

January 9, 2005 by Steve Brandon



When Hypocrites Lead

Matthew 23:1-12

When hypocrites lead, ...

1. Respect Their Authority (verses 2-3a).
2. Ignore Their Example (verses 3b-7).
3. Don't Feed Their Egos (verses 8-10).
4. Be Their Model (verses 11-12).

I have a book in my library called, "Farewell Sermons." It is a collection of sermons preached in England by various pastors in August of 1662. These pastors had refused to submit to the "Act of Uniformity" which had been drawn up by Charles the Second and his bishops in the church of England. This "Act of Uniformity" required that all ministers in England conform perfectly to the "book of Common Prayer." Those who didn't would be removed from their ministerial offices. The deadline to submit was on August 24th, 1662. Nearly 2,500 pastors refused to submit to the "Act of Uniformity" and knew that they would be kicked out of their church on that fateful day. The book records the final sermons that these pastors preached, as they gave their parting comments to their beloved congregations. These were the words that the pastors of the churches wanted their people to remember.

In Matthew 23, we have Jesus' farewell sermon. It is the last time that Jesus will publicly address the multitudes before He is taken away to be crucified. Certainly, Jesus will have plenty more to say to His few disciples. But this is the last time that He will teach the multitudes. And Jesus knows that these words will be His last words of council to the people. As such, I believe that these words have been carefully chosen. They are words of warning against the religious leaders, namely the scribes and the Pharisees. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He was in constant conflict with these leaders. They never liked Jesus. They never believed Jesus. They always resisted Jesus. Even when Jesus performed great miracles, they refused to acknowledge His power. They claimed that "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Matt. 12:34). They criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:10). And yet, they demanded that Jesus would do more miracles! This all demonstrated their adulterous hearts (Matthew 16:1). When Jesus and His disciples ate grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees criticized them as being law breakers. The same thing happened when the disciples failed to wash their hands when they ate bread (Matt. 15:2). The Pharisees constantly set traps for Jesus, trying to ensnare Him. They had placed a man with a withered hand before Him and tempted Jesus to heal Him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse Him of being a law breaker (Matt. 12:9-14). They had asked Jesus about controversial theological questions (Matt. 19:3ff; 22:15-40), hoping his response would upset whole groups of people. This was particularly evident when we looked at Matthew 22.

In Matthew 23, the patience of Jesus had finally run out on the scribes and Pharisees. They had seen enough. They had heard enough. They had witnessed enough. Still, they were unrepentant. The last six verses of Matthew 22 proved their hardness of heart. In these verses, Jesus proved from the Old Testament that the Messiah would be more than a man. Rather than accepting the fact and repenting, the Pharisees were silent. So never again will Jesus speak with these religious leaders.

This illustrates a great point in Scripture. As patient, kind, and loving as God is, there is a point where God will turn His back and give a hardened sinner over to his own desires. It's the kindness and patience of God that leads you to repentance, but if you remain in your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you can only expect the wrath and judgment of God (Rom. 2:4-5). This is exactly what we see in Matthew 23.

Seven (or eight) times in Matthew 23, Jesus pronounces a woe upon these scribes and Pharisees. Look at verse 13, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Verse 14, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." Verse 15, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites..." Verse 16, "Woe to you blind guides." It goes on and on and on. These woes are a declaration of God's coming judgment upon these religious leaders.

Matthew 23 doesn't contain kind words. Matthew 23 contains words of judgment against the religious leaders of the day. Their judgment has come upon them because of their hypocrisy. The mantra that Jesus gives over and over is, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (verse 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). Jesus condemned them because they were not real in their religion. They were fake. They were in it for their own good. They were in it for their own desires.

This morning, we will look at the first twelve verses of Matthew 23, where Jesus begins His exposure of these religious leaders. In these twelve verses, Jesus speaks to the crowds about how to deal with spiritual leaders who are hypocrites. Indeed, this is what verse 1 says, "Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples." The point of this verse is to explain who was hearing these words. This was a public discourse that Jesus gave in the hearing of all. It wasn't directed to the Pharisees alone. It was directed to the crowds. Though certainly, I believe that the Pharisees could hear these words. The sense is that they began immediately after Jesus had finished dealing with these leaders.

