

Matthew 23

ASVh with Comments

Summary. In this chapter, the Lord Jesus interacts with His disciples, the Pharisees, the scribes, and the crowds. The interactions described in the chapter occur in some public places as the Lord Jesus was traveling and teaching. The chapter is well structured into four parts. 1) The Lord Jesus tells the crowds that the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. Their role is to read Scripture to the children of God, but they misuse their role by judging the Scripture and making rules and regulations. Doing this, they create heavy burdens on people's shoulders to suit their appetites. 2) The Lord tells us who is our true Teacher (Rabbi), Father, and Master, so we know whom to follow, listen to, and obey. 3) The Lord gives eight woes to the scribes and Pharisees. All these woes have one common warning: to worship the Lord with your heart, not your wealth. The Lord owns all the wealth of this earth, and why should you offer the Lord what is already His? The Lord only wants the hearts that glorify Him. Because the Lord gives everyone freedom, the heart is important for the Lord to receive. He gives all things, but only the human heart receives the freedom, so use your heart to glorify the Lord. The following are the woes given. a) Woe against taking advantage of the weak; in their greed, they use the name of the Lord to take advantage. b) Woe to those who work against God's calling; they teach that their way is the right way and do not teach that God's way is the right way. c) Woe against the children of hell who try to interrupt the children of God to enter the kingdom of heaven. d) Woe against lying tongues; they make the dark way seem the right way through their lying tongues (teachings from lying tongues). e) Woe against showing off; showing that they are the best when they are nothing. f) Woe against those who are outwardly faithful but inside have no faith; these people have fake faith. g) Woe against the darkness of the heart; they only act righteous, but inside, their hearts are filled with darkness. h) Woe against twisting the truth; they make themselves righteous at the cost of a truly righteous life (the prophets of the Lord). 4) The Lord speaks against this generation for ignoring the warning that comes directly from the Lord; until they accept who the true King of their life is, no more prophets will be sent.

23¹ Then **Jesus** spoke to the multitudes and to **His** disciples,
² saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;

Comments 23:1-2. The scribes and the Pharisees sit on the seat of leadership; as Moses led the Jews out of Egypt, they have the duty of leading, but not of judging.

³ all things therefore, **how many** if they **might command** you, these **keep** and observe; **however**, **according to** their works do not, for they **speak**, and do not.

⁴ **Moreover**, they bind heavy burdens and **hard to bear**, and lay them on **people's** shoulders; but they themselves **are not willing to** move them with their finger.

Comments 23:3-4. Because they have schooling, they lead the reading of Scripture, but they should not judge. However, all of them put themselves leading and judging when only the Lord is the judge. The Lord tells us to take the Scripture they read but do not follow their judging of the Scripture. Here, it means they judge what the Scripture says and lay rules and regulations for people without having the authority.

⁵ **Now** all their **deeds** they do to be seen **by people**; for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge their **tassels**,

⁶ and love the chief place at **the** feasts, and the **first** seats in the synagogues,

⁷ and the **greetings** in the marketplaces, and to be called by **people**, Rabbi.

Comments 23:5-7. These verses have a clear meaning. You can see this behavior nowadays as well within the church; they do not dress as in the past, but all their clothes are from famous brand names. The wage for the clothes themselves can go to do more things for the Lord, but the things of this world have captured all humans, as the Bible tells us.

⁸ But **you shall** not be called Rabbi, for **One** is your **Teacher**; **moreover**, all **you** are **brothers**.

Comments 23:8. "Rabbi" means my teacher or my master. In those times, the meaning of the rabbi was deeper than that of a teacher or master, as we think these days. A rabbi is a person who is qualified to surrender to him as the person who has the most knowledge, and all have to follow the Word as he interprets. Or you could say a rabbi is the person who knows the teachings of the Lord, and people must follow all they say; they almost replace

God in people's lives. Rabbis were highly respected in those times because they had school. In this world, school is higher than all because it measures you in a human way of living; to be lifted high, you just need to have school.

"For One is your Teacher." This part of the verse refers to whom you should consider as the teacher of your life. Only Christ alone can have that place in your life. There is only one teacher in our lives, Christ the begotten Son of God.

