

Luke 11:44

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.

Analysis

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not (ὅτι ἐστὲ ὡς τὰ μνημεῖα τὰ ἄδηλα)—the third woe uses cemetery imagery. Mnēmeia (graves, tombs) that are adēla (unmarked, hidden) were problematic because stepping on them caused ritual defilement (Numbers 19:16). Jews whitewashed tombs annually before Passover to mark them visibly. **And the men that walk over them are not aware of them**—the Pharisees' hidden corruption defiles those who trust their teaching.

This devastating metaphor reverses their self-image: they considered themselves sources of purity, but were actually contagious corruption. Their religious authority defiled followers rather than sanctifying them. Jesus warns that false teachers are dangerous precisely because their corruption is hidden—they appear righteous while spreading spiritual death.

Historical Context

Numbers 19:16 declared anyone touching a grave unclean for seven days. Annual tomb-whitewashing (mentioned in Matthew 23:27) made graves visible to prevent accidental defilement. Jesus's metaphor of 'unmarked graves' suggests the Pharisees were even more dangerous than obvious corruption—hidden death masquerading as life.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What hidden sins or hypocrisies might you be harboring that could spiritually 'defile' those who trust your example?
2. How does this passage challenge the danger of religious leadership divorced from genuine godliness?
3. In what ways might respectable external religion mask internal corruption that harms others?

Interlinear Text

οὐαὶ ὑμῖν γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι, ὑποκριταί, ὅτι
Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites ! for
G3759 G5213 G1122 G2532 G5330 G5273 G3754

ἐστὲ ὥς οἱ μνημεῖα οἱ ἄδηλα καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι
ye are as which graves which appear not and which the men
G2075 G5613 G3588 G3419 G3588 G82 G2532 G3588 G444

οἱ περιπατοῦντες ἐπάνω οὐκ οἶδασιν
which that walk over not aware
G3588 G4043 G1883 G3756 G1492

Additional Cross-References

Acts 23:3 (Parallel theme): Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

Psalms 5:9 (Parallel theme): For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

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