

# Woe to Ungodly Leaders

Matthew 23:13-33

Halifax: 5 November 2006

## Introduction:

Last week we looked at the first 12 verses of Matthew 23.

- In these verses,
  - Jesus began to warn His disciples and the multitude about the great danger of following the example of the scribes and Pharisees...
  - The scribes and Pharisees were indeed the official teachers and expounders of Moses who sat in Moses seat...
    - They were entrusted with the precious oracles of God to deliver to the people.
    - They had the promises, the covenants, the service, and the law of the living God.
    - The word of God was very very near to them...even on their lips...
      - but instead of receiving it, these wicked men continually resisted it!
      - God had made them a fountain of truth, but they did not drink
        - Their hearts were as hard as stone.
- As long as God's people drank from the fountain of God's word, they would be blessed...
  - But sadly, there is always a tendency to follow bad example rather than good counsel...
  - Therefore Jesus is urging the multitude, saying,
    - Matthew 23:3: Whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.
  - We looked at three maxims of false leaders to avoid...
    1. First, the maxim that godliness consists primarily in the observance of rituals
    2. Second, the maxim that what other people think of you is extremely important.
    3. Third, the maxim that man is, at least in part, the source of truth.
  - Jesus gives this warning to the multitude and to His disciples...

But as He thinks about the behaviour of this wicked leaders,

- and the affect that their example and false doctrine has on His people,
  - He becomes more and more grieved...
    - to see these wicked hypocritical leaders devouring the flock of God that has been entrusted to their care!

- When we get to verse 13; where we pick up today, Jesus has become deeply stirred...
  - He is passionate with both sorrow and anger!
  - He stops addressing the multitude and begins to address these wicked leaders themselves!
    - Seven times He calls them hypocrites...
    - twice He calls them blind guides...
    - He calls them robbers, and fools, and serpents and a brood of vipers...
      - He holds nothing back!
  - Eight times, He addresses them with the words “Woe to you.”
    - “Woe” is an exclamation of both pity and anger that was used by the prophets when they saw the wretched condition of a people in rebellion against God.
    - In the language of the Jews, it is a guttural groan...
      - *ywh hoh’ee*
      - It is a declaration of the wretchedness of vile men about to be judged.
        - It is to say,
          - “How wretched you are!”
          - “How miserable and how despicable is your condition!”
          - *κ1-ywa hoh’ee l’cha*, (Woe to you) Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

Today we will look at the reasons for all these *κ1-ywa hoh’ee l’cha* (Woe to you)

- We will look the question,
  - “Why does our LORD look with such disdain upon these men?”
- Brothers and sisters, as I study this passage,
  - I am convinced that we do not groan enough about the wicked Christian leaders of our own day!
    - The sentiment of our Lord against evil is not our sentiment.
    - We are far too cavalier about it all!
    - We have absorbed too much of the spirit of this age that refuses to call a spade a spade...
      - and too little of the Spirit of Jesus that passionately condemns wicked hypocrisy!
  - We often feel that we must apologise for Jesus’ harsh words toward the respected leaders of His day...

- But I tell you that instead of apologising,
  - we need to understand how appropriate and fitting His words are...
  - and how He would speak the very same way to hypocritical leaders in our own city if He were alive today.
    - I don't mean to say that we should each take it upon ourselves to rebuke them—it is not our place to do so...
      - but we need to think the way our Lord teaches us to think about such men.
      - They are still with us—they are in the church—and Jesus assessment is still the same.

First of all, then, see that...

### **I. Jesus pronounces woe on false leaders because they devour God's flock.**

- *hoh'ee l'cha* Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

A. God had, in His providence, appointed the scribes and Pharisees to shepherd His people.

1. As we saw last week, the Lord had put them in Moses' seat...
  - From that seat, they had the privilege and responsibility to teach the people that God they were His very own people, a holy nation to the LORD.
  - They were entrusted with the oracles of God,
    - given His very Word to teach to the people.
  - They were to set before them the promises and the law and the glory of God so that God's people might serve Him in true faith and assurance.
    - In those oracles, (the scriptures),
      - God had promised that He would forgive His people's sins and that He would write His law in their hearts so that they would serve Him forever.
      - The Scribes and Pharisees were to point the people to look to God for these things that He had promised,
        - and to guide them into new lives that were transformed by His grace and filled with rejoicing in His forgiveness.
2. When Jesus came into the world and declared that God's kingdom had come,
  - a. He meant that all those promises of God were now to be fulfilled in Him!
    - He had come, as John presented Him, to be the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of world!