"Moreover, all you are brothers." Because all have one Father, as the Bible tells us, we have one Father (the Creator), which is why we all are brothers (among believers). If you are not a believer, you will not call the Father to be your heavenly Father. In the eyes of the Lord, those who are not believers are just His created creatures, not His children. To be children of God, you must acknowledge the Lord Jesus, the begotten Son of God, as your Lord and follow the Father's commandments.

All humans are His creation (and, in this sense, His children), but some are rebellious children. The rebellious children are those that do not acknowledge the Father. The Father has created all things, but the rebellious children do not acknowledge the One who created them. The Father loves all His creation; He has only One Begotten Son and gave His Son for the redemption of all humans He has created. Many places in the Bible refer to the rebellious children by His Word and His actions, but you can see the Father's love being greater than His anger.

⁹ And call no **one** your father on the earth; for **One** is your **Father**, who is in heaven.

Comments 23:9. The Father discussed in this portion of Scripture is not about the father of the human body but the Father of the soul; this passage refers to the Father of your soul, not of the physical body. Because the soul comes from the Father, He is the Father of your soul.

¹⁰ Neither be called masters, for **One** is your master, the **Christ**.

Comments 23:10. In this verse, master, or instructor in other translations, is Christ Himself, who obeys the Father even to death on the cross. Therefore, we humans should obey Christ; He is our master to follow. Love one another as Christ loves all humans and takes all their sufferings on the cross of Calvary. Love brothers in faith as Christ loves you in faith.

¹¹ **Moreover**, the greatest among you **will** be your servant.

Comments 23:11. See Comments Matthew 20:26.

¹² And whoever shall exalt himself **will** be humbled; and whoever shall humble himself **will** be exalted.

Comments 23:12. We hear from many places on earth about famous people, and when pride gets hold of them, they all fall; nothing lasts. They fall because, in them, they lift themselves up and think they are wiser and better than other brothers; instead, they should be humble.

¹³ But woe **to** you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! **For** you shut the kingdom of the heavens **before** people; **for** you enter not, neither **do** you **allow** those who are entering to enter in.

Comments 23:13. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" The woes come against the scribes and Pharisees because they do many things that are not right. They are leaders and have all the knowledge at those times, but they do a lot of damage to the people. The woes are important; rebuking the leaders is something that the Lord can only do; people had no right because they (the scribes and Pharisees) used the Scripture to take advantage of the commoners; that is why the woes are here (See John 9:22, John 9:34).

"For you enter not, neither do you allow those who are entering to enter in." They do not enter because all of their beliefs are that they are completely righteous and fulfill God's will, when in fact, they themselves do not know what the will of God is. Remember what the Bible tells us: if you lift yourself up and it is not the Lord lifting you up, you will be put down. That is what they have been doing; they lift themselves above and think they know everything. All they know is the traditions of men, which are being taught among each other, but they do not know the traditions of God. But also, they will not let the ones that could enter to find the way; as it is written, they teach their way to be the right way, not God's way to be the right way. You do not enter, and you do not want anyone else to enter also; this is the most selfish act. It is the worst thing to do by using the name of the Lord and claiming the name of the Lord.

¹⁴ Woe **to** you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! **For** you devour widows' houses, **and** **as** a **pretense**, you make long prayers; therefore, you shall receive greater condemnation.

Comments 23:14. "For you devour widows' houses." This woe shows exactly how they take advantage of those who already feel bad and discouraged, the widows that no one protects, and they do that to them. How bad is

that? Do something to the ones who cannot fight back; the Lord has mercy for the widows, as it says in many places in the Bible.

“And as a pretense, you make long prayers.” Really, they want to swallow up their inheritance; they devour widows’ houses, forcing down their throats everything they can. Still, they present themselves as the ones to comfort the widows and make prayers to help the widows believe that their dead ones because of their prayers are in a good place. This makes widows feel obligated to give what they ask. They are hypocrites; they use God to take advantage of others, which is wrong to do. They take advantage of the widows’ minds; that is what they do.

¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you traverse the sea and the dry land to make one convert; and when he becomes, you make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves.

