

January 16, 2005 by Steve Brandon



How To Avoid Condemnation (Part 1)

Matthew 23:13-15

1. Get the Gospel Right (verse 13).
2. Serve Others, and not Yourself (verse 14).
3. Don't Follow False Leaders (verse 15).

We often be led to think that Jesus spoke only nice-sounding words of love and grace. After all, sinners loved to come to Him, because of the compassion that He extended to them. Children were fond of sitting in His lap, because of His gentleness. And yet, Jesus spoke some of the hardest words of condemnation ever included in the Bible, which is the case in Matthew 23. At the start of this passage, you need to realize that these words came from the mouth of our Lord. It would do us well to pay attention to them.

In the first 12 verses of Matthew 23, Jesus was teaching the multitudes how to respond to hypocritical leaders. On the one hand, they are to be respected as leaders. On the other hand, they are to entirely ignored in their example. Beginning in verse 13, Jesus changes His focus. At this point, Jesus begins to condemn these scribes and Pharisees. He uses no uncertain terms. Again and again, Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Time after time, Jesus says, "Woe to you, ... Woe to you, ... Woe to you."

The Greek word for "woe" is ouai (ouai), which is pronounced, "oooo-eye." If you pronounce it right, you can almost hear the groanings that this word describes. It's almost as if it is an expression of pain. Indeed, there are several instances in Scripture where "woe" upon "woe" upon "woe" is mentioned. In each circumstance, it is a grim statement. Consider the following:

In Isaiah 5, the prophet pronounces six woes upon the wicked people of Israel. Verse 8, "Woe to those who add house to house." Verse 11, "Woe to those who early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink." Verse 18, "Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood." Verse 20, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil." Verse 21, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes." Verse 22, "Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine."

In Habakkuk 2, the prophet pronounces five woes upon the wicked. Verse 6, "Woe to him who increases what is not his." Verse 9, "Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house." Verse 12, "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed." Verse 15, "Woe to you who make your neighbors drink." Verse 19, "Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, 'Awake!'"

In Revelation 18, judgement is pronounced against the great city, Babylon. "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come" (Rev. 18:10). "Woe, woe, the great city" (Rev. 18:16). "Woe, woe, the great city" (Rev. 18:19).

In every instance where this word is used with repetition like this, it isn't good. Rather, it's a declaration of God's coming judgment. Here in Matthew 23, Jesus declares the condemnation that is coming upon the scribes and the Pharisees. I believe that the clear application of these words are simple: if you want to avoid condemnation, then steer clear from the example of the scribes and the Pharisees. Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning, "How to Avoid Condemnation." Stay away from leaders like they are. Stay away from the example that they set forth. As we go through this text, we will take each "woe" that Jesus pronounces and use it as a warning sign for us. This morning, we will cover the first three woes. They focus on the evils of false teachers and leaders. We are not to follow such leaders, because doing so risks condemnation.

How to Avoid Condemnation? Here is the first thing, ...

1. Get the Gospel Right (verse 13).

In verse 13, Jesus said, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." These scribes and Pharisees were very busy about their religion. They were very good about attending the Sabbath services. They were very good about saying their prayers. They were very good about tithing their income. And yet, all of their religious activity brought them nowhere. They didn't get into the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps what is worse, they prohibited others from getting into the kingdom of heaven as well. This is what Jesus says, "You do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."

Several years ago, my family was invited to go to a "Harvest Celebration" with the international students groups Rockford College. My wife had received the invitation by email, that told us of the fun-filled evening that was planned. There would be a potluck meal, an apple pie contest, a square dance caller, and a piñata game for the kids. Needless to say, our children were very excited about attending this party. For us as well, we were interested, as it was an opportunity for us to reach out to a foreign student at Rockford College whom we knew and perhaps meet some of his friends or other families in the community. And so, we put in on our calendar, Saturday, October 26, 2001. It was going to be held at a church in town. When that Saturday came, Yvonne was busy cooking some things for the party. I put forth a great effort to finish my sermon early, so that we could go as a family together. The kids were especially excited about going. They had attended a