- He was, as He Himself said, the bread of God that came down from heaven to give life to the world.
- b. The Scribes and Pharisees, being those who knew the word of God and the promises of God, and who were entrusted to impart these to the people,
- should have immediately rejoiced at the appearing of Jesus and His announcement that the kingdom of God had come!
    - They should have told the people,
      - “Here is the one we have told you about for all these years. He has come to save the world. Come to Him and find life.”
      - “Here is the one who can wash away your sins...”
      - “Here is the one who can take away all you guilt...”
      - “Here is the One who can give you His Spirit to change your life that the prophets spoke about.”

TRANS> Oh what a privileged place these men were in to be the heralds of the glad tidings...

- to stand at the door way to God’s kingdom and to tell the people that “This is the One God promised!”
- They were in the same position that every Christian leader is in today who expounds God’s word!
  - He has been entrusted with gospel of God’s grace.

B. But what did these shepherds of God’s flock do instead?

1. Instead of standing at the door and pointing people to Jesus,
  - a. They did all they could to block up the entrance!
    - They tried to discredit Jesus before the people...
    - When someone showed interest in following Him, they ridiculed that person and threatened to put him out of the Synagogue...
    - And they asked them questions like, “Have any of the scribes or Pharisees accepted Him?”
  - b. And when they saw that some people were still wanting to follow Jesus and that they were unable to discredit Him,
    - They began to make plans as to how they might destroy Him.
    - They did not want anyone to come to Him for the salvation that God had promised.

TRANS> This is what the ones who had been entrusted to care for God’s flock did.

- As Jesus puts it in verse 13,
  - they “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men,”
  - do not go in themselves,
  - and do not allow those who are entering to go in!
  
- No wonder Jesus said *ywh hoh'ee* to you Scribes and Pharisees!
  - What could be worse than to shut people out of God’s kingdom when God has called you to open the door to them!
  
- 2. What was wrong with these shepherds?
  - a. The same thing that is wrong with every man...
    - Our hearts are desperately wicked!
    - In these men, the depravity of man is clearly displayed.
  
  - b. They are true representatives of what God’s people have always been until they are born again...
    - 1) They were so proud and so full of malice toward God that even when His full forgiveness and redemption was offered to them,
      - They in effect said, “Anything but that!”
      - The last thing they wanted to do was admit that they were defiled and ruined by sin and needed to be cleansed with a cleansing that none but the Son of God could give.
        - Repentance and faith were not acceptable terms with them!
        - They did not mind trusting God to do good to them, but they minded very much trusting Him in the sense of looking to provide for their forgiveness and to change their hearts.
  
    - 2) They had taken God’s word and had so twisted it and distorted it that they had come up with a whole substitute way of righteousness...
      - They had a different Christ than the Christ of God.
      - This is the spirit of Anti-Christ already at work...
        - Understand that “anti-Christ” does not so much mean “**against** Christ;” as it does “**instead** of Christ.”
        - In other words, they had devised a substitute way of righteousness—
          - a substitute way of salvation that they said was God’s salvation revealed in His word...

  - This was nothing new for them...

- They did not come up with this substitute way of righteousness when Jesus came...
    - They had already come up with it many generations before...
    - Instead believing in Christ as He was presented in the Old Testament promises and ceremonies,
      - They had come up with their anti-Christ.
      - Their rebellion had begun long before; it simply came to a head when Jesus appeared in the flesh and clashed with them.
  - This substitute Christ that they devised was One that preserved man's pride instead of making Him totally dependent on the grace of God.
    - He was one that rescued men from the troubles of life, but who taught them **do** certain things to obtain a right standing with God.
- 3) The leaders presented this false Christ, and sadly, the people, for the most part, accepted this anti-Christ.
- All through the Old Testament we see them continually departing from the truth and loving false doctrine...
    - As we will see tonight in our study of Judges, they preferred service to Baal before service to Jehovah.
    - Anything was better to the unregenerate than living under the grace of God...
  - They are always eager to find a substitute way of righteousness that does not call for repentance and dependence on the true Christ...
    - They want an anti-Christ because the real Christ offends them and tells them that they are unfit for God and need to be washed by the shedding of His blood and need a heart transplant.
      - They did not really want these things because in truth, they did not want to be that close to God.
    - The Pharisees and scribes gave them a welcomed alternative.
      - They had led the people astray, but the people were quite willing to follow!
3. To make things worse, the scribes and Pharisees were not content to confine their anti-christ to Israel...
- They were quite eager to share Him with the gentiles as well!