These first twelve verses are words of advice to the crowds in dealing with hypocritical leaders. Appropriately, my message this morning is entitled, "When Hypocrites Lead." In many ways, it is a difficult message for me to preach. I work very hard in my preaching to teach you the

Bible and to press its application deep into your lives. I don't feel that my job is done when I have simply told you what the Bible says. James 1:22 says, "prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." When I preach, I want you to hear the truth of the word and to know how to respond to the word. And, so, I come to my message this morning which is entitled, "When Hypocrites Lead," and hope in my heart of hearts that you don't have to apply much of I say today. (If you catch my drift).

But, I know in my own heart, that there is much hypocrisy in it. I know that I preach far beyond what I will ever live. I know that I like to put forth a picture of my life which is far better than it really is. I know that I often offer up prayers in this place with a distracted and undevoted heart, because "the show must go on." And so, certainly, I know that there are areas in my message today that will be very applicable to you, as you deal with the hypocrisy that you see in my life as well as in the other leaders of this church. But, my prayer, my hope, my desire is that there will only be a little bit in this message for you to apply, both now and in years to come.

When hypocrites lead, ...

1. Respect Their Authority (verses 2-3a).

In my study this week, these were the verses that surprised me. We know how Jesus constantly battled with the Pharisees. We know of the woes that Jesus will pronounce against these Pharisees. He will condemn them in no uncertain terms. And yet, Jesus still called the multitudes to respect their position of authority. They sat "in the chair of Moses." In some synagogues, this was the central seat that was placed in the front, from which the Pharisees taught. When my wife and I had the opportunity to go to Israel, we visited the ruins of a synagogue in Chorazin. In the front of the synagogue was a seat, where the Pharisees taught. It was the "seat of Moses." It would be analogous to our pulpit or stage.

The surprising words come in the first half of verse 3, "Therefore all that they tell you, do and observe." It seems as if Jesus here is giving blanket approval to all that they teach, "all that they tell you, do and observe." The Greek text places much emphasis here. You could easily translate these words, "all, whatsoever they tell you, do and observe."

We need to temper these words in light of everything that we know about Jesus. For certainly there were words that these religious leaders spoke that Jesus would flat out deny. We have seen this constantly throughout the gospel of Matthew. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said on six different occasions, "You have heard that it was said, but I say to you, ..." (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). In each of those instances, Jesus was correcting the erroneous teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. Furthermore, they went astray in their teaching on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14), they went astray in their teaching on how you are defiled (Matt. 15:1-20), and they denied who Jesus was, questioning His authority (Matt. 21:23-27). Jesus clearly opposed these teachings.

On top of all of that, in a few moments we will read that Jesus refers to these men as "blind guides" (Matt. 23:24). And so, certainly, Jesus doesn't mean by this that you ought to follow the Pharisees in everything that they say. And yet, don't lose the force of the words "**all** that they tell you, do and observe." Some have solved this difficulty by claiming that Jesus was using irony here, as these words are so contrary to the rest of the context of this passage.¹ In other words, some say that Jesus rolled His eyes as he said these things, which surely ought not to be taken for true. I believe that such a belief goes too far to allow for the proper emphasis.

I believe that Jesus is simply saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water." The disconnect between their preaching and their lives doesn't give you the opportunity to throw out everything that they say. Nor does it give you opportunity to neglect what they say. Just because these wicked men have defiled the seat of Moses with their false teaching doesn't mean that we ought to throw out the established authority structure.

I believe that Paul illustrates this principle perfectly when he stood before the religious council, as recorded in Acts 23. Shortly after Paul began his defense, the high priest, Ananias ordered Paul to be hit in the mouth for what he said. Paul responded to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!" (Acts 23:3). Paul used almost the exact same words that Jesus used to describe these religious leaders. Look at verse 27, "you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." And then, it was asked of Paul, "Do you revile God's high priest?" (Acts 23:4). Paul replied, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:5). It's a perfect illustration of what Jesus is teaching. Though the high priest was a wicked man, falsely accusing Paul, there still remained in Paul a vestige of respect for the one in authority.

