

## Putting the Pendulum to Rest (Matthew 23)

### Introduction:

- 1) If we were to look at a pattern of false teaching in the history of Christianity, we would notice a strangely recurring phenomenon. For instance, one of the biggest false teachings faced by the church of the first century was Judaistic teaching, which was an effort made by Jewish Christians to bind the Law on Gentile converts. In many cases the leadership of the church was in the member of the assembly who took initiative to get his own ideas across. However, after about 500 years, the power of the church was not rested in local congregations at all, but in one central location: the bishop of Rome (later the pope). Before long, the authority of church matters and Christianity rested completely in the church, not in the Bible at all, whether New Testament or Old. In the 1500's, people like Martin Luther and John Calvin challenged Catholic doctrines. One of these was that everyone had to come to the Catholic church in order to know the gospel. Luther and Calvin reversed this to the point that many of their followers embraced open fellowship between religious groups regardless of the error they taught.
- 2) We can understand why some of these changes are made in society and in Christianity. Something about the present situation is disgusting or repulsive to that generation, and they make the decision to avoid that situation at all costs. They set themselves apart and swing to the opposite side of the spectrum. As a result, the whole group slowly follows, and before long others are disgusted and it shifts back to the other side. This is called a "Pendulum Shift."
- 3) A pendulum on a clock shifts back and forth and does not come to a stopping place. It just goes from left to right. We need to be careful in our society (especially among religious groups) to not let their liberal ways force us to push further to the conservative side. Remember that Jesus spent far more time rebuking extreme conservatives than he did liberals. The Pharisees were strict, and they kept the Law as best as they thought possible. They even made their own rules around the Law in order to keep them from even coming close to breaking a commandment. Then they tried to force others to keep their rules along with the Law. We have record throughout the gospels where Jesus condemned them. Therefore we must be careful to not follow their example. We need to stop this pendulum swing in the church and find a stopping place where the truth is: the standard—scripture. We need to bind only what the Bible binds, and nothing more. We need to loose only what the Bible looses, and nothing more. The Bible is our standard. Today's lesson is focused on how we can prevent ourselves from becoming Pharisees.

### Discussion:

- I. The first thing that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for was their lack of practicing what they preached.
  - a. Matthew 23:1-12
    - i. They taught the truth. They did some good works. They were always in the synagogues and they fellowshiped often.

- ii. But they would not keep what they taught. They bound burdens on men that they themselves would not try to bear. They did good works in order to be a good example, and not in order to serve others or Christ.
- iii. If we are going to be great Christians, we are going to be servants. Not those who teach others to be servants, but those who show others how to be servants. Many Christians “will not lift a finger” to help those who are in need or to help the gospel to be sent to somewhere else. They want to take care of themselves and their own. As in Steven’s lesson today, we are going to keep #1 first, but we need to be sure that we are not #1, but Christ and his work are #1.
- iv. All too often in the church you may hear someone complain about a Bible class at church, or how the youth group never goes out to do things together, but the person who is dissatisfied is not willing to step in and say, “Let me help.” The truth about Bible classes is that it is a struggle for us to have enough teachers for classes. The truth about the youth group is that they are doing great things together that serve a great spiritual purpose; but if you want the youth group to go bowling or to a sporting event, offer to take them. You will quickly see that your work does not go unrewarded.

II. Another thing Jesus condemned them for was that they taught without having understanding.

- a. They were teaching others to do things that they could not do. They prevented others from entering the kingdom of heaven. They blinded people from the truth. Thus they were blind leaders of the blind.
- b. We often wonder why no one is out teaching the gospel in our communities. We come up with reasons why no one is doing it, and we normally say, “The community is not interested.” “I can’t teach.” “I don’t have time.” These three reasons are all related to the real reason why no one is teaching: “I don’t want to.”
  - i. We don’t want the responsibility of teaching someone else the gospel.
    - 1. This sounds like a parable in the New Testament: the parable of the talents. The one-talent man returned his talent to his master, but he did not go out and bring in more. Why? He was afraid and did not want to be responsible for that talent in case he lost it.
    - 2. This servant was not praised for making a good decision. He was not pampered for being afraid to do it. He was called a wicked and lazy slave, and as a result he was punished. If we are letting fear or lack of initiative prevent us from teaching the gospel, our fate will be no different.
  - ii. We are not spiritually strong enough to be a good teacher of the gospel.
    - 1. We sometimes look at this as a viable excuse from teaching, because we need to leave it up to someone who is trained in the gospel. We often expect the preacher to take care of this duty. This is not the case. A preacher equips you with the tools and knowledge needed to evangelize. The preacher does not do it for you. That is a major reason why preachers stand in pulpits across

the world Sunday after Sunday. Once one is a Christian he needs to study how to teach the gospel to others.

2. In Hebrews 5:12-6:12 we are told that we need to be teachers of the word. The audience of Hebrews is reprimanded for not being skilled enough with the word of God to teach it. The letter to the Hebrews was probably written before 70 A.D., so the church had only existed for probably less than 40 years. Thus if these Hebrews were supposed to be skilled enough to teach (and they had less than 40 years of having heard it), we are supposed to as well.
    - a. Notice something else from Hebrews 6.
      - i. We focus a lot of our attention on repentance, baptism, and other things, and these are called “elementary principles” and “foundation.”
      - ii. These things are necessities for Christianity, yes, but they are not the end—Most teenagers could understand what baptism is and what repentance from past works is. Why is it, then, that many of us do not stretch our understanding of the Bible as we get older?
      - iii. We need to be students of the Bible until the day we die. We have no excuse not to study, and we are commanded to teach the gospel, which we will only know if we study.
    - iii. We do not have time because we do not set it aside to teach the gospel.
- III. The third thing that he condemned them for was that they had their priorities mixed up.
- a. They tithed, they upheld the prophets that were before them, and they looked like good examples.
  - b. However, they neglected weightier matters of the law.
    - i. Righteousness, mercy, and faith are more important than how much we give and what others think about us.
    - ii. Many times we have our priorities out of order as well, because we try to make sure we are dressed our “Sunday best,” and we neglect the fact that God wants our hearts to be right more than he wants us in a suit and tie. There is nothing wrong with dressing up, but dressing up is not the reason we are here. We need to keep in mind the words of Christ: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me.”

### **Conclusion:**

1. If we are going to stop this pendulum swing in the church today, we are going to have to set aside everything that keeps us from accepting the truth of scripture and that keeps others from seeing the truth in us.
  - a. We need to practice what we preach.
  - b. We need to be so skilled with the word that we can teach others.
  - c. We need to set our priorities straight.