

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God  
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-09151

## ***Seated in the Chair of Moses #1***

August 21, 2009

**(1) Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, (2) saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; (3) therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. (4) They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. (5) But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. (6) They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, (7) and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. (8) But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. (9) Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. (10) Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. (11) But the greatest among you shall be your servant. (12) Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.** (Matthew 23:1-12 NASB)

Recently, as I was reading the above verses, I was struck by how similar the political leaders of our day are to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day when He walked this earth 2,000 years ago.

Before offering a comparison, there are a few points that need to be made.

First, I must stress that these verses speak to an arrogant and proud religious spirit. The religious leaders of Judaism were full of pride and exalted themselves because of this pride. The Pharisees were zealous for the law given through Moses, and, to this extent, the Lord Jesus told the people and His disciples to do and observe all that the scribes and Pharisees told them to do. After all, the Lord did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17).

However, this is the only thing that He could tell the people to do in regard to listening to or following the religious leaders. Everything else that the scribes and Pharisees did was summed up in one word—*hypocrisy*. Jesus referred to them as **hypocrites** fourteen times in Matthew, which is the gospel of the King and His kingdom.

Second, it is safe to state that the Lord hates hypocrites. Why? Because a hypocrite is a pretender, a person who pretends to be what he is not; one who pretends to be better than he really is. This is what the leaders were like in that day. They thought of themselves as better than the rest of the people. They looked down on the people and told them to do things beyond the law that they were not willing to do themselves. Simply, they were blind to their true condition before God, unlike the people that they looked down upon, such as the tax collectors and prostitutes who knew that they were sinners.

**“But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ (14) “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** (Luke 18:13-14 NASB)

Third, it was worse than this, for they placed heavy burdens on the people by demanding that they do certain things or live a certain way that even the Pharisees did not live up to. It was similar to the days in which the Hebrews were in Egypt and Pharaoh kept increasing the physical load on them; however, in this case, Jews increased the load on fellow Jews by making them observe their tradition that went beyond the law or word of God. The scribes and the Pharisees should have shown mercy and compassion on their fellow countrymen, but instead they neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

In the parable of the unforgiving slave, Jesus revealed the character of the leaders. A king came to settle accounts with his slaves. One slave could not repay the king and pleaded that he be given time to repay everything. Feeling compassion for the slave, the king forgave him the debt. The slave then went out and found another slave (second slave) that owed him and demanded repayment. When the second slave pleaded for patience as the first slave had done, rather than have compassion as the king had had on him, the first slave threw the second slave in prison. When he heard of this, the king turned the first slave over to the tormentors (jailers) until he should repay all his debt (Matthew 18:23-35).

In another parable about slaves, Jesus said: **“From everyone who has been given much, much will be required”** (Luke 12:48). The scribes and Pharisees knew how much God had forgiven the Jews and how much patience He had graced them with since delivering their forefathers out of Egypt. It should have led them to be just and merciful and faithful to the people, but instead, they treated the people as second-class citizens and, even worse, added burden to their lives through the Talmud, which invalidated the word of God (law) for the sake of their tradition. **“You hypocrites”** (Matthew 15:6, 7).

Fourth, although there is a parallel with the political leaders of our day, we must realize that our leaders are a reflection of us Americans because we voted them into office and have repeatedly voted them back into office. We have allowed political office, especially in the US Congress, to become an elite profession in which men and women wield power and influence over the people. Instead of being servants of the people, they have become elitists over the people, a privileged class. We pride ourselves as one nation under God (at least we used to have this pride), but we have become a divided nation under a professional class of politicians that have little to no use for God, as they have become little gods unto themselves as they have failed to uphold the unalienable rights endowed by the Creator. They have usurped God as sovereign over the people, as well as His creation.

Fifth, is this not also a reflection of the church-at-large, especially of an elite clergy class that has usurped Christ as Head of His ecclesia? There is only one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5), but many groups, whether they openly recognize it or not, have put a professional class of men (and women) between themselves and Christ. Please do not take this to mean that I am against pastors-teachers as one of the gifts given **for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ** (Ephesians 4:11-12). I believe that the Lord has given some to do this equipping, and I trust that I am fulfilling my part in what I write. But this is a far cry from an elite and professional class called clergy, pastor, or priest (as opposed to the laity; a concept not seen in the New Testament) that runs an organization called the “church.”

I believe that the doctrine of “covering” has done much to prop up this elitist class. In case you are not familiar with this doctrine, it goes something like this: As long as you sit under a pastor who is the head of his (or her) flock, you have spiritual protection. If you take yourself out from under this covering, you are like a walking target for the enemy to pick off. The same principle applies for some groups that operate with a plurality of leaders (i.e., elders or several pastors without one man as head or senior pastor). To me, it is a form of bondage that keeps people under the control of men and stifles individuals from following the Lord and hearing the spirit of God for themselves. Believe me; those who have a personal life with the Lord who get close to this doctrine soon discover that they are like fish out of water. Eventually, they must swim away from it, or they will end up on the bank of the river rotting, metaphorically speaking, of course.

Recently, a research group concluded that a large number of people are leaving the organized church for a variety of reasons. However, it makes me wonder if the professional clergy or pastor class and the doctrine of covering are at the heart of the exodus. Perhaps some of the true believers are holding fast to their Head and hearing His voice as He leads them to follow Him into His kingdom. I use the term *true believers* to contrast with the ones who simply joined an organization and have not been united with Christ. Recently, I heard some interviews of people that have left the organized church; it was apparent that they fell into this last group, for they talked about all religions being relevant (equal?) and that it is about spirituality (obviously, without Christ).

It might seem like I have deviated a bit from the stated objective, but, as I was writing this, I realized that there is a parallel, not only with the scribes and the Pharisees and present-day political leaders, but also with “church” leaders. These parallels will be noted in the next issue.