

The Dangers of No-Love Religion, Part 2

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[0 : 00] I am this morning in the Gospel of Mark where I am trying to close out kind of a two-part sermon on the dangers of no-love religion.

Let's see if we can get this thing rolling with that. The dangers of no-love religion. So if you weren't here last week and you would like to, I would encourage you to go on our website and you can pick that sermon up and if you'd like to, listen to it and catch up with it even after this one.

Although I'll be doing a pretty extensive review which is kind of my custom when we come to these two-part or three-part things, I like to keep you moving through the context of the passage.

We don't want any proof texting going on in what we're doing. We don't want to take the passage or the verse and lift it out of its context to make it say what we want it to say. We want it to speak to us in terms of what the author intended when he wrote it.

What was the author's meaning? That's the meaning. And we want to honor that. That takes a lot of work and a lot of focus when we study the Bible together to try and understand the author's intent and ultimately what we're trying to understand is God's intent.

[1 : 33] What does God mean by this passage? In other words, long before Jeff Jackson came along to preach quote-unquote this sermon, God preached it. He preached it first to the people who originally heard it.

And so I just need to preach it the way God preached it. And that's the way we're blessed as His people. Now, as we move into what will be Mark chapter 7, before I read the text, I again want to make some comments that bring us into a like-minded understanding of what's going on in this particular passage.

I want to say to you, religion is a very, very powerful force of influence and control well used by the enemy of our souls.

Satan is one of the most religious creatures alive today. Satan is very religious. Right?

You understand that? Do you think that Satan has certain beliefs? Convictions? Does he operate by what defines him?

[2 : 49] Jesus said that he is a liar and a murderer and the father of lies. He is very committed to his religion. And he has many, many, many converts in his religion.

Satan employs every aspect of religion to exploit the human soul and condition. If Satan can make your situation in life worse with religion, he's all for that.

The Apostle John tells us that there is a spirit of truth and of error operative in our world.

Here's the way that he says it. By this you know the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist of which you have heard it is coming.

[4 : 03] And now it is already in the world. We are from God. He who knows God listens to us.

He who is not from God does not listen to us. By this then we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Now why is he saying that? Within the context of this passage in John, John is dealing with the reality that there were some people that were involved in what they would call the Christian way or conversion to Christ in the early church.

These are the first converts that are coming out of Jesus being resurrected from the dead.

Churches are being formed. And John said we have some people that used to be involved with us in that.

And now they have moved out from us. And they are saying that Jesus Christ did not come as Messiah. He is not God in the flesh.

[5 : 04] And so this is why he is making a big deal out of the spirit of Antichrist. It is already with us in the world. We here are from God.

So that he who listens to us knows God is with us. We are sharing in the reality that Jesus is indeed the Christ. The only hope for the forgiveness of sins and yet we've got people that have left our congregation who are saying something very different.

This is the spirit of error operative in this world. It is anti-Jesus. The apostle Paul then tells us that this operative spirit of error, this spirit of the Antichrist, which exalts itself against the truth of God in Christ, is formed by demons seeking to indoctrinate people with spiritual lies.

They use those spiritual lies to then draw people into what the Bible describes as deceitful schemes.

Satan is a deceitful schemer using lies to ensnare, to entrap. He doesn't walk up with a bifurcated tail and horns and a red suit and gleaning eyes and yellow teeth and tell you things and try to convince you it's right.

[6 : 37] He comes to you as an angel of light. And He wants to make it palpable for you. He wants to make the medicine of error go down smoothly. And so we're being warned even by the apostle Paul that there is this deceitful scheming that is seeking to keep you ensnared to these lies that he tells.

And this is the spirit of the age. This is the reality that we live in. I want to show you this. It is actually the doctrine or the beliefs or the teachings or the instruction of demons.

It's perpetrated by human teachers, false teachers. But the origin of what they're teaching is actually from demons. Here's how Paul says it.

But the Holy Spirit explicitly says that in later times, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.

Now, these people who are falling away are not Christians losing their salvation. That's not possible. We know that from Scripture. These are people who were making a profession of faith and they were acting like Christians, but they were under a grand deception.

[8 : 02] And he's saying that in the times after the cross, as things began to march toward that day when God is going to judge the world, things are going to get worse and worse.

The persecution is going to ramp up and become increasingly bad for people who love the Lord. And as that happens, people are going to be led away from what is the true faith by the doctrines of demons.

It's a scary proposition. Likewise, we have another one. The Apostle James informs us of the satanic origins of human wisdom in our world.

Now, what I'm doing here is I'm trying to help us understand that when we face the issues of evil in our world, the Bible gives us a clear understanding and picture of where that evil comes from.

That evil is perpetrated by the arch enemy of your soul. They are the doctrines and teachings and beliefs of demonic spirits at work in our world.

[9 : 09] Now, the world hears that from us and thinks we've lost our mind. What's scientific about that? Well, it's true. It's in the Scripture, isn't it? And I'm showing it to you.

What does James say about all of this? Look at this. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant, prideful, and lie to yourself.

That is, lie against the truth. The truth is bearing witness. If you've got that in your heart, the truth is bearing witness against you. So don't be deceived about this. What you're calling wisdom isn't wisdom.