Comments 23:15. “Convert” or “proselyte” here refers to Gentile converts who had committed themselves to the teachings of the Jewish faith (converts to Judaism). This verse tells us that the scribes and Pharisees take the name of the Lord and go to teach to Gentiles, but the way they teach, instead of making the Gentiles come to the kingdom of God, they teach them how to walk straight to hell. We should remember that these converts are Gentiles, not children of God; the rule and law they cannot keep all because they are Gentiles. As the Bible tells us, if they make one (commandment) wrong, all is wrong. However, the Gentiles in those times could still be saved by faith in God, not by following Moses’s Law.

¹⁶ Woe to you, blind guides, who say, Whoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, is bound by his oath.

Comments 23:16. “Shall swear” means to promise to do something; if you don’t keep the promise, a curse will come upon you. “Shall swear by the temple” means to do something valuable in the eyes of the Lord; God needs the heart to glorify the Lord; that is the Lord’s pleasure. “Shall swear by the gold of the temple” means to do something valuable in the eyes of the people. “He is a debtor” or “He is bound by his oath” means that they feel obligated with the gold (the promise to do something valuable in the eyes of the people) but not with the temple, and it shouldn’t be this way.

The meaning of this verse relates to the traditions of the Jews. In those days, traditions played a big role and controlled the people; it was not the Scripture that controlled them, but the tradition. The Lord gives this woe to point out to them that it must be from the Lord, not by traditions, to control the people.

The tradition taught from generation to generation was that a person builds (or makes) something and takes it to the temple; most of the time, they build a small thing as a symbol of a promise. In those times, people came to the temple to give a gift and asked the leaders to keep them in prayer and promised that if they kept them in prayer continually, then next time, when they came to the temple, they would bring something bigger and more valuable, and they could keep the small thing for themselves. The next person goes and promises bigger, and if you want the Lord to accept you, you have to build something bigger, more valuable, and better than the person before you. This is a teaching from greed because they use the Lord to satisfy their greed, and this is wrong, and that is why, in the Bible, the Lord always calls them hypocrites. The Lord never asks this, but this has become a tradition, which is wrong in God’s eyes (See also Matthew 15:5-9).

People come in and see the temple, but they can’t feel the Lord. This feeling is happening today as well in many churches. But, when the scribes and Pharisees explain to do the tradition, building up, and then adding, this makes people believe that they are part of whatever has been built upon (because it is a tradition, people just need to feel they are part of it). But this is never taught by the Lord.

¹⁷ Foolish and blind! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that is sanctifying the gold?

¹⁸ And, Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gift upon it, he is bound by his oath.

Comments 23:18. This verse alone tells us to know how people’s eyes see things, not as the Lord sees. Things that the eyes see have meaning for people; that is why the Bible always tells us that the Lord sees the heart and not the things. Think about it this way: when humans see the altar, what do they really see? Do they see the altar representing the Lord or the things on it (the gold)? Which is more likely for humans to see? (See Isaiah 66:1-2; Acts 7:48-50).

¹⁹ Blind! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that is sanctifying the gift?

²⁰ The one therefore having sworn by the altar, swears by it, and by all things upon it.

²¹ And the one having sworn by the temple, swears by it, and by the One dwelling in it.

²² And the one having sworn by the heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by the One sitting upon it.

Comments 23:19-22. These verses talk about seeing God or the things around. When you swear by the altar or temple, you swear by God. That is, you say a word of promise to the altar or in the temple; for example, you promise some fast or prayer just between you and God, but you don't take it seriously. Yet, if you swear by the things, like if you promise to do something valuable, for example, to build something in the temple or bring something to the altar, a sacrifice or gift, you say that you must do it because people can see what you bring; and most people boast about what they bring.

²³ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and you have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith; now these it behooved you to do, and the others not to have left undone.

Comments 23:23. This verse lets us know that even though you choose to do small things that people don't need to see, you make it significant to be known because of the aroma (even when you choose to do small things, you choose them such that people will notice you). Because you choose to do small things, you pick the things that you do not need to invest your time to do, but they look big because of the smell and the aroma. People walking by can smell them, but actually, you did nothing significant. Also, as an example of a job, one job is in the front, but all the heavy labor jobs are behind; however, you do not do those labor jobs, but you do only the decorating jobs in the front. This is also only to show that you do work, but in fact, you did nothing significant.