I believe that this is what Jesus is getting at in these words. Though a hypocrite be found leading God's people, there still is some respect that ought to be given to their authority. Another illustration of this principle comes in the civil realm. Paul wrote in Romans 13:1-2, "There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God." These words come with equal surprise to the words of Jesus. Paul was writing to Romans, who lived in the very capital of the Roman Empire. The Roman authorities were corrupt and not at all sympathetic to the cause of Christianity. From Rome came forth some of the most brutal persecutions the church has ever seen. The coliseum, in which Christians were thrown to the lions, was built in Rome. The emperors who legalized and encouraged the persecutions against Christians were headquartered in Rome. And yet, Paul informs those in Rome to respect those in authority.

In Matthew 23, I believe that Jesus is informing the multitudes to place a proper respect upon the authority of these religious leaders, even if they are hypocritical leaders. And as Moses is taught from the seat of Moses, they need to "do and observe." When hypocrites lead, Jesus said we should still respect their authority.

It is good to take a moment right here to realize that these words are about the last of the good things that Jesus will say about these religious leaders. From here on, the rest of what Jesus says will be hard words of condemnation against these leaders. Though you are to "do and observe" what they say, Jesus tells His disciples to ...

2. Ignore Their Example (verses 3b-5).

Jesus says, "do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them" (Matt 23:3b). These words reveal the essence of hypocrisy: saying, but not doing. Hypocrisy is expecting from others what you are not willing to do yourself. Hypocrisy is wanting things to be done, though you are not willing to do them. Hypocrisy is taking the speck out of your brother's eye, while not even noticing the log that is in your own eye (Matt. 7:3). Hypocrisy is denouncing sin, while holding to the sin yourself. This was true of the Pharisees.

Jesus elaborates in verse 4, "they tie up heavy loads and placed them upon the shoulders of men." I believe that Jesus here is referring to the weight of all of the admonitions that these Pharisees would place upon others. They would instruct them with rules upon rules upon rules. "Say these prayers. Read these scriptures. Do these things. Walk this way." They had rules for praying -- when to pray, how to pray, what to pray. They had rules for Sabbath keeping -- what to do, what not to do, how much to do. They had rules for washing hands -- where to get the water, how to apply it to the hands, when it must be done (cf. Matt. 15:2).

Some of this surely came with good intentions. They viewed the law as so holy, separated, and important that they need to build a superstructure around the law, so that people wouldn't even come close to breaking the law. Down through the centuries, the Pharisees had amassed this traditional law, which helped to protect the law from ever being violated. It's called the Mishnah. It's a bit similar to what God told Moses to do with Mount Sinai when he came up to meet with God. God said to him, "you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death'" (Ex. 19:12). Their traditions were meant to protect the law. However good intentioned it was, it created a system of legalism that was burdensome and difficult to bear. You simply can't live that way with rule upon rule upon rule. Even these religious leaders themselves couldn't do it.

An interesting event took place in the life of the early church which confirms the impossibility of keeping all of these demands. The Jewish leaders were wrestling with the question of law, with respect to the believing Gentiles. The question on the table was this: "How much of the law ought we require the new believers to keep?" Peter stood up and questioned their fundamental understanding of salvation, "Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we [Jews] are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as [the Gentiles] also are" (Acts 15:10-11).

Salvation doesn't come by keeping rules. Salvation doesn't come by obeying everything in the law. Salvation doesn't come through a religious system of do's and don't's. Salvation comes "through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11). It's within the culture of this day that Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The teaching of the Pharisees did one great thing: it demonstrated to the people how impossible it is to live by rules. Those who have tried have always found it impossible to do. And Jesus says to you this morning, "Are you burdened with the weight of your sin? Have you found the demands of life too difficult to bear? Then, come to Me, I'll give you the rest that you are looking for." Jesus came and gave rest. The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day weren't interested in giving rest. They were interested in piling it on!