This wisdom is not that which comes down from above. No, it's not. It's not godly. It is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder in every evil thing. The product betrays the origin. Where you've got disorder in every evil thing, you've got something that is at work behind the scenes that is earthly, natural, and demonic.

[10 : 16] Folks, listen. That is the legacy and reality of the spirit of error defining our age. It is an active principle, an active spirit engaged in deceiving human beings, mankind.

The purveyors of this kind of thing are human beings, false teachers who can sound very academic, scholarly.

They can sound very religious. And there is a certain religious devotion to many of them that fool, fool, many people. Look, I want to say this to you up here.

Remember, we are not neutral thinkers. We are not neutral problem solvers. There's nothing about us as human beings that is in this neutral, middle ground, gray area of spiritual relationship to God. We are either in belief, trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and making us right with God the Father, or we are not trusting in Jesus Christ and believing in Him for the forgiveness of sins and to make us right with God the Father.

[11 : 37] That's it. There's no middle ground. We're in one of those camps. So we are never in a place where we are thinking neutrally about the issues of life.

We're either being influenced by truth or by error. You are in one of those conditions when you face the issues in your life. When you begin to problem solve, seek solutions, try to come up with definitions and perspectives and interpretations on the matters of life, you are either coming at it from the perspective of truth in Christ or error.

That's it. According to the Bible. I'm showing this to you right now. In fact, human societies are deeply dominated by deceitful demonic lies serving as the baseline of our solutions to the issues of human suffering and sin.

We don't come at it neutrally. We're biased. Human wisdom is steeped in the lies of satanic deception. This is a terrible problem. Folks, this is why we have the gospel.

It's good news because it conquers this. It's good news because it's the hope. But it's not a religious hope.

[13 : 00] And I don't want you to be ensnared by this. Folks, buckle up. God's doing an incredible... You are living in a historic moment. Things are about to change.

Look at the face of world politics alone and see the hand of Almighty God answering the prayers of His people. We just dodged a huge bullet and yet we don't put our faith in a man, do we?

We put our faith in Christ. Things are about to really heat up and you're going to see some incredible stuff happening soon, very soon. It's already in the mix.

And I don't want you to be deluded or deceived about what's going on and I want to help you interpret these things from a spiritual point of view. You need to interpret the situations and activities of the world spiritually, theologically, biblically, truthfully.

Those are all synonyms. Think about this stuff spiritually. Behind the scenes of all that's going on in our world today as it's been since the fall we experienced in Genesis 3, what's behind all of that is this great cataclysmic kind of confrontation with truth against evil.

[14 : 21] Truth against lies. Alright? That's what's going on. It's a spiritual reality. You're spiritual people. And so we need to make those interpretations spiritually as we look at them.

As we come then to Mark chapter 7 we're going to see this deception at work in the religious leaders confronting Jesus. So I'm not up here preaching every Sunday.

Greg and I are not ministering as under shepherds of the Lord in this congregation to help you become better religious people or to help you live your religion better.

That is not what we're aiming at. We have to say that very differently. Lest you be left vulnerable to satanic deception. This is not about religion.

There are lots and lots of religious people in the world. This is about a relationship with the God of the universe through His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord of glory.

[15 : 21] That's what this is about. It is about Him. We exalt Jesus. We do not exalt a religion. A denomination. Not even a perspective.

What do we know? Our perspectives are warped. We come to Jesus Christ who Himself is the way the truth and the life.

Jesus is the life. You will not find life in religion. You will find life in Christ. And so we exalt Jesus.

Look, if you will, at the text with me. Mark chapter 7. And this morning I'll read down through probably about verse 8 and then we'll take in some more as I move through it.

I'm reading this morning from the New American Standard version of the Scripture. The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Jesus when they had come from Jerusalem and had seen that some of Jesus' disciples were eating their bread with impure hands.

[16 : 38] What does that mean? That is unwashed. It simply means that they had not first washed their hands before they ate. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands.

Thus observing the traditions of the elders. And when they come from the marketplace, that is when they come from a place where they've had to rub elbows with the common people, they do not eat

unless they cleanse themselves.

And there are many other things which they have received in order to observe such as the washing of the cups and pitchers and copper pots. The Pharisees and the scribes asked Jesus, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders but eat their bread with impure or that is unwashed hands?

And Jesus replied this way in verse 6, Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites. As it is written, This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far away from me.

But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men, neglecting the commandment of God you hold to the tradition of men.

[17 : 57] Folks, there's your contrast. That's religion. And Jesus scathingly denounces that false religion. I am not anti-religion when we use that term to help us better describe our faith in Jesus Christ.

That's fine. But I am anti-religion when it tries to exalt itself through any means or by any means over the personhood of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only hope for salvation from sins.

In other words, you can't religious your way into heaven. You can't operate your way into heaven by religious ritual and do's and don'ts and rule keeping and thinking that you've arrived because you do the right things and try to stay away from the wrong things.

Or your prayers are high enough to convince God that you really mean it. We just sang a song that said, you know what, it doesn't lift its hands, tearful songs, earnestness, none of those things guarantee salvation.

You can be sincere and sincerely wrong at the same time. And so what do we preach? We preach Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and raised again as the hope of salvation.

