false teachers always cover themselves

in the garments of God. They want people to believe that they represent God, that they know God, that they have special insights into spirituality and divine truth and divine wisdom that nobody else has so they can become indispensable to the people. Listen to what the Apostle Paul told Timothy about this from **1 Timothy 4:1&2**:

**1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,
2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,**

Peter echoed this same warning from **2 Peter 2:1-3**

1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

3 and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:12-15

12 But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed,

13 suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,

14 having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

15 forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the *son* of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

2 Peter 2:17-19

17 These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved.

18 For speaking out arrogant *words* of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error,
19 promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.

Just a month ago I read an article where one of these false teachers, Paula White, said that God would give "Resurrection Life" to everyone who gave her \$1,144 from **John 11:44**.¹ Now, if you can't afford that much, you can give \$144, or even \$11.44, and that will do the trick. And, of course, the Book of **Jude** was written for no other reason than to warn the Church about the danger of false teaches and false doctrine.

Now my question is this: If it doesn't matter what you believe, then why are there all these warnings in the Bible? If the only thing that matters is sincerity, then why are there so many verses in the Bible that tells us very specific things to believe? If it is true that there are three or four different ways for lost people to be saved, then why did Paul say this in **Galatians 1:8-9**:

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

And why did Jesus say this in **Matthew 7:21-23**:

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 *will enter*.

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?'

23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; *DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.*'

... and if all of this is all up in the air, and there is such great uncertainty and confusion about Divine Truth, then why did the Apostle John say this in **1 John 5:18-20**

¹ <http://www.nowtheendbegins.com/paula-white-wants-you-to-sow-your-lazarus-seed-of-1144-shell-send-handkerchief-back/>

18 We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.

19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one.

20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Three times here John says, “**We know**”. In fact, that is why John wrote the Epistle of **1 John** in the first place:

1 John 1:4

These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

1 John 2:1

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

1 John 2:26

These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

... and the summary of everything John wrote in the Epistle is found in **1 John 5:13:**

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

... so that you may “**know**”, not guess, not wish, not hope, not be ignorant, but John said he wrote all that he wrote so that we would “**know that you have eternal life**”.

False teaching brings confusion and chaos to people. False teaching is the source of all doubt and disbelief. And that is why three things are true:

1. Those in leadership in the Church are commanded to assure that what is being taught in the Church is Biblical.

2. Those in leadership in the Church are commanded to shepherd the people into the Truth.
3. Every genuine believer is to exercise discernment about what Teaching is to be accepted and what is to be rejected.

Now, last week, in verses 41 to 44, Jesus took them back to **Psalm 110** in which David calls Messiah "My Lord." So Jesus was saying that the true Messiah is both David's Son and David's Lord, and therefore, He is a man yet to be born, but He must also be God, Who was alive at the time David spoke.

So in one more compassionate effort, Jesus once again affirms again His full Deity, and the necessity of Messiah being both God and Man. And with that last effort, Jesus is done. He's finished talking to the scribes, and the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, and the Herodians, except by necessity at His trial. He is finished speaking to the crowds. And then verse 45 says,

While all the people were listening, He said to His disciples

... so this is a transition. People are still listening, but He turns to speak only to His disciples. And this is what Jesus will now do from here on. No more messages to the crowds. From now on, Jesus speaks only to His disciples. And it is the message of verses 46 and 47, a message of warning.

Beware of the scribes.

So, as many today are saying that we need to just let people "do their own thing" and not have such a rigid Standard of beliefs and a set way of worship, we need to ask a very serious question:

How did Jesus deal with those who didn't believe the Truth?

How did Jesus deal with those who were religious and who set spirituality at the very pinnacle of human experience and yet rejected the Truth? How did Jesus deal with the leaders of false religion? Did He say that they were all on the same path toward heaven? Did Jesus just allow people to believe whatever they wanted to and still belong to

Him?

Well, what we can say for sure is that Jesus never engaged in some abstract relativistic dialogue on the themes of spirituality, throwing around ideas about God and ideas about Himself that were as flexible as rubber. Here are our Lord's final Words, and keep in mind He was talking to religious people, not atheists. And Jesus categorically condemned them all.

Now remember, you've got a theocratic kingdom here where all law is viewed as God's Law; the law of tradition; the laws that had evolved all through the years. All that composite of law was viewed in a theocratic way. So to these people, it was all the Law of God.