These scribes and Pharisees demonstrated their hypocrisy in the fact that they didn't want to bear it themselves. Jesus said that they were "unwilling to move them with so much as a finger" (verse 4). Again, this statement ought to be a surprise to you as well. Of anything that was true of the Pharisees it was their amazing zeal for God. Never on the face of the entire planet has any people group ever existed who put more effort into living holy lives, than these Pharisees. They weren't lazy people. The Pharisee who Jesus described in Luke 18:9-14 clearly lived a righteous life! He didn't cheat people. He was fair to people. He lived sexually pure. He fasted twice each week. He gave a tenth of all that he received to the work of the Lord. This takes great effort. If this was the picture of the Pharisee in Jesus' day, how can Jesus say that they were "unwilling to move them with so much as a finger"? (verse 4).

I believe that Jesus here is getting at unmasking the true identity of the Pharisees. While outwardly, they might appear to be good and work strenuously, Jesus says that it is all a show. Verse 5, "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men." On the one hand, they are piling up rules and regulations of the things that you need to do. On the other hand, when nobody is looking, they find ways to free themselves of these very same burdens. They were different in secret than they were in public. In verse 5, we have a few examples of the things that they do for their own honor:

a) They broadened their phylacteries.

Three times in the books of Moses, the people were instructed to take the commands of God and "bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead" (Deut. 6:8; 11:18; Ex. 13:16). In other words, God's words were to be close to their heads in what they know. God's words were to be close to their hands in what they do. And so, down through the ages, the Jews had developed this tradition of placing these passages of scripture on tiny parchments, which are placed in a box, and strapped to their foreheads and to their hands. The Hebrew word for this is "Tefillin." Jewish worshipers all around the world still use them today.

Sadly, these Pharisees had forgotten the place of the heart. They had forgotten that the most important place for God's word is upon the heart. Some of the very words that are inscribed upon the parchments and placed in these Tefillin reads thus, "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart" (Deut. 6:6). But these Jews placed so much emphasis upon the externals, that they made these Tefillin nice and big for all to see. In fact, we even get a sense that a friendly competition arose: those with the biggest phylacteries wins the prize of being most spiritual.

b) They lengthened the tassels of their garments.

Again, we see a command of God that is used to promote their own religiosity. In Numbers 15:38, Moses commanded the people to wear blue tassels on their garments. Like the command about the phylacteries, these tassels were to direct the Jewish people to think about God, "It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them" (Numbers 15:39). Jesus wore these tassels. Remember when the woman came up from behind Jesus and merely wanted to touch "the fringe of His cloak"? (Matt. 9:20) She may have touched the tassels on His garment. In and of themselves, they weren't wrong. But, again, these scribes and Pharisees had made a competition out of these things.

They wanted their obedience to the law published abroad. Their tassels lengthened and thickened, for all to see. Perhaps even they made sure that the blue was as bright as it could possibly be, so that nobody would miss their tassels. Jesus says that such pious displays of religiosity should be ignored. Jesus says, "Don't be like them." When Christian leaders put forth intentional displays of their own righteousness, ignore their example.

This is where I struggle. In seeking to lead this church, I want to be like Paul who said "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ"(1 Cor. 11:1). I want to be an example to you. And yet, often I know that I give you a picture of my life that is beyond reality. Last night is an example. Perhaps you picture me as on my knees for hours on Saturday night, pleading for this church.. But last night, I watched the AFC wild-card game that went into overtime (Jets vs. Chargers). Perhaps you picture me as a consumed with the Word all the time, always memorizing, always reading. This isn't the case. There are things in this world that grab my attention away from the Scriptures. I constantly pray, "May I be thrilled by Your word!"

When you see me being hypocritical, just ignore it. That's not to say that you should let it go. That's not to say that you should be indifferent about it. By all means, if you see such hypocrisy in me, please come to me and help me with these things. I have been helped by some of you with these very same things. I have had some of you come to me and tell me where I have made efforts to show myself as the great example of righteousness, and thereby demonstrating my hypocrisy. I'm thankful for such demonstrations of love on your behalf. Pray for me and help me in this regard.

When I say, "ignore the example," I mean that you shouldn't learn godliness in that way. Godliness isn't about putting on the greatest show. Godliness is about you before God. In chapter 6, Jesus warned about this. He said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven" (6:1). Those who practice their righteousness before men have lost all credibility before God. God doesn't reward outward, ostentatious displays of righteousness. God rewards the secret giving (Matt. 6:2-4). God rewards the secret praying (Matt. 6:5-15). God rewards the secret fasting (Matt. 6:16-18). Godliness isn't about showing it before others. Godliness is about humility and service (which comes in my final point from verses 11 and 12).