square dance before and knew of the fun that was in store for them. So, we got in our car, and drove over to the church. But, as we drove into the parking lot, we noticed that something was not quite right. The building was pretty dark. As we drove around, we discovered that there weren't many (if any) cars in the parking lot either. Something was dreadfully wrong. We were quite confused. We turned around and went home. When our children realized that there might not be a party that night, many tears flowed from their eyes. When we got home, Yvonne double checked her email to figure out what was wrong. It was then that she discovered that the invitation had been for **Friday**, October 25th! Not for **Saturday**, October 26th! It was a most disappointing evening for our children. We had missed the party! Here is the point of the story. We had entrusted Yvonne with the details of the party. Though we had wanted to attend this party, though we were eager to attend this party, though we did all that we were asked to do in order to attend this party, we were misled by a guide who was mistaken.

This is exactly what took place with the scribes and the Pharisees. They had said, "It's this way to the kingdom of heaven. Come, follow us! We will get you there!" And many there were who followed in their deception. Like the rats who followed the Pied Piper, there were many in Israel who were enchanted by the tune that these scribes and Pharisees played on their pipes, only to find themselves to be drowned in the end. But, unlike the Pied Piper, I don't believe that these scribes and Pharisees realized that their end was destruction. I believe that they were dead earnest about the way to the kingdom. I believe that they were like Yvonne, who was sure in her mind that the party was on Saturday.

I can imagine them standing before the Lord saying, "Lord, let us in!" And yet they were denied entrance. I can imagine them arguing with God about all the religious things that they did. They will say, "We performed miracles. We prophesied. We've cast out demons." And the Lord will reply, "I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." Such things are easy to imagine because Jesus told us that such things would take place (see Matt. 7.21-23).

I don't care how earnest you are. I don't care how sincere you are. If you are on the wrong path, you won't arrive at your destination. They believed that their path was the right way. But it was the wrong way. See, there are two roads in this life. One leads to eternal life. The other leads to eternal death. How important it is that you are on the right path! The right path is the way of the gospel. How important it is that you get the gospel right! It's not that it's secretive. It's not that it's difficult. It's not that it's only for those who are really clever. It's really quite plain and clear. The only way to get to God is by forsaking yourself and by trusting another. You will never get into the kingdom through your own efforts. You will never get into the kingdom through your own works. You need help. You need Jesus. You need what Jesus has. Jesus has a perfect righteousness, which is the ticket to heaven. You don't get into the ball-game or performance without a ticket! And you don't get into heaven without perfect righteousness!

When Jesus died upon the cross, there was no reason at all that He should have died. He had committed no crime. He had done nothing wrong. He had never sinned. This is exactly the point! He was a sinless sacrifice! The good news of the gospel is that when Jesus died upon the cross, He obtained for us what we could never obtain by ourselves: perfect righteousness. The gospel can be summarized with this one word: substitution. When Jesus died, He died in the place of sinners. He died instead of sinners. It was His death for the death of others. The Bible puts it this way, "Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). "Christ suffered for you" (1 Pet. 2:21). "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24). "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). "Christ ... gave Himself up for the [church]" (Eph. 5:25). "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). This is the good news. Jesus died for me! It's because of His work that I enter heaven!

You can think of the gates of heaven being like a toll plaza. This morning, I'm sure many of you are aware of the recent toll hike that the tollway authorities of Illinois imposed on vehicles throughout tollway system. They decided to impose the hike only on those vehicles that did not pay tolls electronically through using I-PASS. Many of you, I'm sure, have I-PASS already, especially those of you who travel frequently into Chicago. When the tolls increased for those paying tolls with cash, I finally obtained an I-PASS device because it was pretty obvious that within a short amount of time, the device would pay for itself. I used it the first time this week. It was wonderful. I'm driving through the toll plaza and put this thing up to my windshield, and the light immediately turned blue indicating my toll has been paid and that I can pass through without putting any coins in that nasty basket. This is like the gospel in that by faith, you can have an I-PASS. He paid your balance on the cross. The toll at the toll plaza is 40 cents. The toll at the gate of heaven is the cost of your sin! The sinful soul will die. You will never get through the heavenly toll plaza on your own. You need an I-PASS. Its yours by trusting in Christ alone.

