

CHAPTER 23

In the foregoing chapter, we had our Saviour's discourses with the scribes and Pharisees; here we have his discourse concerning them, or rather against them.

I. He allows their office (v. 2, 3).

II. He warns his disciples not to imitate their hypocrisy and pride (v. 4-12).

III. He exhibits a charge against them for divers high crimes and misdemeanors, corrupting the law, opposing the gospel, and treacherous dealing both with God and man; and to each article he prefixes a woe (v. 13-33).

IV. He passes sentence upon Jerusalem, and foretels the ruin of the city and temple, especially for the sin of persecution (v. 34-49).

Ⓜ MATTHEW 23:1-12

THE SCRIBES AND THE PHARISEES CONDEMNED

We find not Christ, in all his preaching, so severe upon any sort of people as upon these *scribes and Pharisees*; for the truth is, nothing is more directly opposite to the spirit of the gospel than the temper and practice of that generation of men, who were made up of pride, worldliness, and tyranny, under a cloak and pretence of religion; yet these were the idols and darlings of the people, who thought, if but two men went to heaven, one would be a Pharisee. Now Christ directs his discourse here *to the multitude, and to his disciples* (v. 1) to rectify their mistakes concerning these scribes and Pharisees, by painting them out in their true colours, and so to take off the prejudice which some of the multitude had conceived against Christ and his doctrine, because it was opposed by those men of their church, that called themselves the people's guides. Note, It is good to know the true characters of men, that we may not be imposed upon by great and mighty names, titles, and pretensions to power. People must be told of *the wolves* (Ⓜ Acts 20:29, 30), *the dogs* (Ⓜ Philippians 3:2), *the deceitful workers* (Ⓜ 2 Corinthians 11:13), that they may know here to

stand upon their guard. And not only the mixed multitude, but even the disciples, need these cautions; for good men are apt to have their eyes dazzled with worldly pomp.

Now, in this discourse,

I. Christ allows their office as expositors of the law; *The scribes and Pharisees* (that is, the whole Sanhedrim, who sat at the helm of church government, who were all called *scribes*, and were some of them Pharisees), they *sit in Moses's seat* (v. 2), as public teachers and interpreters of the law; and, the law of Moses being the municipal law of their state, they were as judges, or a bench of justices; teaching and judging seem to be equivalent, comparing ^{<417>}2 Chronicles 17:7, 9, with ^{<415>}2 Chronicles 19:5, 6, 8. They were not the itinerant judges that rode the circuit, but the standing bench, that determined on appeals, special verdicts, or writs of error by the law; they sat in Moses's seat, not as he was Mediator between God and Israel, but only as he was chief justice, ^{<185>}Exodus 18:26. Or, we may apply it, not to the Sanhedrim, but to the other Pharisees and scribes, that expounded the law, and taught the people how to apply it to particular cases. *The pulpit of wood*, such as was made for Ezra, *that ready scribe in the law of God* (^{<684>}Nehemiah 8:4), is here called *Moses's seat*, because Moses had those in every city (so the expression is, ^{<415>}Acts 15:21), who in those pulpits preached him; this was their office, and it was just and honourable; it was requisite that there should be some at whose mouth the people might *enquire the law*, ^{<317>}Malachi 2:7. Note,

1. Many a good place is filled with bad men; it is no new thing for the vilest men to be exalted even to *Moses's seat* (^{<518>}Psalms 12:8); and, when it is so, the men are not so much honoured by the seat as the seat is dishonoured by the men. Now they that sat in Moses's seat were so wretchedly degenerated, that it was time for the great Prophet to arise, like unto Moses, to erect another seat.

2. Good and useful offices and powers are not *therefore* to be condemned and abolished, because they fall sometimes into the hands of bad men, who abuse them. We must not *therefore* pull down Moses's seat, because scribes and Pharisees have got possession of it; rather than so, *let both grow together until the harvest*, ^{<430>}Matthew 13:30.

Hence he infers (v. 3), “*Whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do* As far as they *sit in Moses's seat*, that is, read and preach the law

that was given by Moses” (which, as yet, continued in full force, power, and virtue), “and judge according to that law, so far you must hearken to them, as remembrances to you of the written word.” The scribes and Pharisees made it their business to study the scripture, and were well acquainted with the language, history, and customs of it, and its style and phraseology. Now Christ would have the people to make use of the helps they gave them for the understanding of the scripture, and do accordingly. As long as their comments did illustrate the text and not pervert it; did make plain, and not *make void, the commandment of God*; so far they must be observed and obeyed, but with caution and a judgment of discretion. Note, We must not think the worse of good truths for their being preached by bad ministers; nor of good laws for their being executed by bad magistrates. Though it is most desirable to have our food brought by angels, yet, if God send it to us by ravens, if it be good and wholesome, we must take it, and thank God for it. Our Lord Jesus promiseth this, to prevent the cavil which some would be apt to make at this following discourse; as if, by condemning the scribes and Pharisees, he designed to bring the law of Moses into contempt, and to draw people off from it; whereas he *came not to destroy, but to fulfil*. Note, It is wisdom to obviate the exceptions which may be taken at just reproofs, especially when there is occasion to distinguish between officers and their offices, *that the ministry be not blamed* when the ministers are.

II. He condemns the men. He had ordered the multitude to do as they taught; but here he annexeth a caution not to do as they did, to beware of their leaven; *Do not ye after their works*. Their traditions were their works, were their idols, the works of their fancy. Or, “Do not according to their example.” Doctrines and practices are spirits that must be tried, and where there is occasion, must be carefully separated and distinguished; and as we must not swallow corrupt doctrines for the sake of any laudable practices of those that teach them, so we must not imitate any bad examples for the sake of the plausible doctrines of those that set them. The scribes and Pharisees boasted as much of the goodness of their works as of the orthodoxy of their teaching, and hoped to be justified by them; it was the plea they put in (⁴²⁸¹Luke 18:11, 12); and yet these things, which they valued themselves so much upon, were an abomination in the sight of God.

Our Saviour here, and in the following verses, specifies divers particulars of their works, wherein we must not imitate them. In general, they are

charged with hypocrisy, dissimulation, or double-dealing in religion; a crime which cannot be enquired of at men's bar, because we can only judge according to outward appearance; but God, who searcheth the heart, can convict of hypocrisy; and nothing is more displeasing to him, for he desireth truth.

Four things are in these verses charged upon them.

1. Their saying and doing were two things.

Their practice was no way agreeable either to their preaching or to their profession; for *they say, and do not*; they teach out of the law that which is good, but their conversation gives them the lie; and they seem to have found another way to heaven for themselves than what they show to others. See this illustrated and charged home upon them, ^{<R17>}Romans 2:17-24. Those are of all sinners most inexcusable that allow themselves in the sins they condemn in others, or in worse. This doth especially touch wicked ministers, who will be sure to have their portion appointed them with hypocrites (^{<R51>}Matthew 24:51); for what greater hypocrisy can there be, than to press that upon others, to be believed and done, which they themselves disbelieve and disobey; pulling down in their practice what they build up in their preaching; when in the pulpit, preaching so well that it is a pity they should ever come out; but, when out of the pulpit, living so ill that it is a pity they should ever come in; like bells, that call others to church, but hang out of it themselves; or Mercurial posts, that point the way to others, but stand still themselves? Such will *be judged out of their own mouths*. It is applicable to all others that say, and do not; that make a plausible profession of religion, but do not live up to that profession; that make fair promises, but do not perform their promises; are full of good discourse, and can lay down the law to all about them, but are empty of good works; great talkers, but little doers; *the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. Vox et praeterea nihil — mere sound*. They speak fair, *I go, sir*; but there is no trusting them, for *there are seven abominations in their heart*.

2. They were very severe in imposing upon others those things which they were not themselves willing to submit to the burthen of (v. 4); *They bind heavy burthens, and grievous to be borne*; not only insisting upon the minute circumstances of the law, which is called *a yoke* (^{<R50>}Acts 15:10), and pressing the observation of them with more strictness and severity than God himself did (whereas the maxim of the lawyers, is *Apices juris*

son sunt jura — *Mere points of law are not law*), but by adding to his words, and imposing their own inventions and traditions, under the highest penalties. They loved to show their authority and to exercise their domineering faculty, lording it over God's heritage, and saying to men's souls, *Bow down, that we may go over*; witness their many additions to the law of the fourth commandment, by which they made the sabbath a burthen on men's shoulders, which was designed to be the joy of their hearts. Thus with force and cruelty did those shepherds *rule the flock*, as of old, ³⁶⁰⁴Ezekiel 34:4.

But see their hypocrisy; *They themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*.

(1.) They would not exercise themselves in those things which they imposed upon others; they pressed upon the people a strictness in religion which they themselves would not be bound by; but secretly transgressed their own traditions, which they publicly enforced. They indulged their pride in giving law to others; but consulted their ease in their own practice. Thus it has been said, to the reproach of the popish priests, that they fast with wine and sweetmeats, while they force the people to fast with bread and water; and decline the penances they enjoin the laity.

