

# Weightier Matters of the Law

The Bible contains 31,102 verses ... If you want to memorize the Bible, it is not a million vs!

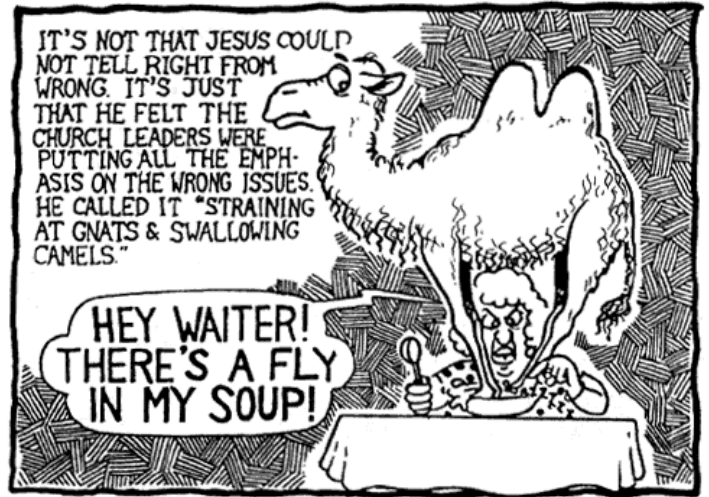
Today I would like to explore just one verse (and to complete the thought, we'll also include the verse that follows) ... The verse is rich with meaning ... and this gives us a chance to see the many ways we can harvest & explore meaning in a scripture! In the future, you might use some of these techniques in your personal Bible study!

**Mat\_23:23-24** "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (G5273) For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier (G926) matters of the law: **justice** (G2920) and **mercy** (G1656) and **faith** (G4102). These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

1) What does the verse say "without a lot of analysis"? ... at a surface layer? This gives us some avenues we might explore further!

To me:

- Jesus is angry ... calling scribes and Pharisees blind & hypocrites!
- Jesus is making value judgments about God's Law – some Laws appear to be **more important** "weightier" – I want to explore the Greek of some key words to ensure we understand exactly what is "more important to God!"
- Jesus also confirms all Law is important ... tithing should be done ... too!
- Jesus uses hyperbole to create a powerful word picture to show ridiculous behavior



2) Explore some key words...

G5273 - hupokritēs - hoop-ok-ree-tace' - an actor or stage player, that is, (figuratively) a dissembler (*a person who professes beliefs and opinions that he or she does not hold ...in order to conceal his or her real feelings or motives*) - hypocrite.

G926 – barus - bar-ooce' = weighty, grave, heavy

G2920 – krisis - kree'-sis = judgment, **justice**

G1656 – eleos - el'-eh-os = active **compassion**, tender mercy

G4102 – pistis - pis'-tis = moral conviction, assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity (*loyalty*)

- Attention should be given to Jesus' emphasis on justice, mercy, and faith (Mat\_23:23). **Justice** is honest diligence in **doing what is right** and fair. **Mercy** is **active kindness** to everyone in need. And **faith** here means **covenant faithfulness**: consistent **integrity** in dealing with others, loyalty to God

3) **Context of Matt 23** ... Involves Jesus pronouncing eight woes on the proud religious hypocrites of His day. These are not “curses,” but rather “expressions of sorrow” at their fate, not unlike the expression, “Alas for you!” (“Too bad” for you... It is “so sad” for you)

- Mtt 23:23 is related to the pharisaic practice of meticulously tithing all their possessions. They went so far as to carry the practice down to the smallest spices from plants: mint, dill, and cummin. While **meticulously** following the Law in this area (Lev\_27:30), they failed to manifest the justice, mercy, and faithfulness demanded by the Law. They were **majoring on minors**, straining out a gnat, while minoring on majors, swallowing a camel. **Being so busy with small details, they never dealt with the important matters.** Jesus was not saying tithing was unimportant; He was saying they were **completely neglecting** the one area at the expense of the other. They **should** have been doing both.



Since they were not, they were blind guides. Other expressions: focusing on the wrong thing, making a mountain out of a molehill, nit-picking, going down a rabbit hole, “can't see the forest for the trees”

- According to **Leviticus 11**, the largest unclean animal was a camel. The smallest was a gnat. Jesus said the Pharisees picked gnats out of their soup but missed the big camel swimming around. They had all the little details down—even tithing their spice seeds—but missed the big picture of love,

faith, mercy and righteousness

4) **Exploring the characters** of the verse: The scribes & Pharisees

- Perhaps we should remind ourselves that not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites. There were about 6,000 Pharisees in that day, with many more who were “followers” but not full members of the group. Most of the Pharisees were middle-class businessmen and some were sincere in their quest for truth and holiness. The name “Pharisees” came from a word that means “to separate.”
- Among the Pharisees were a few members who sought for true spiritual religion. Nicodemus (Joh\_3:1-36; Joh\_7:50-53), Joseph of Arimathea (Joh\_19:38), and the unnamed man mentioned in Mar\_12:32-34, come to mind. Even Gamaliel showed a great deal of tolerance toward the newly formed church (Act\_5:34). But for the most part, the Pharisees used their religion to promote themselves and their material gain. No wonder Jesus denounced them.