²⁴ Blind guides! Those straining out the gnat, and swallowing the camel!

Comments 23:24. "Straining out the gnat" is like when we try to justify the deeds we do, the small little deeds. We see these deeds are wrong, but the bad thing itself, which is like the camel size, we hide it inside and don't get rid of it. However, we get rid of little things, but the real big things we hid them. For example, we get rid of cigarettes and alcohol, but inside of us, we don't really see them as bad; we just do not want to do those deeds. If we can think we don't do it, why don't we see inside that it is completely wrong and not good?

Q: How do we achieve this? **A:** When tests come, to think by our own strength, we can't do it. Grab the Word in the heart we have, the Word that we memorize, that the Lord wants us to memorize; the Word only can help.

Q: Why should we memorize the Word of the Bible? **A:** Memorization of the Word is important. It is different in the human way of thinking; if we memorize the Word, when temptation thoughts come you can call the Word right away. By memorizing the Bible, the mind pulls up the thoughts right away without thinking (there is like an automatic reaction that comes to counterattack the temptation). The Lord encourages us to memorize the Bible; if we memorize the Word in our hearts, then when things happen, instantly, the Holy Spirit goes through the Word and will bring up the light in our eyes to help us.

²⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

²⁶ Blind Pharisee! Cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the platter so that the outside of them might become clean also.

Comments 23:25-26. The cup and platter themselves; they clean the outside of the cup and platter, not the inside that has been cleaned, but they clean the outside. These verses refer also to the outside of some Christians; some call themselves Christians but only their appearance shows as Christian, but their inside itself has never yet been cleansed. It is the same as the leaders in the old times; they dress as kings, but inwardly, they are dirtier than the house of animals. Also, many of us look outwardly nice, but our hearts are full of negativity. You cannot be clean just on the outside; the Word has told us that if we do not clean within, the outside has no meaning in the eyes of the Lord. Remember that the Bible always tells us that the Lord looks inside the heart and mind.

²⁷ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whited tombs, which from outside indeed appear beautiful, but from within are full of bones of the dead, and of all uncleanness.

²⁸ Even so you also outwardly indeed appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Comments 23:27-28. The meaning in these verses is similar to that in verses 25 to 26. "Whited tombs" or "Whitewashed tombs" are used to compare the actions they make; they look beautiful on the outside, but for God, the inwardly is to be cleaned up, not just to put the unclean in a corner or push it out in the corner and let it

rot. That is why their actions are compared to a tomb; inside a tomb, there are only dead bones (the unclean is kept inside); they just decorate the outside, but the inside of their hearts is full of uncleanness.

Similarly, nowadays, in the church, people walk in beautiful dresses, but how many are cleaned inwardly? They should read these woes.

²⁹ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and arrange the monuments of the righteous,

Comments 23:29. In that time, people literally built the tombs of the prophets they killed just to cover up what they did to them and to appear innocent. They built the tombs for them to be able to pretend they were innocent.

³⁰ and you 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.

³¹ Therefore, you bear witness to yourselves, that you are sons of those having killed the prophets.

³² Then you fill up the measure of your fathers.

Comments 23:30-32. Also, they condemn their father's generation to be the guilty ones, not them, but they themselves do not act differently than how their fathers did.

³³ Serpents! Offspring of vipers! How shall you escape from the judgment of hell?

Comments 23:33. "Serpents" and "brood or offspring of vipers." It has a deeper meaning, the way the Lord called them. They are the ones who claim to know it all; they claim among His own people that the word of the Lord is in them. They can quote what is written because they are the ones who keep the Scripture, but when they interpret the Scripture to His people, they talk from their own understanding and teach wrong things to His children. Only they know what is written and hide it from His children to see. When they make out the teachings to His children, they use their own understanding.

³⁴ Because of this, behold, I send to you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and will persecute from city to city;

Comments 23:34. "Because of this ..." This verse itself supports the verses before; because of what they did as told in this verse, the judgment of the Lord comes upon them. They do these, all written they did to His prophets; some they killed, and some they kicked out of town. They do not listen to the prophets of the Lord, but when the false ones appear, they all turn to accept and lead the children of the Lord astray. From the false ones that come in among the children of God, it is not because they do not know, but because they can benefit, so they take sides and let greed have power over them.