(2.) They would not ease the people in these things, nor put a finger to lighten their burthen, when they saw it pinched them. They could find out loose constructions to put upon God's law, and could dispense with that, but would not bate an ace of their own impositions, nor dispense with a failure in the least punctilio of them. They allowed no chancery to relieve the extremity of their common law. How contrary to this was the practice of Christ's apostles, who would allow to others that use of Christian liberty which, for the peace and edification of the church, they would deny themselves in! They would lay no other burthen than necessary things, and those easy, ⁴⁴⁵³Acts 15:28. How carefully doth Paul spare those to whom he writes! ⁴⁶⁷³1 Corinthians 7:28; 9:12.

3. They were all for show, and nothing for substance, in religion (v. 5); *All their works they do, to be seen of men*. We must do such good works, that they who see them may glorify God; but we must not proclaim our good works, with design that others may see them, and glorify us; which our Saviour here chargeth upon the Pharisees in general, as he had done before in the particular instances of prayer and giving of alms. All their end was to be praised of men, and therefore all their endeavour was to be seen of

men, to *make a fair show in the flesh*. In those duties of religion which fall under the eye of men, none ere so constant and abundant as they; but in what lies between God and their souls, in the retirement of their closets, and the recesses of their hearts, they desire to be excused. The *form* of godliness will get them a name to live, which is all they aim at, and therefore they trouble not themselves with the *power* of it, which is essential to a life indeed. He that does all to be seen does nothing to the purpose.

He specifies two things which they did to be seen of men.

(1.) *They made broad their phylacteries*. Those were little scrolls of paper or parchment, wherein were written, with great niceness, these four paragraphs of the law, ^{<BIB>}Exodus 13:2-11; 13:11-16; ^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21. These were sewn up in leather, and worn upon their foreheads and left arms. It was a tradition of the elders, which had reference to ^{<BIB>}Exodus 13:9, and ^{<BIB>}Proverbs 7:3, where the expressions seem to be figurative, intimating no more than that we should bear the things of God in our minds as carefully as if we had them bound between our eyes. Now the Pharisees made broad these phylacteries, that they might be thought more holy, and strict, and zealous for the law, than others. It is a gracious ambition to covet to be really more holy than others, but it is a proud ambition to covet to appear so. It is good to excel in real piety, but not to exceed in outward shows; for overdoing is justly suspected of design, ^{<BIB>}Proverbs 27:14. It is the guise of hypocrisy to make more ado than needs in external service, more than is needful either to prove, or to improve, the good affections and dispositions of the soul.

(2.) *They enlarged the borders of their garments*. God appointed the Jews to make borders or fringes upon their garments (^{<BIB>}Numbers 15:38), to distinguish them from other nations, and to be a memorandum to them of their being a peculiar people; but the Pharisees were not content to have these borders like other people's, which might serve God's design in appointing them; but they must be larger than ordinary, to answer their design of making themselves to be taken notice of; as if they were more religious than others. But those who thus enlarge their phylacteries, and the borders of their garments, while their hearts are straitened, and destitute of the love of God and their neighbour, though they may now deceive others, will in the end deceive themselves.

4. They much affected pre-eminence and superiority, and prided themselves extremely in it. Pride was the darling reigning sin of the Pharisees, *the sin that did most easily beset them* and which our Lord Jesus takes all occasions to witness against.

(1.) He describes their pride, v. 6, 7. They courted, and coveted,

[1.] Places of honour and respect. In all public appearances, as *at feasts, and in the synagogues*, they expected, and had, to their hearts' delight, *the uppermost rooms, and the chief seats*. They took place of all others, and precedence was adjudged to them, as persons of the greatest note and merit; and it is easy to imagine what a complacency they took in it; *they loved to have the preeminence*, ~~600~~ 3 John 1:9. It is not possessing the uppermost rooms, nor sitting in the chief seats, that is condemned (somebody must sit uppermost), but *loving* them; for men to value such a little piece of ceremony as sitting highest, going first, taking the wall, or the better hand, and to value themselves upon it, to seek it, and to feel resentment if they have it not; what is that but making an idol of ourselves, and then falling down and worshipping it — the worst kind of idolatry! It is bad any where, but especially in the synagogues. *There* to seek honour to ourselves, where we appear in order to give glory to God, and to humble ourselves before him, is indeed to mock God instead of serving him. David would willingly lie at the threshold in God's house; so far was he from coveting *the chief seat* there, ~~680~~ Psalm 84:10. It savours much of pride and hypocrisy, when people do not care for going to church, unless they can look fine and make a figure there.

[2.] Titles of honour and respect. They *loved greetings in the markets*, loved to have people put off their hats to them, and show them respect when they met them in the streets. O how it pleased them, and fed their vain humour, *digito monstrari et dicier, Hic est* — *to be pointed out, and to have it said, This be he*, to have way made for them in the crowd of market people; “Stand off, here is a Pharisee coming!” and to be complimented with the high and pompous title of *Rabbi, Rabbi!* This was meat and drink and dainties to them; and they took as great a satisfaction in it as Nebuchadnezzar did in his palace, when he said, *Is not this great Babylon that I have built?* The *greetings* would not have done them half so much good, if they had not been in the markets, where every body might see how much they were respected, and how high they stood in the opinion of the people. It was but a little before Christ's time, that the

Jewish teachers, the masters of Israel, had assumed the title of *Rabbi*, *Rab*, or *Rabban*, which signifies *great or much*; and was construed as *Doctor*, or *My lord*. And they laid such a stress upon it, that they gave it for a maxim that “he who salutes his teacher, and does not call him Rabbi, provokes the divine Majesty to depart from Israel;” so much religion did they place in that which was but a piece of good manners! For him that is taught in the word to give respect to him that teaches is commendable enough in him that gives it; but for him that teaches to love it, and demand it, and affect it, to be puffed up with it, and to be displeased if it be omitted, is sinful and abominable; and, instead of teaching, he has need to learn the first lesson in the school of Christ, which is humility.

(2.) He cautions his disciples against being herein like them; herein they must not do after their works; “But be not ye called so, for ye shall not be of such a spirit,” v. 8, etc.

Here is,

[1.] A prohibition of pride. They are here forbidden,

First, To challenge titles of honour and dominion to themselves, v. 8-10. It is repeated twice; *Be not called Rabbi, neither be ye called Master or Guide*: not that it is unlawful to give civil respect to *those that are over us in the Lord*, nay, it is an instance of the honour and esteem which it is our duty to show them; but,

1. Christ's ministers must not affect the name of *Rabbi* or *Master*, by way of distinction from other people; it is not agreeable to the simplicity of the gospel, for them to covet or accept the honour which they have that are in kings' palaces.

2. They must not assume the authority and dominion implied in those names; they must not be magisterial, nor domineer over their brethren, or over God's heritage, as if they had dominion over the faith of Christians: what they received of the Lord, all must receive from them; but in other things they must not make their opinions and wills a rule and standard to all other people, to be admitted with an implicit obedience. The reasons for this prohibition are,

(1.) *One is your Master, even Christ*, v. 8, and again, v. 10. Note,

[1.] Christ is our Master, our Teacher, our Guide. Mr. George Herbert, when he named the name of *Christ*, usually added, *My Master*.

[2.] Christ only is our Master, ministers are but ushers in the school. Christ only is the Master, the great Prophet, whom we must hear, and be ruled and overruled by; whose word must be an oracle and a law to us; *Verily I say unto you*, must be enough to us. And if he only be our Master, then for his ministers to set up for dictators, and to pretend to a supremacy and an infallibility, is a daring usurpation of that honour of Christ which he will not give to another.

(2.) *All ye are brethren*. Ministers are brethren not only to one another, but to the people; and therefore it ill becomes them to be masters, when there are none for them to master it over but their brethren; yea, and we are all younger brethren, otherwise the eldest might claim an *excellency of dignity and power*, ^{<149B>}Genesis 49:3. But, to preclude that, Christ himself is *the first-born among many brethren*, ^{<60D>}Romans 8:29. Ye are brethren, as ye are all disciples of the same Master. School-fellows are brethren, and, as such, should help one another in getting their lesson; but it will by no means be allowed that one of the scholars step into the master's seat, and give law to the school. If we are all brethren, we must not be *many masters*. ^{<30E>}James 3:1.

Secondly, They are forbidden to ascribe such titles to others (v. 9); "*Call no man your father upon the earth; constitute no man the father of your religion, that is, the founder, author, director, and governor, of it.*" The fathers of our flesh must be called *fathers*, and as such we must *give them reverence*; but God only must be allowed as *the Father of our spirits*, ^{<50D>}Hebrews 12:9. Our religion must not be derived from, or made to depend upon, any man. We are born again to the spiritual and divine life, *not of corruptible seed, but by the word of God; not of the will of the flesh, or the will of man, but of God*. Now the will of man, not being the rise of our religion, must not be the rule of it. We must not *jurare in verba magistri* — *swear to the dictates of any creature*, not the wisest or best, nor pin our faith on any man's sleeve, because we know not whither he will carry it. St. Paul calls himself *a Father* to those whose conversion he had been an instrument of (^{<40E>}1 Corinthians 4:15; Philippians 10); but he pretends to no dominion over them, and uses that title to denote, not authority, but affection: therefore he calls them not his *obliged*, but his *beloved*, sons, ^{<40H>}1 Corinthians 4:14.

