


MATTHEW 23:1-15
WRITING OFF THE FUTURE
(WHY OUR CHILDREN ARE GOING TO HELL)

“Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”¹

eldom do I preach my doubts. However, when I consider the future of the Faith as taught to our children, I am plagued by serious concerns that quickly mount to the level of doubts. As a young man just beginning my service before the Lord, I was possessed of boundless anticipation. During the seventies and eighties, the Christian world witnessed a number of religious movements that appeared to thrust the message of Christ aggressively into the midst of the world—the Jesus Movement, the popularity of books such as “The Late, Great Planet Earth” focusing on the return of the Master, the formation of The Moral Majority and a series of “revivals” that broke out spontaneously in seminaries and theological schools in the United States and in Canada. The evidence seemed to point to some momentous event that must surely herald the return of the Master. Though I was careful to avoid setting dates, it was evident that Christendom was being shaken by successive movements that challenged the established churches and promised some dramatic transformation.

I confess that I’ve lost the youthful optimism I once possessed. Almost without exception, the religious excitement died down as quickly as it had flared up. The Jesus Movement degenerated into a cesspool of immorality for the most part. The excitement generated by the various books was short-lived, to say the least; the message of those books is mostly forgotten and ignored today. Those who had authored these works often turned out to be sleazy, self-centred opportunists who were prepared to take advantage of the gullibility of the professed, though largely untaught people of God. The Moral Majority and the evangelical vote quickly shifted its gaze to formation of an earthly kingdom rather than focusing on righteousness and godliness. The revivals were not only transient, but those who were so excited at the first grew distant and cold toward the cause of Christ in short order.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

I have now preached and pastored among the Lord's saints for almost forty-five years. During that time, I have witnessed the vast majority of children raised in church desert the Faith. A little over seven years ago, I preached a sermon that generated surprising hostility in one congregation. The sermon was entitled, "Inoculated Against the Faith."² The message generated hostility because those listening wanted to believe that their children were "good" kids because they had once "prayed the prayer" or they had been baptised and joined the church. The parents of these children and their former Sunday School teachers did not want to believe that the children of the church were in eternal jeopardy—but they were in peril of divine judgement.

That message was a study of the life of Judas Iscariot. I was motivated to prepare that particular message after reading the results of a survey published by the Barna Group. That study found that the vast majority of American teens reported they had attended a church or church-sponsored training session during their teen years; yet, six out of ten youth rejected Christian spiritual disciplines after they left home.³ The study prompted me to review the records of that congregation over the previous twenty years. The record of youth continuing in the Faith, though professing to believe in their teen years, was dismal at best.

At the time the message was delivered, not one child that had reached the age of majority still worshipped with her or his parents in that particular congregation. The young families that were members of the assembly had come into the fellowship through outreach into the community and not through continuation in the Faith from childhood. The children expressed enthusiasm about the Faith until they were about fourteen years of age. Then, each Sunday morning was a battle, usually with parents conceding the fight in favour of a modicum of peace in the home. The blunt assessment from the pulpit proved so distressing to some of the stalwarts of that particular congregation that they ceased attending services, giving mute, though effective evidence both for the genesis and for the validity of that stern assessment. The faith of the stalwarts could stand neither challenge nor examination. I trust that will not be the situation among our own people.

I see a lot of children in our services, their presence among us gives me great pleasure. However, I caution each parent and each grandparent, that our children are going to hell if we do what has been done in other churches in days gone by. My concerns about the teaching ministry provided by the churches of our generation will become apparent as the message proceeds. The message is centred on the strong warning Jesus issued when warning against the teaching of the Pharisees in His day. We do well to heed His words of warning. Consider the message of the Master as drawn from Matthew's Gospel.

THE HIGH COST OF FAILURE TO TEACH GODLY VALUES — "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you" [MATTHEW 23:2, 3a]. The Pharisees have received a bad rap in our day. If we want to say something terrible about someone who is conscientious about living out their faith, we call them a Pharisee. The term is used as opprobrium, a means of reproach, a term of ignominy. Somehow, the term has come to speak of one who is wicked in the extreme and opposed to godliness.

