

GOSPEL PEARLS

Devotion or vainglory?

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Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honour at banquets, seats of honour in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23: 1-12)

Devotion must lead you to love God and become the grateful expression of this love. If on the other hand, you allow the formal aspect of this love to take precedent, while focusing on your obedience to human rules and laws, then you will fall prey to a fundamental pitfall. Those who are formally obedient feel they are at peace with God, while those who are unable to do the same feel hopelessly condemned. However, we will all be judged according to our obedience to the essence of God's Law: love. When you find yourself observing a rule or law, ask yourself honestly whether you are doing so for your own vainglory, just like the Pharisees did, or out of true devotion.