

Jesus Christ the Teacher Confronts Religious Abuse (Matthew 23:1-12)

“We were designed to live in community – to know and be known, to love and be loved, to serve and be served, to celebrate and be celebrated.”

1. Be Holy: Cultivate a Simple Faith

“Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.” (Matthew 23:1-4)

Short Guide to the Duties of Church Membership

- To follow the example of Christ in home and daily life, and to bear personal witness to Him.
- To be regular in private prayer day by day
- To read the Bible carefully.
- To come to Church every Sunday
- To receive the Holy Communion faithfully and regularly
- To give personal service to Church, neighbours, and community
- To give money for the work of parish and diocese and for the work of the Church at home and overseas
- To uphold the standard of marriage entrusted by Christ
- To care that children are brought up to love and serve the Lord.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:27-30)

2. Be Hidden: Content with a Secret Faith

“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. (Matthew 23:5-10)

3. Be Humble: Concentrate on a Serving Faith

“The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11-12)

Symptoms of Abusive Religion

- Abusive leaders base their spiritual authority on their position of office rather than on their service to the group. Their style of leadership is authoritarian.
- Leaders in abusive churches often say one thing but do another. Their words and deeds do not match.
- They manipulate people by making them feel guilty for not measuring up spiritually. They lay heavy religious loads on people and make no effort to lift those loads. You know you are in an abusive church if the loads just keep getting heavier.

- Abusive leaders are preoccupied with looking good. They labour to keep up appearance. They stifle any criticism that puts them in a bad light.
- They seek honourific titles and special privileges that elevate them above the group. They promote a class system with themselves at the top.
- Their communication is not straight. Their speech becomes especially vague and confusing when they are defending themselves.
- They major on minor issues to the neglect of the truly important ones. They are conscientious about religious details but neglect God's larger agendas.

Contrast between Spiritual Abusers and Godly Leaders

- Abusers drive; leaders lead (John 10:11-15)
- Abusers say, "I"; true leaders say, "We" (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)
- Abusers insist on being served; true leaders serve (Matt.23.11)
- Abusers govern by fear; leaders create trust (1 Thess. 2:10-11)
- Abusers manipulate; leaders influence by example (Phil. 3.17)
- Abusers elevate themselves; leaders elevate others (Phil. 2.3)
- Abusers assert authority; leaders serve (Matthew 20.25)
- Abusers make service a grind; leaders make it fulfilling (Neh)
- Abusers serve in self-interest; leaders serve others (1 Cor. 9:19)
- Abusers wield authority; leaders empower people (2 Tim. 2:2)
- Abusers fix blame; true leaders take responsibility (Phi. 18-19)
- Abusers know how; true leaders show how (Exodus 18:17)

Ten Principles of Conduct

1. If you have a problem with me, please come to me (privately).
2. If I have a problem with you, I'll come to you (privately).
3. If someone has a problem with me and comes to you, send them to me. (I'll do the same for you.)
4. If someone consistently will not come to me, say, "Let's go see him together. I am sure he will see us about this." (I'll do the same for you.)
5. Be careful how you interpret me – I would rather do that myself. On matters that are unclear, do not feel pressured to interpret my feelings or thoughts. It is easy to misrepresent intentions.
6. I will be careful how I interpret you.
7. If it's confidential, don't tell. If you or anyone else comes to me in confidence, I won't tell, unless
 - (a) the person is going to harm themselves,
 - (b) the person is going to harm someone else,
 - (c) it involves a child who has been physically or sexually abused.
 - (d) in cases of church discipline, the clergy will follow Jesus instructions in Matthew 18:15-20.
2. I expect the same from you.
8. I do not read unsigned letters or notes.
9. I do not manipulate; I will not be manipulated; do not let others manipulate you. Do not let others try and manipulate me through you.
10. When in doubt, just say it. If I can answer it without misrepresenting something or breaking a confidence, I will.