

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

Fakes, Phonies, & The Faithful

Matthew 23:13-39

Written By

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How should we, as Christians, in our post-modern, except-all-viewpoints, tolerate-all-positions culture respond to outright false teaching? Yes, as the culture brings all its power to bear on forcing believers to lay down their adherence to the supposed outdated moral maxims of the Word of God in favor of more loving and caring progressive morals, what would Jesus have us say? As false theologies and false systems of belief run amuck and proliferate at breakneck speed in our country, as we are told to be accepting and non-argumentative, even of those theological systems we know don't have our best interests at heart, should we be docile, quiet, and just smile as if nothing detrimental is occurring? As once great Christian denominations buckle under the onslaught of a godless, Bible-rejecting culture, as they listen to religious leaders in their own ranks who twist and distort the true and timeless teachings of the Word of God where sexuality are concerned, are we to set those teaching aside and join their "righteous" ranks? Yes, as we slip into the darkness Paul prophesied would occur in the last days prior to the appearance of Jesus (1 Timothy 4:1-5), should we slide into the abyss silently, enjoying our well-ordered lives and comfortable church buildings?

In a word, no.

Jesus is our model when it comes to how we should live in dark days. The gospels showcase that model for all to see if they want to study it well. He had great, endless

compassion for the lost, as He did for the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1ff), He had a love for those who were from different ethnic groups like He demonstrated to the Roman Centurion in Capernaum (Matthew 8:5ff), and He even evidenced a great patience in dealing with His most fierce religious opponents, the Pharisees. However, He didn't mince words when it came to speaking spiritual truth and countering spurious doctrines masquerading as divine truth. His entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) took the false teaching of the day, as promulgated through the religious leaders, regarding spirituality and He categorically demonstrated its weakness against the true teaching of the Word of God. And as those leaders ramped up their hatred of His truth teaching, He didn't back down from engaging them at every turn, seeking to definitively expose and demolish their devilish teachings. His multiple verbal encounters with the religious elites on the Temple Mount the Tuesday before they crucified Him on Friday is a case study in defending spiritual truth and in going on the offense with said truth (Matthew 22:23-23:12).

To those misguided, misinformed, misaligned, and menacing spiritual leaders, the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus moved from doctrinal correction to divine condemnation in His last public address to them in Matthew 23:13-39. He gave them no academic quarter. He showed them no verbal softness, going so far as to employ pejorative terms to describe their diabolical nature: hypocrites, blind men, serpents, brood of vipers. He didn't engage these spiritually rudderless men, who espoused hellacious doctrines and who were instrumental in duping the masses into believing their unfounded teachings, with soft, tender, friendly language. He wasn't interested in agreeing to disagree, or finding some common ground for the sake of ecumenical tranquility. No, when the false religionists dogged Him all the way to the end of His life, when they attempted time and time again, despite incontrovertible evidence to the contrary for His divine messiahship, to silence Him, when it became apparent the cement of their unbelief had cured to complete spiritual hardness, Jesus gave them the most ominous warning in the New Testament in His final words to them on the Temple Mount that Tuesday.

As I said, we who live in dark times as our Savior can and should learn from His model. What does His model teach us?

Oppose False Teaching & False Spirituality (Matthew 23:13-39)

Remember, our culture calls us, as Christians, to be tolerant of all teachings, to never articulate that our beliefs are superior to any other beliefs, be what they may, to not evidence any kind of dogmatic conviction for our Scriptural beliefs, to certainly not ever be guilty of the high crime of judgmentalism, and to never be so passionate about our spiritual beliefs as derived from the Bible we show any kind of disdain for different religious teachings. We, however, don't answer to culture. We answer to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the eternal, non-changing Word of God, and because we do we are, by definition, called to lovingly and honestly oppose false teaching and false spirituality. Do you? Will you? The hope of our land rests with your commitment to call sin, sin and to point the spiritually blind to the Savior who, alone, can and will redeem and save them if they will turn to Him in faith.

How do we go about doing this in a God-honoring fashion? First, we realize there are times when you must share, like Jesus did ...