² Michael Stark, "Inoculated Against the Faith," preached 15 October 2006, <https://sermons.logos.com/#q=Inoculated%20Against%20the%20Faith/1000002&content=/submissions/32808&tab=paneTabResults&pane=resultsPane>, accessed 11 June 2014

³ "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," The Barna Group, 11 September 2006, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years#.U5ijDNSwWc0>, accessed 11 June 2014

However, the popular view of the Pharisees was anything but negative in ancient Judea! The Pharisees were highly regarded in Jewish society. They were the evangelicals of Judaism; they were the orthodox guardians of the Faith. They believed the Scriptures and studiously adhered to the minutest particulars of what was written. When all about them professors of the Living God were prepared to give way to pagan thought, they held tenaciously to the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees were separated from all flagrant offenders of the Law; in fact, their name, “Pharisee,” meant “separated.”⁴ They were separated from all pagan practises that would defile the purity of Jewish religion and life. Thus, the Pharisees grew to be one of the dominant forces within Judaism because they were so respected as paragons of piety by the people.

When Jesus said, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat,” His words were freighted with far more significance than we might imagine. The Greek word “seat” is *kathédra*. When the Bishop of Rome is supposed to speak doctrinally, he is said to speak “ex cathedra,” or “from the seat.” The idea arises from a large stone that was situated in front of each synagogue. Whenever a rabbi would speak, he would be seated on the stone, known as the seat. Similarly, in the modern university, professorial chairs are set up for distinguished academicians. The concept of the chair is to acknowledge an expert that can speak authoritatively. Jesus’ reference to “Moses’ seat (*kathédra*)” is the earliest known literary reference to this expression.⁵

Similarly, the term “scribes” does not communicate effectively what the term meant to those living in the day in which Jesus walked in Judea. When we see the word “scribe,” we probably think of a professional copyist. However, these were recognised experts in the Law of Moses and in the application of traditional laws and regulations. The scribes were the scholars of that ancient world. In time, those who were scribes in Jesus’ day became known as “sages” or “rabbis.”⁶ Perhaps we would be better served if we spoke of them as “experts in the law.”⁷ Both the Sadducees and the Pharisees had their own scribes, but the scribes of the Sadducees were never identified as a threat to Jesus or His ministry, since the Sadducees were the liberals of that ancient day. The Master, however, was a threat to the Pharisees and their scribes primarily because they claimed to represent the Faith of the True and Living God. This accounts for Jesus’ command that people do and observe whatever the Pharisees commanded.

During Israel’s history, whenever the moral and ethical teachings were neglected, declension resulted. Idolatry and attendant moral dissipation became commonplace when righteousness was neglected. Community righteousness and concern for others was superseded by an attitude of self-promotion and self-preservation. Here is one example drawn from Hosea.

“Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel,
for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or steadfast love,
and no knowledge of God in the land;
there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery;
they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

⁴ D. A. Hagner, “Pharisee” (art.), in Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney (ed.), **The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, M-P** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 842-852

⁵ Michael J. Wilkins, **Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary** (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 2004) 745

⁶ A. Rainey, “scribe” (art.), in Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney (ed.), **The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Q-Z** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2009) 352-355

⁷ Cf. translation note on **MATTHEW 2:4** in **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

Therefore the land mourns,
and all who dwell in it languish,
and also the beasts of the field
and the birds of the heavens,
and even the fish of the sea are taken away.”

[HOSEA 4:1-3]

Hosea continues by observing that the people were ignorant of God **[HOSEA 4:4-6]**; thus they ignored His will. Consequently, religious observance had degenerated into mere show **[HOSEA 4:7-9]** and idolatry was commonplace in the land **[HOSEA 4:10-19]**. The dreadful sins had permeated every facet of society until even the nobility was corrupt and ungodly **[HOSEA 7:1-7]**.

The principle of failure to teach moral values is emphasised in other prophetic writings as well. Let me give just one further example from the pen of Amos.

“This is what the LORD says:
‘Because Judah has committed three covenant transgressions—
make that four!—I will not revoke my decree of judgment.
They rejected the LORD’s law;
they did not obey his commands.
Their false gods,
to which their fathers were loyal,
led them astray.
So I will set Judah on fire,
and it will consume Jerusalem’s fortresses.’”

[AMOS 2:4-5 NET BIBLE]

The history of mankind is a repetitious story of one generation rejecting the moral foundations of prior generations as nations descend into insignificance, becoming dissolute and corrupt. Whether studying the declension of the Roman Empire, observing the dissolution of France during the reign of the Bourbons or watching western society descend into irrelevance, the sad history of national greatness squandered for momentary pleasure is repeated. It is not so much a case of history repeating itself as it is a case of mankind rebelling against God.