It's important for you to know this, and to understand this, and to believe this. But, I would go even further. It is important for you to be following those who know this, and understand this, and believe this. The sad reality in Jesus' day was that you had people following these scribes and Pharisees. And they are following them on the way to destruction.

Jesus was aware of the implications of following false teachers. Also, the New Testament writers were very aware of the dangers of false teachers. In fact, several of the New Testament books were written precisely because of the false teaching that people were following in other churches. I'm talking about 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, Hebrews, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude. Their main purpose was to address the issue of false teaching that was taking place in their churches. In each of them, the false teachers were identified. At times, they gave very specific characteristics of what these false teachers are like (2 Peter and Jude). In 2 Corinthians, the false teachers are called, "false apostles [and] deceitful workers" (2 Cor. 11:13). In each of them, the people were exhorted to stop following them! In Colossians 2:8, Paul says, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception." In Galatians, Paul called those in the church, "foolish" for having begun to follow these teachers (Gal. 3:3). In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to "test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; Examine yourselves!" False teachers had come in and begun to wrongly influence those in the church. So Paul exhorted the church to examine themselves to determine if they were in the faith. None of the warnings come as strong as the warnings of Hebrews. In Hebrews, God warns of the condemnation that will come to those who follow after false teachers instead of the gospel.

This isn't child's play. This is a matter of life and death. This is a matter of eternal life or eternal damnation. If you want to avoid condemnation, you need to get the gospel right. Let's look at our next point. If you want to avoid condemnation, you need to ...

2. Serve Others, and not Yourself (verse 14).

Look at verse 14. Do you see it there? At this point, some of you might have a problem. You might be looking for verse 14 in your Bibles, but can't find it. If you are looking at a New International Version or an English Standard Version of the Bible, you won't find a verse 14. It skips from verse 13 to verse 15. If you look in your footnotes, you should probably be able to find the verse, which reads like this, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation" (Matt.23:14).

Without trying to get technical with you, let me tell you that this is one of those instances in which we have a textual discrepancy in the ancient manuscripts. There are thousands of ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Each of them were copied by hand by scribes. Certainly in that process, mistakes were made. There are times in which letters or words or even entire verses were skipped by accident in the copying process. At other times, scribes may have added phrases or sentences from similar accounts in other Biblical books. At any rate, some of the ancient manuscripts include verse 14. Some of the ancient manuscripts don't include verse 14. Some of the ancient manuscripts have verse 14 before verse 13. Older manuscripts typically don't have this verse, and many of the manuscripts that were written later do have this verse.

It is difficult to know exactly whether or not Matthew wrote these words in his writing of the gospel. Scholars are divided on this issue. But, we do know that Jesus spoke the words that are recorded in verse 14, because Mark and Luke record these same words also. You can read them in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. We simply don't know whether or not Jesus actually said these things in His farewell sermon. Nor can we be absolutely sure that Matthew wrote them down for us. However, But, for completeness sake, we'll look at them this morning.

These scribes and Pharisees were condemned for two activities. First, they were devouring widows' houses. Second, they were making a show of their long prayers. Jesus said, "therefore, you shall receive greater condemnation." Notice that their condemnation was linked directly to their religious activities. It was precisely because they devoured the houses of widows. It was precisely because they prayed long, pretentious, showy prayers, that they were condemned. I believe that each of these actions were religious activities that went astray. They went astray because they were performed for their own benefit, and not for the benefit of others.

Regarding the devouring of the widow's houses, I believe that Jesus is simply talking about taking advantage of the poor. During the time of Jesus, there was no governmental welfare system. The widow, was often totally helpless. Without a husband and at times without a family, widows were totally at the mercy of the religious community. These scribes and Pharisees kicked these widows when they were down. We know that these Pharisees were big into tithing. Perhaps they demanded a tenth of their house each year to be given to the work of the Lord. In so doing, they lost their houses. Rather than helping the poor, they took advantage of them. They used their religion to gain an advantage for themselves.