The reason given is, *One is your Father, who is in heaven*. God is our Father, and is All in all in our religion. He is the Fountain of it, and its Founder; the Life of it, and its Lord; from whom alone, as the Original, our spiritual life is derived, and on whom it depends. He is *the Father of all lights* (^{<3017>}James 1:17), that *one Father, from whom are all things, and we in him*, ^{<4006>}Ephesians 4:6. Christ having taught us to say, *Our Father, who art in heaven*; let us *call no man Father upon earth*; no man, because *man is a worm, and the son of man is a worm*, hewn out of the same rock with us; especially not upon earth, for man upon earth is a sinful worm; *there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not*, and therefore no one is fit to be called *Father*.

[2.] Here is a precept of humility and mutual subjection (v. 11); *He that is greatest among you shall be your servant*; not only call himself so (we know of one who styles himself *Servus servorum Dei* — *Servant of the servants of God*, but acts as Rabbi, and father, and master, and *Dominus Deus noster* — *The Lord our God*, and what not), but he shall be so. Take it as a promise; “*He shall be accounted greatest, and stand highest in the favour of God, that is most submissive and serviceable*,” or as a precept; “*He that is advanced to any place of dignity, trust, and honour, in the church, let him be your servant*” (some copies read *esto* for *estai*), “let him not think that his patent of honour is a writ of ease; no; *he that is greatest is not a lord, but a minister*.” St. Paul, who knew his privilege as well as duty, though *free from all, yet made himself servant unto all* (^{<4009>}1 Corinthians 9:19); and our Master frequently pressed it upon his disciples to be humble and self-denying, mild and condescending, and to abound in all offices of Christian love, though mean, and to the meanest; and of this he hath set us an example.

[3.] Here is a good reason for all this, v. 12. Consider,

First, The punishment intended for the proud; *Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased*. If God give them repentance, they will be abased in their own eyes, and will abhor themselves for it; if they repent not, sooner or later they will be abased before the world. Nebuchadnezzar, in the height of his pride, was turned to be a fellow-commoner with the beasts; Herod, to be a feast for the worms; and Babylon, that sat as a queen, to be the scorn of nations. God made the proud and aspiring priests contemptible and base (^{<3009>}Malachi 2:9), and the lying prophet to be *the tail*, ^{<2005>}Isaiah 9:15. But if proud men have not marks of humiliation set

upon them in this world, there is a day coming, when they shall *rise to everlasting shame and contempt* (^{<711P>}Daniel 12:2); *so plentifully will he reward the proud doer!* (^{<4823>}Psalm 31:23).

Secondly, The preferment intended for the humble; *He that shall humble himself shall be exalted*. Humility is that *ornament which is in the sight of God of great price*. In this world the humble have the honour of being accepted with the holy God, and respected by all wise and good men; of being qualified for, and often called out to, the most honourable services; for honour is like the shadow, which flees from those that pursue it, and grasp at it, but follows those that flee from it. However, in the other world, they that have humbled themselves in contrition for their sin, in compliance with their God, and in condescension to their brethren, shall be exalted to inherit the throne of glory; shall be not only owned, but crowned, before angels and men.

^{<4233>}MATTHEW 23:13-33

THE CRIMES OF THE PHARISEES

In these verses we have eight woes levelled directly against the scribes and Pharisees by our Lord Jesus Christ, like so many claps of thunder, or flashes of lightning, from mount Sinai. *Three* woes are made to look very dreadful (^{<6833>}Revelation 8:13; 9:12); but here are *eight* woes, in opposition to the eight beatitudes, (^{<4883>}Matthew 5:3). The gospel has its woes as well as the law, and gospel curses are of all curses the heaviest. These woes are the more remarkable, not only because of the authority, but because of the meekness and gentleness, of him that denounced them. He came to bless, and loved to bless; but, if his wrath be kindled, there is surely cause for it: and who shall entreat for him that the great Intercessor pleads against? A woe from Christ is a remediless woe.

This is here the burthen of the song, and it is a heavy burthen; *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites*. Note,

1. The scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites; that is it in which all the rest of their bad characters are summed up; it was the leaven which gave the relish to all they said and did. A hypocrite is a stage-player in religion (that is the primary signification of the word); he personates or acts the part of

one that he neither is nor may be, or perhaps the he neither is nor would be.

2. That hypocrites are in a woeful state and condition. *Woe to hypocrites;* so *he* said whose saying that their case is miserable makes it so: while they live, their religion is vain; when they die, their ruin is great.

Now each of these woes against the scribes and Pharisees has a reason annexed to it containing a separate crime charged upon them, proving their hypocrisy, and justifying the judgment of Christ upon them; for his woes, his curses, are never causeless.

I. They were sworn enemies to the gospel of Christ, and consequently to the salvation of the souls of men (v. 13); *They shut up the kingdom of heaven against men*, that is, they did all they could to keep people from believing in Christ, and so entering into his kingdom. Christ came to *open the kingdom of heaven*, that is, to lay open for us *a new and living way* into it, to bring men to be subjects of that kingdom. Now the scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses's seat, and pretended to the key of knowledge, ought to have contributed their assistance herein, by opening those scriptures of the Old Testament which pointed at the Messiah and his kingdom, in their true and proper sense; they that undertook to expound Moses and the prophets should have showed the people how they testified of Christ; that Daniel's weeks were expiring, *the sceptre was departed from Judah*, and therefore now was the time for the Messiah's appearing. Thus they might have facilitated that great work, and have helped thousands to heaven; but, instead of this, they shut up the kingdom of heaven; they made it their business to press the ceremonial law, which was now in the vanishing, to suppress the prophecies, which were now in the accomplishing, and to beget and nourish up in the minds of the people prejudices against Christ and his doctrine.

1. They would not go in themselves; *Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?* ~~ATB~~ John 7:48. No; they were too proud to stoop to his meanness, too formal to be reconciled to his plainness; they did not like a religion which insisted so much on humility, self-denial, contempt of the world, and spiritual worship. Repentance was the door of admission into this kingdom, and nothing could be more disagreeable to the Pharisees, who justified and admired themselves, than to repent, that is, to

accuse and abase and abhor themselves; therefore they *went not in themselves*; but that was not all.

2. They would not *suffer them that were entering to go in*. It is bad to keep away from Christ ourselves, but it is worse to keep others from him; yet that is commonly the way of hypocrites; they do not love that any should go beyond them in religion, or be better than they. Their not going in themselves was a hindrance to many; for, they having so great an interest in the people, multitudes rejected the gospel only because their leaders did; but, besides that, they opposed both Christ's entertaining of sinners (⁴⁰⁷⁹Luke 7:39), and sinners' entertaining of Christ; they perverted his doctrine, confronted his miracles, quarrelled with his disciples, and represented him, and his institutes and economy, to the people in the most disingenuous, disadvantageous manner imaginable; they thundered out their excommunications against those that confessed him, and used all their wit and power to serve their malice against him; and thus they *shut up the kingdom of heaven*, so that *they who would enter into it must suffer violence* (⁴¹¹²Matthew 11:12), and *press into it* (⁴¹³⁶Luke 16:16), through a crowd of scribes and Pharisees, and all the obstructions and difficulties they could contrive to lay in their way. How well is it for us that our salvation is not entrusted in the hands of any man or company of men in the world! If it were, we should be undone. They that shut out of the church would shut out of heaven if they could; but the malice of men cannot *make the promise of God to his chosen of no effect*; blessed be God, it cannot.

II. They made religion and the form of godliness a cloak and stalking-horse to their covetous practices and desires, v. 14. Observe here,

1. What their wicked practices were; they *devoured widows' houses*, either by quartering themselves and their attendants upon them for entertainment, which must be of the best for men of their figure; or by insinuating themselves into their affections, and so getting to be the trustees of their estates, which they could make an easy prey of; for who could presume to call such as they were to an account? The thing they aimed at was to enrich themselves; and, this being their chief and highest end, all considerations of justice and equity were laid aside, and even widows' houses were sacrificed to this. Widows are of the weaker sex in its weakest state, easily imposed upon; and therefore they fastened on them, to make a prey of. They devoured those whom, by the law of God,

they were particularly obliged to protect, patronise, and relieve. There is a woe in the Old Testament to those that *made widows their prey* (⁽²³⁰⁾Isaiah 10:1, 2); and Christ here seconded it with his woe. God is the judge of the widows; they are his peculiar care, he *establisheth their border* (⁽¹⁵⁵⁾Proverbs 15:25), and *espouseth their cause* (⁽²²²⁾Exodus 22:22, 23); yet these were they whose houses the Pharisees devoured by wholesale; so greedy were they to get *their bellies filled with the treasures of wickedness!* Their devouring denotes not only covetousness, but cruelty in their oppression, described ⁽³⁰⁸⁾Micah 3:3, *They eat the flesh, and flay off the skin.* And doubtless they did all this under colour of law; for they did it so artfully that it passed uncensured, and did not at all lessen the people's veneration for them.

