

# Pharisees Strain Out Mosquitoes and Swallow Camels

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon warns against the dangers of Pharisaism, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing our relationship with God and practicing love and obedience to Scripture.*

**Scripture:** Micah 6:8, Matthew 22:37-39, Matthew 23:24, Luke 11:42, John 13:34-35, Romans 13:10, Galatians 5:14, 1 Timothy 1:5, James 1:22, 1 John 4:20-21

**Topics:** "Hypocrisy", "True Obedience"

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## Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who meticulously focus on trivial matters while neglecting the weightier commands of Scripture. He illustrates this inconsistency by comparing their actions to straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel, highlighting the importance of prioritizing love and obedience to God over mere outward appearances. Poonen critiques the tendency of some Christians to excel in superficial religious practices, such as memorizing Scripture for competitions, while failing to embody the true essence of the gospel, which is love. He calls for a genuine pursuit of love for God and others as the ultimate goal of the Christian life, urging believers to recognize and act on what truly matters. The sermon challenges listeners to reflect on their priorities and align their actions with the core teachings of Christ.

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## Transcript

"You Pharisees, hypocrites and blind guides - who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matthew 23:24).

Pharisees are very careful in small unimportant matters (straining out dead mosquitoes). But they neglect to obey the commands in Scripture (swallowing dead camels). Jesus was not thereby telling the Pharisees that it was all right to swallow dead mosquitoes. He was showing them their inconsistency in neglecting more important matters.

Such Pharisees are careful in small matters such as wearing clean clothes when going to the church meetings, or in keeping their houses neat and tidy. These are good habits. But when it comes to more important matters such as seeking God earnestly to overcome anger and sexual lust, or helping in the practical work in the church, or travelling to the villages to bring people to Christ, they are not so keen - because these matters require the sacrifice of one's convenience, time and money.

The Message Translation paraphrases this verse thus: "Do you have any idea how silly you look, writing a life story that's wrong from start to finish, but nitpicking over commas and semicolons?"

There are Bible Memory competitions held in Bangalore that many Christians participate in to get a prize of a few hundred rupees. To win that prize, one has to write down not only all the words of the Scripture passage accurately, but also place all the commas and the semi-colons accurately!! Some believers spend weeks and weeks memorizing the correct places for these commas and semi-colons in order to win this prize. But all the while they live in disobedience to the Scriptures in their homes. But that does not disturb them. You can win the first prize in such Bible contests and still be a Pharisee of the first order.

Love is the ultimate end and goal of the gospel (1 Timothy 1:5) - to love God with all our heart, soul and strength and to love our fellow-believers as Christ loved us. If we pursue after this love, we will know instinctively what the most important things in the Christian life are.

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