[19 : 15] My friends, in this passage we are seeing that Mark 7 is a stunning picture of the confrontation between the self-righteousness of the human heart and the servant heart of the Son of God.

Don't miss Jesus in this passage. It's also a contrast between empty religion and eternal truth between hypocrisy and humility.

We see hypocrisy in the religious leaders, we see humility in the Lord Jesus. It's something they should have taken careful note of, but they hated Him all the more for what He's confronted them with in this passage.

This delegation of religious leaders was confronting Jesus about what is considered a sacred Jewish duty violated by Jesus' disciples.

disciples. You have taken the tradition of our teachers over the years and you have not observed it, which gives you a clear indication about what was going on, beloved.

[20 : 15] The Pharisees were following these people, Jesus and His disciples, around and watching them so intently that they even were able to take notice that they didn't wash their hands before they ate a meal.

That's how intense the scrutiny is. How would you like somebody following you around seven days a week intently watching you and taking notes about every little infraction and every little...

and then bringing it into public display. In other words, they walk in that door right there and they say, excuse me, pastor, if you can step aside for a moment, I've got something I want to say about this Mitch Foose character.

I can pick on Mitch because he loves me. Or this Jeff Jackson character.

I mean, which one of us could stand that kind of scrutiny, right? What we would hope to be able to do in that instance is say to somebody like that, you know what? You're right. You did see some of that stuff in me and it breaks my heart and I hope that you're as quick to say how I responded as I came under conviction how I asked God to forgive me and I repented and I sought the Lord and I hope that what you saw in my life was a consistent effort to come before the Lord Jesus Christ and worship Him and allow Him to change my heart.

[21 : 36] Are you going to speak to any of that? Well, hopefully that's what they could say because that's what we should be living if we love the Lord. Verses 3 and 4 as I mentioned to you last week in the sermon verses 3 and 4 are Mark's kind of parenthetical note to his Gentile readers.

Readers who have not been brought up in the Jewish faith and so they might not be familiar with this tradition of the elders issue. So he explains what it is. What's wrong with them not washing their hands before they eat?

I mean, they're in a hurry. Things are probably chaotic right now and they're just trying to get something down as fast as they can. Well, the Pharisees would say that is a sign of the impurity of their souls.

If they were more concerned about the external stuff, it would be an indication that they're concerned about the internal. Jesus turned that right on its head and said, man, you've got that as backwards as it can be.

That's the argument leveled against Jesus. It's very simple. His disciples aren't following the rules of human wisdom. religious piety according to men. Rules that men have made up.

[22 : 47] Traditions that men have held to. I told you last week, it's like us saying this, well, we've never done it that way before. And so it's taboo. The accusation was actually a means to get at Jesus.

That's what they want. Look at your disciples. Their reflection on you as their teacher and their rabbi. What's that say about you? You don't care about the traditions of the elders, do you?

So Jesus was implicated. Now what I'm doing is I'm bringing out what I'll put up here as three dangers of religion without love. This is a loveless religion.

This is rule keeping. This is legalism. This is weaponizing religious truth for your gain to your advantage.

It's a false religion that's based on the wisdom of man. I want to show you, I'll just read it to you to save time. When we're talking about the wonders of love in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and we're contrasting that with a loveless religion, I want to be careful to help you understand how this comes forward from Scripture from the mouth of Jesus Himself as He speaks to people who are going to follow Him and what He tells us.

[24 : 11] Listen to how He describes this issue of love for those who will follow Him as Christians. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another even as I have loved you that you also love one another.

I'm going to read that one more time. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another. Notice this part.

Even as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another.

Now, why would Jesus command us to love one another if He didn't give us what we need to actually fulfill it? What a setup that would be. And so, do we have what we need in the Holy Spirit to love one another as Jesus also loved us?

Yes, we do. And so, I want you to notice He's not commanding us to be religious. He does tell us many times in the Gospel of John and other places that He wants us to obey His commandment.

[25 : 30] How will you know if you love Me you will obey Me? But why do we obey Him? Why do we keep the rules? Why are we careful about what our obedience looks like in our relationship with Jesus?

Why? Because we're afraid of getting zapped? Well, that certainly could be a good motivation. You know, none of us want to be punished. None of us want to be disciplined.

None of us want to come under the discipline of the Lord for living a life that is kind of ignoring Him and being callous. But no, we keep the rules because we love Him. Our desire to please Jesus out of our love for Him is what keeps us in that obedient mode.

You with me? I'm sure as you raised your kids, did you want your kids to obey more out of the fear of you or of love for you? If you had to pick, which would you pick?

God the Father wants us to obey because we love Him. We've come to love Him. He's precious to us. And we want to share the same love that we're being loved with with others.

[26 : 38] I want to love you the way that Jesus is loving me. Who am I to withhold forgiveness from you, brother, when God's not withholding forgiveness from me?

Who am I to come alongside of you and point out all your warts and faults when God doesn't follow me around pointing out all my warts and faults? Who am I to withhold mercy from you, kindness and gentleness?

That's how I'm treated every moment of my life by Jesus. He deals with me in the gentleness of His wisdom. And I'm called on to do the same toward you. This is not religion.