The Reality of Condemnation (Matthew 23:13-33)

To those who purposefully and perpetually lead people away with their false teachings and false lifestyles, as the Scribes and the Pharisees did, to those who, despite the clear teaching of the Word of God to the contrary, choose to teach and embrace spurious and erroneous teachings and doctrines, there comes the time when you must level with them, when you must warn them, and when you must expose them so others, whose hearts are not as hardened, might be motivated to move from spiritual darkness to the spiritual light as showcased in Christ's gospel. Jesus, the final prophet (Deuteronomy 18), did this, as Isaiah, Micah, and Habakkuk had in their day before the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah (Isaiah 5; Micah 2:1-4; Habakkuk 2:6-20), and as Amos did before the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 5:18-20). It quickly becoming my turn and your turn as darkness descends.

Christ's condemnation of the religious leaders revolves around seven woes. Some translations like the KJV and the NASB add verse 14, viz., "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation;*" however, it is textually best to omit it because this reading doesn't appear in the oldest Greek uncial documents. Regarding this textual evidence and decision, the renowned Greek scholar, Bruce Metzger comments:

That ver. 14 is an interpolation derived from the parallel in Mk 12:40 or Lk 20:47 is clear (a) from its absence in the earliest and best authorities of the Alexandrian and the Western types of text, and (b) from the fact that the witnesses that include the passage have it in different places, either after ver. 13 (so the Textus Receptus) or before ver. 13.¹

A copyist, therefore, added this reading after he read it in Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. The statement is, in fact, true and ancient; however, since it was not part of the Matthean text, we shall not include it as one of the "woes" of Christ.

All in all, Matthew records seven woes, which naturally corresponds with God's number of perfection. This latently and naturally underscores that His condemnation of the religious leaders was perfect and precise, leaving them no wiggle room to escape the factual nature of His verbal castigation. Each woe will not just take them to task for their false teaching and false spirituality, it will also serve as a reminder to His disciples, and us, the type of living and leadership God is looking for from viable kingdom members. Put differently, while there is a negative word of judgment against the religious leaders, there is a positive word of teaching for those who desire to walk the walk of faith in a carnal, Christless culture. I'll point these positive points out as we move through this ominous passage. Additionally, I must say up front, especially as we focus in this study on Christ's condemning words, that we must not ever forget that words of condemnation, where spiritual falsity is concerned, are always founded upon a deep love and compassion for the lost in question. Such is the finale of this emotionally charged passage as we see Christ speaking like a parent whose love has been spurned by his children

¹ Metzger, Bruce Manning, United Bible Societies. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)*. London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994: 50.

(Matthew 23:37-39). He wanted a loving relationship with His people, but when they rejected Him He had no choice but to move in judgment; however, this was not the ultimate desire of His heart. He always longed for their conversion, and such should always be the nature of our hearts. Keeping all this in mind, we now turn our attention to those seven divine, bone-rattling woes.

False Religionists Contest Jesus (Matthew 23:13)

The emphatic interrogative “Woe,” (Ὁὐαὶ) appears at the first of the sentence out of proper grammatical sequence in order to create a strong, in-your-face emphasis, and it will stand in this position throughout Christ’s excoriating lesson (Matthew 23:15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29):

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

These religious leaders, who prided themselves in their adherence to ritualistic rules and regulations they claimed God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, who taught everyone that salvation and heaven are gained by righteous activity, are called hypocrites by Jesus. They all knew what the Greek term connoted. Coming from the real of Grecian theater, where an actor wore a mask to pretend he was someone other than himself, the word spoke of deception, of phoniness, of a conflict between whom a person says they were and what their actions showed they really were.²

In this woe, Jesus lambasted the Scribes and Pharisees for teaching they were leading people into the kingdom of God, into heaven itself, while really doing all they could to keep people from the kingdom and King because they were not bound for this eternal abode themselves. Shocking words, especially to these religious men who thought they, if anyone, would wind up on God’s presence. All of their teaching focused on paving the way into the kingdom through performing religious works on a perpetual basis served to really slam the door to the kingdom in the face of all those who did want to be in God’s presence. All their emphasis upon adhering to their blinding religious rules and regulations to earn and procure God’s favor, served to keep people from knowing God and it demonstrated, by definition, that they, the spiritually devoted ones didn’t really know God and wouldn’t see Him in the next life.