- a. A lot of people think the Scribes and Pharisees were not interested in proselytising the nations,
- but that is not true at all!
    - They took great pride in their skill and zeal to win proselytes to their anti-religion (substitute religion disguised as the true religion).
  - In verse 15, Jesus says that they would travel land and sea just to make one proselyte!
    - Their goal was to make **full proselytes** of the Gentiles—
      - that is, to get them to submit to circumcision and to all the laws and traditions that they had developed over the years...
    - Often they could only get them to be become what they called “**proselytes of the gate.**”
      - In the book of Acts, these are the ones called “God-fearers” or “devout persons.”
      - These agreed to submit to the Noahic Covenant,
        - but not to Moses or to all the traditions that had been added to him as the full proselytes did.
- b. In verse 15, Jesus says  $\kappa\lambda\text{-}\gamma\omega\alpha$  *hoh'ee l'cha* to the Pharisees because the proselytes they made were worse twice as bad as they were.
- 1) Jesus says that the Pharisees made them twice as much the sons of hell than the Pharisees themselves were!
    - As new converts who had embraced all the traditions,
      - they were even more zealous for these traditions than the Pharisees were!
    - These Gentile proselytes are the ones that gave so much grief to the Apostle Paul when he ministered the true gospel to the Gentiles...
      - They could not endure the thought of someone accepted of God with circumcision and the traditions of the fathers!
      - They had swallowed the anti-christ of the Pharisees hook line and sinker!
  - 2) At the same time though, I should point out that God used the zeal of the Pharisees for good among the Gentiles...
    - The proselytes of the gate were the ones who made up a great part of the population of the New Testament Church...

- They knew that Israel's God was the true God and had come to worship Him,
  - and when Paul came and showed them the way of salvation in Christ, very many of them embraced it.
  
- But those that had accepted the false way of righteousness taught by the Pharisees were often found to be thoroughly insulated against the truth of the gospel.
  - They did not need to repent, they had their righteousness through the observance of the law...
    - that is, the law as it was presented in those days by the Scribes and Pharisees...
    - They had their own Messiah they were looking for, and Jesus did not fit the bill.
    - These Gentiles had been made the doubly confirmed sons of Hell by the doctrine of the Pharisees.
      - Like so many of the Jews, they loved an anti-Christ instead of the Christ of God.
      - *Kl-ywa hoh'ee l'cha* Jesus says, to those who had disciplined them!

C. Brothers and sisters, do you see this great wickedness?

1. What could be worse than to be entrusted with the gospel and to present a substitute gospel instead—
  - a. And to do that because really—deep down inside—you don't want to be made right with God...
    - You want to validate your refusal to repent and live under the grace of God by using your position to keep others from living under the grace of God...
    - You want to bring them into your own system of righteousness to validate that system of righteousness.
  
  - b. The human heart is so adverse to God that it will seek out these false substitutes—anything to avoid real repentance and faith in the crucified one!
    - “Give me something that will inflate my pride and let me deny my corruption and I will take it...”
      - “Even if it means I have to submit to all sorts of ceremonies or give lots of money or sleep on spikes every night.”
      - “Anything but salvation by free grace through faith in a crucified Saviour.”



- c. The people were responsible for following these false teachers, but the false teachers will be held responsible for leading them astray.
    - There is nothing worse than to be found a devouring wolf standing in the place of a shepherd when the day of judgement comes...
    - To be found devouring those for whom Christ shed His precious blood!
2. But there are many such wolves today my friends!
- a. Over eighty-five percent of the people in Nova Scotia profess to be Christians,
    - but they are not resting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin and their hearts have never been changed...
  - b. They have their anti-christs...
    - One is following that United Church minister who tells them that that God is pleased with them for following their lusts as long as they do it in a loving way!
    - Another is following that Priest who tells him that God is pleased with him because he follows certain rituals of Christian religion and rests in the Church, and that whatever he lacks can be made up in purgatory.
    - And then there are all those who in the name of Christ and deny that the Son of God has come in the flesh—
      - They preach that we are not in need of the Son of God to come in the flesh...
      - They refuse to acknowledge the depth of their sin.
3. All these false leaders devour the flock of God that has been entrusted to them.
- It is a terrible thing.
    - It is to all these false leaders that Jesus *Kl-ywa hoh'ee l'cha* continues to resound through the ages.
  - But let us all be humbled as we see here what is in our own hearts apart from the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ.
    - And let us be humbled as we consider how tolerant we are toward such false teachers—
      - how little we groan with our Lord over the fact that they are leading thousands to Hell...
        - Thousands who are so near to God's grace, yet so far away.

