

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • TV-441B

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By

HENRY T. MAHAN

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Zebulon Grace Church
6088 Zebulon Highway
Pikeville, KY 41501
PH: 606-631-9053

Matthew 23:12

“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”

I want to speak to you on the subject: **“FORM OR FAITH.”** Now remember that title: **“FORM, CEREMONY, RITUALISM, FORM OR FAITH,”** which?

I’m reading from **Matthew 23:12**. Our Lord said; *“Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased. And he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”*

Now my message today is going to begin on a negative note. I don’t like that; I don’t like negative preaching. I know you don’t care for it and I’m sorry but it just must begin that way. It must begin on a negative note.

I’ll tell you why. If you’ll notice, if you’ll read **Matthew 23**, that whole chapter, the entire **23rd chapter of Matthew** is given to one thing, our Lord rebuking, rebuking, the religious leaders; He calls them, *“Hypocrites.”*

There are all kind of things He says about them through this whole chapter, the religious leaders of that day, whose entire religious lives were made up of form, ceremony, legalism, and self-righteousness.

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

And through this whole chapter our Lord literally cuts these men to ribbons. In all of these **39 verses**, He just deals with these religious hypocrites. And I'll tell you what He says about them. He says about seven things, seven distinct charges He brings against these religious leaders.

Now you listen to what He said to them and you see if it doesn't fit most situations in this day, most religious situations. These charges brought against these Pharisees, Sadducees; He called them, "*Hypocrites*, (these religious leaders)." It will fit today.

In **verses 2 and 3** our Lord says this about them; "*They say but they don't do it.*" They bind grievous burdens about the necks of their hearers but they themselves don't do these things. They preach one thing and do something else. They preach to you sacrifice but they don't sacrifice. They preach, "Do you give," but they don't give.

They preach to you faithfulness, but they're not faithful. They preach faith and they live in the flesh. He said, "*They say but they don't do it.*" That's the first charge brought against them.

Secondly: In **verse 5** He says this about them; "*They do their works to be seen of men. They love the praise and glory of the chief seats. They want to sit on the chief seats*"

And then He says, "They love to be called impressive names. They like to be called Master." They like to be called, "*Rabbi.*" They like to be called, "Reverend." They like to be called, "Doctor."

They love these impressive names. They'll even go to school so they can earn certain degrees to be called by that name. And they pray and they fast and they give to be seen of men. They do their praying on the street corner and publically.

They do very little privately. They do practically nothing privately. They do everything to be seen of men.

And then **verse 14**; "*And they devour widows' houses and for a pretense they make long prayers.*" Widows' houses; they devour widows' houses, widows' savings, widows' storehouses. They devour these things.

Someone told me recently that most of the support for these religious hucksters and telethons and religious con-men on television; most of their support, do you know where it comes from? It comes from older women.

One woman had sent her entire estate her husband left her to live on after his death to a religious organization and she was on welfare. They send their social security checks to these preachers, and these preachers tell them, "It takes a lot of money to support our program. It takes a lot of money to keep us in our great homes and driving our automobiles and so we take from these poor little widows and we're going to pray for them. You send your money and we'll pray for you. Oh we'll pray for you when you get sick and pray for your problems and pray for your trials. But you've got to send some money. You've got to buy a healing cloth or buy something

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

and we'll send it to you and we'll pray for you." *"They devour widow's houses and for a pretense they make long prayers."*

I'm telling you this; I mentioned these commentaries. They've been put in print and they're now being published and translated in Russian. The money was raised for that translation without asking anybody for a dime.

And I've told you this for 19 years on this television program; I don't ask for money. I don't beg for money. God's not a beggar; God's a King. And if He's in something He'll support it.

We have missionaries on the field. I go to the mission fields and all these things. This program is paid for and we don't ask for a dime and we don't beg for a nickel. I'll tell you; God will supply the needs and the means if the Lord is in something.