And it was these men called "Scribes" who *interpreted* the Law of God, and *applied* the Law of God. They were the lawyers in Israel. So these guys were not merely giving vague insights into the meaning of Scripture, they were also interpreting all the law. And they were doing this not only in its interpretation, but in its application as well.

So these Scribes were the lawyers in Israel. They were the dominant force in Judaism, not only religiously, but socially. They handle all legal matters for people: property, estates, contracts, resolutions. All those things fell into the hands of these lawyers. And because they were supposedly the agents of God, the Scribes carried tremendous weight and trust. People had nowhere else to turn because there were no others than the Scribes to handle all their matters.

And yet right here, Jesus says;

Beware of the Scribes.

Well, wait a minute. How in the world were these Jews supposed to do that? The Scribes were in everything. They were the dominant authority in Israel. So if you're going to live in Israel in the 1st Century, you're going to have to do business with the Scribes.

Now why are the Scribes so dangerous? Because they're not godly. They do not know God. They do not have any spiritual wisdom. They are deceived themselves and they go about to deceive others also. They are agents of Satan sent to fight the Will and Word of God.

Listen, false religion can't forgive a single sin or save a single soul. False religion can't change a wretched heart. Black hearts can only be

made white when washed with Red Blood. So the leaders of all false religions are always going to be one thing on the outside and something else on the inside. So we must always beware of them. They are not godly. They don't have anything spiritually to offer anyone. They can't give you anything eternally beneficial. They are destructive. They are deadly. They are dangerous. Don't get near them, you'll get burned. So stay away from them.

And so Jesus goes into telling His disciples why these Scribes are dangerous. They are dangerous because they are ungodly. And so look at the characteristics of what Jesus said made the Scribes to be ungodly in verses 46-47:

46 ... who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets,

47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers.

Jesus said here there were six attributes of the ungodly, five of them having to do with having an outward show of religiosity while inwardly being lost, unsaved sinners:

- ✓ Who like to walk around in long robes
- ✓ Who love respectful greetings in the market places
- ✓ Who love chief seats in the synagogues
- ✓ Who love places of honor at banquets
- ✓ Who for appearance's sake offer long prayers

So let's just work our way through these.

First, they like to walk around in long robes. This is where these false teachers like to walk around dressed differently from everybody else. Now everybody back then wore robes. But the Scribes though they were better than everybody else because they were God's men, and so they developed robes that were very different than other people's robes. They were robes that had certain little things on them, markings and fancy things. They became unique, and fancy, and expensive robes that would supposedly identify them as being holy people.

Matthew 23:5 says:

They “**lengthened the tassels on their robes,**”

Now back in **Numbers 15:38-40**, God had ordained that the Jews could put little tassels on the bottom of their robes to remind them of the Law of God. So everywhere they would see the tassels, it would remind them of the Law of God. And according to **Matthew 9:20**, Jesus had them on His robe. It was what devout Jews did.

But the Scribes lengthened the tassels on their robes not for the sake of remembering the Law, but to draw attention to themselves so everyone would think they were holy. So this was a way to position themselves as being superior to the people. And what they wanted was to get into the lives of the people, and abuse and use the people for their own self will. So they wore special clothes.

I think about that every time I see somebody dressed in some ridiculous religious garment parading around as if this is some indication of their greater holiness or greater devotion to God.

Many in the Health, Wealth, and Prosperity cult teach that since they are children of the King they don't have to wear the same clothes as the rest of the people. One man told me that he didn't have to shop any more at K-Mart because Jesus loved him. Another man told me that the reason he drove a Cadillac was to show how much God favored him. But if that was true, then why stop at a Cadillac?

This is nothing new. And even though they want to try to put a religious spin on it, this is nothing more than people trying to sanctify covetousness and self-righteousness, and a love of money, and thinking that material gain is a sign of God's Favor rather than purity of heart.

Now, there is nothing wrong with dressing nice when dressing nice is appropriate. But some people try to dress to impress. So what we should do is to dress appropriately for the occasion because dressing a certain way doesn't make you holy. But we must also know that being sloppy and un-kept is just being sloppy and un-kept, it isn't being humble either.

Secondly, Jesus said that the Scribes loved respectful greetings in the marketplace. So, as they moved in and out of people in their daily life, these religious phonies expected to be addressed with titles of dignity. In the Talmud, Sanhedrin 88, it says:

“It is more punishable to act against the words of a scribe than the words of Scripture.”

So these religious hypocrites wanted to be called “excellency”, or “elevated one”, or “most knowledgeable one”, or “exalted one.” Kind of like people wanting to be called, “The most very reverend”.