TRANS> Let's move on to a second reason that Jesus pronounces woe on the Scribes and Pharisees...

## II. Secondly, Jesus pronounces woe on false leaders because they twisted God's law.

A. Jesus brings this out in the woes of verse 16 and verse 23 especially...

1. In verse 16, He speaks of the way they had come up with the idea of vows that didn't mean anything...
  - a. They claimed that if you swore by the temple, you were not bound to your promise, but if you swore by the gold of the temple, you were!
    - And likewise, if you swore by the altar you were free,
      - but if by the gift on the altar, you were bound.
    - Apparently, they had a whole book devoted to all the ins and outs of swearing and what bound you and what didn't bind you...
  - b. But Jesus cuts through all that nonsense...
    - He shows them that *every* vow brings God in as a witness...
    - There is no such thing as a vow that doesn't bind you because whether you admit it or not,
      - whenever you swear, you are asking God Himself to judge you if you don't keep our word...
        - And you can be sure that He will judge you for this...
  - c. I don't need to spend a lot of time showing you how foolish the casuistry of the Scribes was!
    - It is easy for us to see how blind they were....
      - But understand that Jesus had to labour to refute it because it was one of those things that had become generally accepted after long use in their day...
        - It seems very foolish to us when we look in from the outside, but to them it was just the way things were done.
    - But what can we say about the twisting that is done in our own day?
      - Perjury has become very common among us...
        - We break our marriage vows and it is nothing!
        - A person will lie in a court of law, and it is winked at!
        - You see that we have our own ways of twisting God's law about swearing too—in our case, minimising them.

TRANS> In verse 23, Jesus speaks of a second way they twisted God's law...

2. They ignored what was most important and emphasised what was least important.

- a. There are thousands of examples that Jesus might have used to demonstrate this,
  - but He mentions the way they made a big deal about tithing the herbs from their gardens...
    - Now it is fine if they were thankful for these herbs—indeed we should be thankful...
      - but the point of tithing all your increase is not to burden you with separating out a tenth of every specific thing that comes your way.
  
- b. The idea is that one tenth of the increase of our wealth should go to the Lord.
  - You don't have to take out the interest collected on your checking account and every little detail like this...
    - The tithe is a very practical way of supporting the public worship of God and the work of the church that you are to participate in.
    - It is a part of your expression of gratitude to God for all that He has given you materially and in Jesus Christ.
    - It is a way of remembering that it all comes from Him.
  
- c. It is not so much that they did these things that Jesus opposes though...
  - 1) He even commends them for being diligent to tithe and says these things ought to have been done...
    - but the problem was that they were doing all these little things and ignoring the more important things...
      - what Jesus calls the weightier matters of the Law...
        - things like justice, mercy, and faith!
  
  - 2) In other words, it was a twisting of priorities—of what was most important.
    - They were careful to take a tenth of their mint leaves and bring them as a tithe,
      - but they were not careful to pay a fair wage to someone who worked for them...no justice.
    - They were diligent to separate out one in every ten seeds from their herb garden,
      - but they looked the other way when they saw their neighbour's goat caught in a fence... no mercy.
  
  - 3) I am sure you have seen this kind of thing before...

- I remember a man who had committed many serious crimes explaining to me about the great reverence he had for the Bible and how he would never let a Bible fall on the floor...
- Now I warned you last week that we all seem to have a tendency to do this kind of thing...
  - We will pride ourselves that we sing psalms,
    - but then we take God's name in vain by mouthing the words off in a thoughtless way and we overlook that greater sin.
  - Or we will pride ourselves that we never miss family worship,
    - but we don't bother to believe or obey the things we read in family worship—it becomes an empty ritual.

B. Why do hypocritical leaders of God's people twist the law, and why do people follow them in it?

1. Well, it goes right along with the rejection of God's way of righteousness.
  - God's way of righteousness tells us that we are all law breakers and that we need the death of Christ to redeem us and the Holy Spirit to change our hearts...
    - It makes us dependent on the grace of God for our righteousness.
    - It calls us to repent and look to Christ alone—to live under the grace that God promises through Him.
2. But the religion of the Scribes and the Pharisees and of all false Christian leaders today says...
  - a. But we can be right with God without all that grace!
    - We can do something to make ourselves righteous—some ritual, some attitude, some good work...
      - That is their substitute gospel—the spirit of anti-Christ...
  - b. And my friends,
    - 1) If anyone is set on establishing His own righteousness,
      - He is going to have to twist the commandments of God.
      - If He looks at the commandments as they are,
        - They will condemn Him and make him a desperate transgressor with no hope but in the radical mercy of God!
    - 2) That is why, if he can adjust swearing so as to say that the vow he took didn't really count because he swore by the altar instead of by the offering...