And when men stand and beg and plead and cry for you to send money; don't do it. *"They devour widow's houses and for a pretense they make long prayers."*

Well I told you it would be negative but it needs to be said. Our Lord said it. And then **verse 15** He said; *"They compass sea and land to make converts, to make proselytes. And when they have made them, they're twofold more the child of hell than they are themselves."*

You see; the goal of these fellows; it was not to glorify God. Their goal was not to declare the Word of God. Their goal was not to honor and glorify Christ; it was to make converts.

You see; they want to report great numbers. They want to report what they've done and what they've accomplished. And they want to build huge followings and huge churches and huge organizations.

So they get a great crowd of people and have them raise their hand and make professions and come down to the front. And they'll say, "Now you repeat after me. Say this prayer.

And then you say, "They can't save people." These people can't save themselves. The church can't save them, *"Salvation's of the Lord."* Isn't that right? It is God that saves sinners. But these people make converts because they want to report numbers, success, and build great followings and great churches.

And then they say, "Now, you've made your profession, you're saved. You write us and send us your name and your address and we'll keep flooding you with material. We'll tell you how to live and how to give and how to be faithful to our program and how to support us."

And look at **verse 23**, the fifth charge. Our Lord says, *"They pay tithes on mint (not just on the big things) on anise, cumin (herbs, and the little things)."* They pay tithes; they're so particular to pay tithes on everything, to pay their tithes and keep their religious duties and days and ceremony.

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

But watch this, they neglect the weightier matters of God's Word like, "*Judgment and mercy and faith.*" They spend their time talking about tithes. They spend their time talking about healings.

They spend their time talking about Armageddon. They spend their time talking about ceremonies and laws and they neglected to deal with the matters of the heart like judgment. "*How can God be just and justify the ungodly?*"

What about judgment? "*It's appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment.*" How am I going to fair in the judgment? How can my sins be pardoned? How can my sins be put away? How can I prepare for the judgment?

What about mercy? The people, in the days when our Lord walked this earth they came to Him seeking mercy. Can mercy and truth meet together? Will God be merciful to me? Can I find mercy in the eyes of God? Mercy; I need mercy. The miserable need mercy; the guilty need grace. Sinners need salvation. Let's talk about mercy.

And then faith; what about faith? "*Without faith it's impossible to please God. Abraham believed God. It was counted to him for righteousness.*" When the Son of man comes will he find faith on this earth, faith?

Oh, I tell you; after you've raised your hand and the preacher's raised enough money and you've raised your attendance records; when are we going to talk about these, "*The weightier matters of the law?*"

Our Lord said of these hypocrites in His day; "They pay their tithes. They follow their programs. They have all these things just set in the right places and they've neglected to deal with things, matters of the heart, weightier matters, and heavy matters of the Word of God, "*Judgment, mercy, and faith.*"

Listen to **verse 25**, the sixth charge against them. He said; "*They make clean the outside of the cup and the platter but within they are full of extortion and excess.*"

Do you see this? They're like whited tombstones. "*They appear beautiful on the outside but on the inside they're full of dead men's bones.*" They're like the flowers on a grave; "*They appear beautiful to men but they're full of extortion and excess.*"

All these religious folks; they're against dancing and they're against worldliness. And they're against drinking and they're against smoking and they're against adultery. They're against abortion, they're against sports, and they're against all of these outward things you know.

And there are things wrong with these outward things but that's not man's problem. These outward things are the results of an inward problem. It's a heart problem, its soul problems.

And I'll tell you about these folks who put all their emphasis on the outward. Our Lord says that, "*They make clean the outside of the cup but the inside they've neglected, the inside.*"

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Most of these people that are so pure and wholesome and holy on the outside are mean on the inside. They have a bad attitude and a bad spirit. They're full of envy, jealousy, lust, and hatred. They can't even have a business meeting in the church without having a fight.

But they don't believe in drinking. They don't believe in smoking. They don't believe in going to a ballgame on Sunday. They got all these outward things all fixed up and cleaned up but on the inside they're full of sham and hypocrisy, envy, hatred and the malice.