Oh, how the Christian world is susceptible to this today! I remember when I was working in the secular workplace, I was ridiculed by certain co-worker as being a preacher-boy. On several occasions, this man asked me, "What do you do Steve? Do you stand in front of a group of people and say, 'give me money and the Lord will bless you!'" On several occasions, I attempted to correct him by telling him that I don't do that. I told him that at our church, we don't even pass an offering plate. We have a box in the back for those who want to contribute to the needs of this work. But, where do you think that he got the idea that I was like this? Television. There are many hucksters out there today, who want nothing more than your money. Second Peter 2:14 says that one of the characteristics of a false teacher is that they are greedy. You need to steer clear of those religious leaders who are greedy. And it's not only on television. There are plenty of pastors whose main desire is to move up the ecclesiastical ladder. They enter as a youth pastor. Soon, they become an associate pastor. Then, they become a senior pastor. They move to a bigger church. And then, a bigger church. And then, a bigger church. Perhaps at some point they become a seminary professor. And then, a nice retirement for their years of service. Were the truth known fully, these pastors were really in it for themselves. They saw ministry as a job. It was an opportunity for self-gain. They were not in it for the people they served.

In another approach, there are plenty of pastors who will push their people financially to help in the building of their own little kingdom. They want to build their church. They want to build their school. They want to promote themselves. Perhaps the one who illustrated this best was John Tetzel. In the early 1500's, he went around Europe promising the release of relatives from purgatory if only the family members would contribute to St. Peter's Basilica in Rome! Those who could least afford it gave from their poverty. The result was that the religious leaders in Rome could live in luxury! It was a sham!

When you see such religious leaders, flee from them, for they are on the same path as these Pharisees were on. They were on the path of "greater condemnation" (as verse 14 indicates). It comes in all shapes and styles, and in varying degrees. But, it is there, and you need to avoid it.

Regarding the showy prayers that these scribes and Pharisees offered, I believe that Jesus is talking about the same thing: using religion to your advantage. Praying long and flowery prayers before others might not earn you any money, but it might make you seem spiritual in the eyes of others. Preaching nice sounding sermons might not make you the wealthiest man in the world, but it might make others think highly of you.

This is what Jesus is getting at with these words: the use of religion for your own benefit. I'm talking about using religion in such a way that it will help you. This is especially a danger in the ministry when people are paid to minister to others. Ministry can often be seen as a means to an end. In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Paul anticipated the time "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). We might often think about this in reference to the congregation, drifting in their sin, away from the sound words of the gospel of Christ. What about the guy who steps into the situation to tickle ears? Isn't he involved in his religion for his own benefit? He wants a nice, cushy job, and so, he become a professional story-teller who satisfies the desires of his congregation.

I remember knowing a man who was a pastor of a church, leading a congregation spiritually. He was a nice guy. But, his marriage turned sour and it ended in divorce. He was no longer permitted to be a pastor in his denomination. And so, do you know what he did? He switched

denominations to a more liberal denomination that he might continue being a pastor.

But don't think that the danger is only in the ministry. There are subtle ways that it can affect the average church-goer as well. There are plenty of people who attend church, because it helps their reputation, around the city. This is true especially of those in public service. There are plenty of people who attend church, because it keeps their family happy. There are plenty of people who attend church, only when it is convenient for them. I remember when I was in high school thinking about the numerous advantages that I had because I was a Christian. "I was a good student. I was a good athlete. I was popular. And, I was a good Christian. What else could I ask for? Everything in my life lined up just right." In my own mind, my Christianity was simply another reward on my shelf. I found comfort in the fact that others looked at me as a fine, moral young-man. I was using my religion to my own advantage.