Jesus, the true shepherd, attempted to show people how the way through the door into the kingdom is by means of belief in His desire to graciously forgive them of their sin (John 3:16;

² Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000: ὑποκριτής, οὐ, ὁ (ὑποκρίνω; Aristoph., X., Pla.+; ins; PEdg 71 [=Sb 6777], 44 mostly in the sense ‘play-actor, role-player’; so also EpArist 219; Tat. 22, 1) in our lit. only metaph. **actor**, in the sense **pretender, dissembler** (Achilles Tat. 8, 8, 14; 8, 17, 3; Artem. 2, 44 p. 148, 3 in the marginal note of a ms.; Jos., Bell. 2, 587 ὑποκριτής φιλανθρωπίας; Did., Gen. 122, 9.—Job 15:34 Aquila and Theod. of the godless [=LXX ἀσεβής]; 20:5 Aquila [=LXX παράνομος]; 34:30 and 36:13 Theod.) Mt 6:2, 5, 16 (in these three passages the dramatic aspect ‘play-actor’ is strongly felt); 7:5; 15:7; 16:3 v.l.; 22:18; 23:13–15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 24:51; Mk 7:6; Lk 6:42; 11:39 D; 12:56; 13:15; Hs 8, 6, 5; 9, 18, 3; 9, 19, 2; D 2:6; 8:1f.—PJoüon, Ὑποκριτής dans l’Evang.: RSR 20, 1930, 312–17; DMatheson, ET 41, 1930, 333f; LMarshall, Challenge of NT Ethics ’47, 60f; BZucchelli, ΥΠΟΚΡΙΤΗΣ, Origine e storia del termine ’62; RBatey, Jesus and the Theatre: NTS 30, ’84, 563–74; AStock, Jesus, Hypocrites, and Herodians: BTB 16, ’86, 3–7 (theaters in many Palestinian localities).—DNP V 810–12. M-M.

5:24-25). As He taught, the way into the kingdom is through a narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14), which is belief in Him as the Savior and Messiah, but these prideful, smug religious men rejected Him outright, as they did with John the Baptist, His forerunner. And in so doing they shut the door to the kingdom for themselves and for other who listened to them by denying Jesus as the Christ, the divine, prophesied Savior (Isaiah 7:14; 53:1ff). No wonder Jesus opened with this condemnation for it is the central issue at hand. To deny Jesus as the divine Christ and to teach otherwise, no matter how well-meaning and passionate you are, is to lead people into the pit of the eternal hell.

Let me ask you. First, realize this type of Scribe and Pharisee is still alive and well on planet earth. Second, will you engage them and expose their spiritual hypocrisy and error? Jesus did. Will you? God gave me an opportunity at a time I least expected it just recently.

On Memorial Day I headed out to the yard to catch up on all of the explosive growth from the final passing of the cold weather. Kneeling down with a small hoe in my hand, I started taking weeds out around my mailbox. I became so focused on my work, I did not even notice the two people standing there looking down at me.

After a few minutes I looked up and there they were. As they smiled and said good morning, I couldn't help but notice the matching Bibles in their hands. Immediately, I knew they had to be Jehovah's Witnesses. After I said, "Hi," the man, Philipp, said, "Do you believe that this book (pointing to his Bible) is the source of spiritual truth?"

Knowing their so-called Greek and Hebrew scholars have tampered with the original documents in order to support their false teachings, I replied, "Well, that all depends. There are viable translations of that book and ones which are highly questionable."

"What do you mean by that,?" he asked.

"Some religious groups," I stated, "alter the proper translation of the text in order to support erroneous teachings. Take, for example, how a given group might change the wording from the original authors in order to obscure the true person and work of Jesus Christ."

With that he said, "And who do you think Jesus Christ is?"