In 1935, the noted historian, Will Durant, wrote, “It is almost a law of history that the same wealth that generates a civilization announces its decay. For wealth produces ease ... it softens a people to the ways of luxury and peace, and invites invasion from stronger arms and hungrier mouths.” It is a secular restatement of the apostolic overview of cultural declension given in the Letter to Roman Christians.

“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” [ROMANS 1:18-32].

The lesson to be learned is that failure to teach Christian values ensures destruction of society and culture. Failure to ground our children in the truths of God’s Word means that they will worship what fills their lives. Since we live in a day of wealth and relative ease, untrained youth will naturally worship wealth and ease. As this happens, we will ensure the destruction of life as we know it; we will doom this culture to destruction.

The wise father depicted in the Proverbs speaks twenty-three times to urge his son to heed moral and ethical imperatives he endeavours to teach.

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction,
and forsake not your mother’s teaching,”

[PROVERBS 1:8]

Throughout the book, the son is urged to receive the father’s words, treasuring up his commandments [PROVERBS 2:1; 3:1], to keep sound wisdom and discretion [PROVERBS 3:21], to be attentive to the wisdom of his father [PROVERBS 5:1]. Unquestionably, without training in morality or ethics, we lose our children. By nature, our children are pagans and savages; fathers, especially, are responsible to train children in godly values so that they are equipped to choose right from wrong.

THE HIGH COST OF TEACHING GODLY VALUES — “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice” [MATTHEW 23:2, 3]. What the Pharisees and scribes taught was correct, but they themselves did not do what they taught. Peter seems ultimately to have grasped this daunting truth, for during the Jerusalem Council, he challenged those participating in that discussion, “Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear” [ACTS 15:10]?

The danger of teaching religious values without the power to perform what was required by God was exemplified through the lives of the Pharisees and their scribes. The Pharisees knew what must be done to fulfil the Law; however, they assumed that obedience to the Law would satisfy the righteous demands of God. The Pharisees were icily precise in fulfilling the entire law; they were scrupulous in doing everything that God had mandated in the Scriptures. They were straight as a gun barrel theologically, and just as empty.

Jesus put His finger on the festering sore that infected the scribes and the Pharisees—“they preach, but do not practise.” He delivered a devastating summary of their miserable lives through pronouncing seven “woes” against them. The scribes and the Pharisees were so focused on being seen by others that they were deaf to the silence of heaven—there was no divine commendation, only the meaningless approval of their colleagues for uniformity of thought. These religious scholars acted as they did for the applause of men. People who seek the applause of Heaven are seldom honoured by society. On the other hand, those who seek the applause of this dying world must not imagine that God will commend them.

How scathing was the Master’s assessment of these esteemed and honoured leaders! They wore their religion like a peg leg that had to be strapped on each morning; and just as it was carefully strapped on, so it could easily be removed whenever it was convenient to do so. These religious phonies loved to be called “Rabbi,” and they were willing to perform the most ostentatious acts to receive the accolades of mere men who would die, just as they also must die. Overbearing in their demeanor and dress, the scribes and the Pharisees exalted themselves; and in doing so they debased the True and Living God. They sought approval from one another, though they were ignorant of God’s approval. Truthfully, the scribes and Pharisees were suffering “I” strain; and Jesus exposed them as the frauds they were.

These religious experts knew what they should teach; indeed, they actually taught what was true! This is what was so infuriating to the Master! They knew the truth and even taught the truth! However, their hearts were unchanged—they had never been transformed. Tragically, these learned biblical scholars were still in their sin; and because they were unchanged, they led astray those who followed them as well.

I have on occasion said of such people that they know the words but they do not know the melody. It seems as if I have witnessed a number of such people in my few years of service before the Lord. Perhaps they were seminary professors, or perhaps they were climbing the ladder of denominational hierarchy; they knew the truth and they were capable of teaching what was true, but somehow there was no spark in their life, no sense of the holy.

Here is the danger of teaching Christian values: the Faith is caught, not taught. Those for whom we bear responsibility are watching our lives, just as people were watching the lives of the scribes and the Pharisees in that ancient day. Consider a couple of Jesus’ sayings in light of these concerns. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus cautioned those who listened that day, “I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” [**MATTHEW 5:20**].