When you begin to use your religion for your own advantage, there is great danger. It is empty. Jesus said that those who practice their righteousness before men to be noticed by them, have already received their full reward (see Matthew 6:1-18). They will have no reward from God. In fact, what Jesus says here is that they might be condemned for it. If you want to avoid condemnation, serve others and not yourself. We are followers of Christ. We ought to focus our attention upon bringing glory to Christ as we serve others, and not our own aggrandizement.

If you want to avoid condemnation, ...
3. Don't Follow False Leaders (verse 15).

In verse 15, Jesus places his attention upon the disciples that these scribes and Pharisees produced. He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (verse 15). The picture that Jesus gives here is of the great effort that the Pharisees went through to produce a disciple. And yet, their problem was that the result of their labors was more about themselves than it was of God. Notice that Jesus didn't criticize them for their zeal. It was the results of their labors that Jesus criticized. Their converts weren't converted to biblical Judaism. Their converts were converted to Pharisaism. Their converts were like themselves. Isn't this what you would expect from them? Like produces like. Corn produces corn. Flowers produce flowers. Rabbits produce rabbits. Dogs produce dogs. Pharisees produce Pharisees.

This "Woe" that Jesus pronounces upon these scribes and Pharisees is really a culmination of everything that they were. They were false teachers who believed a false gospel. They misunderstood the law and focused all of their attention upon the external regulations of the rabbis. They put all of their efforts on creating converts just like themselves. I'm sure that these converts of the Pharisees looked and acted much like the Pharisees. In some sense, I believe that they did their jobs too well. Their converts took what they were taught and went twice as far. They were twice as legalistic. They put forth twice the effort on their external behaviors. They were doubly convinced of their ways. And as a result, they became "twice as much a son of hell" as they were.

I know that I have met some members of some religious cults that have born an amazing resemblance to their teachers. I have met them on college campuses. They act the same way and say the exact same things as each other. I have met them on my doorstep. They say the exact same things (with the same personality, even) as others I have spoken with. I have seen them riding on their bicycles. They look and act exactly like each other. And certainly, from this verse ought to come to all of us as a warning not to follow after those who are propagating a false religion. Those who are going to hell are leading others to hell.

As the multitudes heard Jesus say these things about the scribes and the Pharisees, I'm sure that many of them were awakened to the danger of following them. You need to feel the warning here, if people don't get the gospel right, then don't follow them. If you do, you will end up where they will end up. Again, there is an eternal reality at stake here. Don't follow false leaders!

How are you going to know if you are following a false leader? There are two critical ways: (1) discern their doctrine, and (2) discern their life. What is it that they are teaching? How is it that they are living? Do they teach the truth? Do they live the truth? Listen to the advice that Paul gave to Timothy. He said in 1 Timothy 4:16, "Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

A pastor's task is to maintain a purity of life and a purity of doctrine. In so doing, the people will be saved. But, how are you going to discern whether or not a spiritual leader is teaching the truth? You need to know the Bible for yourself. Oh may we all be students of God's word! How are you going to discern whether or not a spiritual leader is living the truth? You need to get to know him! Beware the spiritual leader who is aloof from his congregation. As a spiritual leader deviates in one or the other (or both), those who follow him will be led to destruction along with him. This was the case of the Pharisees. Their teaching was wrong. Their lives were wrong. They led many to hell!

I believe that there is another application for us as well. We need to make sure that we (as a congregation) lead people properly. As a church, it is easy for us to define what we want to produce. We want to produce disciples of Christ. We want to produce those who are trusting solely in the work of Christ. We want to produce those who come to love the cross of Christ. We want to produce those who are walking in the love of Christ. Isn't this what we are all about? It happens on all levels. It happens when you are in the world, talking to your unbelieving friend about Christ. Your desire is for them to know Christ and the wonders of His forgiving love, and to become His disciple. It happens when you are at home. Parents, you have a tremendous opportunity to disciple your children in the ways of the Lord. You don't want them to be like you. You want them to be like Christ. So, lead them to Jesus and have them find in Him all that they need. It happens in our interactions with one another at church. It happens in your conversations with others, in your home Bible studies, and in your counseling of one another. It happens as you are in each other's homes. We need to be leading others to be Christ-followers.

