

## Parental Woes

### I. The recipients of the woes. Matthew 23:13-36; James 3:1

- The scribes copied the Scriptures and were teachers and interpreters of the law. “Pharisee” encompassed everyone of the time who had certain theological beliefs concerning the Old Testament and who strove to perfectly keep the law. These people were the spiritual leaders of the day because many of them functioned in the political and religious forums.
- Every time Jesus levies a woe, He will refer to the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites.
- It is abundantly appropriate for us parents—the spiritual leaders in our homes, the ones who are to be rearing our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord—to stop and consider that if Jesus is levying these woes against spiritual leaders who do what the scribes and Pharisees were doing, I had better make sure *my* parenting isn’t guilty of the same things.

### II. The Seven Parental Woes

- **Woe to parents who aren’t children of God and who encourage their kids not to be children of God.** Matthew 23:13
  - Jesus was not talking to atheists. He was talking to the spiritual authorities. These people were constantly offended by Jesus’ criticisms because they *absolutely* believed He was insane for suggesting they would not enter heaven and they did not allow others to enter.
  - This means that if they—who were more acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures than most of us are with our completed Scriptures and who lived more aggressively devout lives than most of us—if these people were mistaken about their spiritual leadership . . . what are the chances we may be too—at least a little?
- **Woe to parents who are in it for what they get out of it.** Matthew 23:14
  - These spiritual leaders were all about what they would get. Many were motivated by money, popularity, and power. And—guess what—there are a lot of well-meaning parents who have similar motivations. Some just want a little person to mold. Others are thinking about how their kids will take care of them when they’re old. Some control freaks just like having subservients to boss around.
  - But even more purposeful parents can be tempted to parent the way they do because they want people to perceive them a certain way—not the least of which is their own children.
- **Woe to parents who turn their children into versions of themselves.** Matthew 23:15; I Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; II Thessalonians 3
  - These individuals went to great lengths to make carbon copies of themselves. And we should all know that the best teachers put out students who go on to surpass the teachers themselves.
  - Whether consciously or subconsciously, we want our kids to make the same food and friends and clothing and music and lifestyle choices that we make because we think they’re best and they would be better off if they did. We have rules that only enforce our own opinions and preferences. We want our kids to prescribe to a label or a tradition, but in so doing we actually either teach them incorrectly, or we encourage them to follow a system instead of a Savior.
- **Woe to parents who have the wrong priorities.** Matthew 23:16-22
  - When we make the process more important than the Person, when we have goals other than God’s glory, when we’re so consumed with chores and food and vacations and entertainment and homework than we are the God for whom we were created to live and testify . . . we’re foolish and blind.

- **Woe to parents who pick and choose how they submit to God.** Matthew 23:23-24
  - We are so often tempted to claim that our parenting is successful because our sons aren't doing drugs and our daughters aren't pregnant. Good grades must be the mark of good parenting, right?
  - But the weightier matters, justice and mercy and faithfulness—those seemingly subjective, hard-to-quantify from a human perspective character traits—are so much more important that wearing the right clothes, eating correctly, only watching “clean movies” and reading your Bible every day.
- **Woe to parents who are selfish.** Matthew 23:25-26
  - The outside looks great, but the heart is selfish. If the fruit of our lives is going to please the Lord, the roots cannot be selfish, self-serving, and self-worshipping.
  - These parents work hard on the superficials without recognizing and addressing the absolutely vital heart God requires of His people.
- **Woe to parents who are impure.** Matthew 23:27-28
  - Like the last and first accusations, woe to parents whose external life is not consistent with the spiritual realities of their inner man.
  - In I John we learn that people who say (or try to act) like they're living in the light, but who have the darkness in their heart, are lying and don't know the truth.
- **Woe to parents who follow the wrong spiritual leaders.** Matthew 23:29-33
  - The path we walk gives clear testament to the influences we've chosen to follow.
  - When we choose to follow the teachings of someone or we subscribe to another's worldview, but those truths do not agree with God's Word, woe on us.

### III. The recipients of the woes.

- Woe to parents who push their children from God, who use their parenting for personal gain, woe to us who would turn our children into us, those who have secular priorities that dethrone the divine priorities, woe to the parents who pick and choose how and when they submit to God, who are selfish, who are impure, and who submit themselves to unqualified spiritual authorities. Why do we do these things? Matthew 23-12 gives us the answers.
- Jesus calls them hypocrites because they have one standard for everyone else, and another for themselves.
- A hypocrite is not someone who says that we all need to glorify God, but who sins, confesses, apologizes, and repents. That is to be human. That's the process to which God calls us. A hypocrite is someone who expects other people to do it, but does not ever or truly expect it of themselves.
- Our biggest issue is that we're prideful. Our thoughts and actions and words and feelings are consumed with self. But pride isn't the only problem. We're also arrogant. We don't just think too often about ourselves, we think too highly of ourselves.
- And that causes us to be hypocrites. Our parenting is often on point from the way it sounds. But really, it's all about us.
- Instead, we must be humble. Humility doesn't think too much of itself. Humility doesn't think about itself at all. It's motivation is God and His glory.
- We can teach without needing to be viewed as a teacher. We don't have to be the center of our spiritual authority. We follow Christ, and we invite others to follow as we follow Him. We serve the Father and our children by being God's Ambassador to them. We don't need to exalt ourselves. It's not about what I want or think I need or feel. It's about pleasing our Savior.