- But Jesus qualified the Pharisees leadership by several observations:
  - first**, they **multiplied commands** upon individuals which they themselves would not practice;
  - second**, they practiced their religious traditions **for the recognition** they received of men;
  - third**, they **had respect of person**, for they loved chief places in the assembly and wanted to be greeted with honor in society. Jesus **condemned** their status-seeking, and contrasted their practice with the Church that He was creating. The true people of God have **one** Teacher, the Christ; **one** level, all are brethren; **one** Father before whom all bow, the Father in heaven; and **one** measure of greatness, that of being servants who humble themselves in service.
- The Pharisees were externalists. They were fussy about the smallest details of the ceremonial law, such as tithing tiny herbs. But they were **careless** in their relations with God and with man. They **oppressed** the poor and **failed** to love God.

- The Pharisees feared contamination from ritual uncleanness, but Jesus pointed out that their **greed, pride, and wickedness** **contaminated** the entire nation.

- It was not their tithing that was wrong, but their failure to love.

- This passage, terrible as it is, commends itself to all that-is **noblest and best** in us. Who is there who does not thank God for this scathing denunciation of the abomination of **hypocrisy**? See how He brands it in every sentence-"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" - how piece by piece Jesus shows their miserable life to be a lie. Hypocrites! because you profess to sit in Moses' seat, to have the key of knowledge, to know the way of life yourselves, and show it to others; and all this profession is a lie (Mat\_23:13). Hypocrites! because your pretended charity is a lie, (Mat\_23:14). Hypocrites! because your zeal for God is a lie, being really a zeal for the devil, your converts being perverted worse than yourselves (Mat\_23:15). Hypocrites! because your morality is a lie, making the law of God of none effect by your miserable **clever unsound reasoning** (Mat\_23:16-22). Hypocrites! because your devotion is a lie, consisting merely in fussy attention to the minutest forms, while the weighty matters of the law you set aside, like those who "strain out the gnat and swallow the camel" (Mat\_23:23-24, R.V). Hypocrites! because your whole demeanour is a lie, all fair-on-the-outside (like a whited sepulcher), while within ye are "full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness" (Mat\_23:25-28)

### Origin of the Pharisees, Sadducees & Scribes

#### PHARISEES :

**Meaning** - 'separated one' or 'separatist'

↳ Mainly 'lay people'

↳ One year apprenticeship

**Aim**: strict interpretation & keeping the law on all matters esp **TITHING & RITUAL PURITY**

**Goal** : keeping the "LETTER" of the Laws

**Means** : 'religious policing'

**Place of influence** : the synagogue

**Exclusivity** ...but Highly Respected

Eg : Paul & Nicodemus



## Origin of the Pharisees, Sadducees & Scribes

### SCRIBES:

- @ Lawyers
  - ↳ Learned people well versed in the Law
  - ↳ Copyist, Teachers & Interpreters
    - ↳ Explained the meaning of the Law...
    - ↳ How it should be kept...
  - ↳ Highly respected
  - ↳ Many Pharisees were also Scribes
- If the Pharisees are  
the Practitioners of the Law  
Then the Scribes are  
the 'Theologians/Seminarians'



## 5) Questions raised by this section &verse?

- Ye serpents! **Does Christ call names?** Yes, **but** this does not warrant us to do so. He infallibly knew what was in man, and knew them to be subtle as serpents, cleaving to the earth, feeding on dust; they had an **attractive** outside, but were within **malignant**, had poison under their tongues, the seed of the old serpent. They were a generation of vipers; they and those that went before them, they

and those that joined with them, were a generation of **envenomed, enraged, spiteful adversaries** to Christ and his gospel. They loved to be called of men, Rabbi, rabbi, but Christ calls them serpents and vipers; for he “calls out” their true characters, and delights to put contempt upon the proud. Hypocrites originally meant play-actors but by this time the term was also used pejoratively for two-faced people, whose behavior either **differed from their belief** or **varied when they were with different people**.

- **The words of Matt 23** are perhaps the most terrible in the whole Bible. It is "the wrath of the Lamb." **Is this at all inconsistent with the meekness and lowliness of His heart, the love and tenderness of His character?** Certainly not! Love is no love at all, unless it **be capable of indignation against wrong**. Besides, it is **not personal wrongs** which stir the heart of Jesus, "Who when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not"; but the **wrong these hypocrites are doing to the poor sheep** they are leading all astray. The occasion absolutely demanded a tempest of indignation. There is this further to be considered ... Jesus, reveals God the Father... & must display His justice as well as His mercy, His wrath as well as His love.

