

Small Group Guide

THE DANGER OF DAMNATION IN SINCERE RELIGION

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

June 3, 2012

Matthew 23

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word with His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Welcome—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Review—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. (The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time.) Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to review the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Prayer—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

A Serious Caution...

- It is possible for you and me to genuinely believe that we are doing God's work, obeying God's Word, and accomplishing God's will, yet to be deceived and to experience eternal damnation.
 - May God expose our blind spots, uncover our hearts, and save us from ourselves...

Key Questions...

- Do we practice what we preach? (vv. 1-4)
- Are we content with the approval of God or do we desire the applause of men? (vv. 5-7)
- Do we assert our superiority over others (and in the process usurp Christ's superiority over all)? (vv. 8-10)
- Do we humbly serve others or are we hypocritically centered on ourselves? (vv. 11-12)
- Are we hindering people's salvation... (vv. 13-15)
 - Either through deceiving potential disciples of Jesus?
 - Or through creating virtual disciples of ourselves?
- Are we more concerned with biblical minutia than we are with practical ministry? (vv. 16-24)
 - Do we justify sin according to our traditions or do we flee sin according to God's truth?
 - Do we pride ourselves on following convenient laws or do we spend ourselves expressing costly love? (Micah 6:8)

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- Are we focused on outward cleanliness instead of inward holiness? (vv. 25-28)
 - Purity always begins in the heart.
 - Religion is a subtly dangerous cover-up for spiritual deadness.

The Final Charge... (vv. 29-36)

- They had murdered God's messengers.
- They would murder Christian missionaries.
- They were about to murder the promised Messiah.

The Frightening Conclusion...

- We are them.

The Inevitable Certainty... (vv. 37-39)

- The condemnation of sinners is imminent.
- The salvation of sinners is possible.
- The exaltation of Jesus is guaranteed.

So How Shall We Respond?

- Among our elders...
 - Let us lead with integrity from God's Word as the only source of authority for what we believe and how we behave.
 - Let us lead by submission to God's Son as our Chief Shepherd and the Coming King.
- In our lives...
 - Let us humbly hide under the shelter of Christ's mercy.
 - Let us wisely walk in surrender to Christ's authority.
 - Understanding His Word rightly.
 - Desiring His worship wholeheartedly.
 - Let us passionately proclaim the supremacy of Christ's glory.

Message Summary

The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day were a highly respected class of people. Most of them were highly sincere in their Jewish faith, attempting to follow God's Law in every way possible, even creating their own rules to make sure that they did not miss any application of the Scriptures. Many times their sincere desire to follow the letter of the Law conflicted with the spirit and purpose in which God gave the Law in the first place. In addition, their pride blinded them to the spiritual truth of the Messiah standing right in their midst. Thus, despite their sincere affection for the Law, they neglected to be affected in mind and heart by the Truth and lived in such a way that screamed of hypocrisy.

The same danger exists for each of us today. Even the most sincere of religious worshipers may indeed be worshipping an idol sincerely. Even the one sincerely believing in a false gospel is still sincerely wrong. Even those of us who sincerely believe in God and who are religious leaders may stand under eternal condemnation if we are not sincerely affected by His Truth.

Group Discussion

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

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- Jesus stated that when the religious leaders were accurately teaching the Word of God, the people should listen, but they should not follow the hypocritical actions of their leaders. How does this statement solidify the authority of God and His Word over the traditions and experiences of people?
- What we truly value and believe is that which is demonstrated through our actions in our lives. What would those closest to you list as your most deeply held convictions?
- Jesus noted that the pride of the religious leaders, along with their desire for man's honor and approval, contributed to their hypocrisy. How did their pride lead them to a belief of superiority over others, and even over God's Law?
- How can our inclination toward sinful pride exhibit itself in an overt or hidden competition with others?
- What role does our social media often play in feeding this kind of unhealthy pride and competition?
- How can we address such pride in our lives and begin to serve others with a humble spirit instead of with one of superiority or false humility?
- What does our tendency to teach spiritual truths with our words, but ignore them with our actions, indicate about the true nature of our faith? What does it reveal about what we truly believe in our hearts?
- Children often are quick to recognize a disconnect between what we teach them and how we act. How do we deceive our children and/or others we are to disciple into following a false faith or a false gospel by neglecting an authentic faith that shows itself in actions?
- Based on Verse 23, what are some actions that our children and others should see in our lives that indicate authentic faith?
- In verses 16-24, the religious leaders had found ways to justify sin with human traditions. How might this same tendency look in our 'church culture' today?
- What sins do our culture justify because we do not take them seriously, want to be politically correct, or want to shield someone from feeling the full effect of conviction and righteous guilt?
- How does addressing sin on our own terms instead of God's terms lead us to invent outward "holy" behavior apart from a pure heart?
- In verses 29-36, the religious leaders thought themselves to be immune to the sins of their fathers. How did this way of thinking endanger their sensitivity to their own propensity to sin?
- Why is it so dangerous to entertain the thought that we are above certain sins or that we are immune to disobedience?
- How does the Word of God lead us to know how to live according to God's righteous standards instead of our own?
- What are some of 'God's righteous standards' that are revealed in this text that we need to embrace for our lives?
- How can we intentionally make God's Word a greater and more influential presence in the life of our families? How can we passionately proclaim and better demonstrate the supremacy of Christ in our homes?
- Leaders, another way to approach today's study could be to honestly dialogue about the seven questions that Pastor David presented and pray for one another in the areas that each participant is honestly struggling.

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of today's study. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

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Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church..

Weekly Prayer Focus ... (from our worship guide)

- *For Our Lives:* Pray that our church would not be guilty of what we find in this passage. Pray that our message would be the gospel of grace, not a gospel of self. Pray that those in our church who are burdened with guilt about their own inability to earn God's love would be freed by the reality that it is Jesus' righteousness that makes us right before God, not our own.
- *For Our City:* This week we are praying for Brookwood Baptist church, Jim Barnette, Pastor. We are also praying for the summer "Rock the Block Clubs" (Backyard Bible Clubs) that will be occurring throughout Birmingham neighborhoods, apartments, and urban locations.
- *For Our World:* This week we are praying for our Short-term team serving in North Africa and Macedonia. We are also praying for Brook Hill's Long-term missionaries, The Hansen Family, serving in Kenya. Erik Hansen serves as a pediatric surgeon at the Kijabe Hospital outside of Nairobi. He and his wife Amanda raise their four children and minister to other children alongside an organization called BethanyKids. They are also engaging those they meet with the gospel in order to strengthen the local church in Kenya. For more information follow their blog at uncommonroad.blogspot.com.