³⁵ so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zachariah son of Berekiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar.

Comments 23:35. The Lord Jesus never cut off the Old Testament; the Lord came to fulfill the prophecy of the Bible. The Old and the New have a joining part: One God, with two portions of activity, the Old Law by the order and the New Law by grace and mercy, both from One God. You cannot take only the New and ignore the Old, but not that many people read the Old Testament and take it as important. The Lord gives all things for good reason; the entire Bible is one; you cannot have the New Testament without the Old Testament. But, because of the grace of the Lord, the New Testament came for all humanity. When the Jews read the Old Testament, many places are linked to the New Testament; they can shut off their own ears and hearts, but they can't ignore it, and it speaks loud for them. The Jews cannot escape the Old and the New together; just because they are His people, it does not mean they do not need the blood of the Lord Jesus to enter heaven. They are still responsible for the blood of the Old Testament prophets even if we live by grace now. However, they can all enter heaven by grace and mercy if they repent and accept salvation through the blood of the beloved Son of God with their whole hearts, not only by their heads.

³⁶ Truly I say to you, All these things will come upon this generation.

Comments 23:36. This is the portion (the woes) for His own people to take full responsibility. Until the end of the Old Testament, His own people were the ones who had to take responsibility for mistreating the prophets of the Lord. With the end of the Old Testament, the new generation started, the generation of grace and mercy. The new generation of humans has a chance to be saved through the blood of God's Beloved Son. The grace and mercy started through the death of God's Own Son. Imagine His Son as the bridge; all the Gentiles and the world

walk under that bridge to enter the kingdom of the heavens. But His own chosen people still walk in a circle; they do not want to accept God's beloved Son; then and now, they still have that line of walk, and not many choose the bridge. This verse tells them that this generation of the Old Testament will end.

³⁷ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that **kills** the prophets, and **stones those having been sent to** her! How often would **I** have gathered **your** children together, even as a hen **gathers** her chickens under **the** wings, and **you were not willing!**

Comments 23:37. This verse itself applies to the past among God's children, and it also applies to the children under the blood of God's Son. Both groups can be linked through One God. He is the God of His people but also the God for the children through His Son. Both groups have been sheltered by His mercy. Regardless of what happens to the world and how many come against them, He is their shelter as the Bible tells; look at the hen; it spreads the wings out to protect its chicks; how much more love the Father will have for His children? The Lord gives the Holy Spirit as a covering; as the hen uses her wings to cover all the chicks, the Holy Spirit Himself can cover all; His wing is wider and bigger than humans can imagine. Only abide in God's love and follow His teaching, and all will be covered. Regardless of what they do, foolish things, but they can't cut the love of the Father. In many places in the Bible, how many of His servants have been mistreated, but His love continues (for His children).

³⁸ Behold, your house is left **to** you desolate.

Comments 23:38. Love and punishment go along together; no love, no care. The love here refers to the love of His people towards the Lord; if they do not love the Lord, He still loves them, but He will not show His care until they repent. The Lord may stay far for a moment, for them to learn to come back to Him by their own choice. No prophet will be sent to them; they must walk back to Him. Their house will be abandoned (no prophet) if they do not repent. If He does that to them, how will the rest of the people be? They must think for themselves; all things are written.

³⁹ For **I** say **to** you, **You** shall not see **Me** from now, **until** you shall say, Blessed is **the One** coming in the name of the **Lord**.

Comments 23:39. This verse shows the connection between the Old and the New Testaments; the Father's love brings joy to the new generation through His Son. When the Old Testament ended, no more generations of prophets were to come; the joining point between the Old and the New starts with the death of His Son. They killed the beloved Son that the Father sent; therefore, no more prophets would be sent.

Life and Faith Applications. 1) Read the Bible and meditate on the Word yourself. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your Holy Teacher and help you understand the Scripture so man's teachings cannot influence your mind. 2) Confess all uncleanness from your heart and repent; the blood of the Lord Jesus can cleanse all of us from the inside out. 3) Memorize Bible verses to help you fight against temptation. If we memorize the Word in our hearts when things happen, instantly, the Holy Spirit goes through the Word and will bring light to our eyes to help us.