When hypocrites lead, ...

3. Don't Feed Their Egos (verses 6-9).

Have you ever been to a national park or a zoo, and seen a sign that said, "Don't Feed the Bears"? Why do the park rangers and zookeepers tell you not to feed the bears? It's because the bears will come to love the taste of human food. Soon, they will begin crave it. The bears will seek to get from people more food like they had tasted before. The bears see people as a source of food. They may even turn violent in order to obtain it. In fact, the people themselves could become the bear's food. I believe that Jesus is sounding a similar warning with respect to religious leaders: Don't Feed Their Egos! If you feed their egos, their egos will only get bigger, and you will create a monster.

Jesus said, "And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men 'Rabbi'" (Matt. 23:6-7).

These Pharisees loved to be recognized. These Pharisees loved to be known as righteous people. These Pharisees loved to be first. In this sense, they are like Diotrefes, "who loves to be first" (3 John 9). Like Diotrefes, if ever there was a place of honor, these Pharisees were first in line to sit in that seat. In social settings, they loved to sit at the head of the table. They loved to sit at the most important places. In the religious settings, they loved to sit in the most important seats. They loved to sit in front of the congregation, for all to see how important they were. They loved to be set apart, adored, honored, and respected. They loved the titles of honor.

There are subtle ways for these things to creep into Christian circles today as well. Don't think that Christian pastors and leaders are immune to these types of things. Too often pastors are placed on pedestals. When you place something up high, the only place for it to go is crashing down to the ground. When pastors are elevated too high, the only thing that they can do is fall. Always giving them honorable seats in social settings and always addressing them with revered titles will simply lead to your disappointment when you realize that Christian leaders aren't always so honorable.

Perhaps you have attended other churches, where the pastor of the church sits up in front of everybody. I have often called these seats "thrones" upon which a pastor sits. I've had a few occasions where I sat up in front of a congregation. I hated it. It has been pure torture for me. As long as I live and lead this church, I will fight against the placing of thrones in front of the congregation.

Respectful greetings are commonplace in many churches today. Pastors often pursue higher degrees of learning, and then insist upon using their titles in their names. "Dr. so-and-so." There are some churches that insist that their pastors be called, "Pastor so-and-so." I understand their reasoning. There is a measure of respect that ought to be paid to others. It is proper for a child to address an adult using the words, "Mr. and Mrs." There is also, within our culture, an immense resisting of authority, which leads our culture to want to drop all titles. As we use respectful titles, they help to reaffirm their positions of authority. But, I want you to listen to the warning of verses 8-10 as if for the first time, and you tell me if this is a good practice. Jesus said, "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is Christ" (Matt. 23:8-10).

Jesus clearly tells us not to be called "Rabbi" or "Teacher" or "leader." Jesus clearly tells us not to call others your "father," for God is your Father. It doesn't mean that you should refuse to call your biological father, "dad." Jesus means that your respectable titles will often mislead you into thinking wrongly about others, which will lead you to think wrongly about God, Himself.

At this point, let me be honest with you. I don't struggle with this at all. (My struggle is with point #2, putting forth myself as better than I really am). But, this isn't my struggle. I don't have any desire to called, "pastor" by any of you. I don't feel as if I need to ensure my respect through your use of this title. Perhaps some of this has to do with my upbringing. I grew up in a church where I had absolutely no desire to be a pastor. I looked at my pastors growing up, and I didn't want to be like them. I didn't want to wear a robe, sit in the front of the church, speak

meaningless things from the pulpit, and shake hands with everybody as they left the church service.

