

Does Your Church Have Chief Seats?

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Jesus, in warning His disciples not to follow the prideful and hypocritical actions of the scribes and Pharisees, includes in His portrayal of their self-importance the fact that they "love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues" (Matthew 23:6). I want to focus on the "chief seats in the synagogues." What are they?

Commentator Albert Barnes says, "Chief seats in the synagogues - The seats usually occupied by the elders of the synagogue, near the pulpit. The meaning is, they love a place of distinction."

Robertson's Word Pictures, commenting on Matthew 23:6 and citing someone called Zuchermadel, says these chief seats "were on the platform looking to the audience." Of the chief seats, John Gill says, "these were different; the seats of the senior men were turned towards the people...these seem to be what the Scribes and Pharisees coveted, that they might be in the full view of the people." Hmmm. Is this not beginning to sound familiar? Gill then quotes Maimonides, "The elders sit, i.e. first, and their faces are towards the people, and their backs are to the temple, or holy place; and all the people sit in rows, and the faces of one row are to the backs of the row that is before them; so that the faces of all the people are to the holy place, and to the elders, and to the ark."

So, the chief seats were where the elders of the synagogue sat. They were near the pulpit. They faced the people who sat in rows. And Jesus said to His disciples to beware of the pretentious and pompous attitude that would lead one to desire to sit in these chief seats. You wouldn't happen to know of any chief seats like this in your church, would you? And who might happen to sit in them? Something to think about.

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