On another occasion when He was challenged by the Pharisees and their scribes because His disciples failed to wash their hands before eating, Jesus bluntly responded, “Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

“‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

Then, calling those who followed and who were watching this exchange, Jesus warned, “Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone” [MATTHEW 15:3-20].

Did you notice that despite having truth revealed, the Disciples did not understand. All their lives they had been trained to believe that orthodox morality was proof positive of the smile of Heaven. Jesus exclaims in exasperation when Peter asks for an explanation. Jesus asked, “Are you also still without understanding?” It was bad enough that the crowds pressing around failed to understand what Jesus taught; but for those who had actually walked with Him, who had heard multiplied sermons and witnessed His interactions with the Pharisees on repeated occasions, it was unbelievable. For over three years He had instructed the Twelve, and they still failed to grasp elementary truths concerning the Faith. The principle is that it matters little how orthodox one is, if the life denies what is professed. Possession, not profession is what counts.

The scribes and the Pharisees were paragons of piety—but they did not recognise truth when it was standing before them! Think of several of the exasperating exchanges between Jesus and the religious leaders of that day. After healing the man at the Pool of Bethesda, the Jewish leaders confronted Jesus—in fact, they wanted to kill Him [see JOHN 5:18]. Listen to Jesus’ summation of that confrontation.

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people. But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words” [JOHN 5:39-47]?

On another instance, during the Feast of Booths before His Passion, Jesus taught the people; His teaching confounded the religious leaders. Therefore, we read, “Jesus, while teaching in the temple courts, cried out, ‘You both know me and know where I come from! And I have not come on my own initiative, but the one who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him, because I have come from him and he sent me’” [JOHN 7:28, 29 NET BIBLE]. The religious leaders were so incensed at His words that they determined to seize Him in order to kill Him, but they were restrained out of fear of how the crowds might respond.

I provide but one other instance of Jesus confronting the failure of the religious leaders to recognise truth when it was presented. “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, ‘We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, “You will become free”?’

“Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father’” [JOHN 8:31-38].

This exchange resulted in further hostility toward the Son of God and elicited this cautionary statement from the Master, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” [JOHN 8:47].

Truth divorced from the power of the indwelling Spirit is enervated, paralysed, vitiated. The scribes and the Pharisees truly were blind guides of the blind. Brother Aime is fond of saying that such people are attempting to “make the world a better place to go to hell from.” Truly, that was a valid description of the scribes and the Pharisees.

WOE TO YOU, EVANGELICALS AND ORTHODOX — “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” [MATTHEW 23:2-12].

In an article written a couple of years past, Dr. Albert Mohler, President of Southern Seminary, cites a letter written to an advice columnist. The woman writing the letter had stated, “I am a stay-at-home mother of four who has tried to raise my family under the same strong Christian values that I grew up with. Therefore I was shocked when my oldest daughter, ‘Emily,’ suddenly announced she had ‘given up believing in God’ and decided to ‘come out’ as an atheist.”

While I am always somewhat surprised that a professed Christian would consult an advice columnist for religious advice, you are likely not be surprised that the advice columnist gave therapeutic advice—advice which, I might add, mirrors the moralistic therapeutic deism that emanates from most contemporary pulpits. In fact, the advice given by that columnist could readily qualify for presentation from most pulpits today, though the columnist was avowedly not religious. Ms. Hax wrote, “Parents can and should teach their beliefs and values, but when a would-be disciple stops believing, it’s not a ‘decision’ or ‘choice’ to ‘reject’ church or family or tradition or virtue or whatever else has hitched a cultural ride with faith.”

Ms. Hax soothes the distraught mother by urging her to accept her daughter’s atheism and get over her “disappointment that she isn’t turning out just as you envisioned.” Hax supports her advice by appealing to what she learned from her own childhood, stating that she now applies what she learned, including what she learned from church, to “a secular life.” Her assertion is that the values she learned in church are now applied to a secular life. What else can an advice columnist operating from a secular worldview say?⁸

⁸ See Albert Mohler, “Christian Values Cannot Save Anyone,” September 11, 2012, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2012/09/11/christian-values-cannot-save-anyone/>, accessed 20 September 2012; see

The problem is not Carolyn Hax's answer; rather, the problem is the mother's question! Note that this mother stated that she "tried to raise my family under the same strong Christian values that I grew up with." *Christian values are the problem*. Hell will be filled with people who were committed to Christian values.

