

Matthew 23:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Analysis

Outwardly appear righteous unto men (ἔξωθεν μὲν φαίνεσθε δικαίοις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις)—phainesthē means "to appear" or "seem," implying the appearance doesn't match reality. Dikaiois (righteous) would normally be praiseworthy, but here it's mere façade. The Pharisees cultivated reputation for righteousness through conspicuous piety—long prayers (23:14), elaborate phylacteries (23:5), prominent almsgiving (Matthew 6:2).

Within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (ἔσωθεν γέμετε ὑποκρίσεως καὶ ἀνομίας)—gemete means "filled, packed full." Hypokrisis originally meant "play-acting"—performing a role rather than being authentic. Anomias (lawlessness) is shocking: those zealous for law-keeping were actually law-breakers at heart level. Romans 2:17-29 echoes this—external Judaism without circumcised heart is lawlessness.

Historical Context

First-century Judaism highly valued public reputation for righteousness. Pharisees gained social prestige, political influence, and religious authority through perceived piety. They occupied chief seats in synagogues (23:6), received reverential titles (23:7-10), and controlled Temple operations. But Jesus exposes their public righteousness as performance—they played the role of righteous men while their hearts remained unregenerate, filled with pride, greed, and cruelty.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What aspects of your Christian life are performed for human approval rather than authentic heart devotion to God?
2. How does Jesus's equation of hypocrisy with lawlessness challenge the idea that external religious conformity equals righteousness?
3. In what ways might your concern for appearing righteous actually reveal the absence of true righteousness?

Interlinear Text

οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔξωθεν μὲν φαίνεσθε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις
Even so also ye outwardly G3303 appear G3588 unto men G444
G3779 G2532 G5210 G1855 G5316

δίκαιοι ἔσωθεν δέ μεστοὶ ἐστε ὑποκρίσεως καὶ
righteous within but full ye are of hypocrisy also
G1342 G2081 G1161 G3324 G2075 G5272 G2532

ἀνομίας

iniquity
G458

Additional Cross-References

Luke 16:15 (Righteousness): And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Psalms 51:6 (Parallel theme): Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Matthew 23:5 (Parallel theme): But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

1 Samuel 16:7 (Parallel theme): But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

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