2. What was the cloak with which they covered this wicked practice; *For a pretence they made long prayers;* very long indeed, if it be true which some of the Jewish writers tell us, that they spent three hours at a time in the formalities of meditation and prayer, and did it thrice every day, which is more than an upright soul, that makes a conscience of being inward with God in the duty, dares pretend ordinarily to do; but to the Pharisees it was easy enough, who never made a business of the duty, and always made a trade of the outside of it. By this craft they got their wealth, and maintained their grandeur. It is not probable that these long prayers were extemporary, for then (as Mr. Baxter observes) the Pharisees had much more the gift of prayer than Christ's disciples had; but rather that they were stated forms of words in use among them, which they said over by tale, as the papists drop their beads. Christ doth not here condemn long prayers, as in themselves hypocritical; nay if there were not a great appearance of good in them, they would not have been used for a pretence; and the cloak must be very thick which was used to cover such wicked practices. Christ himself *continued all night in prayer to God,* and we are commanded to *pray without ceasing* too soon; where there are many sins to be confessed, and many wants to pray for the supply of, and many mercies to give thanks for, there is occasion for long prayers. But the Pharisees' long prayers were made up of vain repetitions, and (which was the end of them) they were for a *pretence;* by them they got the reputation of pious devout men, that loved prayer, and were the favourites of Heaven; and by this means people were made to believe it was not possible that such men as they should cheat them; and, therefore, happy the widow that could get a Pharisee for her trustee, and guardian to her children! Thus, while they seemed to soar

heaven-ward, upon the wings of prayer, their eye, like the kite's, was all the while upon their prey on the earth, some widow's house or other that lay convenient for them. Thus circumcision was the cloak of the Shechemites' covetousness (⁽¹³²⁾Genesis 34:22, 23), the payment of a vow in Hebron the cover of Absalom's rebellion (⁽¹³³⁾2 Samuel 15:7), a fast in Jezreel must patronise Naboth's murder, and the extirpation of Baal is the footstool of Jehu's ambition. Popish priests, under pretence of long prayers for the dead, masses and dirges, and I know not what, enrich themselves by devouring the house of the widows and fatherless. Note, It is no new thing for the show and form of godliness to be made a cloak to the greatest enormities. But dissembled piety, however it passeth now, will be reckoned for as double iniquity, *in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men.*

3. The doom passed upon them for this; *Therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* Note,

(1.) There are degrees of damnation; there are some whose sin is more inexcusable, *and whose ruin will therefore be more intolerable.*

(2.) The pretences of religion, with which hypocrites disguise or excuse their sin now, will aggravate their condemnation shortly. Such is the deceitfulness of sin, that the very thing by which sinners hope to expiate and atone for their sins will come against them, and make their sins more exceedingly sinful. But it is sad for the criminal, when his *defence* proves his *offence*, and his pleas (*We have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name made long prayers*) heightens the charge against him.

III. While they were such enemies to the conversion of souls to Christianity, they were very industrious in the perversion of them to their faction. They shut up the kingdom of heaven against those that would turn to Christ, but at the same time *compassed sea and land to make proselytes* to themselves, v. 15. Observe here,

1. Their commendable industry in making proselytes to the Jewish religion, not only proselytes of *the gate*, who obliged themselves to no more than the observance of the seven precepts of the sons of Noah, but proselytes of *righteousness*, who addicted themselves wholly to all the rites of the Jewish religion, for that was the game they flew at; for this, for one such, though but one, they compass sea and land, had many a cunning reach, and laid many a plot, rode and run, and sent and wrote, and

laboured unweariedly. And what did they aim at? Not the glory of God, and the good of souls; but that they might have the credit of making them proselytes, and the advantage of making a prey of them when they were made. Note,

(1.) The making of proselytes, if it be to the truth and serious godliness, and be done with a good design, is a good work, well worthy of the utmost care and pains. Such is the value of souls, that nothing must be thought too much to do, to save a soul from death. The industry of the Pharisees herein may show the negligence of many who would be thought to act from better principles, but will be at no pains or cost to propagate the gospel.

(2.) To make a proselyte, sea and land must be compassed; all ways and means must be tried; first one way, and then another, must be tried, all little enough; but all well paid, if the point be gained.

(3.) Carnal hearts seldom shrink from the pains necessary to carry on their carnal purposes; when a proselyte is to be made to serve a turn for themselves, they will compass sea and land to make him, rather than be disappointed.

2. Their cursed impiety in abusing their proselytes when they were made; “Ye make him the disciple of a Pharisee presently, and he sucks in all a Pharisee's notions; and so *ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*” Note,

(1.) Hypocrites, while they fancy themselves heirs of heaven, are, in the judgment of Christ, the children of hell. The rise of their hypocrisy is from hell, for the devil is the father of lies; and the tendency of their hypocrisy is toward hell, that is the country they belong to, the inheritance they are heirs to; they are called *children of hell*, because of their rooted enmity to the kingdom of heaven, which was the principle and genius of Pharisaism.

(2.) Though all that maliciously oppose the gospel are children of hell, yet some are twofold more so than others, more furious and bigoted and malignant.

(3.) Perverted proselytes are commonly the greatest bigots; the scholars outdid their masters,

[1.] In fondness of ceremony; the Pharisees themselves saw the folly of their own impositions, and in their hearts smiled at the obsequiousness of

those that conformed to them; but their proselytes were eager for them. Note, Weak heads commonly admire those shows and ceremonies which wise men (however for public ends they countenance them) cannot but think meanly of.

[2.] In fury against Christianity; the proselytes readily imbibed the principles which their crafty leaders were not wanting to possess them with, and so became extremely hot against the truth. The most bitter enemies the apostles met with in all places were the Hellenist Jews, who were mostly proselytes, ^{<4135>}Acts 13:45; 14:2-19; 17:5; 18:6. Paul, a disciple of the Pharisees, was *exceedingly mad against the Christians* (^{<4131>}Acts 26:11), when his master, Gamaliel, seems to have been more moderate.

IV. Their seeking their own worldly gain and honour more than God's glory put them upon coining false and unwarrantable distinction, with which they led the people into dangerous mistakes, particularly in the matter of oaths; which, as an evidence of a universal sense of religion, have been by all nations accounted sacred (v. 16); *Ye blind guides*. Note,

1. It is sad to think how many are under the guidance of such as are themselves blind, who undertake to show others that way which they are themselves willingly ignorant of. *His watchmen are blind* (^{<2360>}Isaiah 56:10); and too often the people love to have it so, and say to the seers, *See not*. But the case is bad, when the leaders of the people *cause them to err*, ^{<2316>}Isaiah 9:16.

2. Though the condition of those whose guides are blind is very sad, yet that of the blind guides themselves is yet more woeful. Christ denounces a woe to the blind guides that have the blood of so many souls to answer for.

Now, to prove their blindness, he specifies the matter of swearing, and shows what corrupt casuists they were.

(1.) He lays down the doctrine they taught.

[1.] They allowed swearing by creatures, provided they were consecrated to the service of God, and stood in any special relation to him. They allowed swearing by the temple and the altar, though they were the work of men's hands, intended to be the servants of God's honour, not sharers in it. An oath is an appeal to God, to his omniscience and justice; and to

make this appeal to any creature is to put that creature in the place of God. See ^{<REF>}Deuteronomy 6:13.

[2.] They distinguished between an oath by *the temple* and an oath by the *gold of the temple*; an oath by *the altar* and an oath by *the gift upon the altar*; making the latter binding, but not the former. Here was a double wickedness; *First*, That there were some oaths which they dispensed with, and made light of, and reckoned a man was not bound by to assert the truth, or perform a promise. They ought not to have sworn by the temple or the altar; but, when they had so sworn, they were taken in the words of their mouth. That doctrine cannot be of the God of truth which gives countenance to the breach of faith in any case whatsoever. Oaths are edge-tools and are not to be jested with. *Secondly*, That they preferred the gold before the temple, and the gift before the altar, to encourage people to bring gifts to the altar, and gold to the treasures of the temple, which they hoped to be gainers by. Those who had made gold their hope, and whose eyes were blinded by gifts in secret, were great friends to the Corban; and, gain being their godliness, by a thousand artifices they made religion truckle to their worldly interests. Corrupt church-guides make things to be sin or not sin as it serves their purposes, and lay a much greater stress on that which concerns their own gain than on that which is for God's glory and the good of souls.

(2.) He shows the folly and absurdity of this distinction (v. 17-19); *Ye fools, and blind*. It was in the way of a necessary reproof, not an angry reproach, that Christ called them *fools*. Let it suffice us from the word of wisdom to show the folly of sinful opinions and practices: but, for the fastening of the character upon particular persons, leave that to Christ, who knows what is in man, and has forbidden us to say, *Thou fool*.

To convict them of folly, he appeals to themselves, *Whether is greater, the gold* (the golden vessels and ornaments, or the gold in the treasury) *or the temple that sanctifies the gold; the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift?* Any one will own, *Propter quod aliquid est tale, id est magis tale — That, on account of which any thing is qualified in a particular way, must itself be much more qualified in the same way*. They that sware by the gold of the temple had an eye to it as holy; but what was it that made it holy but the holiness of the temple, to the service of which it was appropriated? And therefore the temple cannot be less holy than the gold, but must be more so; for the less is blessed and sanctified of the better, ^{<REF>}Hebrews

7:7. The temple and altar were dedicated to God fixedly, the gold and gift but secondarily. Christ is our altar (^{<3830>}Hebrews 13:10), our temple (^{<4022>}John 2:21); for it is he that sanctifies all our gifts, and puts an acceptableness in them, ^{<4025>}1 Peter 2:5. Those that put their own works into the place of Christ's righteousness in justification are guilty of the Pharisees' absurdity, who preferred the gift before the altar. Every true Christian is a living temple; and by virtue thereof common things are sanctified to him; *unto the pure all things are pure* (^{<5015>}Titus 1:15), and *the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife*, ^{<4074>}1 Corinthians 7:14.