From prior study I knew they did not believe that Jesus in his full deity, so I remarked, "As a Christian and a pastor, my years of study have validated the fact that He is none other than Jehovah God."

"Do you have proof to back that up?" he asked.

"Absolutely" I said confidently. "In John 8:58 Jesus identifies himself to the Pharisees as the great I AM of history (εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ἰησοῦς Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμὶ), and the phrase He uses is a personal pronoun wedded to the verb "to be," making it highly emphatic. In addition, you will find Jesus making the same claim at various places throughout the book of John. When He identified Himself to the woman at the well He said, "Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ λαλῶν σοι" (John 4:26). To the Jews who wondered who He was after the healing of the blind man, He said to them, "I am the one" (εἶπεν ὅτι Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ) in John 9:9. When He prophesied to the disciples that Judas would betray Him, He specifically stated in John 13:19: "From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur you may believe that I am He" (ἀπ' ἄρτι λέγω ὑμῖν πρὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι ἵνα πιστεύητε ὅταν γένηται ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι). Again, it is important to note that the "He" is italicized, meaning it is added into the English sentence to make it grammatically complete. The pronoun, however, doesn't appear in Greek. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, note the conversation:

³ Judas then, having received the *Roman* cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am *He*." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. ⁶ So when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am *He*; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," ⁹ to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one" (John 18).

Three times here Jesus identifies Himself by the great, eternal name of God from the Old Testament by saying, "I am He." Why were the soldiers literally blown back by Christ's words? They fell down because He specifically called Himself the great "I Am," who exists beyond our time/space continuum. The Greek couldn't be more precise:

John 18:5-8 ⁵ ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἐγὼ εἰμι εἰστήκει δὲ καὶ Ἰούδας ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτὸν μετ' αὐτῶν ⁶ ὡς οὖν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὅτι Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἀπήλθον εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ ἔπεσον χαμαί ⁷ πάλιν οὖν αὐτοῦς ἐπηρώτησεν τίνα ζητεῖτε οἱ δὲ εἶπον, Ἰησοῦν τὸν Ναζωραῖον ⁸ ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς εἶπον ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι· εἰ οὖν ἐμὲ ζητεῖτε ἄφετε τούτους ὑπάγειν·

At that juncture, Philipp opened his Bible and read John 8:58. His altered version had Jesus saying, "Before Abraham was, I have been."

"Ah," I countered, "that is what I said a few minutes ago, Philipp. Your translators have wrongly translated that very emphatic present tense verse with a past tense connotation, which is grammatically inappropriate. The Greek text clearly emphasizes the perpetual and eternal deity and being of Jesus."

"But that is only one verse, Marty," he rejoined. "You need to have additional proof in order to confirm a belief like that. You also need to pay attention to the context of the lone verses you are quoting, making sure your interpretation reflects the author's intent."

"I have reflected the intent of the authors in question. Nothing I have said is divorced from those texts.

"I still have a problem with the fact you have just given me two verses to prove that Jesus is Jehovah. That is a weak argument," he argued.

"Well, if you will go to the Old Testament you will discover that in the Greek version of the Hebrew text the only person who ever uses the title "I Am" with the personal pronoun "he" attached as a direct object is Jehovah. There are no exceptions with the seven uses. They all point to God" I countered.

Consider the Old Testament examples:

- Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I, I am He (Hebrew: **אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא** Greek: ἐγὼ εἰμι) and there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand." It is interesting here how the Hebrew has the Ist

- person pronoun “I” two times in a row for extra emphasis in declaring God’s identity.
- Other references of this identical title for the name of God can be found in elsewhere in the Old Testament : Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12 (2x); 52:6. The only exception for this grammatical usage is in Isaiah 47:8, 10 and Zephaniah 2:15 where it is used in condemnation of those who would dare call themselves by the divine title. Other than these, everyone in the Old Testament period knew this grammatical formula was reserved for God. For Jesus to employ underscored His divine identity, and it also motivated His enemies, as in John 8, to want to stone Him for blasphemy.