This is your relationship with Jesus. And my challenge to all of us as we face this new year is, will you allow the Lord Jesus to help you consciously grow in an attitude and spirit of love and truth this

year?

Will you say to Jesus, above all things, I want to become more loving. I want to know you in love and know your love for me and I want to minister that love to others.

[27 : 43] I want to be a more loving human being. I want love to be the rule of my heart. Love sacrifices.

I'm not saying are you feeling challenged to be more kind? That's not, that's part of it. I just, this year, I am endeavoring to be a nicer person.

Well, what does that mean? But when you say, I want to know more of the love that God has for me and I want to be able to share or serve or minister that love, that same love to others, now we're getting ourselves where we need to be.

Because you're going to do that in humility. You're going to do that from a heart that is breaking with the goodness and peace of Jesus because you can't get over how much God loves you in His Son and what He's done for you.

And that defines you. And you begin to serve and live out of that every day. God, I just can't get over that you love me. Help me know the length and breadth and width.

[28 : 58] Help me to know all of the heights of your love for me so that as I know that love, I can minister that love to others. Look, I can't make enough of a deal about this.

This is why I'm bringing this message and dusted it off and said, let me bring this to Him. We need to love. The first point that I offered you from last week, the first of these three, is religious knowledge without love.

This is the first danger. Religious knowledge without love. This is me taking pride in what I know. So, I'm weaponizing my knowledge.

I have a certain biblical knowledge, religious knowledge, I could even have a certain knowledge of the truth, but I weaponize it. I use it against people.

I manipulate them, control them, I cut them, I control conversations, I use my religious knowledge or the truth of what I know to remind people of how often they fail to measure up in their relationship with me.

[30 : 01] I find ways to help them understand their faults. Oh, albeit, I'm just trying to help them see the way that they need to go. Bless me. When in reality, what we're doing is we're weaponizing the truth so that we can let people know, hey dude, you're not measuring up.

Hey gal, you're just not measuring up. You need to up your game here, okay, because actually it's inconveniencing me. Do we not do that? I guess I'm the only one that struggles with that.

I don't know. I used several other passages last week. I'm not going to do it again this week. Please listen. I used several other passages last week to illustrate that the men in our passage, these religious leaders, had religious knowledge.

They even had a religious zeal. But it didn't serve to humble them. They weaponized their religious knowledge against these people and it puffed them up in pride.

Their knowledge did not humble them and make them more loving, kind, gentle. No. Their knowledge puffed them up in pride so that they used this as a weapon against anybody who would disagree with them or challenge their authority.

[31 : 15] You remember, these religious leaders, they are the religious gatekeepers for the faith in Israel. I want you to notice their question because this is a question to try to trap Jesus and find fault with Him.

You see it in, I think, verse 5. The Pharisees and the scribes then asked Jesus, why do your disciples not walk according to what? Did He say the truth? The Torah?

No. The tradition of the elders. This was an oral tradition passed down among religious leaders from previous generations.

Here's the problem. Why do they not do this? They don't wash their hands before they eat and they're supposed to do that. That's what's been handed down to us and you guys aren't doing it. That's their concern.

That's the limit of their concern. Now notice how Jesus exposes this as hypocrisy. He doesn't just go to the behavior, He goes right to the attitude of the heart behind what they're saying because He can see their hearts.

[32 : 18] He nails down their wacky, dishonoring use of God's Word. Please notice this. This is indicative of how every single false system handles God's truth because there are many people out

there who will espouse knowing about God's truth but they use it in a way that Jesus is going to expose.

Now, if you'll begin in verse 6 and reread this with me. Isaiah prophesied this about you hypocrites. So, He's saying, Jesus is saying, you know, way back when Isaiah said this some 700 years ago, He's talking about you guys.

Wow! This people honors me with their lips but their hearts far away from me. In vain do they worship me. We don't want that here at Grace, folks. Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. God help me and Greg that we would ever teach as the doctrines of God nothing more than just human wisdom. That's why we don't teach psychology from this pulpit. We don't teach philosophy, human philosophy from this pulpit.

We teach God's Word. Neglecting the commandment of God, verse 8, you hold the tradition of men. You see, it's one or the other.

[33 : 35] In order for you to hold on and put priority on the tradition of men, the wisdom of men, you have to neglect the commandment of God. Verse 9, He was also saying to them, you are, now notice folks, experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

For Moses said, honor your father and mother and he who speaks evil of father and mother is to be put to death. But you say, if a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban.

That is to say, given to God. Oh, isn't that convenient? You understand what he's saying? You know, I know that I have an abundance here, but I've set aside a significant portion of it for the Lord. It belongs to God. And so whatever I would have been able to take from that to help you, it belongs to the Lord. And you want to ask him, yeah, where is that money? Is it in your account?

How are you using it for God? Can you give me a kind of a breakdown of how that money each month is being used for the purposes of serving the Lord? They couldn't do it.

[34 : 46] This is a lie. Remember, Jesus has already labeled them as hypocrites. They don't know what they're talking about. Verse 12, you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother.

Now, do you see that? The language in the Scripture is so specific. You no longer permit him. Who made them God?