And this is what Jesus meant when He said:

Do not call *anyone* on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”

He wasn’t teaching His followers to ignore appropriate titles or to disrespect somebody who had earned a degree or a position in life. Back in the 1st Century, “Father” meant “Source.” So not only was “Father” exalted in their wisdom, but they are the very *source* of spiritual life. So these men held out to be the source of all spiritual truth.

So, they want to wear fancy robes. And they want to take exalted high and mighty sanctimonious titles. And they want to be called “father” as if they are the source of spiritual life. Thirdly, they love not only “respectful greetings in the market places,” same verb, but, “they love chief seats in the synagogues.”

These men had elevated platforms on the front of the synagogue. The important scribes and Pharisees would sit up on that elevated platform being recognized as the experts in the law. Visiting scribes coming from their own place to another synagogue would expect to be ushered up to the elevated place.

Now today, Pastors and Elders and visiting big shots all sit up on the platform elevated above the people. And I’ve never done that and I never will. The only reason why I am elevated when I preach is so that the Word of God is respected, not me.

Fourthly, they love places of honor at banquets. Any kind of a special occasion, they want the place of honor, which is next to the host. They want to be the center of attention, the most honored of all. This is what they’re after. It’s all about human pride and arrogance and self-righteousness. All four of those things have to do with pride, elevation. That’s what they seek, religious leaders are after this, false religious leaders.

But now Jesus says something strange next. He says:

Who devour widows' houses.

Now why in the world did Jesus bring this up here? What does this have to do with what He is talking about? Well, first of all, let me just tell you, the word "devour" is a very strong word. Literally, it means "to eat". This is "to totally consume, to plunder, to eat up." Jesus says that these men go after the most defenseless people.

Now keep in mind that the attitude that a leader has toward the weakest person in the room is what shows you where his heart is. The way a leader treats people who cannot do anything for him is one of the most important aspects of true leadership. The way a leader treats people who need him the most is what defines a godly man. And nobody fits all three of these characteristics better than widows.

Widows are historically older women who are the poorest and the weakest of all people. Widows require more attention and more help, yet they are the ones who can give the least. So how a leader or how a Church treats widows is very telling. There is more information about how we are to treat widows in the Bible than almost any other group. So God is concerned with the weak and the frail and the poor and the helpless.

The first line of defense for widows is their children. And children are commanded by the Owner and Creator of the Universe to care for their mothers. And children who will not care for their mothers are evil people. In the Bible they are the lowest of the low. And in the case where a widow has no children, then the Church should take them and care for them. But the widows that the Church keeps must be older widows and women who have shown godly fruit in their lives, or the Church should not care for them.

Now keep in mind that back in the 1st Century the Scribes were the lawyers of Israel. So when a widow needed someone to protect her, she would turn to the lawyer with the idea that he'd protect her home and her property. But, in fact, these Scribes were taking advantage of the widows, whatever help they gave the widows they would charge them. These Scribes would also get the widows all wrapped up in the legalities of the law and eat away their estate. And then they would abuse the hospitality of the widows and take advantage of available room, board, and food.

But perhaps the worst was that these lawyers would accumulate debts that the widow owed, and when she was unable to pay, they would take the widow's home as pledge for the debt, and in that way devour the house. So when the widow couldn't pay, they just threw her out.

So they were proud and greedy. And that's typical of all false teachers. They do what they do for filthy lucre. They elevate themselves. They put on a facade of spirituality. And they bilk the most helpless, defenseless people.

Now what did Jesus say to these religious frauds? Look at the end of verse 47:

... These will receive greater condemnation.

Jesus pronounces a more severe condemnation on them. Religious people who are not saved get a greater damnation, not a lesser one. So if you're in the wrong religion, you're going to be condemned. If you're a leader of the wrong religion, you're going to receive a far greater suffering and damnation in hell.

So what should we do? Be on your guard about false religionists. They're hypocrites. Jesus said they're worthy of greater condemnation. So should we show these people compassion? Sure. Show everybody compassion. Should we give them the Gospel? Absolutely. You are to preach the Gospel to every creature. Well, should we pray for their Salvation. Yes. And should we grieve over their deception. Yes.

But in the end, we must understand that we have nothing to learn from false teachers or false religions. I give all people some degree of dignity and respect, but I do not respect false religion that deceives people. So, in some way, they must know that they are under sentence of Divine Condemnation. They must know for their own sake and the sake of those who need to be protected from them.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729
www.covenantofpeace.net

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.