Sadly, there are many today who are doing more to produce converts to their own creeds, denominations, liturgies, and Christian sub-cultures, than they are producing converts to Christ. As they do this, they are demonstrating what is most important to them. It's often their church that gets the focus and not Christ. I know that I'm guilty of this. I remember on one occasion meeting a man who was involved in a para-church ministry. He was starting to get involved in our church a bit. And I remember a conversation that I had with him, where I began promoting our church over his para-church ministry. I told him of all the great things about our church. I told him of all the limitations of his

campus ministry. I later called him and confessed to him how I was wrong in my zeal for the church. In our discussion, I confessed to my being over-zealous for the church, and forsaking the role of Christ.

J. C. Ryle, bishop of Livermore in England during the 1800's, put it well when he said, ...

How much religion among some members of the Church of England consists of nothing but churchmanship! They belong to the Established Church. They are baptized at her fonts, married at her communion rails, buried in her churchyards, preached to on Sundays by her ministers. But the great doctrines laid down in her Articles and Liturgy have no place in their hearts, and no influence on their lives. They neither think, nor feel, nor care, nor know anything about them. And is the religion of these people real Christianity? It is nothing of the kind. It is mere base metal. It is not the Christianity of Peter, and James, and John, and Paul. It is Churchianity, and no more. ¹

And then he turned the table. Rather than looking upon the established church, he focused his attention upon the Dissenters of his day. These were those who couldn't submit themselves to the church of England, because they couldn't submit themselves to the king of England. They may be compared to some of our fundamentalists today. He said, ...

"How much religion among some Dissenters from the Church of England consists of nothing but dissent! They pride themselves on having nothing to do with the Establishment. They rejoice in having no liturgy, no forms, no bishops. They glory in the exercise of their private judgment, and the absence of everything like ceremonial in their public worship. But all this time they have neither grace, nor faith, nor repentance, nor holiness, nor spirituality of conduct or conversation. ... Their Christianity is as sapless and fruitless as a dead tree, and as dry and marrowless as an old bone. And is the Christianity of these people real? It is nothing of the kind. It is base metal. It is dissentianity, and nothing more." ²

What was true of England in the 1800's can be easily true of us today. On the one hand, you can have a cold, dead church, where people are merely going through the motions. It's empty. On the other hand, you can have a church that can have everything nicely bundled. They know everything that they believe. They know the proper way to behave. They know everything that is wrong with everybody else. In this case, a dynamic can often occur that it's more about the church and how they interpret the Bible than it is about Christ. The danger is always there.

It's so easy for people to come into a Christian fellowship and simply begin to learn their ways. They learn how to speak Christianese: "Hey brother." "Praise the Lord!" "Hallelujah!" They learn what to do. They learn what not to do. They learn when to talk. They learn when not to talk. They learn to show up at the popular events. They learn to stay at home for the unpopular events. And as people outwardly conform to all of the regular ways of doing things, churches think that they are doing pretty well. Furthermore, churches can often place a great amount of attention upon their marketing techniques, and show others how to get a crowd. Churches can often place a great amount of attention upon how they do ministry, and teach their methods to the congregation. Churches can often place a great amount of attention upon their particular doctrines, and ingrain them into everybody. Churches can often place a great amount of attention upon their dress or music tastes or their traditions. The new convert becomes ingrained in all these ways of doing church, and the converts become cultural disciples. They are often disciplined into the church culture, rather than into Christ. In many ways, this is the exact same thing for which Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees: creating cultural disciples. The Pharisees were creating disciples of themselves.

As right as we think that we have it at Rock Valley Bible Church, we don't want to produce Rock Valley Bible Church clones. We don't want to produce disciples of ourselves. We want to produce disciples of Jesus. We want to use our influence to drive people to Jesus.

Let me close this morning with a few verses that exhort us to point others to Christ, and not to ourselves.

"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

"What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed" (1 Corinthians 3:5).

"We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 16, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] J.C. Ryle. *Practical Religion*. pp. 53-54.

[2] *ibid*.