(3.) He rectifies the mistake (v. 20-22), by reducing all the oaths they had invented to the true intent of an oath, which is, By the name of the Lord: so that though an oath by the temple, or the altar, or heaven, be formally bad, yet it is binding. *Quod fieri non debuit, factum valet* — *Engagements which ought not to have been made, are yet, when made, binding*. A man shall never take advantage of his own fault.

[1.] He that swears by the altar, let him not think to shake off the obligation of it by saying, “The altar is but wood, and stone, and brass;” for his oath shall be construed most strongly against himself; because he was culpable, and so as that the obligation of it may be preserved, *ut res potius valeat quam pereat* — *the obligation being hereby strengthened rather than destroyed*. And therefore an oath by the altar shall be interpreted by it and by all things thereon; for the appurtenances pass with the principal. And, the things thereon being offered up to God, to swear by it and them was, in effect, to call God himself to witness: for it was the altar of God; and he that went to that, went to God, ^{<498>}Psalms 43:4; 26:6.

[2.] He that swears by the temple, if he understand what he does, cannot but apprehend that the ground of such a respect to it, is, not because it is a fine house, but because it is the house of God, dedicated to his service, the place which he has chosen to put his name there; and therefore he swears *by it, and by him that dwells therein*; there he was pleased in a peculiar manner to manifest himself, and give tokens of his presence; so that whoso swears by it, swears by him who had said, *This is my rest, here will I dwell*. Good Christians are God's temples, and the Spirit of God dwells in them (^{<4086>}1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19), and God takes what is done to them as done to himself; he that grieves a gracious soul, grieves it and the Spirit that dwells in it. ^{<4083>}Ephesians 4:30.

[3.] If a man swears by heaven, he sins (⁴⁰⁵⁴Matthew 5:34); yet he shall not therefore be discharged from the obligation of his oath; no, God will make him know that the heaven he swears by, is his throne (²³⁶¹Isaiah 66:1); and he that swears by the throne, appeals to him that sits upon it; who, as he resents the affront done to him in the form of the oath, so he will certainly revenge the greater affront done to him by the violation of it. Christ will not countenance the evasion of a solemn oath, though ever so plausible.

V. They were very strict and precise in the smaller matters of the law, but as careless and loose in the weightier matters, v. 23, 24. They were *partial in the law* (³⁰⁰⁹Malachi 2:9), would pick and choose their duty, according as they were interested or stood affected. Sincere obedience is universal, and he that from a right principle obeys any of God's precepts, will have respect to them all, (⁴¹⁹⁶Psalms 119:6. But hypocrites, who act in religion for themselves, and not for God, will do no more in religion than they can serve a turn by for themselves. The partiality of the scribes and Pharisees appears here, in two instances.

1. They observed smaller duties, but omitted greater; they were very exact in paying tithes, till it came to *mint, anise, and cummin*, their exactness in tithing of which would not cost them much, but would be cried up, and they should buy reputation cheap. The Pharisee boasted of this, *I give tithes of all that I possess*, (⁴²⁸²Luke 18:12. But it is probable that they had ends of their own to serve, and would find their own account in it; for the priests and Levites, to whom the tithes were paid, were in their interests, and knew how to return their kindness. Paying tithes was their duty, and what the law required; Christ tells them they ought not to leave it undone. Note, All ought in their places to contribute to the support and maintenance of a standing ministry: withholding tithes is called *robbing God*, (³⁰⁰⁸Malachi 2:8-10. They that *are taught in the word*, and do not *communicate to them that teach them* that love a cheap gospel, come short of the Pharisee.

But that which Christ here condemns them for, is, that they *omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith*; and their niceness in paying tithes, was, if not to atone before God, yet at least to excuse and palliate to men the omission of those. All the things of God's law are weighty, but those are most weighty, which are most expressive of inward holiness in the heart; the instances of self-denial, contempt of the world, and resignation to God, in which lies the life of religion. Judgment

and mercy toward men, and faith toward God, are the weightier matters of the law, the *good things* which the *Lord our God requires* (³⁰⁸Micah 6:8); to do justly, and love mercy, and humble ourselves by faith to walk with God. This is the obedience which is better than sacrifice or tithe; judgment is preferred before sacrifice, (³¹¹Isaiah 1:11. To be just to the priests in their tithe, and yet to cheat and defraud every body else, is but to mock God, and deceive ourselves. Mercy also is preferred before sacrifice, (³⁰⁶Hosea 6:6. To feed those who *made themselves fat with the offering of the Lord*, and at the same time to shut up the bowels of compassion from a brother or a sister that is naked, and destitute of daily food, to pay tithe-mint to the priest, and to deny a crumb to Lazarus, is to lie open to that judgment without mercy, which is awarded to those who pretended to judgment, and showed no mercy; nor will judgment and mercy serve without faith in divine revelation; for God will be honoured in his truths as well as in his laws.

2. They avoided lesser sins, but committed greater (v. 24); *Ye blind guides*; so he had called them before (v. 16), for their corrupt teaching; here he calls them so for their corrupt living, for their example was leading as well as their doctrine; and in this also they were blind and partial; they *strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel*. In their doctrine they strained at gnats, warned people against every the least violation of the tradition of the elders. In their practice they strained at gnats, heaved at them, with a seeming dread, as if they had a great abhorrence of sin, and were afraid of it in the least instance; but they made no difficulty of those sins which, in comparison with them, were as a camel to a gnat; when they devoured widows' houses, they did indeed *swallow a camel*; when they gave Judas the price of innocent blood, and yet scrupled to put the returned money into the treasury (⁴⁷⁶Matthew 27:6); when they would not go into the judgment-hall, for fear of being defiled, and yet would stand at the door, and cry out against the holy Jesus (⁴⁸⁸John 18:28); when they quarrelled with the disciples for eating with unwashed hands, and yet, for the filling of the Corban, taught people to break the fifth commandment, they strained at gnats, or lesser things, and yet swallowed camels. It is not the scrupling of a little sin that Christ here reprove; if it be a sin, though but a gnat, it must be strained at, but the doing of that, and then swallowing a camel. In the smaller matters of the law to be superstitious, and to be profane in the greater, is the hypocrisy here condemned.

VI. They were all for the outside, and not at all for the inside, of religion. They were more desirous and solicitous to appear pious to men than to approve themselves so toward God. This is illustrated by two similitudes.

1. They are compared to a vessel that is clean washed on the outside, but all dirt within, v. 25, 26. The Pharisees placed religion in that which at best was but a point of decency — the *washing of cups*, ~~(⁴⁰⁷)~~ Mark 7:4. They were in care to eat their meat in clean cups and platters, but made no conscience of getting their meat by extortion, and using it to excess. Now what a foolish thing would it be for a man to wash only the outside of a cup, which is to be looked at, and to leave the inside dirty, which is to be used; so they do who only avoid scandalous sins, that would spoil their reputation with men, but allow themselves in heart-wickedness, which renders them odious to the pure and holy God. In reference to his, observe,

(1.) The practice of the Pharisees; they made clean the outside. In those things which fell under the observation of their neighbours, they seemed very exact, and carried on their wicked intrigues with so much artifice, that their wickedness was not suspected; people generally took them for very good men. But within, in the recesses of their hearts and the close retirements of their lives, they were *full of extortion and excess; of violence and incontinence* (so Dr. Hammond); that is, of injustice and intemperance. While they would seem to be godly, they were neither sober nor righteous. Their *inward part was very wickedness* (~~(⁴⁰⁸)~~ Psalm 5:9); and that we are really, which we are inwardly.

(2.) The rule Christ gives, in opposition to this practice, v. 26. It is addressed to the blind Pharisees. They thought themselves the *seers of the land*, but (~~(⁴⁰⁹)~~ John 9:39) Christ calls them *blind*. Note, those are blind, in Christ's account who (how quick-sighted soever they are in other things) are strangers, and no enemies, to the wickedness of their own hearts; who see not, and hate not, the secret sin that lodgeth there. Self-ignorance is the most shameful and hurtful ignorance, ~~(⁴¹⁰)~~ Revelation 3:17. The rule is, *Cleanse first that which is within*. Note, the principal care of every one of us should be to wash our hearts from wickedness, ~~(⁴¹¹)~~ Jeremiah 4:14. The main business of a Christian lies within, to get cleansed from the *filthiness of the spirit*. Corrupt affections and inclinations, the secret lusts that lurk in the soul, unseen and unobserved, these must first be mortified and subdued. Those sins must be conscientiously abstained from, which the eye of God only is a witness to, who searcheth the heart.

Observe the method prescribed; *Cleanse first that which is within* not that *only*, but that *first*; because, if due care be taken concerning that, the outside will be clean also. External motives and inducements may keep the outside clean, while the inside is filthy; but if renewing, sanctifying grace make clean the inside, that will have an influence upon the outside, for the commanding principle is within. If the heart be well kept, all is well, for *out of it are the issues of life*; the eruptions will vanish of course. If the heart and spirit be made new, there will be a newness of life; here therefore we must begin with ourselves; first cleanse that which is within; we then make sure work, when this is our first work.