Here is my great concern: parents, and the churches they attend, are committed to teaching Christian values; however, Christian values cannot save anyone. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a Christian value—it is a call to transformation by the power of the True and Living God. Christian values can—and do—blind sinners to their need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sinners protest that they are good people, that they do what is acceptable and good in the eyes of society, and thus they feel they have no need for transformation.

A child raised with nothing more than Christian values will almost inevitably abandon those values when they reach adulthood. If there is no firm commitment to the Faith of Christ the Lord, why would any child profess to believe as her parents believed? My neighbours will all profess to have commitment to some Christian values; but they are lost if they have no faith in the Son of God. Most of the members of this community believe there was a man named Jesus, and they would agree that He was a good man who taught many good things; but they are lost. Salvation comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Pharisees and the scribes were content to accept those who professed to adhere to the Law of Moses. According to Jesus' stern words, the converts to Pharisaism were twice the child of hell as were the Pharisees [MATTHEW 23:25]. They were focused on externals of their religious devotions without seeing God who stood within the shadows [MATTHEW 23:16-24]. They were content to clean up their lives, concerning themselves only with religious exercise rather than concerning themselves with transformation [MATTHEW 23:25-28]. They avowed devotion to the great men of the Faith even as they resisted those seeking to follow hard after the Lord God [MATTHEW 23:29-36].

Similarly, our children witness our devotion to liturgy, our devotion to buildings even as they crumble around our heads, our devotion to a particular Bible translation, our devotion to some doctrinal scheme—but the question that must be answered is, "Do they know the Saviour?" Have our children witnessed the power of God in our lives? Do they believe that we believe?

I must ask the simple questions, especially of fathers. Do you pray? Are you familiar with the words of the Book? Do your children, do your grandchildren, know that you are walking with the Master? Has your life transformed the lives of your children? Do they hunger and thirst after righteousness because they have witnessed your own hunger and thirst for righteousness? One demonstration of the power of God is worth a thousand puerile stories. One transformed life is worth a million feeble pleas flung heavenward without faith in God.

All around us are churches that long ago forsook the Faith they once professed. All that remains after the substance of belief has evaporated is the language of values. Now, these churches perpetuate Christian values, but they have no awareness that they have lost vitality. Like Samson of old, they imagine they can shake themselves out of their lethargy and advance to thrust aside the Philistines; but the effort proves too strenuous, and so they content themselves with speaking of the values that once marked the lives of adherents. Their feeble existence serves only to authenticate the sleep of death that marks their dwindling congregation as they watch the future drain away like water grasped in dirty hands.

also, Carolyn Hax, "Daughter's turnabout on religion shakes mother's faith," The Washington Post, http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/daughters-turnabout-on-religion-shakes-mothers-faith/2012/09/04/1e6ead68-f3a9-11e1-a612-3cfc842a6d89_story.html, accessed 14 June 2014

Cultural Christianity must inevitably dissipate into atheism, agnosticism and other forms of non-belief. Cultural Christianity gives way to the assault of raw paganism parading as reason. Cultural Christianity is nothing more than the denomination of moralism. Tragically, too many of the professed churches of this day fail to recognise that they have nothing left except cultural Christianity—the genuine Faith of Christ the Lord was left behind long ago.

I am calling on those who are Christians to resist the inexorable push to be satisfied with cultural Christianity. I call on all who are Christian to this day, before God and Christ Jesus who shall judge the living and the dead, determine that you shall henceforth live for His glory. There are fathers here who need to go now to their children, confessing that they have misled those children by permitting them to imagine that the Faith consisted of what they do. There are parents listening who need to ask their children to forgive them because they have failed to act as they should. There are fathers today who need to confess their sin before the Living God, asking Him to show mercy that they may speak once more with their children.

If we fail to bring our children to Christ the Master, we must be assured that they will go to hell. We must know that if all we have is moralistic therapeutic deism, we are making children that will prove to be twice the child of hell as ourselves. If this is what we present today, know that we are writing off the future. We must not permit ourselves to degenerate into mere religion such as that to which others have grown accustomed.

If you have never put faith in the Son of God, and if your life has not been transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit, you are not born from above, let this be the day you seek Him and receive the life which He offers to each one who believes. Hear the call of the Lord. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10**]. The promise of God has not been rescinded, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:13**]. Amen.