

They Say and Do Not

Recorded in Matthew chapter 23 is a scathing reprimand of the scribes and Pharisees who were supposed to be shedding light on the truth to those who listened but were instead injecting their own message. “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye 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 move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi” (Mat. 23:2-7). What religion they practiced was merely for the purpose of being seen as “religious”. They were obviously teaching some truth, for Jesus commanded the people to “observe and do” that which was in harmony with God’s will. However, the scribes and Pharisees also went beyond God’s Word in what they bound upon their listeners. They went to extreme measures to “show” that they were men of God, (i.e. “they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments”), but they, themselves, were not practicing what they preached. This led Jesus to rebuke, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness” (Mat. 23:27).

There are many examples that could be given in regards to how men today do the same things. They are hypocrites because “they say and do not” (Mat. 23:3). We will examine just a few for our learning and admonition.

1. **“They say,”** *“except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3), **“and do not.”** There are many in the religious world who rightfully contend that a man must acknowledge and turn away from the sins that separate him from his God, yet when they are confronted with error in their own lives, they refuse to repent. “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye” (Mat. 7:5).

2. **“They say,”** *“sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”* (1 Pet. 3:15), **“and do not.”**

Many sermons and bulletin articles have been dedicated to this verse, yet some, who teach that we must be ever ready to give a defense for what we say and do, cower when they, themselves, are called upon to give a defense. As I was taught in Preaching School, “a position not worth defending is a position not worth having.”

3. **“They say,”** *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”* (2 John 9-11), **“and do not.”**

Sadly, this passage has been ignored, probably, ever since the day God said it. Even sadder is the fact that men who once taught and practiced the truth in regards to dealing with error and those who teach error, now find themselves bidding God speed to those who harbor and defend false teachers and those who are living in public sin.

4. **“They say,”** *“Come now, and let us reason together”* (Isa. 1:18), **“and do not.”** When God called upon His people to “reason” with Him, His desire was that by presentation of facts and evidence, the people would see the error of their ways and return unto Him. Today, many call for unity but do not want to review facts or evidence, they want to sweep them under the rug and pretend that everything is O.K. Some are content with being ignorant of the facts and evidence so that they can continue their involvement in and with certain projects, individuals, and congregations without irritating their consciences. Those who try to remain ignorant for such purposes would do well to study Acts 17:30 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

Let us not follow the path of the scribes and Pharisees. Let us love God and be faithful to His commands. Christians have to make difficult decisions at times and when those times come, let us be careful to examine the truth and ourselves so that we only come to such conclusions as are in harmony with the facts and are pleasing to God.

- *Brad Green*