

September 3, 2023

Strain at a Gnat

by Rickie Jenkins

In Matthew chapter 23, the Lord gives the most sustained and unsparing condemnation of the Pharisees. The tone is harsh, and the attack has been described as grossly unfair-- even libelous. Were all scribes and Pharisees as bad as this? To answer this, two things should be considered.

First, when Christ characterized the Pharisees as "hypocrites," "blind guides," "fools and blind," "full of extortion and excess," "full of dead men's bones," "of all uncleanness," "serpents," and "generation of vipers," He spoke the unvarnished truth. The heart of official Judaism was rotten, and He intended to expose it.

Second, His censure is not just against conscious hypocrisy, but against the Pharisaic approach to religion. Pharisees were committed to a system that was inherently evil. It was grounded on legalistic self-righteousness (Matthew 5:20).

What Jesus says is radical, but necessary. Depending on the individual, this will accomplish at least one of three things: (1) Shock and awaken some of the Pharisees. (2) Warn others lest they be misled by blind leaders. (3) Warn all of us lest we become like the Pharisees or be misled by them.

One of the rebukes Jesus gave is "Blind guides, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:24). This aphorism

illustrates the absurdity of majoring in minors. A gnat was an insect and therefore unclean-- but so was a camel (Lev. 11:4). In order to avoid the risk of drinking anything unclean, wine was strained through muslin gauze so that any possible impurity might be strained out of it. While the Pharisees were careful to avoid swallowing something small and unclean during this straining process, the Pharisees were choking down the largest unclean animal around (Matt. 19:24). Their conscience troubled them if they failed to tithe seeds but caused them no unrest when they were unjust, heartless, or faithless (Matt. 27:6).

It can be hard for us to understand this little aphorism. See if this makes more sense. Have you ever eaten homemade ice cream? Homemade ice cream is made of one dozen eggs and six cans of sweetened condensed milk. Then, someone asks, "What would like to drink?" You say, "I'm watching my weight. I'll drink a diet coke." See how foolish that is?

The Pharisees strained at a gnat, mistakenly believing that external conformity to the law was enough, while not seeing that the evil in their hearts was a camel-sized problem. Their hearts were full of envy, pride, greed, and malice. They strained at the gnat of

Welcome!

When you visit our assemblies, you will be received friendly, kindly and courteously. We believe this to be the natural attitude of those who truly love God and mankind. Though you may at first be among strangers, we hope that you will come to know us well and count us as your friends.

We offer Bible studies as well as correspondence courses for those interested in learning more about what God expects of us.

Important Dates

Gospel Meeting - San Marcos, September 29 - October 1

If you know of upcoming events, please inform Darrell so they can be included here.

ceremony, but they ignored the camel of sin in their hearts.

We can make sure we have all outward behaviors doctrinally correct but ignore what is taking place in our hearts, all the while being blind to the corruption in our hearts. If we take the Lord's Supper every Sunday, but have hearts filled with hatred, we're in danger of taking the memorial in an unworthy manner.

We need to be aware of our thinking that we are "the church of Christ." We don't use instruments of music, we don't have a "fellowship-hall," and we partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Therefore, we are righteous. Yet, our mouths are filled with venom, we spread gossip, and we bite and devour each other. We fail to forgive as God has forgiven us. We would be straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. We can have all the "i's" dotted and all the "t's" crossed but not have a heart of Christ.

The question is not about us as a whole. The question is personal. "Do I strain at a gnat and swallow a camel?"

Now, it's not okay to swallow a gnat. Even the little things matter. But we need to be aware about making the little things big and ignoring the big things.

Prayer Requests

Jack Wilson is still struggling with pain and limited mobility.

Jerry Richardson's lymphoma has returned and is undergoing chemo.

Dinah Williams continues to have mobility issues.

Don Simmons is still struggling with his breathing; he is on oxygen at all times. **Alene** is having hip issues.

Lisa Mullen (Darrell's sister) is undergoing chemotherapy.

Tony Mauck has cancer that has spread.

Vicki Stevens has cancer and is undergoing treatment.

Debbie McMurray is undergoing immunotherapy.

Randall's brother, Van, collapsed and broke a rib and punctured a lung.

Tristen Boatright has a procedure coming up on the 19th to remove a cyst.

If you know of someone that needs to be on this list, please tell Darrell (email preferred) and provide updates so names stay on the list as long as needed.

"praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,"
(Ephesians 6:18 ESV)

The Oaks West church of Christ is a group of individual Christians who have been added to the Lord's body through baptism (Acts 2:38, 47; Gal 3:26, 27), and have joined themselves together (Acts 2:42ff) in an effort to do the Lord's will.

We are not a part of any larger organization - we do not follow any man-made creeds and we do not answer to anyone other than the Lord.

Our standard of faith and practice is the Word of God. We believe in the God of revelation (Eph 3:1-7; 2 Tim 3:16-17) and follow his instructions in an effort to have an ongoing relationship with him (1 John 4:7-11; 5:3).

Our times of study and worship are open to all, and our members are happy to meet with interested individuals or families for study.

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