



Berean Christian Fellowship

DEVOTIONAL 184.0

April 20
2018

Middlemen, Mafia, and Gatekeepers

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13).

Let’s say you’re a drug addict who notices a large crowd of addicts heading to a pharmacy where a free cure is being offered. You follow along and watch as people are cured of addiction inside the pharmacy. Rather than taking the cure for yourself, you hatch a plan to take advantage of this situation and the processions of people coming to these doors.

First, you’ll declare you’re a spokesman for the cure and meet people at the door, preventing them from going inside—you’ve just inserted yourself as a “middleman,” mediator, or go-between. With very little effort on your part, your words are now seen as “the doctor’s orders.” Second, you’ll keep people from getting the real cure, and sell them drugs as if these are the cure to keep them struggling and returning to you. Third, to retain your power, you’ll have to silence anyone who knows you’re a fraud. This is a “mafia” scam.

Throughout human history, mafias have risen to power inserting themselves between the people and what they need. On the spiritual level, the Pharisees had this down. They extorted the vulnerable and helpless by inserting their religious “mafia” between the people and God’s Word. In this way, they profited off people’s weaknesses while masquerading as guides, helpers, experts, and authorities—misdirecting people into half-truths, lies, deeper spiritual confusion, and slavery, while literally blocking the gateway to what’s drawing the people in the first place! They further enslave people to their weaknesses and struggles, rather than letting them into the knowl-

edge of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Pharisees declared everyone who “*does not know the Law is accursed*” (Jn. 7:49), but THEY were keeping the Law from the people—keeping them cursed and profiting from it. They even “evangelized” to bring converts under their power: “*And when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*” (Matt. 23:15). When Jesus exposed their scam, they sought to silence Him like the Prophets: “*Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become*” (Acts 7:52).

Even after the Gospel went forth, this cycle happened all over again when opportunists placed themselves between the people and God’s Word in the development of the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church. For centuries, they kept God’s Word out of people’s hands, enslaving people to manmade doctrines on the very steps to the Kingdom of Heaven—profiting from extorted offerings of wealth and power, taken in Jesus’ name: “*But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*” (Mk. 7:7).

Today, while God’s Word is in most homes, satan hinders Christians’ growth in their understanding of it by spreading “authorities” and “experts” into the Church who stand between the people and understanding—sowing confusion, error, and the “doctrines of men” to divert people from the liberty available in Christ. They extort people’s livelihood and entangle them in labyrinths of “self-will,” guilt, or “self-help” that further weaken them, make them ineffective, and keep them coming back.

May we pray that people everywhere would see past “religious mafias” to the freedom in Christ that is offered freely in the Word of God, for “*if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*” (Jn. 8:36). Even so, Amen.

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