My vision of what I am seeking to do at Rock Valley Bible Church is entirely different than what I grew up with. It is entirely different than many things that I see going on in the Christian world today. At times, this is very evident to me, especially when I attend funerals or weddings of those who are nominally Christian. The pastor is seen as the one who simply performs the religious functions of the church. He is the one who knits the knot of a marriage. He is the one who says things at funerals. He is the one who always prays at social gatherings. I don't view myself as a separated, holy man, who has to perform these functions. I view myself as one of you. But, you have given me the great privilege to spend my whole life devoted to the Christ and to this church in ways that none of you can. You pay me to administer and lead and guide this church. My responsibilities primarily include teaching, leading, guiding, helping, serving. This is how I view myself. If you never refer to me as, "Pastor Steve," I'm fine with that. In fact, I prefer it. I prefer that you call me "Steve" or that the children call me, "Mr. Brandon." The instructions of Jesus are too clear. He says, "Do not be called Rabbi. Do not be called Leader."

Though I may not struggle with the titles. I know that I struggle with honor given to me. I know that I like it when people say good, encouraging things about me. I do like hearing about what a wonderful job I do. I do like hearing of what a great sermon that I preached. I know this because of how much I know that I hate it when people tell me of the bad job I'm doing. When I preach a dud of a sermon, and know that others know it, it affects me more than anything else. This extends to all of my pastoral ministry as well. When others criticize me for not doing a good job pastoring, it is difficult for me. I want to be seen as good in their eyes. In this way, it's a bit like craving a nice title of honor. I know that there are many areas of my pastoral ministry that I am open to criticism. Some may criticize me for not calling people enough on the telephone, for not being encouraging enough, for not loving enough, for not leading well enough, for not evangelizing well enough, ... The list goes on and on. The solution to dealing with these things is a humble life. For, the one who is humble will willingly acknowledge these things (which is seen in my final point this morning).

Having said that, let me try to balance things. Back in verse 6, Jesus warned against those leaders who loved the places of honor. In verse 7, Jesus warned against those who loved receiving the verbal affirmation of honor. I don't believe that thrones in front of a church are wrong, in and of themselves. If you find yourself at a church that has "thrones", be gracious. Realize that such practices are not prohibited. What is prohibited is for the pastors to covet those seats. If the congregation wants to eliminate the thrones, but the pastors resist it, you know that there is a problem.

Furthermore, I don't believe that giving verbal honor to a pastor is wrong. Paul said, "Render to all what is due them; tax to whom tax; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Rom. 13:7). In fact, Paul even said that it is right for a hard-working elder to be worthy of double honor. So, if you want to give me double honor after the service, you can call me, "Pastor, Pastor Steve." Perhaps you could also double my salary. So, if you insist upon calling me, "Pastor Steve," I'm not going to pull out Matthew 23 on you and reprove you for doing so. Because there are other passages of Scripture that allow for this. It's not my preference, but if that's what you prefer, it's fine with me. I simply believe that there are dangers in doing these things. There are dangers for you. There are dangers for me. There is a danger among spiritual leaders to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think (Phil. 2:4).

When hypocrites lead, ...

4. Be Their Model (verses 11-12).

Jesus gives the simple instruction in verses 11 and 12. He says, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12).

Jesus has said this before. Whenever people sought spiritual greatness, Jesus always directed them toward humble service. In Matthew 18, the disciples of Jesus asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus took a child and placed him in front of everybody and said, "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4). In Matthew 20, James and John with their mother came to Jesus, seeking a prominent place in the kingdom. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27).

The context here is no different. Why do you think that these scribes and Pharisees eagerly sought the seat of Moses? They wanted to be great in the kingdom. Why do you think that these scribes and Pharisees broadened their phylacteries and lengthened their tassels? They wanted to be great in the kingdom. Why do you think that these scribes and Pharisees loved the places of honor and the chief seats in the synagogues? They wanted to be great in the kingdom. Why do you think that these scribes and Pharisees wanted to be called, "Rabbi" or "Teacher" or "Leader" or "Father"? They wanted to be great in the kingdom.

Once again, Jesus turned their perspective around. If you want to seek greatness, the way to do it is through humble service. You shouldn't do it like the Pharisees did. You ought not to seek great positions of authority and draw acclaim to yourself. That's not the way to do it. If you want to be great in the kingdom, you ought to be humble. Are you humble? May God give to us humble leadership in this church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 9, 2005 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] D. A. Carson, Expositors Bible Commentary, Vol. 8, p. 473.