That's what our Lord says; "Oh listen to me," He said. "*Clean up the inside that the outside might be clean* (straighten up the heart). *Out of the heart the mouth speaks.*"

"It's not what a man puts in his mouth that defiles him; it's what comes out of his heart: Out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, all these things." They come out of the heart.

And I'll tell you; you can whitewash a sinner on the outside to get him to quit every known vice, get him to quit everything. If God doesn't give him a new heart and a new spirit and a new nature, he'll be the most wicked man in your town because he's got an evil spirit. A right spirit will produce a right attitude, a right life and a right walk.

All right; here's the seventh charge down in **verse 29**. He said: "*Woe unto these hypocrites, Pharisees* (these false prophets) *they build and garnish the tombs of prophets but they kill the preachers God sends to them.*"

What's that talking about? Well I'll tell you what that's saying; it's saying they brag on dead preachers and kill living preachers. They brag on these great men of the past but the men who are preaching today, what those men preached back then; they won't listen to them.

They say, "Oh if we'd been in the days of our fathers we'd never persecuted the prophets." And yet, they were at that very moment rejecting Jesus Christ and His apostles, God's true prophet and God's apostles.

You see, this has always been the case. This is man all the way down through the years. The Jews hated Moses. You know they did; they said; "You brought us out here in the wilderness to starve? Why didn't you leave us in Egypt where we were happy?"

They hated Moses but they bragged on Abraham. Abraham was dead. And then when Moses died they bragged on Moses and killed Elisha and Isaiah and the prophets that lived in those times.

And then after the Lord Jesus and His apostles came along they hated the apostles and bragged on Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah.

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

And then the apostles all were put to death and the reformers came along, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Zwingli, and all of these great preachers and they hated them and bragged on the apostles.

And nowadays they're bragging on the reformers again. They brag on John Calvin, they brag on Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, John Bunyan, and Martin Luther. Oh these are great men. We keep their birthdays and visit their tombs. And yet I'm preaching the same thing they preached.

I preach what Johnathan Edwards preached. I preach what William Kerry preached. Judson, Spurgeon, Bunyan, Edwards, Luther; I preach what these men preached. Folks kill living preachers and brag on dead preachers. The longer he's been dead the more popular he is.

Do you know Johnathan Edwards? You young people studied his sermons, "**SINNERS IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD**" in High School. He was fired from his church. They dismissed him as pastor when he was alive. He left his church and went over and he was president of Princeton University. But the religious people hated him.

Charles Spurgeon, that everybody's bragging on today? He made this statement; "Not a preacher in London of any reputation will have anything to do with me." John Bunyan wrote, "**PILGRIM'S PROGRESS**," everybody brags on Bunyan.

Bunyan spent most of his time in the town of Bedford in jail. I visited the place where he was a young man, where he spent 12 years in prison, for what, for what he preached, for what he preached. But now he's popular. And the men who preach what he preached are now hated.

Martin Luther? Martin Luther is famous today but people had to hide him in the woodsheds to keep the church from killing him when he was alive 500 years ago.

Well, thank God we have his Word. Thank God we can listen and learn from these examples here, what our Lord said about these people here. Seven charges were brought against these false religious people who had their religion in form only, in ceremony, in duties and deeds. And they avoided true faith and true worship.

Let me give you in bringing this message to a close, seven marks of true faith like our Lord has given seven charges against these religionists. Let me give you seven marks of true faith. Now here's the first one. You listen carefully to me. You can write to me and get the tape and study it later.

First of all: True faith, true worship of the living God, arises out of a right knowledge of God, as He's revealed in the Scriptures.

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now my friends, God is not who you think He is and God's not who men say that He is. And God is not what the religious people in the churches claim He is; God is who He is. God is who He says He is.

God reveals Himself in creation; *"The heavens declare the glory of God."* He reveals Himself in the heavens. God reveals Himself in His Word. God reveals His holiness in His law. And God reveals Himself in Christ Jesus.

The Lord Jesus said, *"No man knoweth the Father but the Son, He to whom the Son will reveal Him."* The Son declares Him! He said, *"I and my Father are one. God who at sundry times and in different manners spake to our fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son."*

Now, do you want to know who God is? You quit trying to fashion your God out of your imagination or out of the imagination of some eloquent preacher and you go to the Word of God and find out who God is.

