

Matthew 23:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

Analysis

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not—Jesus commands obedience to Torah teaching (tēreite kai poieite, τηρεῖτε καὶ ποιεῖτε, keep and do) while forbidding imitation of hypocritical conduct. The stark contrast legousin kai ou poioucin (λέγουσιν καὶ οὐ ποιοῦσιν, they say and do not) exposes the fundamental flaw: orthodoxy without orthopraxy, right doctrine without right living.

This is not blanket endorsement of Pharisaic oral tradition (which Jesus often challenged) but recognition that when they correctly teach Scripture, it must be obeyed. The verse establishes a crucial hermeneutical principle: truth remains true regardless of the teacher's character, yet teachers will be judged more severely (James 3:1) for failing to live what they teach.

Historical Context

First-century Pharisees added extensive oral traditions to Torah (the 'tradition of the elders' in Mark 7:3-13), creating hundreds of detailed rules. Jesus distinguished between biblical commands (which He upheld) and human traditions that often contradicted Scripture's spirit while claiming to protect it.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do you discern when religious leaders teach Scripture accurately versus imposing human tradition?
2. Why does Jesus command obedience to their teaching despite condemning their hypocrisy?
3. What dangers arise when believers focus on doctrinal correctness while neglecting personal transformation?

Interlinear Text

πάντα	οὖν	ὅσα	ἂν	εἶπωσιν	ὕμῃν	τηρεῖτε	τηρεῖτε	
All	therefore	G3745	whatsoever	they bid	you	observe	observe	
G3956	G3767		G302	G2036	G5213	G5083	G5083	
καὶ	ποιοῦσιν	κατὰ	δὲ	τὰ	ἔργα	αὐτῶν	μὴ	ποιοῦσιν
and	do	ye after	but	G3588	works	their	not	do
G2532	G4160	G2596	G1161		G2041	G846	G3361	G4160
λέγουσιν	γὰρ	καὶ	οὐ	ποιοῦσιν				
they say	for	and	not	do				
G3004	G1063	G2532	G3756	G4160				

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 3:5 (Parallel theme): Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Titus 1:16 (Parallel theme): They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Acts 5:29 (Parallel theme): Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Romans 13:1 (Parallel theme): Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Chronicles 30:12 (Parallel theme): Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.

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