

Teaching 8 of 11

Jesus Against Religion

Gentle with people. Hard on systems.

“They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”

Matthew 23:4

In old Greek theaters the actors wore masks. The crowd only saw a fixed smile or frown. The actor underneath could be bored or grumpy. Jesus looked at some religious leaders and saw masks.

Gentle with people, hard on systems

Jesus ate with tax collectors, touched people no one else would touch, and forgave a woman caught in sin. But when men turned God into a rulebook, He said “woe” again and again (Matthew 23). He saw men stacking bricks into other people’s backpacks and walking away.

The mask

ὕποκριτής

hypokritēs (hoo-po-kree-TAYS)

An actor behind a mask; a hypocrite.

“Hypocrite” is ὕποκριτής *hypokritēs*, an actor on a stage. Man-made religion hands you a mask. It teaches you to look holy on the right day, but it cannot

change your heart. Jesus called those leaders whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27). He was not angry at people for being weak. He was angry at a system that made people fake.

Rules passed down

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

Mark 7:6-7

παράδοσις

paradosis (pah-RAH-doh-sis)

A tradition handed down by people, like an old coat passed along.

“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8). Tradition is παράδοσις *paradosis*, something handed down like an old coat. Not every tradition is bad. But when a man-made rule becomes the way to please God, it stands between you and Him.

Mercy over rules

ἔλεος

eleos (EH-leh-os)

Mercy; a heart that cares about someone in need.

When the Pharisees condemned His hungry friends for picking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus answered, “If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless” (Matthew 12:7).

Mercy is ἔλεος *eleos*. Religion asks, “Did you keep the rule?” Jesus asks, “Did you love the person in front of you?”

A yoke that fits

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:29-30

χρηστός

chrēstos (khray-STOS)

Easy, kind; fitting just right, like a yoke shaped to your neck.

Jesus grew up a carpenter. He knew yokes. “Easy” is χρηστός *chrēstos*: kind, well-fitting, shaped to your neck. Religion’s yoke rubs you raw. His fits.

Religion you make for yourself

ἐθελοθρησκία

ethelothrēskia (eh-theh-lo-thrays-KEE-ah)

Self-made religion: worship I build for myself.

At Colossae teachers said, “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch.” Paul said such rules have “an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion” but “are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:21-23). Self-made religion is ἐθελοθρησκία *ethelothrēskia*: worship I build for myself, then feel proud of keeping.

The only religion God wants

θρησκεία

thrēskeia (thrays-KAY-ah)

Religion; the way you worship.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). The word is θρησκεία *thrēskeia*. God’s idea of religion is a changed life that loves people.

Many people stuck in man-made religion love God sincerely. They need kindness, not scorn. We speak plainly about rules God never gave, but we never mock or look down on anyone. The goal is not to win an argument. It is to help people take off their masks and find rest in Jesus.

Remember this

Jesus was hard on man-made religion and gentle with people. He did not come to give you a better mask. He came to give you a new heart and real rest.