- or if he can show how he can draw attention to his tithing of mint and anise instead of looking at the way he treats his wife...
  - he can go on with the lie that he is righteous.
- 3) Men today will go so far with this that they will even claim that their adultery or even their sodomy is pleasing to God because they did it with a heart of sincere love for their partner...
  - or they will ignore the fact that they yelled at their children in a purely selfish way because they said their prayers and went to church on Easter.
  - It's all a part of that reluctance to submit to God's way of righteousness...
    - That reluctance to acknowledge that I can only live by the grace of God.
- c. Even true believers will do these kinds of things...
  - but brethren, you do not need to change God's law!
  - You do not need to make it say less to you than it really does...
  - If you are trusting in Christ, you are no longer condemned...
    - You can face the Law of God instead of trying to change it and make it keepable...
    - Under God's grace,
      - The law is the goal you are reaching for with His help rather than the standard you must obtain to be accepted in His sight.
      - You don't have to pretend that you don't come short because you are forgiven in Christ and because God is at work in you.

TRANS> Do you see how wrong it is for leaders to twist God's standard of righteousness?

- It soothes men's consciences and makes them think they don't need Christ...
  - It changes the truth about God into a lie.
  - We need to abhor this twisting of God's Law because it takes away the knowledge of the true and living God from us and from others.
    - As we find it characteristically in false teachers...
    - And as we find it all too often in our own souls,
      - we need to detest it.
- Very closely related to this twisting of God's Law is the third reason Jesus pronounces His woes on the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees...

### **III. Jesus pronounces woe on false leaders because they falsely present themselves to others and before God as righteous.**

A. These hypocrites were forever washing themselves and their things...

1. In the Old Testament, before Jesus came, God had appointed many baptisms to remind the people of their need to be cleansed.

a. Jesus had not yet come and shed His blood to wash away their sins and to sprinkle their hearts,

- therefore God kept them in continual remembrance of their need by having them wash ceremonially before they could come before Him.
- But the Pharisees had added to what God required and turned these washings into a way of becoming righteous before God instead of a way of remembering that they needed the cleansing God had promised.
- They completely perverted the intended meaning of the rituals.

b. As far as ceremonial purification, these men were indeed spotless!

1) But ceremonial purification was only external and superficial.

- Jesus drives this point home to these hypocrites who trusted in their ceremonies and taught others to do the same.
- He said...
  - Matthew 23:25: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence

2) His point is that even the cup was clean,

a) the contents of the cup were not clean!

- The wine that was in the cup had been obtained by robbery or extortion...
  - They had cheated their neighbours and taken what was not theirs, and until the contents were cleansed,
    - no amount of outward washing could make up for it!

b) Jesus says, "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also"

- It is the cleansing of the heart that matters—
  - If God cleanses our hearts, the outside will be clean also...
  - The ritual will not even be needed!

3) The lesson is that cleansing ceremonies do not make us clean...

- Ceremonies are given rather to direct us to God, and more specifically to Christ, who alone can make us clean.
  - Woe to all those who trust in their baptisms and their holy water and their masses!
2. Jesus says that those who trust in cleansing ceremonies are like whitewashed tombs...
- a. They are white and shiny on the outside—
    - They have the appearance of purification—
    - But within they are full of dead men's bones!
  - b. What a graphic picture this is!
    - The Jews would, at the time of the Passover, clean up all around Jerusalem to prepare for the pilgrims that would be coming from all around to worship...
      - And part of the regular routine was the whitewashing of tombs...
        - partly to mark them so that no traveller would accidentally come in contact with one and be made unclean for seven days...
        - and partly to make everything more attractive.
    - Jesus seems to be focusing on this second aspect—making things more attractive...
      - He may even be referring to the plastering of the tombs of the rich to make them attractive...
      - But however attractive and white they may have been,
        - they were filthy on the inside—full of decaying bones of dead men!
  - c. Jesus is saying that when you do a bunch of things on the outside to mark you out as one who belongs to God and who is clean...
    - but do not receive the inward cleansing that all these ceremonies point to...
      - You are lovely on the outside but full of death on the inside!
      - If you are only interested in having the appearance of a right relationship with God,
        - then this external whitewashing is all you need.
          - If you want to appear as someone who is close to God, and appear to be someone who loves Him and appear to be someone who prays,

