

Brotherhood of Believers 1-1-06

Matthew 23:1-12 (NIV)

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. ³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶ they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' ⁸ "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. ⁹ And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus had just answered the religious leaders of His day. They threw their best trick questions at Him and received answers that silenced them. Then Jesus posed a question to them. (Matthew 22:45) The question was meant to help them understand that the Messiah would be all God and all man. They had no answer. (Matthew 22:46) ¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: This was His last public address. It was a warning not to emulate the religious leaders of that day. I believe it was one last attempt to shake the religious leaders' sense of what was pleasing to God and help them see God's perspective.

² "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Moses' seat was a stone chair in which the teacher in the synagogue would sit. One such chair from the first century was found in the ruins of Chorazin, a city Jesus preached in. Sitting in that chair meant they were expounding the Laws of Moses with authority. Notice that the Scriptures say that they sit there. They were not given the chair or directed to sit there; they chose to claim that authority. We use the word today in our educational system. I have a friend who chairs the chemistry department at the University of Arizona. In other words, she is the authority for that department.

The Pharisees were by far the most influential religious group at that time. Many of them were scribes. The scribes were teachers of the Law, being so familiar with it through copying it repeatedly. Their claiming Moses' seat for themselves was indication of their lack of real authority. You will recall that the people could recognize this. (Matthew 7:29) When Jesus taught, they knew He had authority that the Scribes and Pharisees did not possess. You can claim the position but the people can sense the lack of anointing.

³ So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. Because they speak about the Law, Jesus said, you should do what they are telling you. Now that is quite a statement, for we have seen how they often taught many strange extensions of the Law. Though

Commented [notes1]: 45 If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"
Matthew 22:45 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 46 No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.
Matthew 22:46 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.
Matthew 7:29 (NIV)

Jesus did condemn some particular points of their teaching, in general, He told the people that they should do as taught. Remember that they could add nothing and had to teach accepted doctrine unless they were a rabbi with authority. The Law was still in affect. Jesus had not yet been slain as the Lamb of God. The Spirit was not yet poured out. Until then, they had the guidelines of the Law. (Ephesians 2:14-15)

His warning was that people not follow the example of these teachers. Though their teaching was generally correct, their actions did not come in line with their teaching. He had called them actors before, (Matthew 6:2) and now He was clearly telling the people not to follow their bad examples. They do not practice what they preach.

I wonder, if Jesus were here today walking among us, would He say the same thing about many religious leaders and Christians today. The worst example we could possibly be is to speak the truth, tell others what is right, and then not back it up with our lives. We tell others that God deserves first place in our lives, but when they look at us, is that what they see us demonstrating? (Matthew 22:37) Is He first in our finances, first in our priorities, and first in our desires? We declare Him to be the only One worthy of worship, and yet, do they see us worshipping material things? This week as I was reading Deuteronomy, I saw God instructing us to talk about the word when we lie down and when we get up. (Deuteronomy 11:19) I am convicted that I do not do that more. God expects the Word to dominate our thought life. May God help us to practice what we preach! Our lives must line up with our teaching.

We have been watching the cultural war on Christmas in our nation. We feel that increasing pressure not to use Jesus' name. Do you think people would be so opposed to us if our actions lined up with our words? Voice of the Martyrs reported that in Pakistan's hard hit earthquake region, some of the mosque leaders were opening their arms to Christian relief workers and even Christian literature in their mosques because "...in our difficult time, the Christians have been supporting us with tents, food packages, blankets, medical camps and Action Packs. With this concern and good behavior, we are sure that 'heaven' is your treasure." Real Christians practice what they preach and that is the greatest testimony we could teach. I believe the expression, "People will never care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Not only do false leaders lack true anointing, but they lack integrity. They do not want their life to be closely examined. They do not invite you in to look at how they live. In contrast, when approached by John's disciples, Jesus said, "Come and see." (John 1:39) Anointed leaders live open lives of integrity.

Jesus went on to say, ⁴ *They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.* False leaders are unconcerned about their flock. They are calloused to the burdens they place upon them. Imagine being told that it was only your good works and obedience to hundreds of rules that would make you pleasing to God. Jesus was comparing it to some overloaded beast of burden driven mercilessly along by a heartless owner who carried nothing. It can happen today as well. Instead of inviting people to be led of the Spirit of God, we often start laying down rules and formulas for people. Instead of inviting them to a life of freedom in Christ, we show them the drudgery of religiosity.