And here's the result. Verse 13, thus invalidating the Word of God. Now, would you like to be guilty of that? Invalidating the Word of God, how?

By your tradition. You could read that by your human wisdom, which you have handed down. So in other words, you are multiplied guilty because you have handed it down in terms of its lying and its error and its compounded as it's gone from each generation.

It's just grown bigger and bigger and fatter and fatter. And you do many things such as that. What an indictment, folks. Do you see that? That's scary business.

[35 : 53] You wouldn't want the Lord Jesus to sit down across from you and bring an indictment like that against you and say, you know what? The way you live your life invalidates the truth. And you do many such things like that.

Whoa. Well, this is a heavy indictment indeed. Our knowledge of God that we get from God's Word is supposed to lead us in a greater love for God and others.

There you go. I don't know how to say it any clearer than that. If we're reading God's Word and coming to worship under God's Word and week after week we're not finding ourselves growing in the love of the Lord as God describes that love in the Word of God, there's something wrong.

Where's the disconnect? That's what we want to start asking. So here's what we're dealing with. Are we allowing God's truth to change our hearts?

Not our wife's heart or our husband's heart or our family member's heart or our unbelieving co-worker's heart. No. So that we are growing in His love for Him and for others.

[37 : 07] In my Christian life, am I not just growing in knowledge? Am I not just growing in how to out-argue people or whatever? Am I actually growing in a love for them?

And a love for them says, I, listen, here's love. Love gets a bad rap, man. You see, love, oh boy. We could just go off all over the place about the sentimentality about what love is called love in our world today.

Here's love. It's in the symbol of what's right behind me. Thank you for putting that up for me, Michael. It's in that right there. There's love. There's love. a willingness to be sinned against and still

minister the best for that human being.

You will not be able to chase me away from doing and believing what is best for you no matter what you say or do to me. You can run me out of your life.

You can do whatever you want to do to me. But the love of Jesus Christ constrains me in my heart to be willing to forgive you and to remain in an attitude of forgiveness towards you and to do whatever I can do in the Lord Jesus Christ to have your best interest at heart.

[38 : 27] Do you have people in your life right now that have kind of ostracized you or kicked you out of their lives because of your faith or your belief and they don't want to have? I do. We have to maintain a forgiving spirit toward them.

A prayerful spirit toward them. Love keeps us in the position hear me? Love keeps us in the position of self-sacrifice. Self-denial.

That's love. Now, I'm going to ask you if you think I'm all wet on that, does anything that I just said contradict the cross or what you saw Jesus do on the cross?

No. Jesus gave His life for people who hate Him. That's love.

We've got to work on the love thing, don't we? Yeah, all of us. Another thing.

[39 : 32] Am I considering others more important than myself? You know, Philippians 2 tells us to do that. To consider others more important than yourself.

It says that. Quote, Am I forgiving? Am I a forgiving person? Am I gentler? Am I a more patient person? Am I a kinder person in how I relate to other people?

Especially when they sin? Those are manifestations of what could be a loving heart. Especially when they sin against me. Look, it's easy for me to love Suzanne when everything's going my way with Suzanne.

Right? Getting everything I want. She's, you know, saying all the right things. It's like, girl, you're on it. Keep it up. It's fantastic. But the first time I have some perception or interpretation of a, yeah, yeah, you're dropping the ball here.

You know, what happens then? Yeah, I don't know. No, sometimes these questions are answered in our lives more by expediency than by what is truthful and loving.

[40 : 47] Right now, what that means is that we're more concerned with the personal payoff in those instances than with what pleases Jesus. Can I say this in order to get what I want, get relief from the issue, get this person off my back, or am I more concerned in what I'm about to say pleasing Jesus?

Sometimes we live more by expediency than what pleases the Lord. Now, the question is at this point, what was the payoff in all this for the religious leaders?

Why would they do this? Well, here's the payoff. I'll put it up here just to... knowledge is power.

That's the payoff. These men could quote the Torah.

Jesus called them experts. They can discuss the finer points of technical religious issues. Have you ever met somebody like that? They can out-technical you in terms of the Bible.

They knew how to use their superior knowledge and their religiosity and religious system to impress people, control people, to intimidate people around them, to keep people scared to ask them anything.

[41 : 58] System and order aren't bad. I'm not arguing against system and order. But when we live for the system we create, and as we try to keep our place in that system at all costs, the system then fast becomes our task master.

The system becomes our idol. The thing. Well, we're not about a system here. We're about a person. Christianity is not a system.

It's a life of following a person. It's a relationship with God through our relationship of faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. We always want to bring it back to, we are in a relationship with the Lord of glory through the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does that relationship look like? Have you taken the pulse of your relationship with Jesus lately? Is it beating strong? Is it weak? Have you taken the temperature of your relationship with Jesus lately?

Is it warm? Or is it cold? Well, why is that? Is the problem with Jesus? Or might it be somewhere else?

[43 : 08] The church. Notice this with me. The church is not a system. It's not a program.

Or even a series of programs, events, activities. No, the church is you. You're the church. You are God's people. You're a spiritual family.

You are the living organism. You are the body of Christ created for loving service to the glory of God. Do you hear all those words emphasize relationship?