After I presented this point, Philipp remarked: “So, you are saying that since that all of this usage points to Jehovah, and Jesus also makes this claim that Jesus is Jehovah.”

“Absolutely. That is what the evidence says, so follow the evidence Philipp. In our quest for truth, we want to make sure we follow the evidence so we are not misled, right? Add to this fact that Paul says in Colossians 2:9ff that the fullness of the deity dwells in Jesus, there is no way we cannot conclude that Jesus is Jehovah. Further, in Hebrews 1:3 (“*And He [Jesus] is the radiance of His [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power*”), the unknown author states that Jesus is the exact representation of the Father. Interestingly enough, the Greek he employs is a coinage term used for making coins. When an exemplar struck a heated blank it formed an exact representation. I know you believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word so you must wrestle with the fact the author chose this specific term for good reason He wanted to underscore the full deity of Jesus, the Messiah.”

At that point, Philipp wanted to change the conversation, so he asked me a question about John 3:16. I didn’t let him go there, because I wanted to talk about the opening question, “Who is Jesus?” Hence, I replied, “Philipp, I don’t want to talk about that verse, I want to talk about the identity of Jesus because it is so important. If he is not the God-man, then what we think of the text you mention is of no consequence.”

About that time my Pakistani neighbor, whom I’ve had several theological discussions with over the last year, came riding by on his bicycle. He stopped, looked at Philipp and said in his Farsi accent, “My friend, you have finally met your match.” He then got back on his bike and rode off, leaving Philipp looking dumbfounded. Philipp hadn’t met his match. He had met a believer who has studied the Word of God, who knows the identity of Jesus, and is ready and willing to share the true gospel.

Desiring to head in another direction, he asked, “If Jesus is God, as you say, then I have a problem with the Trinity. How can God the Father speak to God the Son at his baptism? That sounds illogical.”

I replied, “Philipp, I know you are strict monotheists (he shook his head in agreement) and I know you know I am a believer in a trinity. Let me ask you a question, When you consider the absolutely complexity of the cosmos, from the intricacy and design of the DNA change to the magnificence of an amino acid chain, not to mention the proper placement of all the planets in our cosmos to make sure we have life on this blue planet, which God do you think is better suited to the true God and Creator, yours or mine? Your God is one I can wrap my mind around because he is just one simply constructed God, My God, on the other hand, claims throughout both testaments that He is three in one. He is the ultimate complex One and dwells

in absolute mystery concerning his Being. Of the two Gods, I think my God, which is presented in the Scriptures as possessing a complex unity while still possessing three Persons, is the logical one to create to be called the Creator.

After this, Philipp started giving indications that he was ready to walk down the sidewalk to the next house. I thanked him for the theological debate about theological truth, and he said, "This hasn't been a debate but a friendly discussion."

I replied, "No Philipp, we have debated the most important question in life: Who is Jesus Christ? You have attempted to change my mind about his identity and I have attempted to change your mind because we both hold diametrically opposed views. I would simply challenge you now as you leave to follow the biblical evidence concerning the person and work of Jesus, and I would also counsel you to use a different translation, one which doesn't tamper with the text in order to validate erroneous teachings."

You see, the problem with Philipp is he rejects Christ as God outright and will not consider the evidence to the contrary, just like the ancient Scribes and Pharisees. And just like these religious people he is sincere in his belief, zealous in his desire to get others to embrace the teachings of the Jehovah Witnesses, and passionate about going door to door to move people toward the truth that salvation is composed of belief in God coupled with earning God's favor by means of performing good works. As their books attest:

"Immortality is a reward for faithfulness. It does not come automatically to a human at birth."³

"Those people of good will today who avail themselves of the provision and who steadfastly abide in this confidence will find Christ Jesus to be their everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6)."⁴

See the emphasis upon faith plus works? It is the age-old false teaching the Scribes and Pharisees just dressed up in the clothing of another religion. The question is, when you encounter those religious (or non-religious types) who vehemently reject the person and work of Jesus, when you bump into those who are passionately opposed, on religious grounds, to seeing Jesus as God in the flesh, will you engage them? Will you warn them of God's condemnation for their false teaching and false spirituality, or will you slink away attempting to not cause any ripples, to just be a peacemaker and fit into society?