Commented [notes4]: 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,
15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.
Ephesians 2:14-15 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 2 "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
Matthew 6:2 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."
Matthew 22:37 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
Deuteronomy 11:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 39 "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour.
John 1:39 (NIV)

What a contrast to Jesus who declared, *"Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:28-30 Instead of all the demands of the law and all the rules about how to keep those demands, Jesus offered Himself. Friends, the only way to please God is the life of Jesus. God said, *"With Him I am well pleased"* (2 Peter 1:17) and Jesus offers His righteousness to you. Come to Jesus. Instead of loading you with burdens, He offers to take your burden.

⁵ *"Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; What a warning Jesus has for us here. We have the same temptation since we are people of like nature. We want people to respect us, so we do things that we think they will admire. Instead of being motivated by the love of God and a desire to please Him, we give in to a self-promoting display of hypocrisy for the praise of men. The Pharisees were experts at it. They stood on street corners to pray. (Luke 18:11) Some even wore a list of their good deeds on their shoulder. They would put ashes on their faces and make painful expressions when they fasted. It was all for the approval of men, and it worked. Most Jews thought a Pharisee was as religious and pleasing to God as one could possibly be. Jesus said, "They love the praise of man more than the praise of God." John 12:43*

Phylactery (*tefallin*) were small leather boxes strapped to the forehead and arm in which four Scriptures were placed. Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21. It comes from the instruction of God to Moses in Deuteronomy 6:8 *Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* It seems obvious from the context of the passage that this was a symbolic statement that implied God was to be in all their thoughts and actions. About four centuries before Christ, they began to take it literally. Did Jesus wear a *tefallin*? It is quite possible. In every outward way, Jesus followed most of the customs of His day. Why wouldn't He, unless it dishonored God in some way? He wanted to connect with the people. Excessive separation from the culture would limit the ability of the people to hear Him.

Notice that in this passage what Jesus is condemning is how they made wide *tefallin*, not that they wore them. This goes along with their desire to be seen. In Qumran, a 13X20 millimeter *tefallin* was discovered. It still had the four texts neatly tied within. It would hardly be visible on the headband, small enough to be covered by a postage stamp. The purpose was to remind them that the law should be on their mind. But the purpose of a three-inch wide phylactery is to tell everyone that you are spiritual.

Then He rebuked them for making their tassels long. The four corners of the outer covering were tied into tassels in such a way as to remind them of the Torah. Though we cannot be certain that Jesus wore a *tefallin*, we know that He wore the customary tassels. (Luke 8:44) ³⁷ *The LORD said to Moses,* ³⁸ *"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. Numbers 15:37-38 (NIV) The Hebrew word is tzitzit. Orthodox Jews today wear the tzitzit on the corners of their prayer shawl. There was a tradition in that day that the Messiah's tassel would have the*

Commented [notes9]: 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 2 Peter 1:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. Luke 18:11 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: 1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal." 3 Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. 4 Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. 5 When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites--the land he swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey--you are to observe this ceremony in this month: 6 For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. 7 Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. 8 On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' 9 This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. 10 You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year. Exodus 13:1-10 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 11 "After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, 12 you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. 13 Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons. 14 "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' 16 And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand." Exodus 13:11-16 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 13 So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul-- 14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. 15 I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. 16 Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. 17 Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. 18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. 21 So that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD is giving you. [1]

power to heal. That is why the woman with the issue of blood reached out to touch His tassel, (Matthew 9:20) sometimes translated "hem". She was expressing her conviction that He was the Messiah.

Commented [notes15]: 20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.
Matthew 9:20 (NIV)

I want us to consider this for a moment. Sometimes these laws of the Old Testament seem arbitrary to us, but they are rich with significance. In antiquity, tassels were a sign of nobility. It was as if they were wearing a royal robe. The blue dye was rare, expensive and used for the priestly robes. Remember that God told the people of Israel that He wanted to make them a kingdom of priests. (Exodus 19:6) Peter says that we are a royal priesthood. (1 Peter 2:9) In wearing the tassels, they were reminded that God set them apart. The tassels were knotted in a way to remind them about the Law, and the dangling threads represented each of the 613 laws. It was the national uniform to remind them that they were a kingdom of priests. It was a witness of their faith. Every time they dressed, it should have reminded them that they were to be God's representatives to the world around them. They were to show how God expected people to live.