So if you're coming to church, I know what we mean when we say that, but you're the church. When you come to church, if you're not growing in your love for the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of being involved with these people in worship, then there's a disconnect somewhere, isn't there?

And that should be cause for pause. Anything that supplants or replaces Jesus Christ as the supreme object of your love is an idol.

[44 : 17] It could be a good thing. Anything that serves to rob Jesus of glory in and through your life is an idol. And anything that deceives you into loving and valuing yourself more than others is an idol.

Look, God's Word leads us away from idols and into relationship with the Lord.

What did John say? Little children, guard yourselves from idols. What did Paul say? Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

Don't embrace it. Don't coddle it. Don't be ignorant about it. Flee from it. Guard yourself from it.

Well, that's the payoff. What about the product? I didn't get to this last time.

The product is prideful religious knowledge makes a hypocrite. That's what you're always going to find in the way of weaponizing religious knowledge. It just makes good hypocrites.

[45 : 20] Expert is what Jesus said. You're just expert hypocrites. His accusation was that they were religious phonies. They were the false teachers, not Jesus.

They were the ones that were neglecting God's Word and ruining God's Word, not Christ. The word for hypocrite was a theatrical term that they used to describe an actor wearing a mask.

The actor is pretending to be the character reflected by the mask. That's where the word hypocrite comes from. He wasn't really who he was pretending to be.

Now, up here, they professed, this is a quote from D. Edmund Hebert, one of the commentators that I read from Mark, they professed to be followers of God but were in reality followers of men.

There's the problem. Religion had been smothered beneath ritual. Washing the hands counted for more than the devotion of the heart and they were careful of petty rules and careless of the great commands of God.

[46 : 26] That's what it does to your heart. It's very dangerous. This is where false teaching leads. Alright? The second danger of no-love religion. Religious rules without love.

So this is pride in what I do. Not pride in what I know as much now. Pride in what I do. Religious tradition called for the disciples to ceremonially clean their hands before they took any food.

So it wasn't an issue of personal hygiene. It was a command that they were saying was from Scripture in terms of the tradition of the elders but it wasn't. This is not a command given by Scripture for them to follow.

That's what the problem is as they face it with Jesus and Jesus identifies it right away. And they had seen that some of Jesus' disciples were eating their bread with unwashed hands because the Pharisees were holding the tradition of elders which required them to wash their hands ceremonially before they ate a meal especially when they had been out according to the Bible here especially when they had been out in the marketplace among the common people they had to come in and ceremonially wash their hands as a way of symbolizing symbolizing the washing of their hearts.

Jesus will later tell them you fools you cannot cleanse your heart by exterior. It's not what goes from outside in that corrupts you.

[48 : 01] It's what's already in there that comes out that defiles you that's what you're going to be judged by. It's what already resides within you that God's dealing with not what you can put in from without.

This is what he'll say in the next part of the passage. And this is what the problem is with these people. The disciples in their mind were disregarding critical matters of personal religious holiness that distinguish them from the irreligious or the unbelieving.

So these men craved the approval of other people. This was all about them saying don't you know that people out here are watching and they're watching you as a rabbi and they see you do this and the Jews are kind of going oh my goodness they're not keeping the tradition.

Don't they know how we do it around here? But Jesus isn't seeking the approval of men. And I'm thinking man Jesus you are so centered on doing the will of your Father and exposing this for what it is and it's such an example for us.

Think of the inner peace and freedom that there was for Jesus in his Godward focus way of life. everything Jesus measured he measured according to his Godward consciousness and focus in life.

[49 : 21] I just came to please my Father. Everything I say and do is about pleasing my Father whatever it costs me whatever compromise comes my way it won't be a compromise that I make.

This is Jesus. Now what would it be like for you and for me if we would follow his example and make our careful prayerful focus in our responses to life about what would most please Jesus in that moment.

Would that be liberating for you? In this moment of circumstance situation trial suffering I'm going to make how I think about this and how I respond more about pleasing Jesus Christ than anything else.

More about solving the problem getting the problem to go away trying to tamper the problem or whatever. Whatever I'm going to say and do in this moment I want it to be about pleasing the Lord. What will most please the Lord? You don't have to say what would Jesus do. Turn to the Bible and read it and say this is what Jesus did and then do it. you don't have to wonder.

[50 : 40] It's right here. We just need to go see. Well, what's the payoff here in this second one? What's the payoff? Rules are control.

Those who wanted to serve God had to jump through the man-made religious hoops designed and or guarded by these leaders. So this is the face. What you're seeing in this passage is the face of a prideful heart.

This is what pride looks like in religion. You either do it the way that we say or you're out. There's no grace, no mercy, no discussion, nothing.

We're going to expose you, ridicule you in front of everybody. You know, folks, listen, we can do this with each other. I don't want to gloss over this.

We can do this kind of thing from this prideful attitude with each other. We can have this subscribe to my agenda mentality. It may sound like this.

[51 : 43] Submit to my expectations for you. You're falling short. Meet my needs. You're not meeting my needs.

And they're legit. And they could be. And if you don't meet my agenda, submit to my expectations and come to my needs, I'll withhold God's love from you until I get what I want from you.