God's sovereign, God's almighty, God's holy, God's just, and God's gracious, and God's merciful. God is love. God is God. *"Let God be God and every man a liar."* Find out who He is because you're not going to get a right faith till you get a right God. That's just so!

Secondly: True faith arises out of a right knowledge of myself as I'm described in Scripture.

You see, God made man in His own image, made him holy and upright. But man rebelled, sought out many inventions and fell. *"By one man sin entered this world and death by sin, so death passed upon all men."*

And as a result of that one man, Adam's sin; Adam, the word means; man, red earth, came from the earth, God made him from the dirt and every man was made in him. We came from his loins. And being born of that fallen Adam, that fallen man, we're born fallen men. That's right!

"In sin my mother conceived me. I was shapen in iniquity and brought forth speaking lies. The wicked are estranged from the womb as soon as they're born speaking lies."

Paul describes us in **Romans 3**; *"There's none righteous, there's none good, there's none that seeketh after God. There's none that understand. There's no difference. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."*

Listen to me: *"There's not a just man on the earth who doeth good and sinneth not."* That's what the Scripture says.

Now; we better quit bragging on this flesh, praising this flesh, and thinking God is going to show mercy and favor to this flesh like it is. *"Flesh and blood are not going to inherit the kingdom of God."* We've got to be made new creatures in Christ.

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Thirdly: True faith is an understanding of the great things that God has done for us in Christ.

Now that's true faith, not what I've done for God, what God has done for me in Christ. That's true faith. Before man fell God provided a Redeemer. *"He was the lamb slain from (before) the foundation of the world."*

God set forth Christ in promise; He said, *"The woman's seed is going to bruise the serpent's head."* God set forth Christ in picture in the Old Testament: The Ark; that's Christ lifting His people above the flood of judgment.

The Passover Lamb, the serpent, the cities of refuge; those are all pictures of Christ. *"God sent Him into the world in the flesh made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem us who were born under the law."* He said, *"This is my Son in whom I am well pleased hear Him."*

God accepted His perfect life as our righteousness. God accepted His death as our atonement. God raised Him from the dead as our justifier. God seated Him and enthroned Him at His right hand as our Mediator and Intercessor. And He'll return again and receive us to himself.

True faith is an understanding of the great things God has done for us in our substitute Christ Jesus. That's as plain as I can make it.

Fourthly: True faith is believing the Gospel and by faith in Christ having a good hope through grace.

What did Abraham find? **Romans 4** says, *"He found righteousness."* Where did he find it, by what he did? No, by whom he believed. How, by faith or works, by faith alone? When was he justified, when he believed? Well, this wasn't written for his sake but for us to whom this righteousness shall be given if we believe. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."*

Fifthly: True faith produces a principle of love, love for Christ and a full surrender to His Lordship.

Now listen to me; you listen to what I'm saying. The whole religious world is talking about, "You accepting Jesus as your personal Saviour." You won't find that in God's Word. You can do that 1,000 times and it won't change your relationship with God, accepting Jesus as your personal Saviour.

The issue between you and God today is not, who is your personal Saviour; the issue is who is your Lord, who owns you, who runs your life, and who rules you? God will be Lord or He won't be your Saviour.

That's right! *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."* The Scripture says, *"With the heart man believeth unto righteousness. With the mouth his confession is made unto salvation."* By whom, those who believe that Jesus Christ is Lord?

FORM OR FAITH

MATTHEW 23:12 • HENRY T. MAHAN

“God exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess (that He is what, their personal Saviour, no) Lord, Lord.”

Sixth: True faith makes the goodness and love of God to me, the model of my behavior toward others. *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”*

Seventh: And last, true faith presses on us three goals, total commitment to Christ, and total communion with Christ, and one day total conformity to Christ Jesus. That’s true faith. It’s a heart work and it’s forever and it’s by the power of God through the work of Christ for the glory of God!