Commented [notes16]: 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
Exodus 19:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

What if we were required to wear a *tzitzi*? We often try to go incognito, trying to blend in, but what if God asked us to wear a uniform? Whether we do or not, we are a nation of priests. We should always be wearing the fruits of the Spirit when step out into the world. (Galatians 5:22-23) That should be our priestly blue thread that tells the world we are representing our Lord Jesus. We are either drawing people to Him or repelling them. Like the Pharisees, we can display our faith and not live it, or we can let others see that we are Jesus' servants as we minister to them with His love. (1 Peter 2:12)

Commented [notes18]: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

⁶ *they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;* Jesus instructed His disciples to take the lowest seat, to humble themselves, and know that God would exalt them when it was time. (Matthew 18:4) The Pharisees were always vying for the most honorable seat. How contrary to what Jesus taught! The desire for recognition is a powerful influence. Only when we truly know who we are in Christ can we break free from it. Then we have no need to vie with people over respect of others. We know we have the honor that comes from God alone. This lust for honor often manifests itself in the form of titles.

Commented [notes20]: 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 18:4 (NIV)

⁷ *they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'*⁸ "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. They love the titles that come with the position they have worked for. Rabbi would be comparable to saying, "My great one" or "My honorable sir". It was a position earned through much study. It is difficult not to use titles. Titles often recognize the role given in an organization. What was wrong was their love for the honor that the title afforded them. Instead, Jesus was saying, you should recognize that the real Master is God. He is the great One. He is the honorable One. We are all in the same boat as servants of the great One. The title of your role may be different, but we are not above one another. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

We struggle with this issue today. Some want to elevate the pastor to supreme ruler of the congregation. The Scripture does say to honor your elders (plural) (1 Thessalonians 5:12)

Commented [notes21]: 12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.
1 Thessalonians 5:12 (NIV)

and consider those who minister the Word of God to you worthy of double honor, and yet, they are just another part of the body. (1 Timothy 5:17) (1 Corinthians 12:22-25) The respect is given because of Christ in the person, not the instrument. Jesus did not leave it there. He made it even clearer.

⁹ *And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.* Well, I do not think I need to elaborate. God is jealous of His titles. We should not give them to men lest we tempt them to think more highly of themselves than they ought. Jesus even takes it a step further.

¹⁰ *Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.* What is Jesus getting at by telling us to drop all these titles? They were titles that the Pharisees took pride in. They were ways of stealing the glory from God. Credit must go to whom it is due. It goes to God who is our Great One, our Father, and our Teacher. How easily we are caught up in seeking titles of respect. Listen to this common phrase. "I need to make a name for myself." Excuse me? For whom? What we are saying is I want the respect and recognition of man to feed my ego and advance my authority. That is the way of the world, not the Kingdom way.

¹¹ *The greatest among you will be your servant.* Now that put the Pharisee's mind set on its head. They wanted to be served and honored. If we use the title Pastor, then, let us use it in the sense of servant, not a superior, but as one calling within the body. It simply means shepherd. The respect goes to the Lord who anoints the instrument. Is the janitor greater than the pastor? We are all brothers. We all err. We all need Jesus to head up the church. (Ephesians 1:22-23) We need pastors, just as we need janitors. We need administrators and helpers. We need each other. The Christ-like church is one in which the body is not vying for position, but seeking ways to serve one another. I serve you by sharing the word. Some of you serve by feeding those in need, others by working with your hands, someone comes and makes sure there are envelopes and pencils each Sunday morning, and someone else makes coffee. Someone directs outreach productions, while others perform in them. Some greet and others follow up on those with needs. We are together to serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13) Does that sound like a great church or what! That is because it is Jesus idea of how His body is to function.

¹² *For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* So if someone wants to be the exalted Pharisee, hungry for a title and recognition, let them beware. God knows how to humble us. This is an eternal truth. God keeps His word. If we are a church that humbles ourselves, we can know that God will exalt little Wayside Chapel in His time. That is His word as well. It is so much nicer to be a church of love and service than one of power and position. Amen? May God help us to continually humble ourselves and serve one another in love! Jesus vision for the body of believers was not to have some elevated leader that all followed blindly with great reverence, but a group of loving caring people that recognize Christ in one another. Have you found your place of service? Are you investing your talents for the glory of God? How can you humbly serve in 2006?

Commented [notes22]: 17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.
1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.
1 Corinthians 12:22-25 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.
Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 13 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love.
Galatians 5:13 (NIV)

13 So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul-- 14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. 15 I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. 16 Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. 17 Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. 18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (NIV)