2. They are compared to *whited sepulchres*, v. 27, 28.

(1.) They were fair without, like sepulchres, *which appear beautiful outward*. Some make it to refer to the custom of the Jews to whiten graves, only for the notifying of them, especially if they were in unusual places, that people might avoid them, because of the ceremonial pollution contracted by the touch of a grave, ^{<4196>}Numbers 19:16. And it was part of the charge of the overseers of the highways, to repair that whitening when it was decayed. Sepulchres were thus made remarkable, ^{<1236>}2 Kings 23:16, 17. The formality of hypocrites, by which they study to recommend themselves to the world, doth but make all wise and good men the more careful to avoid them, for fear of being defiled by them. *Beware of the scribes*, ^{<4246>}Luke 20:46. It rather alludes to the custom of whitening the sepulchres of eminent persons, for the beautifying of them. It is said here (v. 29), that they *garnished the sepulchres of the righteous*; as it is usual with us to erect monuments upon the graves of great persons, and to strew flowers on the graves of dear friends. Now the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was like the ornaments of a grave, or the dressing up of a dead body, only for show. The top of their ambition was to *appear righteous before men*, and to be applauded and had in admiration by them. But,

(2.) They were *foul* within, like sepulchres, *full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness*: so vile are our bodies, when the soul has deserted them! Thus were they full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Hypocrisy is the worst iniquity of all other. Note, It is possible for those that have their hearts full of sin, to have their lives free from blame, and to appear very good. But what will it avail us, to have the good word of our fellow-servants, if our Master doth not say, *Well done*? When all other graves are opened, these

whited sepulchres will be looked into, and the dead men's bones, and all the uncleanness, shall be *brought out*, and be *spread before all the host of heaven*, ^{<281E>}Jeremiah 8:1, 2. For it is the day when God shall judge, not the shows, but the secrets, of men. And it will then be small comfort to them who shall have their portion with hypocrites, to remember how creditably and plausibly they went to hell, applauded by all their neighbours.

VII. They pretended a deal of kindness for the memory of the prophets that were dead and gone, while they hated and persecuted those that were present with them. This is put last, because it was the blackest part of their character. God is jealous for his honour in his laws and ordinances, and resents it if they be profaned and abused; but he has often expressed an equal jealousy for his honour in his prophets and ministers, and resents it worse if they be wronged and persecuted: and therefore, when our Lord Jesus comes to this head, he speaks more fully than upon any of the other (v. 29-37); for that toucheth his ministers, *toucheth his Anointed*, and toucheth the *apple of his eye*. Observe here,

1. The respect which the scribes and Pharisees pretend for the prophets that were gone, v. 29, 30. This was the varnish, and that in which they outwardly appeared righteous.

(1.) They honoured the relics of the prophets, they built their tombs, and garnished their sepulchres. It seems, the places of their burial were known, David's sepulchre was with them, ^{<412D>}Acts 2:29. There was a title upon the sepulchre of *the man of God* (^{<1227E>}2 Kings 23:17), and Josiah thought it respect enough not to *move his bones*, v. 18. But they would do more, rebuild and beautify them. Now consider this,

[1.] As an instance of honour done to deceased prophets, who, while they lived, were counted as the off-scouring of all things, and had all manner of evil spoken against them falsely. Note, God can extort, even from bad men, an acknowledgment of the honour of piety and holiness. Them that honour God he will honour, and sometimes with those from whom contempt is expected, ^{<1062>}2 Samuel 6:22. *The memory of the just is blessed*, when the names of those that hated and persecuted them shall be covered with shame. The honour of constancy and resolution in the way of duty will be a lasting honour; and those that are manifest to God, will be manifest in the consciences of those about them.

[2.] As an instance of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, who paid their respect to them. Note, Carnal people can easily honour the memories of faithful ministers that are dead and gone, because they do not reprove them, nor disturb them, in their sins. Dead prophets are *seers that see not*, and those they can bear well enough; they do not torment them, as the living witnesses do, that bear their testimony *viva voce* — *with a living voice*, ⁽¹¹¹⁾ Revelation 11:10. They can pay respect to the writings of the dead prophets, which tell them what they *should* be; but not the reproofs of the living prophets, which tell them what they *are*. *Sit divus, modo non sit vivus* — *Let there be saints; but let them not be living here*. The extravagant respect which the church of Rome pays to the memory of saints departed, especially the martyrs, dedicating days and places to their names, enshrining their relics, praying to them, and offering to their images, while they make themselves drunk with the blood of the saints of their own day, is a manifest proof that they not only *succeed*, but *exceed*, the scribes and Pharisees in a counterfeit hypocritical religion, which builds the prophets' tombs, but hates the prophets' doctrine.

(2.) They protested against the murder of them (v. 30); *If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them*. They would never have consented to the silencing of Amos, and the imprisonment of Micaiah, to the putting of Hanani in the stocks, and Jeremiah in the dungeon, to the stoning of Zechariah, the mocking of all the messengers of the Lord, and the abuses put upon his prophets; no, not they, they would sooner have lost their right hands than have done any such thing. *What, is thy servant a dog?* And yet they were at this time plotting to murder Christ, *to whom all the prophets bore witness*. They think, if they had lived in the days of the prophets, they would have heard them gladly and obeyed; and yet they rebelled against the light that Christ brought into the world. But it is certain, a Herod and an Herodias to John the Baptist, would have been an Ahab and a Jezebel to Elijah. Note, The deceitfulness of sinners' hearts appears very much in this, that, while they go down the stream of the sins of their own day, they fancy they should have swum against the stream of the sins of the former days; that, if they had had other people's opportunities, they should have improved them more faithfully; if they had been in other people's temptations, they should have resisted them more vigorously; when yet they improve not the opportunities they have, nor resist the temptations they are in. We are sometimes thinking, if we had lived when Christ was upon earth, how

constantly we would have followed him; we would not have despised and rejected him, as they then did; and yet Christ in his Spirit, in his word, in his ministers, is still no better treated.

2. Their enmity and opposition to Christ and his gospel, notwithstanding, and the ruin they were bringing upon themselves and upon that generation thereby, v. 31-33. Observe here,

(1.) The indictment proved; *Ye are witnesses against yourselves*. Note, Sinners cannot hope to escape the judgment of Christ for want of proof against them, when it is easy to find them witnesses against themselves; and their very pleas will not only be overruled, but turned to their conviction, and *their own tongues shall be made to fall upon them*, ^{<4618>}Psalm 64:8.

[1.] By their own confession, it was the great wickedness of their forefathers, to kill the prophets; so that they knew the fault of it, and yet were themselves guilty of the same fact. Note, They who condemn sin in others, and yet allow the same or worse in themselves, are of all others most inexcusable, ^{<4132>}Romans 1:32-2:1. They knew they ought not to have been partakers with persecutors, and yet were the followers of them. Such self-contradictions now will amount to self-condemnations in the great day. Christ puts another construction upon their building of the tombs of the prophets than what they intended; as if by beautifying their graves they justified their murderers (^{<2118>}Luke 11:48), for they persisted in the sin.

[2.] By their own confession, these notorious persecutors were their ancestors; *Ye are the children of them*. They meant no more than that they were their children by blood and nature; but Christ turns it upon them; that they were so by spirit and disposition; *You are of those fathers, and their lusts you will do*. They are, as you say, *your fathers*, and you *patrizare* — *take after your fathers*; it is the sin that runs in the blood among you. *As your fathers did, so do ye*, ^{<405>}Acts 7:51. They came of a persecuting race, were *a seed of evil doers* (^{<2104>}Isaiah 1:4), *risen up in their fathers' stead*, ^{<4614>}Numbers 32:14. Malice, envy, and cruelty, were bred in the bone with them, and they had formerly espoused it for a principle, to *do as their fathers did*, ^{<2417>}Jeremiah 44:17. And it is observable here (v. 30) how careful they are to mention the relation; “They were *our* fathers, that killed the prophets, and they were men in honour and power, whose sons and successors we are.” If they had detested the wickedness of their ancestors, as they ought to have done, they would not have been so fond to

call them *their fathers*; for it is no credit to be akin to persecutors, though they have ever so much dignity and dominion.