It'll look like the silent treatment. It'll look like manipulation. It'll look like nagging. It'll look like bringing up a record of wrongs from your life and reminding you of how you continue to fail in this area.

How much longer am I going to have to deal with this? Huh? Huh? It's very ugly. I won't be forgiving.

I won't be kind. I will not be gentle or patient. Instead, I'll keep a record of wrongs and find ways to punish you for your infractions against me until you wake up and get the point.

[52 : 50] My goodness, you say, Jeff, really? Well, yeah. Huh? The love of Jesus, on the other hand. The love of Jesus is a love that's willing to be sinned against and when sinned against, it doesn't seek its own way, but it, notice this quote here from 1 Corinthians 13, it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

That's 7 and 8. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13, 7 and 8. It is the sacrificial love of the cross. What's the product in all this?

Prideful religious rules produce a hard heart. That's what happens. The result was that their wrong doctrine led to a wrong duty. Jesus said that though they said with their lips that they were serving God, what was actually happening inside of them were their hearts were far from God.

Folks, please know how dangerous that is. We don't want you to come in here every Sunday and certainly not leave here and go out in the workaday world every week with this hypocritical deceitful reality going on in your heart where you're coming in here thinking you're going through the motions and then you're going back out there and telling everybody you're a Christian but you're not living for the glory of Jesus.

You're not growing in love. Your heart isn't changing and growing in a love for Christ. You're not becoming more humble, gentle, kind, expressions of the Holy Spirit working in you and all of that motivated by a willingness to be sinned against and not complain, not whine, not take vengeance, not punish.

[54 : 34] You say, Jeff, who lives like that? Right. Who indeed? We don't want this to produce a hard heart in us.

The real danger of this kind of thinking is that that hard heart turns inward and focuses on self. It insists on its own way while calling it the way of God.

Have you ever been guilty of using the Scriptures in a weaponized way to show the other person how they're falling short so that they will make things better for you? I made that mistake in my early marriage.

I knew the part about the wife's role super well. And I was pretty good. Don't say anything, honey. No.

Zip it. She said no. Yeah, and I was, listen, I was called out on that. I was called out on that pretty early on, thank the Lord. Yep.

[55 : 43] This is our heart. And I don't want to be guilty of that. The third danger, finally, folks, and I'm more brief here. Religious life that isn't warmed and grown in love for God is a religious devotion.

Yes, these men were devoted, but without love. And this is pride in who I am. Pride in what I know, pride in what I do, pride in who I am. I am above you. Do you not realize that?

This is what this says. I know the Bible better than you do. I know better the insights of this passage than you do.

I might not tell you that, but I'm definitely going to give you that impression. This is what it looks like and sounds like when I weaponize God's word or truth or religion against people.

I just weaponize it. The scribes and Pharisees were their own worst enemies because they fed off of each other's misplaced religious zeal and they thought it was devotion to God.

[56 : 50] Remember when I told you last week you could be in a congregation of 5,000 people and you have a person that's got a heart like this, they will find another person out of that 5,000 that thinks like they do and believes.

It's amazing to me. And then they'll get together and reinforce each other. We look for people that will tell us what we want to hear. That's our nature. The danger of that is that we're reinforcing and compounding.

This is exactly what Jesus said when he said for generations you have handed down this very thing. And so generations of people have come together as a tradition of elders and reinforced this in each other and said it enough to where now it's law.

In fact, it's so important in religious life in Israel that we elevate it above the word of God and we use it to interpret the Bible. You see how that happens?

Now we're using human wisdom to measure whether or not what the Bible says is accurate. Do you know how many people in modern times have used science quote unquote to figure out there is no way in God's universe that God Almighty could have.

[58 : 02] This is the person who sent Jesus to the cross and takes a dead soul and animates it to life he cannot create the world in six literal days.

It just cannot be done. It's not scientifically possible. And so we use science to interpret the Bible and tell us that the Bible is mistaken here.

We can't possibly interpret it that way even though the Bible takes pains to tell you that it was done in six literal days. that's what we do.

And many many things like that. We seek out other people that will share our perspective of being wronged and of being right. I've been wronged in this but I'm right in that right?

Am I right? Oh absolutely. I had the same thing happen to me. They'll tell us what we want to hear they'll affirm us in our deceitful pride and oh God help us that is so dangerous. We don't want a bunch of people in our congregation speaking into each other's lives in a way that say this kind of thing.

[59 : 06] Look I'm from the deep south so I'm just going to do it. You know where I'm going. Bless your heart. Bless your heart. I know. I know. And it's almost as if we're giving license to sin because it's just hard.

Life is hard. We don't want that. It's very dangerous. Tradition has to serve the truth. But examine everything carefully.

Hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil. What's the payoff? What's the payoff? The payoff is piety is security. In other words it may be a wonderful feeling to look down your spiritual nose at other less spiritual people than yourself and declare yourself right in your own eyes but God hates it.

Proverbs 6 I'm not going to go there for the sake of time. Proverbs 6 16 through 19 will speak to the issue of how God hates pride in the human heart.

It's an abomination to him. He hates it. What's the product in all this? Prideful piety produces hollow holiness. Jesus indicts these men from verse 6 Isaiah prophesied about you as hypocrites and he said this you do honor me with your lips.