- go let the Pharisee be your guide...
  - But if you really want to be cleansed,
    - then you need the cleansing of Jesus Christ and His Spirit.
  - TRANS> *ywh hoh'ee* to all those who are content with a mere appearance of righteousness!
    - a mere reputation for godliness...
    - God's judgement will surely fall unless you repent...
- B. To this external cleansing Jesus adds an external testimony that they love God's word and God's prophets who spoke it...
1. See how Jesus exposes their hypocrisy in verses 29-30...
    - Matthew 23:29-30: Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'
    - It is so easy to honour dead prophets and to claim that you follow all their teachings and would be their devoted disciples if they were alive...
      - It is easy to honour them because they are not there to confront you for your particular sins...
        - the way Jesus is confronting the Scribes and Pharisees in this passage...
        - and the way all His prophets in the old time confronted the hypocrites of their day!
      - When they are dead, you can ignore the parts of their teaching you don't like,
        - or you can reinterpret those parts and not really apply them to yourself.
        - Its amazing the way Presbyterian and Reformed brothers all use Calvin to defend their own position when they have a controversy with each other...
          - And how both Catholic and Protestant refer back to Augustine!
          - Somebody is twisting something!
  2. Perhaps even more to the point is the way every Christian leader refers back to Jesus and honours Jesus...
    - a. All the true prophets of Old spoke by the Spirit of Christ exactly, so their words are really His words...



- And in their generations they were hated just as Jesus was hated in His generation.
- b. It is very obvious that there are many in the Church today who claim to love Jesus and to follow His teaching that would absolutely detest Him if He were to come today!
- Does this mean that we are all just playing games and that the truth is not clear?
    - No! But it does mean we must be very diligent to search the Scriptures and make sure that we are following them!
  - God's word is clear, very clear,
    - and if you are really honest about what it says,
      - you have come to the conclusion that you are not righteous by your own merit or by any work that you can do...
      - but only by faith in the work that Jesus has done.
        - That is the real test.
  - If you have encountered the living Christ as He speaks through His word,
    - You have said what of yourself what Isaiah said of Himself "Woe is me."
    - But if you are a Pharisee, you say, "Look at me! I am acceptable in God's sight."
      - And you despise anyone that says "Woe to you," you are detestable in God's sight until you receive the cleansing of Jesus Christ.
      - That s what true prophets teach and what Pharisees despise.
- c. Already, they were looking earnestly for an opportunity to destroy Jesus...
- And in only a couple of days, they would deliver him over to be crucified!
    - These very men who claimed to love the prophets of Christ who had gone before!
  - With biting sarcasm,
    - Jesus points out to them that they are indeed sons of those who murdered the prophets...
      - And He tells them in mocking way to go ahead and complete the work that their Fathers had begun...
        - namely, the murder of Him and of the apostles and prophets He is going to send to them.

- This is the same spirit that goes on today among those who claim to follow Christ and yet despise the true gospel and those who preach it.
  - Jesus says to all such persons—
    - Matthew 23:30: "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"
    - These men are without hope until they repent.

C. What wickedness these men displayed!

1. They were content with nothing more than an outward appearance of godliness when they were dead toward God...
2. They were content with a mere profession of love to the prophets of old when in fact that detested the true spirit by which they spoke.
  - They took their teaching and distorted them and twisted them...
  - Today they take the teaching of Jesus and distort it and twist it and pretend to love Him.

**Conclusion:**

Brothers and sisters,

- Do you hate this kind of hypocritical wickedness?
  - Does it seem a trivial thing for men to take their place as their shepherds of God's people who teach a false gospel that shuts men out of God's kingdom...
    - and who twist and distort god's righteous standards so that they can successfully dodge the convicting power of His law?
    - and who content themselves with a mere outward righteousness when they should know good and well that they are rotten within?
- It is these very sorts of persons in our day that have scolded us and told us that we must shut our mouths and not judge them!
  - Now I don't mean that it is necessarily your place to go and confront them the way Jesus did...
  - But it is your place to solemnly hear what He says about them and believe it!
    - We live in a day of wicked toleration!
    - The hypocrites of our day have taught us to wink at sin instead of detesting it!
      - You must not join in their cause, and as much as you have done so, you must repent and look to Christ for His mercy and grace.
      - Otherwise, His woes will fall upon you.