(2.) The sentence passed upon them. Christ here proceeds,

[1.] To give them up to sin as irreclaimable (v. 32); *Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers*. If Ephraim be joined to idols, and hate to be reformed, *let him alone. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still*. Christ knew they were now contriving his death, and in a few days would accomplish it; “Well,” saith he, “go on with your plot, take your curse, walk in the way of your heart and in the sight of your eyes, and see what will come of it. *What thou doest, do quickly*. You will but fill up the measure of guilt, which will then overflow in a deluge of wrath.” Note, *First*, There is a measure of sin to be filled up, before utter ruin comes upon persons and families, churches and nations. God will bear long, but the time will come when he can *no longer forbear*, ^{<2442>}Jeremiah 44:22. We read of the measure of the Amorites that was to be filled (^{<0156>}Genesis 15:16), of the *harvest of the earth being ripe for the sickle* (^{<6145>}Revelation 14:15-19), and of sinners *making an end to deal treacherously*, arriving at a full stature in treachery, ^{<2301>}Isaiah 33:1. *Secondly*, Children fill up the measure of their fathers' sins when they are gone, if they persist in the same or the like. That national guilt which brings national ruin is made up of the sin of many in several ages, and in the successions of societies there is a score going on; for God justly visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children that tread in the steps of it. *Thirdly*, Persecuting Christ, and his people and ministers, is a sin that fills the measure of a nation's guilt sooner than any other. This was it that brought wrath without remedy upon the fathers (^{<1436>}2 Chronicles 36:16), and wrath to the utmost upon the children too, ^{<5106>}1 Thessalonians 2:16. This was that fourth transgression, of which, when added to the other three, the Lord *would not turn away the punishment*, Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13. *Fourthly*, It is just with God to give those up to their own heart's lusts, who obstinately persist in the gratification of them. Those who will run headlong to ruin, let the reins be laid on their neck, and it is the saddest condition a man can be in on this side hell.

[2.] He proceeds to give them up to ruin as irrecoverable, to a personal ruin in the other world (v. 33); *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?* These are strange words to come from the mouth of Christ, into whose lips grace was poured. But he can

and will speak terror, and in these words he explains and sums up the *eight* woes he had denounced against the scribes and Pharisees.

Here is, *First*, Their description; *Ye serpents*. Doth Christ call names? Yes, but this doth not warrant us to do so. He infallibly knew what was in man, and knew them to be subtle as serpents, cleaving to the earth, feeding on dust; they had a specious outside, but were within malignant, had poison under their tongues, the seed of the old serpent. They were a *generation of vipers*; they and those that went before them, they and those that joined with them, were a generation of envenomed, enraged, spiteful adversaries to Christ and his gospel. They loved to be called of men, *Rabbi, rabbi*, but Christ calls them *serpents* and *vipers*; for he gives men their true characters, and delights to put contempt upon the proud.

Secondly, Their doom. He represents their condition as very sad, and in a manner desperate; *How can ye escape the damnation of hell?* Christ himself preached hell and damnation, for which his ministers have often been reproached by those that care not to hear of it. Note,

- 1.** The damnation of hell will be the fearful end of all impenitent sinners. This doom coming from Christ, was more terrible than coming from all the prophets and ministers that ever were, for he is the Judge, into whose hands the keys of hell and death are put, and his saying they were damned, made them so.
- 2.** There is a way of escaping this damnation, this is implied here; some are *delivered from the wrath to come*.
- 3.** Of all sinners, those who are of the spirit of the scribes and Pharisees, are least likely to escape this damnation; for repentance and faith are necessary to that escape; and how will *they* be brought to these, who are so conceited of themselves, and so prejudiced against Christ and his gospel, as they were? How could *they* be healed and saved, who could not bear to have their wound searched, nor the balm of Gilead applied to it? Publicans and harlots, who were sensible of their disease and applied themselves to the Physician, were more likely to escape the damnation of hell than those who, though they were in the high road to it, were confident they were in the way to heaven.

428 MATTHEW 23:34-39

THE GUILT AND DOOM OF JERUSALEM

We have left the blind leaders fallen into the ditch, under Christ's sentence, into the damnation of hell; let us see what will become of the blind followers, of the body of the Jewish church, and particularly Jerusalem.

I. Jesus Christ designs yet to try them with the means of grace; *I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes*. The connection is strange; “*You are a generation of vipers, not likely to escape the damnation of hell;*” one would think it should follow, “*Therefore you shall never have a prophet sent to you any more;*” but no, “*Therefore I will send unto you prophets, to see if you will yet at length be wrought upon, or else to leave you inexcusable, and to justify God in your ruin.*” It is therefore ushered in with a note of admiration, behold! Observe,

1. It is Christ that sends them; *I send*. By this he avows himself to be God, having power to gift and commission prophets. It is an act of kingly office; he sends them as ambassadors to treat with us about the concerns of our souls. After his resurrection, he made this word good, when he said, *So send I you,* 431 John 20:21. Though now he appeared mean, yet he was entrusted with this great authority.

2. He sends them to the Jews first; “*I send them to you.*” They began at Jerusalem; and, wherever they went, they observed this rule, to make the first tender of gospel grace *to the Jews,* 436 Acts 13:46.

3. Those he sends are called *prophets, wise men, and scribes*, Old-Testament names for New-Testament officers; to show that the ministers sent to them now should not be inferior to the prophets of the Old Testament, to Solomon the wise, or Ezra the scribe. The extraordinary ministers, who in the first ages were divinely inspired, were as the prophets commissioned immediately from heaven; the ordinary settled ministers, who were then, and continue in the church still, and will do to the end of time, are as the wise men and scribes, to guide and instruct the people in the things of God. Or, we may take the apostles and evangelists for the prophets and wise men, and the pastors and teachers for the scribes,

instructed to the kingdom of heaven (^{<435>}Matthew 13:52); for the office of a scribe was honourable till the men dishonoured it.

II. He foresees and foretels the ill usage that his messengers would meet with among them; “*Some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and yet I will send them.*” Christ knows beforehand how ill his servants will be treated, and yet sends them, and appoints them their measure of sufferings; yet he loves them never the less for his thus exposing them, for he designs to glorify himself by their sufferings, and them after them; he will counter-balance them, though not prevent them. Observe,

1. The cruelty of these persecutors; *Ye shall kill and crucify them.* It is no less than the blood, the life-blood, that they thirst after; their lust is not satisfied with any thing short of their destruction, (^{<435>}Exodus 15:9. They killed the two James's, crucified Simon the son of Cleophas, and scourged Peter and John; thus did the members partake of the sufferings of the Head, he was killed and crucified, and so were they. Christians must expect to resist unto blood.

2. Their unwearied industry; *Ye shall persecute them from city to city.* As the apostles went from city to city, to preach the gospel, the Jews dodged them, and haunted them, and stirred up persecution against them, (^{<444>}Acts 14:19; 17:13. They that *did not believe in Judea* were more bitter enemies to the gospel than any other unbelievers, (^{<653>}Romans 15:31.

3. The pretence of religion in this; they scourged them in their synagogues, their place of worship, where they kept their ecclesiastical courts; so that they did it as a piece of service to the church; cast them out, and said, *Let the Lord be glorified,* (^{<246>}Isaiah 66:5; (^{<642>}John 16:2.

III. He imputes the sin of their fathers to them, because they imitated it; *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth,* v. 35, 36. Though God bear long with a persecuting generation, he will not bear always; and patience abused, turns into the greatest wrath. The longer sinners have been heaping up treasures of wickedness, the deeper and fuller will the treasures of wrath be; and the breaking of them up will be like breaking up the fountains of the great deep.

Observe,

1. The extent of this imputation; it takes in *all the righteous blood shed upon the earth*, that is, the blood shed for righteousness' sake, which has

all been laid up in God's treasury, and not a drop of it lost, for *it is precious*. ^{<1724>}Psalm 72:14. He dates the account *from the blood of righteous Abel*, thence this *aera martyrum* — *age of martyrs* — commences; he is called *righteous Abel*, for he obtained witness from heaven, that he was *righteous, God testifying of his gifts*. How early did martyrdom come into the world! The first that died, died for his religion, and, *being dead, he yet speaketh*. His blood not only cried against Cain, but continues to cry against all that walk in the way of Cain, and hate and persecute their brother, *because their works are righteous*. He extends it to *the blood of Zacharias, the son of Barachias* (v. 36), not Zecharias the prophet (as some would have it), though he was *the son of Barachias* (^{<3017>}Zechariah 1:1.) nor Zecharias the father of John Baptist, as others say; but, as is most probable, *Zechariah the son of Jehoiada*, who was *slain in the court of the Lord's house*, ^{<1420>}2 Chronicles 24:20, 21. His father is called *Barachias*, which signifies much the same with Jehoiada; and it was usual among the Jews for the same person to have two names; *whom ye slew*, ye of this nation, though not of this generation. This is specified, because the requiring of that is particularly spoken of (^{<1422>}2 Chronicles 24:22), as that of Abel's is. The Jews imagined that the captivity had sufficiently atoned for the guilt; but Christ lets them know that it was not yet fully accounted for, but remained upon the score. And some think that this is mentioned with a prophetic hint, for there was one Zecharias, the son of Baruch, whom Josephus speaks of (*War* 4.335), who was a just and good man, who was killed in the temple a little before it was destroyed by the Romans. Archbishop Tillotson thinks that Christ both alludes to the history of the former Zecharias in *Chronicles*, and foretels the death of this latter in Josephus. Though the latter was not yet slain, yet, before this destruction comes, it would be true that they had slain him; so that all shall be put together from first to last.

2. The effect of it; *All these things shall come*; all the guilt of this blood, all the punishment of it, it shall *all come upon this generation*. The misery and ruin that are coming upon them, shall be so very great, that, though, considering the evil of their own sins, it was less that even those deserved; yet, comparing it with other judgments, it will seem to be a general reckoning for all the wickedness of their ancestors, especially their persecutions, to all which God declared this ruin to have special reference and relation. The destruction shall be so dreadful, as if God had once for all arraigned them for all the righteous blood shed in the world. It shall

come upon this generation; which intimates, that it shall come quickly; some here shall live to see it. Note, The sorer and nearer the punishment of sin is, the louder is the call to repentance and reformation.

