

Introduction: Jesus characterizes the Pharisees and then condemns them in this chapter for their hypocrisy. In all of Christ's preaching we do not find Him so severe with any people except with the teachers of the law and Pharisees. These men were the idols and favorites of the people. Jesus exposed their true character. It is good to know what people's true character is, that way we are not deceived by it. But it is also a warning to the disciples, for good people tend to have their eyes dazzled by worldly ostentation "*pretentious and vulgar display, especially of wealth and luxury, intended to impress or attract notice.*" This is exactly what the Pharisees and teachers of the law were doing.

Jesus describes the Pharisees and teachers as hypocrites six times in our text. A hypocrite is a play actor in religion, that's the primary meaning of the word, hypocrites "*impersonate or act the part of people that they neither are nor want to be*".

POINT #1 - The power of external religion, vs. 2 - they love to sit in Moses' seat. It would be equivalent to a university "chair". Someone who sits in authority. To do so in this context was to have the highest authority to instruct people on what to do. The expression here could be "*they have seated themselves in Moses' seat*" which indicates an imaginary authority they claimed for themselves.

There was a legitimate sense in which the priests and Levites had authority to decide matters of the law "**And you shall come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision**" (Dt. 17:9). The scribes and Pharisees had gone way beyond this and were adding human tradition to the Word of God. Cf. Matthew 15:3-9 and it is for this very reason that Jesus condemns the Pharisees in vs. 8-36.

POINT #2 - the definition of their hypocrisy is defined in vs. 3-7. They say do as I say not as I do. They taught what was good from the law, but did not live it. Their life contradicted what they taught and said they believed. Matthew Henry describes this in these words, "*To preach so well you would wish they wouldn't stop, but to live so badly you wish they would never preach again.*"

They would impose on others heavy burdens, but wouldn't do themselves. They insisted on imposing the minute details of the law, but they also imposed their own traditions and inventions, with the highest penalties in not observed. Some of their imposing is as follows.

- They urged on the people strictness in religious matters that they themselves defied to be bound by.
- They did works to be seen of men. We must do works as a believer but not for the purpose of being seen of men. Paul describes this perfectly, "**Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power**" (2 Timothy 3:5).

- They made broad their phylacteries. These were small scrolls of paper or parchment on which were written four paragraphs of the Law. They were sewn up in leather and worn on their forehands and arms. But the Pharisees made them bigger and more noticeable.
- They enlarged the borders of their garments. God appointed the Jews to make borders or fringes on their garments (Numbers 15:38), to remind them they were a distinctive people, but the Pharisees weren't happy with that and they made them much larger and elaborate.
- Finally they loved to be seen at the synagogues and have the best seats to appear righteous.

Application: defining the scribes, teachers and Pharisees actions were just to be seen of men, Jesus says to avoid such ways is to be humble (vs. 11-12). Being a shepherd or teacher of the Word of God is not something you should take pridefully as if you are something. Therefore, Jesus now unleashes the woes to those who practice such things.

Point #3 - The woes issued. The word woe is from the Hebrew word *hoy* and is often translated "woe, alas". It expresses personal pain and anguish because of some present or impending situation. As an example to the grief of this word, in 1 Kings 13:30 **"And he laid the body in his own grave. And they mourned over him, saying, 'Alas, my brother!'"** It can literally be translated "Oooooo my brother". You can hear the cries of anguish in this word. And as Isaiah said in Isaiah 1:4 **"Alas, sinful nation, a people loaded with grief."**

Most of the uses of woe are for impending disaster, not personal anguish. The words used here depict future sounds of agony by those whom the predicted woe will soon occur.

In the New Testament it's an interjection and is used in the same way as the Old Testament Hebrew. It means "*bang or ouch*". It also carries the meaning of intense pain and sorrow of present situations. Concerning the end times and tribulation times, Matthew 24:19 **"And alas (woe) for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!"** Heed the impending doom for the betrayer Judas **"The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born"** (Matthew 24:19)

The word is also used as a statement of condemnation to groups, as we see in Matthew 23. In Revelation 8:13 the coming judgment is signified by the consecutive woe's **"Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"** Revelation 9:12 **"The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come."** Revelation 18:10 **"Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."** The phrase "**Alas, Alas**" is mentioned twice more in the following chapter signifying the judgment and wrath to come.

Conclusion: Jesus gave warnings against the scribes and Pharisees about their religious hypocrisy. He wasn't soft about the warning. He urged them to humble themselves and not seek the notoriety of men. Will you do the same today? Will you repent and believe the gospel? Will you stop playing the part of religion and self righteousness and become a child of the King? Finally, I say this not as a matter of pride or self elevation, but as a matter of necessity. I must proclaim the gospel and the truth of the gospel. I must tell you that there is one way to eternal life not many. And if I don't, I myself stand in judgment for not doing so. Paul confirmed this when he told the Corinthians "**For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!**" (1 Corinthians 9:16).