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BAD RELIGION
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The late atheist Christopher Hitchens said “Religion is poison.”
Many would agree.

Some of your deepest wounds have been inflicted in the name of religion.

Ross Douthat says America’s problem isn’t too much or too little religion, but bad religion. But Jesus is its fiercest critic. He is also its only hope.

Unfortunately, Jesus may have been presented to you in a way that He Himself would condemn and reject. The answer is to listen more closely to Him. Matthew 23 is one of the most ignored passages in the New Testament. It teaches what religiosity is. How it’s bad. How to spot it even within ourselves.

The Pharisees were spiritual leaders, guardians of the faith, deeply respected. It’s shocking what Jesus said to them back then. Jesus is addressing religious hypocrisy for all time. Hypocrisy within me and you.

The default mode of our hearts is *religion*. “My own moral achievement can justify me.” “I am good completely apart from God.”

We cast judgment and use works for our salvation. These people have been warned. The best way to avoid misusing this text on others is to see how it applies to us.

What does Christ expose?

In the first 12 verses, He’s speaking to the crowd, to His disciples. Those who hold this office, that, in itself, is not bad. He honors those who sit in Moses’ seat. Honoring leadership is key. Jesus is not against Bible interpretation, He’s against *bad* Bible interpretation. He condemns false religion.

Those who play the part, the role, wear the masks. The hypocrite is completely different on the outside than on the inside. Jesus is exposing a religion of arrogance. These teachers were playing God.

They added all of their own rules. Their religion preaches the demand of God, not the provision of God. Not that they didn’t practice what they preached, but gave the impression that they did.

We assume moral achievement will justify our lives. That is a religion of avoidance. We create these bug burdens and put them on others. It’s like someone who asks you to help them move, and then they supervise and you do all of the heavy lifting.

The hypocrite is oppressive to others. Vs. 6-12. They love a performance. Put on a show. Their appearance has to be higher, better. Their outfits were even preachy. They wore scriptures on their robes and heads. They were proud of their titles and being called "Rabbi." Are you wanting the praise of men rather than the praise of God? Do we use titles for our justification?

We hide behind something. Don't reject opportunities to give God glory.

Bad religion breeds religious schizophrenia. One day we feel good about ourselves, the next we feel condemned-"I'm not good enough." We go back and forth.

Dr. Jesus' diagnosis was that the answer was found in humility. Vs. 11-12.

The way to fight hypocrisy is humility. The goal is God's glory, the fruit is love. In the Beatitudes, Jesus talked about building your house upon a rock.

Here's how you can burn it down.

The Beatitudes were 7 blessings. The woes are 7 curses.

Each woe is a warning, a verdict. My question is, "how do you get there?"

Here are 7 ways you can become a religious hypocrite:

1. Make up your own rules and act like they're biblical. Impose these extra-biblical things as the truth. Try and make other people just like you. V. 15.
2. Keep people from God, but convince them they are growing closer to Him.
3. Make ridiculous distinctions about religious objects. Vs. 16-22.
4. Make practices more important than people. Vs. 23-24.
5. Major on the minors and minor on the majors. Focus on exterior. Vs. 25-28.
6. Only teach truth to others, but never learn yourself.
7. Pretend to honor that which you destroy. Vs. 29-32.

There is no osmosis for righteousness. Don't ride on the coattails of your family.

Verses 33-36 warn of spiritual blindness. **Religion makes us blind to His grace.** Law with love, preaching without practice.

Jesus gives eternal judgment for religion without faith and grace.

He is warning us, yet inviting us.

It's not "good or bad," it's "reject or receive."

Will you choose desolation or restoration?

Humbly come before Jesus and receive His grace.