

AI: ARTIFICIAL INTEGRITY

The Pretenders (Week One)
Matthew 23:1-36



SYNOPSIS

In this first sermon of our Artificial Integrity series, Pastor Frank Bennett shares the seven woes given by Jesus that outlined ways the teachers of the Law were pretending to walk in righteousness. We look at ways these woes can show up in our lives today that reveal we are fake with our faith.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Jesus confront artificial integrity in the Pharisees, and what was the core of their hypocrisy?
2. How did the Pharisees demonstrate that their actions were "all for show," and what was their true motivation?

3. What are the "Seven Woes" that Jesus pronounced against the Pharisees, and what do they represent?

4. How did the Pharisees' "artificial promises" demonstrate their spiritual blindness?

5. What is the lasting message of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees for believers today?

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ANSWER KEY

1. Jesus directly confronted the Pharisees, referring to them as "The Pretenders," because their faith was more performance than reality. Their core hypocrisy stemmed from practicing what they preached only for outward appearance and personal gain, rather than genuine devotion. They tied heavy religious burdens on others, added numerous human-made rules to God's law, and insisted on them as necessary for pleasing God, all while refusing to lighten these loads themselves. Their motives were driven by a desire for public approval, recognition, and honor, evident in their exaggerated religious emblems and insistence on titles.
2. The Pharisees demonstrated their actions were "all for show" by overtly displaying religious emblems such as wide phylacteries and long tassels on their garments, not primarily to honor God, but to be noticed and receive credit from others for being exceptionally religious. They also loved places of honor at banquets and synagogues, and enjoyed being greeted with respectful titles like "Rabbi" in public. Their true motivation was seeking approval, recognition, and self-exaltation from people, rather than a humble desire to serve God.
3. The "Seven Woes" pronounced by Jesus against the Pharisees represent God's official rejection of their artificial integrity and hypocrisy. Each woe highlights a specific area of their spiritual failing:
 - a. Artificial Beliefs: Shutting the door of heaven on people by practicing the opposite of what they preach.
 - b. Artificial Leadership: Leading converts to a legalistic, human-centered belief system that rejects Jesus, making them "twice as much a child of hell."
 - c. Artificial Promises: Creating spiritual loopholes to justify breaking vows and intentionally deceiving others, rather than simply letting their "yes" be yes and "no" be no.
 - d. Artificial Generosity: Focusing on minor technicalities of the law (like tithing tiny herbs) while neglecting crucial matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness, demonstrating an obligatory rather than cheerful spirit.
 - e. Artificial Purity: Emphasizing external cleanliness and public image while remaining internally full of greed and self-indulgence, like cleaning the outside of a cup but not the inside.
 - f. Artificial Righteousness: Appearing righteous outwardly but being inwardly full of hypocrisy and wickedness, likened to whitewashed tombs that look beautiful but are full of decay.
 - g. Artificial Honor: Pretending to honor past prophets while persecuting and rejecting God's current messengers, proving themselves descendants of those who murdered the prophets.
4. The Pharisees' "artificial promises" demonstrated their spiritual blindness by their "lawyer-like" mentality of creating loopholes in their vows. They distinguished between oaths made by the temple versus its gold, or the altar versus the gift on it, believing some vows were less binding. Jesus called them "blind guides" and "blind fools" because they failed to see that the gold and the gift were not greater than the temple or the altar, which made them sacred and were connected to God.
5. The lasting message of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees for believers today is a call to genuine, heart-deep integrity over superficial religious performance. It serves as a warning against hypocrisy in all its forms: saying one thing and doing another, leading others astray with human-made rules, breaking promises, focusing on minor religious duties while neglecting justice and mercy, prioritizing outward appearance over inner purity, and rejecting God's truth.