Unfortunately, we live in a culture where Christ is rejected by many false belief systems, and those systems are only growing and flourishing. In fact, some of those false religious systems are becoming the acceptable forms of belief for those who oppose the Judeo-Christian nature of our great nation. By default, this will set them on a collision course with the Church and with saints who uphold and cling to Jesus being every bit the perfect God-man. When that collision occurs, when they are in the majority and we are in the minority, when they are embraced by politicians and we are effaced, will you courageously and boldly warn them of the error of their belief system?

³ Let God Be True: 74.

⁴ _____: 121.

False Religionists Create Extremists (Matthew 23:15)

This premise is something Jesus has observed from studying the works-based religion of the Pharisees. Once a person became indoctrinated with the idea there is a God they will give account to one day and they had better start performing a whole lot of righteous works to placate Him, they, by default, created superstitious, fanatical people who took their false theology to a whole new realm. Listen and He will explain:

¹⁵Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

The picture here is of the religious leaders traveling far and wide, probably to Jewish synagogues, to find God-fearing Gentiles who had embraced monotheistic religion, but who had not begun observing all of the ritualistic rules and regulations the Scribes and Pharisees said one must observe in order to earn favor with God. Read Paul's journeys in the book of Acts and you'll see these type of Gentiles were, in fact, associated with the synagogues (Acts 17:4). When the religious leaders encountered them they had but one searing goal: to get them to actively and perpetually perform their endless array of spiritual works. Never mind a living, enjoyable relationship with the living God. No, they wanted these folks to get plugged into memorized prayers, washing their hands before meals a certain way, dressing in a certain fashion, praying at certain times, walking so far on the Sabbath, and so on and so forth perpetually out of fear.

What kind of follower did they typically produce? They create one more zealous about the pursuit of law, be what it may in their belief system, than they. Take a look at ISIS (the Islamic State Of Iraq and Syria) in Iraq this week. Even Al-Qaeda is afraid of these blood-thirsty Islamo-fascists. No sooner do they topple towns than they go in declaring Sharia Law based on the teaching of Mohammad and demanding tax monies from conquered Christians, or else. Why, in one town this week they captured two thieves and then summarily (and publically) cut off their hands based on their interpretation of Islamic law. Police officials, along with Iraqi soldiers, were either beheaded or thrown into ditches and shot point-blank. How horrific! How shocking! And it is all done in the name of religion, a works-based religion mind you. Further, these new religious warriors are more ruthless and blood-thirsty than any we've seen before. Why? As Jesus taught concerning the Scribes and Pharisees. False theology and false spirituality breeds extremism because the followers are whipped into a frenzy thinking they are acquiring the respect and favor of God by following the letter of the law without question and without mercy. All of this, of course, in their minds, will weigh in their favor when they see their version of god.

How else could Paul, the Pharisee and rabbi stand off to the side and what other religious leader stone Stephen to death? How could he hold their coats while his friends, in a religious frenzy, killed a completely innocent man simply because he embraced, by faith, Jesus Christ (Acts 7)? How could he move out from here and gladly terminate, or set up for execution, Jewish men and women who had dared to believe in Jesus (Acts 9:1-2)? He had merely and logically taken his training farther than his predecessors, which is what comes naturally with the legalistic turf.

Such, however, is not the case, according to Jesus, the Christ. Adherents of works based religions merely grow and develop followers who are not bound for heaven, but for hell. Wasn't Jesus ever so bold? He taught how these law-loving people, with their so-called divine teachings based on ceremony and rituals naturally give birth to spiritual children who take their legalistic ways to whole new, unimaginable extremes. Again, have we not seen this in Iraq this week? A religious warrior, or two, shows up at a home and asks, "Do you follow Mohammad and worship Allah, or do you follow the Christian God?" How you answer that is a matter will result in your life or execution. So much for tolerance, but this is what happens when false religion and false spirituality flourishes. It becomes more intolerant, more unpredictable, more illogical, and more fearsome.

