

Taking over for God: human nature meets religion, Matthew Ch.23

Another kind of religious idolatry has to do with moral living itself. . . The default mode of the human heart is to seek to control God and others through our moral performance. Because we have lived virtuous lives we feel that God (and the people we meet) owes us respect and support. Though we may give lip service to Jesus as our example and inspiration, we are still looking to ourselves and our own moral striving for salvation.

Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods, 2009.

Jesus judges the Pharisees and institutional religion.

An advisory regarding trusting religious leaders, v.1-12

- Specifically, scribes and Pharisees.
 - Religious lawyers and teachers. _____
 - Seated in “Moses” chair. _____
- Do as they say but not as they do?
 - They don’t do them themselves. _____
 - They will burden you, and refuse to help you with the weight they lay on you. _____
- They do everything for their own benefit, v.5-7.
 - Phylacteries and tassels. _____
 - Places of honor and titles. _____
- As for yourselves, avoid titles, v.8-12.
 - Don’t seek recognition. _____
 - Be a janitor. _____

“Woe to you.” (You’ll be sorry) Seven (or eight) woes, v.13-36

1. v.13, you bar the door to the kingdom, _____
 - Corrupt priesthood. _____
2. v.14 (not in earliest mss.) Carpetbaggers, _____
 - Religious raccoons. _____
3. v.15, you make disciples for the devil, _____
 - That would be **you**. _____
4. v.16-22, you worship the wealth. _____
 - Devaluing the sacrifice. _____
5. v.23, you tithe from the change in your pocket, _____
 - Yet ignore true “justice.” _____

6. v.25, appearance above all, _____
 - After all . . . _____
7. v.27, the same goes for your spiritual “appearance, _____
 - The specter of “nice,” _____
8. v.29-36, you build the tombs of the prophets, _____
 - To cover for your murderous fathers. _____
 - To perpetuate the deception. _____
 - You still despise real prophets. _____

Lament over Jerusalem, 37-39

- And all religious institutions that sanctify themselves.
 - That could include us also, if we aren’t careful. _____
- Your house is being left to you desolate! _____
- Empty spirituality. _____

Here’s the frightening part: this withering expose´ of the religious house of Israel can be directly associated with religion today. That would include all religions and cults, large and small, and doesn’t overlook the Christian faith. It is both a judgment and a warning to us, and perhaps as a warning we can avoid the final pronouncement: “Your house is being left to you desolate!” We cannot simply point our fingers at others, which only results in a more resolute self-righteousness. We would be well advised to judge ourselves on each of these pronouncements, as just the first step in correctly promoting the kingdom of God.

How would we judge ourselves on each of these points? Which would we be most guilty of and which least?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Ask yourself: *this couldn’t possibly be me, could it?*