## 6) Related Scriptures:

Parallel account :

**Luk 11:42** "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by **justice** and the **love of God**. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

- In Luke (Luk\_11:42) it is “judgment, and the love of God” - the expression may have been varied by Jesus Himself on different occasions. In both wordings (Matt & Luke), His reference is to **Mic\_6:6-8**, where the prophet Micah makes “acceptable religion” to consist of three elements - “doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God”. The last point ...”walking humbly with our God” Nicely fits both the “faith” wording of Matthew and the “love” wording of Luke..

Jesus quoting from OT virtues...

- The principle that **virtues** (like justice, mercy and faith) are most important ... is familiar from Scripture (**Deu\_10:12-13**; **Mic\_6:8**), and the rabbis themselves sometimes *summarized the law* in terms of “general principles” like “love”.

**Deu 10:12-13** "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to **fear** the LORD your God, to **walk** in all His ways and to **love** Him, to **serve** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,  
Deu 10:13 and to **keep** the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good

### What Does the Lord Require?

**Mic 6:6-8** With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old?

**Mic 6:7** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

**Mic 6:8** He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

love *do* JUSTICE  
MERCY AND  
*walk* HUMBLY  
WITH YOUR GOD.  
MICAH 6:8

Jesus earlier Pointing out problem with Pharisees (complaining Jesus ate with sinners):

**Mat 9:13** But **go and learn** what this means: 'I DESIRE **MERCY** AND NOT SACRIFICE.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

**Hos 6:6** For I desire **mercy** and not sacrifice, And the **knowledge of God** more than burnt offerings.

Pharisees accusing the Lord of the Sabbath

**Mat 12:7** But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

### Christ Came to Fulfill the Law

**Mat 5:17** "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

**Mat 5:18** For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

**Mat 5:19** Whoever therefore breaks one of the **least** of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

**Mat 5:20** For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.



- The Pharisees maintained, extraordinary strictness. Jesus says that they were **precise in doing small matters** which the law had not expressly commanded, while they omitted the greater things of the Law.
- Pharisees were content with religious ceremonies which gave them an outward, ritual cleansing, but which **never changed their hearts**). Jesus uses hyperbole (exaggeration) to drive home the truth that **external** righteousness without **internal** righteousness will not gain entrance into the kingdom.

## Scriptures about “Weightier Matters”

### The Great Commandment

Mat 22:34 But when the **Pharisees** heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

Mat 22:35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,

Mat 22:36 "Teacher, **which is the great commandment** in the law?"

Mat 22:37 Jesus said to him, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

Mat 22:38 This is the first and great commandment.

Mat 22:39 And the second is like it: 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

1Sa 15:22 So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to **obey** is better than sacrifice, And to **heed** (*hear & obey*) than the fat of rams.

Pro 21:2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the hearts.

Pro 21:3 To do righteousness and justice Is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Jer 22:15 "Shall you reign because you enclose yourself in cedar? Did not your father (*Josiah*) eat and drink, And do **justice and righteousness**? Then it was **well** with him.

Jer 22:16 He **judged the cause of the poor and needy**; Then it was **well**. Was not this **knowing Me**?" says the LORD.

**Hos 6:6** For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

**Gal 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.



## 7) Modern application of the scriptural principles today

- **Hating hypocrisy** ... People dislike hypocrites because they unfairly **use condemnation** to gain **reputational** benefits **and appear virtuous** at the expense of those who they are condemning—when these reputational benefits are in fact **undeserved**
  - **It is crummy when an individual** you encounter is “two faced” ... they are deceitful, untrustworthy, insincere, double dealing, backstabbing, false, duplicitous, counterfeit, backhanded, fake, disingenuous, phony, deceptive, misleading, not to be trusted
  - **It is worse when a group** adopts hypocrisy and equivocating – a bold faced intent to deceive. We hate it wherever we see it:  
*Pastor Adrian & Murray have identified...*  
Modern Marxist techniques (hypocrisy & hidden agendas)
    - cancel culture
    - virtue signaling
    - new entitlements & rights
    - iniquity – lawlessness “promoted”
- **Blind** guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! ...
  - Leaders using Modern Marxist techniques demoralize the whole society
    - **Teachers** who indoctrinate hate of country, shame of race, sexual perversion
    - **Politicians** who band together for their own self-interest – and when they lie “as a group” the **media** and other people will “promote the lies” as valid / truth
    - **Judges** – who overturn stable precedent – so that what used-to-be a crime is now tolerated – and even mandated!
    - **Followers** who blindly accept **dead end** ideas & policies – Defund police that enforce laws, eliminate immigration enforcement, anarchy to tear down society ... Total Blindness to the **consequences of their actions!**



In closing ... Jesus proclaimed:

Mat 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Jesus was angry and indignant because He saw, in his society how a group of phony leaders can **encourage & corrupt the whole society**

- Their bad example has an impact & becomes a model for others to promote corruption and tear down society

Let's hope the Church of God (including **EACH OF US**) promotes goodness & biblical values & honest & sincere love for the brethren & a **mission to educate & help our fellowman** with the **HOPE of Jesus' Gospel** message—we trust a better world is coming, with better leaders & better education of how to live a full and joyous life!