

# Matthew 23:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

## Analysis

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**Whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward** (τάφοις κεκονιαμένοις οἵτινες ἔξωθεν μὲν φαίνονται ὡραῖοι)—Jews whitewashed tombs with lime before Passover so pilgrims wouldn't accidentally touch them and become ceremonially unclean (Numbers 19:16). The whitewashing made them conspicuous and attractive, but within remained **dead men's bones and all uncleanness** (νεκρῶν ὄστέων καὶ πάσης ἀκαθαρσίας). Contact with corpses brought seven-day defilement—the highest level of ritual impurity.

The irony is devastating: those obsessed with avoiding ritual defilement were themselves walking tombs, defiling everyone they touched. Akatharsias (uncleanness) encompasses moral corruption, not just ceremonial impurity. Beautiful exterior, rotting interior—this describes unregenerate religion perfectly.

## Historical Context

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According to Mishnah Shekalim 1:1, Jews whitewashed graves on Adar 15 (month before Passover) to warn pilgrims. The whitewash created attractive monuments—some wealthy families elaborately decorated tombs. But Jewish law considered corpse-contact the most severe defilement, requiring sprinkling with red heifer

ashes (Numbers 19). Jesus spoke this during Passover week when these whitewashed tombs were most visible and pilgrims most concerned about purity.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. What "whitewashing" do you apply to your life to appear spiritually attractive while harboring inner corruption?
2. How can religious activity itself become a form of defilement when divorced from heart transformation?
3. In what ways does concern for external respectability make you more dangerous spiritually—defiling others while convinced of your own purity?

## Interlinear Text

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

παρομοιάζετε τάφοις κεκονιαμένοις οἵτινες ἔξωθεν μὲν  
ye are like sepulchres unto whited which outward indeed  
G3945 G5028 G2867 G3748 G1855 G3303

φαίνονται ὡραῖοι ἔσωθεν δὲ γέμουσιν ὄστέων νεκρῶν  
appear beautiful are within but full men's bones of dead  
G5316 G5611 G2081 G1161 G1073 G3747 G3498

καὶ πάσης ἀκαθαρσίας  
and of all uncleanness  
G2532 G3956 G167

## Additional Cross-References

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**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?

**Luke 11:44** (Resurrection): 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.

**Numbers 19:16** (Parallel theme): And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.