[60 : 28] You make a good show of it but your heart is so far away from me in vain do you worship me. In other words I don't receive your worship verse 7.

I do not receive what you're saying and doing in the way of worship. You teach you've come so far away from the truth. You teach as doctrines that is religious beliefs.

the precepts of men. And as you do that verse 8 you neglect the commandment of God to uphold those traditions of men. You're experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

In other words you are willing to trade anything in the way of God's truth to uphold your own perspectives. Your own insights. Of what's right and wrong.

And it's all hollow. You're hypocrites. God measures holiness friends by one standard. You know what it is? Himself. God measures holiness by himself.

[61 : 30] This is why you and I needed the merit of the righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to our bank account. Our spiritual bank account to stand holy before the Lord. Do you stand holy before the Lord in your righteousness or in Jesus?

Jesus. Right. You received an alien righteousness. righteousness. That is a righteousness outside of you. God credited or merited to you the righteousness of his holy son.

He said I'm going to take the life that my son lived without sin and all the fulfillment of the law. Jesus Christ fulfilled every jot and tittle of my law kept it perfectly.

I'm going to credit that right living under the law to you as if you lived it so that now when I see you I'm going to see the merit of my son living in you because he lived that life on your behalf.

He did it for you. And now here's the gift. Here you go. This is the gift of my son's perfect life. Here it is. Take it. And when I see you I'm going to see the perfect life he lived for you.

[62 : 41] And you know what? That will never change. I will always see you that way. And you. And you. Always. For eternity.

And there is no power in the universe that can snatch that away. That is your security. That's the gift of my son. That's love. That's love.

That's what I'm preaching. The love of Jesus for sinners. The merit of Jesus Christ as the way the truth and the life. Let me give you a few takeaways and then I'm done.

OK. A few takeaways. How might your life be different if you stopped being so influenced by these things? Think about that. I'm going to put them up here.

How might your life be different this year? If you set your heart to love the Lord Jesus Christ and please him in all things. How about this?

[63 : 39] What people think about you. It's not that it's not important that we live a holy life as a witness or a testimony to the love of Jesus.

That's not what I'm saying. But what if you stopped being so influenced by what people think about you so that you're doing what you're doing more out of what people will think about you than what pleases the Lord?

How about this one? What people do to you. You're going to be less influenced this year by what people do to you.

This this would be the wrong the wrongs that you suffer at the hands of sinners, maybe even sinners in your own household. What about this one? What people are not doing to you.

This is what you think is being withheld from you that you deserve or you should have here. Also under this one are your expectations of other people and of the world.

[64 : 38] We get in a lot of trouble with expectations that we don't surrender to Jesus. And then finally, what you consider to be a raw deal for your life because you aren't getting what you think you deserve.

It's very akin to the previous one. How might your life be different if you are no longer as influenced by those things and more influenced by a love for Christ and a desire to please him?

Look, I'll say it this way. God's word is spiritual wisdom for godly thinking and living. Is God's word helping your heart to grow increasingly loving?

Now ask yourself that question, friends, before we leave today. Is your time in God's word helping you in terms of your heart to grow increasingly loving toward the Lord and others?

So that you are increasingly what? Patient, kind and gentle. Compassionate, considerate, servant-hearted and forgiving.

[65 : 42] And then finally, committed to peace with others through a growing deference and a willingness to be sinned against for the sake of Christ and his gospel of grace.

Friends, whatever your commitments are in this new year, I hope that you'll consider and that you will understand the need to consider making a growing love for Jesus your main pursuit in 2025.

Don't miss the point of the Christian life. The point of the Christian life is loving Jesus as he loves you and loving others as you are loved by him.

That focus will never fail you in life and it will keep you from hypocrisy. Let's pray together. Father, we have been deeply challenged from your word this morning in terms of Jesus confronting the Pharisees and hypocrites of his day and warning them that if they embrace the lies, these demonic lies that are constituted in the wisdom of man instead of the wisdom of God, that these men would live as hypocrites and they would be forever separated from you.

What a horrible fate for any human soul to receive a devil's hell because they've never turned to you for forgiveness of their sins.

[67 : 16] So we turn now to rehearse in our hearts the gift of Jesus. You tell us that he is the treasure of wisdom. He is wisdom.

He is the treasure. He is love. He is grace, kindness, patience and peace. He is the self-control that we need to exhibit. He is the one who has called us to self-denial and taking up our cross in order to follow him.

And so, Father, we are keenly aware of the failures of our lives, the lack of love. We are a loveless people at times. Please forgive us and please help us to follow Jesus.

And again, I know the key to all of this is that we would be a people who are keenly aware each day of how much you love us. So help us to reflect on the gospel where we see in the cross and resurrection the wonderful love of almighty God for sinners.

And the provision that you've made in your son for our salvation. What love, what love. We thank you for this. We thank you for the gift of the Lord Jesus and we pray that if there's anyone here this morning struggling with confidence that they have been forgiven for their sins and that you do love them, that they will come forward after the service.

[68 : 40] Talk with me, talk with Greg and settle in their hearts today this issue of your love for them on the cross of Christ. We love you, Lord, and we pray you'll help us to grow in that love even through this week.

In Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.