

## Matthew 23.1–15

Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. “The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God’s Law. You won’t go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following *them*. They talk a good line, but they don’t live it. They don’t take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It’s all spit-and-polish veneer.

“Instead of giving you God’s Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn’t think of lifting a finger to help. Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called ‘Doctor’ and ‘Reverend.’

“Don’t let people do that to *you*, put you on a pedestal like that. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. Don’t set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let *him* tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of ‘Father’; you have only one Father, and he’s in heaven. And don’t let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them—Christ.

“Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. If you puff yourself up, you’ll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you’re content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty.

“I’ve had it with you! You’re hopeless, you religion scholars, you Pharisees! Frauds! Your lives are roadblocks to God’s kingdom. You refuse to enter, and won’t let anyone else in either.

“You’re hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You go halfway around the world to make a convert, but once you get him you make him into a replica of yourselves, double-damned.