IV. He laments the wickedness of Jerusalem, and justly upbraids them with the many kind offers he had made them, v. 37. See with what concern he speaks of that city; *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* The repetition is emphatical, and bespeaks abundance of commiseration. A day or two before Christ had wept over Jerusalem, now he sighed and groaned over it. Jerusalem, *the vision of peace* (so it signifies), must now be the seat of war and confusion. Jerusalem, that had been *the joy of the whole earth*, must now be *a hissing, and an astonishment, and a by-word*; Jerusalem, that has been *a city compact together*, shall now be shattered and ruined by its own intestine broils. Jerusalem, *the place that God has chosen to put his name there*, shall now be abandoned to the spoil and the robbers, ^{<200>}Lamentations 1:1, 4:1. But wherefore will the Lord do all this to Jerusalem? Why? *Jerusalem hath grievously sinned*, ^{<200>}Lamentations 1:8.

1. She persecuted God's messengers; *Thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee*. This sin is especially charged upon Jerusalem; because there the Sanhedrim, or great council, sat, who took cognizance of church matters, and therefore a prophet could not perish but in Jerusalem, ^{<213>}Luke 13:33. It is true, they had not now a power to put any man to death, but they killed the prophets in popular tumults, mobbed them, as Stephen, and put the Roman powers on to kill them. At Jerusalem, where the gospel was first preached, it was first persecuted (^{<400>}Acts 8:1), and that place was the head-quarters of the persecutors; thence warrants were issued out to other cities, and thither the saints were brought bound, ^{<400>}Acts 9:2. *Thou stonest them*: that was a capital punishment, in use only among the Jews. By the law, false prophets and seducers were to *be stoned* (^{<630>}Deuteronomy 13:10), under colour of which law, they put the true prophets to death. Note, It has often been the artifice of Satan, to turn that artillery against the church, which was originally planted in the defence of it. Brand the true prophets as seducers, and the true professors of religion as heretics and schismatics, and then it will be easy to persecute them. There was abundance of other wickedness in Jerusalem; but this was the sin that made the loudest cry, and which God had an eye to more than any other, in bringing that ruin upon them, as ^{<224>}2 Kings 24:4; ^{<436>}2 Chronicles 36:16. Observe, Christ speaks in the

present tense; *Thou killest, and stonest*; for all they had done, and all they would do, was present to Christ's notice.

2. She refused and rejected Christ, and gospel offers. The former was a sin *without* remedy, this *against* the remedy. Here is,

(1.) The wonderful grace and favour of Jesus Christ toward them; *How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings!* Thus kind and condescending are the offers of gospel grace, even to Jerusalem's children, bad as she is, the inhabitants, the little ones not excepted.

[1.] The favour proposed was the gathering of them. Christ's design is to gather poor souls, gather them in from their wanderings, gather them home to himself, as the Centre of unity; for *to him must the gathering of the people be*. He would have taken the whole body of the Jewish nation into the church, and so gathered them all (as the Jews used to speak of proselytes) *under the wings of the Divine Majesty*. It is here illustrated by a humble similitude; *as a hen clucks her chickens together*. Christ would have gathered them, *First*, With such a tenderness of affection as the hen does, which has, by instinct, a peculiar concern for her young ones. Christ's gathering of souls, comes from his love, ^(281B) Jeremiah 31:3. *Secondly*, For the same end. *The hen gathered her chickens under her wings*, for protection and safety, and for warmth and comfort; poor souls have in Christ both refuge and refreshment. The chickens naturally run to the hen for shelter, when they are threatened by the birds of prey; perhaps Christ refers to that promise (^(390A) Psalm 91:4), *He shall cover thee with his feathers*. There is *healing under Christ's wings* (^(391E) Malachi 4:2); that is more than the hen has for her chickens.

[2.] The forwardness of Christ to confer this favour. His offers are, *First*, Very free; *I would have done it*. Jesus Christ is truly willing to receive and save poor souls that come to him. He desires not their ruin, he delights in their repentance. *Secondly*, Very frequent; *How often!* Christ often came up to Jerusalem, preached, and wrought miracles there; and the meaning of all this, was, he would have gathered them. He keeps account how often his calls have been repeated. As often as we have heard the sound of the gospel, as often as we have felt the strivings of the Spirit, so often Christ would have gathered us.

[3.] Their wilful refusal of this grace and favour; *Ye would not*. How emphatically is their obstinacy opposed to Christ's mercy! I would, and *ye would not*. He was willing to save them, but they were not willing to be saved by him. Note, It is wholly owing to the wicked wills of sinners, that they are not gathered under the wings of the Lord Jesus. They did not like the terms upon which Christ proposed to gather them; they loved their sins, and yet trusted to their righteousness; they would not submit either to the grace of Christ or to his government, and so the bargain broke off.

V. He reads Jerusalem's doom (v. 38, 39); *Therefore behold your house is left unto you desolate*. Both the city and the temple, God's house and their own, all shall be laid waste. But it is especially meant of the temple, which they boasted of, and trusted to; that holy mountain because of which they were so haughty. Note, they that will not be gathered by the love and grace of Christ shall be consumed and scattered by his wrath; *I would, and you would not*. *Israel would none of me, so I gave them up*, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 81:11, 12.

1. Their house shall be *deserted*; *It is left unto you*. Christ was now departing from the temple, and never came into it again, but by this word abandoned it to ruin. They doated on it, would have it to themselves; Christ must have no room or interest there. "Well," saith Christ, "it is left to you; take it, and make your best of it; I will never have any thing more to do with it." They had made it *a house of merchandise, and a den of thieves*, and so it is left to them. Not long after this, the voice was heard in the temple, "Let us depart hence." When Christ went, *Ichabod, the glory departed*. Their city also was left to them, destitute of God's presence and grace; he was no longer *a wall of fire about them, nor the glory in the midst of them*.

2. It shall be *desolate*; *It is left unto you desolate*; it is left *eremos* — a wilderness.

(1.) It was immediately, when Christ left it, in the eyes of all that understood themselves, a very dismal melancholy place. Christ's departure makes the best furnished, best replenished place a wilderness, though it be the temple, the chief place of concourse; for what comfort can there be where Christ is not? Though there may be a crowd of other contentments, yet, if Christ's special spiritual presence be withdrawn, that soul, that

place, is *become a wilderness, a land of darkness, as darkness itself*. This comes of men's rejecting Christ, and driving him away from them.

(2.) It was, not long after, destroyed and ruined, and *not one stone left upon another*. The lot of Jerusalem's enemies will now become Jerusalem's lot, *to be made of a city a heap, of a defenced city a ruin* (^{230D}Isaiah 25:2), *a lofty city laid low, even to the ground*, ^{230E}Isaiah 26:5. The temple, that holy and beautiful house, became desolate. When God goes out, all enemies break in.

Lastly, Here is the final farewell that Christ took of them and their temple; *Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh*. This bespeaks,

1. His departure from them. The time was at hand, when *he should leave the world, to go to his Father*, and be seen no more. *After his resurrection, he was seen only by a few chosen witnesses*, and they saw him not long, but he soon removed to the invisible world, and there will be *till the time of the restitution of all things*, when his welcome at his first coming will be repeated with loud acclamations; *Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. Christ will not be seen again till he *come in the clouds, and every eye shall see him* (⁶⁰⁰Revelation 1:7); and then, even they, who, when time was, rejected and pierced him, will be glad to come in among his adorers; then every knee shall bow to him, even those that had bowed to Baal; and even the workers of iniquity will then cry, *Lord, Lord*, and will own, when his wrath is kindled, that *blessed are all they that put their trust in him*. Would we have our lot in that day with those that say, *Blessed is he that cometh*? let us be with them now, with them that truly worship, and truly welcome, Jesus Christ.

2. Their continued blindness and obstinacy; *Ye shall not see me*, that is, not see me to be the Messiah (for otherwise they did see him upon the cross), not see the light of the truth concerning me, nor *the things that belong to your peace, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh*. They will never be convinced, till Christ's second coming convince them, when it will be too late to make an interest in him, and nothing will remain *but a fearful looking for of judgment*. Note,

(1.) Wilful blindness is often punished with judicial blindness. If they *will not see, they shall not see*. With this word he concludes his public preaching. *After his resurrection*, which was *the sign of the prophet Jonas*,

they should have no other sign given them, till they should *see the sign of the Son of man*, ⁽²³⁾ Matthew 24:30.

(2.) When *the Lord comes with ten thousand of his saints*, he will convince all, and will force acknowledgments from the proudest of his enemies, of his being the Messiah, and even *they shall be found liars to him*. They that would not now come at his call, shall then be forced to depart with his curse. The chief priests and scribes were displeased with the children for crying *hosanna* to Christ; but the day is coming, when proud persecutors would gladly be found in the condition of the meanest and poorest they now trample upon. They who now reproach and ridicule the hosannas of the saints will be of another mind shortly; it were therefore better to be of that mind now. Some make this to refer to the conversion of the Jews to the faith of Christ; then they shall see him, and own him, and say, *Blessed is he that cometh*; but it seems rather to look further, for the complete manifestation of Christ, and conviction of sinners, are reserved to be the glory of the last day.