

April 18, 2010

WOE! (PART 2)
MATTHEW 23.13-39

Jesus pronounces the disfavor of God upon the Pharisees, setting them up as a negative example to his own disciples. This disfavor of God upon the Pharisees and Jerusalem is not something that Jesus enjoys but rather laments.

4. WOE TO THE LEGALISTIC OATH-BREAKERS (16-22)

The Scribes and Pharisees had developed elaborate systems of oath-taking that would give them loopholes. They not only found ways but they also developed ways to wiggle or finagle out of commitments made through oaths.

5.33-37: Jesus made an stark statement about taking no oaths at all but letting your word be “yes, yes,” and “no, no.”

What is an oath? An oath is a strong word or a reinforced word. It is a word that calls witnesses to what you say and, if you break that word, you are submitting to the penalties that come with it.

Oaths are permitted and sometimes commanded in Scripture.

Oaths exist b/c God is an oath-taking and oath-keeping God. God always has a double or triple witness. Cf. Gen 22.16; Heb 6.13-19. Cf. Dt 6.13; 10.20; Num 30; and “Amen.”

There is no problem in taking oaths. Jesus is not condemning that in itself either in Mt 5 or in this woe. What he is condemning is the abuse of oaths/words in order to escape commitments.

Sin distorts the reasoning. The distinctions were irrational and invalid. It was only in the context of the Temple and the altar that the gold and the gifts would be made holy. Cf. Ex 29.37. The more holy sanctifies the less holy.

One major point: all oaths are spoken before the face of God b/c the whole world is God’s palace. There was no place they could go where their words were not witnessed by God. The Scribes and Pharisees could not *see* this.

Why would this warrant a woe, a denunciation of God himself? Words create worlds; either good or bad. God creates the world and his people by his word.

Words used unfaithfully, esp these reinforced words, are intended to destroy others and exalt oneself. Unfaithful words destroy instead of build up relationships/community.

Broken oaths create a relationship of oppression of some sort. The one who breaks the oath is taking advantage of the other person in some way whether in a smaller fashion or a greater fashion.

When leaders do this it creates an untrusting culture.

Can the disciples of Jesus still be guilty of this? Yes.

We who bear the name of Christ always have a witness to our words. Our words must always be faithful. When we make commitments and promises, we must, to the best of our ability, fulfill those commitments. Cf. Ps 15

Obligations as members of the church. Not a commitment as long as don’t need to be confronted.

Using “legalese” to avoid dealing with sin.

5. WOE TO THE METICULOUS LAW-BREAKERS (23-24)

A hypocrite is not simply someone who sins, but someone who intentionally leads a double-life, not concerned about dealing with his sin and living inconsistently with his confession.

Hypocrisy in relationship between meticulous tithing and the rest of the Law.

Tithing was proper and commended by Jesus (cf. Lev 27.30-33; Num 18.21-32; Dt 14.22-29; 26.12-15).

Jesus' words indicate that there are some things of greater importance in the Law than other things. This is *not* "relevant vs irrelevant" or optional vs non-optional.

Tithing of the mint, dill, and cumin, while it should be done, is worthless if it is not done within the context of observing the weightier matters of the Law.

Justice, mercy, and faith: cf. Micah 6.6-8.

Justice may involve punishment at times, but the end/goal is peace. Justice in the context of Scripture is things being the way they ought to be (i.e. the way God intended them to be).

Mercy: hospitable welcome to outsiders that seeks their inclusion in the peace that God intends. cf. Mt recording Jesus quoting Hos 6.6 in Mt 9.13; 12.7: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Both in the context of caring for people while presumably breaking a particular law (which he didn't).

Faith and faithfulness: It is possible to go through rituals that God prescribes and not have faith in God. Faith does go through those things God commands, but it does more.

Faith is not merely one activity among many in my life. It is the way of life. Faith believes God's word and walks in it even when it doesn't make that much sense to us. It is following Jesus to victory through the cross when it looks like swords and tanks would be better equipped for the task.

Straining out gnats: keeping gnats out of their wine b/c they were unclean (cf. Lev 11.41). But they were swallowing camels which were not only unclean but vastly larger.

They were meticulous in working out the details, but they missed the really important things.

We can also do this with the way we handle doctrine. We can cross all of our t's and dot all of our i's, getting everything 'right' but still be terribly wrong.

Consider "Sabbath-keeping." Different opinions about what one can and cannot do on the Lord's Day. Cf. Rom 14. Don't destroy others over it

"Good order." Commendable and needful. But can be so meticulously observed that justice is actually trampled.