Again, will you be brave enough to say, "As for me and my house, we follow Jesus?" When, not if, you run into those adherents who are opposed to the person and work of Jesus, will you courageously warn them of their impending judgment at the hands of the living God? When you see someone getting sucked into a false belief system based on works, will you through prayer and personal presence attempt to pull them away from the teaching lest they become and even more ardent supporter of said false system?

Wake up Christian. Fanaticism is coming your way from a variety of sectors, and you will have your moment on the Temple mount with the zealous religious types who reject Jesus outright. Remember: Jesus has set the example we should all study well. He was brave. Check. He was bold. Check. He was honest. Check. We can, and should, do no less for so much is at stake.

[ISIS and Christianity: www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com)

The Cleansing of Iraq's Christians Is Entering Its End Game

By Nina Shea

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The government of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, fell overnight to the jihadist Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, also called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Mosul's panic-stricken Christians, along with many others, are now fleeing en masse to the rural Nineveh Plain, according to the Vatican publication *Fides*. The border crossings into Kurdistan, too, are jammed with the cars of the estimated 150,000 desperate escapees.

The population, particularly its Christian community, has much to fear. The ruthlessness of ISIS, an offshoot of al-Qaeda, has been legendary. Its beheadings, crucifixions, and other atrocities against Christians and everyone else who fails to conform to its vision of a caliphate have been on full display earlier this year, in Syria.

As *Corner* readers will remember, in February, it was the militants of this rebel group that, in the northern Syrian state of Raqqa, compelled Christian leaders to sign a 7th-century dhimmi contract. The document sets forth specific terms denying the Christians the basic civil rights of equality and religious freedom and committing them to pay protection money in exchange for their lives and the ability to keep their Christian identity.

Since 2003, Iraq's Christian community has suffered intense religious persecution on top of the effects of the conflict and, as a result, it's shrunk by well over 50 percent. Mosul, the site of ancient Nineveh of the Assyrians, who converted to Christianity in the first century, has become

the home of many Christians who remained. Considered by Christians the place of last resort inside Iraq, Mosul and the surrounding Nineveh Plain has been home to many Christian refugees driven out of Baghdad and Basra. Mosul has the only university, the best hospitals, and the largest markets serving the Christian towns and villages of the Nineveh Plain. The plain, itself, is now at grave risk of direct jihadi attacks and the possibility of being cut off from an essential city.

Once upon a time, some of the Mosul Christians might have fled to Syria, but they now have few options. More will give up on the region altogether and join their relatives and former neighbors in Michigan, California, Sweden, and elsewhere in the West. The fall of Mosul is a serious blow for the Iraqi state, and the implications for Iraq's Christian community are devastating.

ISIS now controls the area surrounding Mosul's Catholic Chaldean cathedral. Fides reports that Chaldean bishop Amel Shamon Nona and the other bishops of Mosul launched an appeal yesterday to keep churches and mosques there open to pray for peace. Their perseverance in the face of such peril is heartbreaking. ISIS will not listen, of course. They are not men of peace and they kill those who are, as they did Father Paolo Dall'Oglio in Raqqa last year. These bishops and their flocks should load up their cars and head for the Kurdish border without delay.

President Maliki is vowing that Iraq's army will regain control, but this may take time. ISIS has controlled parts of Ramadi, the capital of Sunni Muslim Anbar province, and much of Fallujah for the past six months. When the army does eventually succeed in reversing jihadi control in Mosul, it may be too late for the Christians. Once Middle Eastern Christians flee to the West, they don't return.

In other words, the religious cleansing of Christians from Iraq is entering the end game. This is a profound development for the Christian church, of course, which has had a two-thousand-year-old presence there. But it will have long-term national-security implications for the West. American political leaders have so far failed to distinguish the religious cleansing from its surrounding context of terror and conflict. They overlook the fact that religious pluralism and diversity are among today's casualties. As one Chaldean bishop lamented, "This is very sad and very dangerous for the church, for Iraq and even for Muslim people, because it means the end of an old experience of living together."