

Straining Out Gnats and Swallowing Camels

Picture a man for a moment. He has a great job and has put his wife in a nice house. He and his wife drive new cars. They wear designer clothes, always fashionable. You are impressed because he speaks to his wife with terms of endearment: dear, sweetheart, love of my life. You were shocked one day, however, when his wife called while he was out golfing with you and he responded, "Love of my life, you know nothing is more important to me than golf, you can call the plumber yourself. Don't bother me again. Goodbye. I love you, sweetheart." He received one of those chain e-mails that talked about a couple who left little love notes for each other all over the place. Every day he hides a note for his wife to find. You happened to be there when she found the one that said, "See how much I love you? By the way, if you don't take my suit to the dry cleaner today, you'll be sorry." He knows his wife is an "acts of service" person. So, he does the dishes at least three times per week. He takes the trash out without being asked. He does a load of laundry every morning before going to work, that is, when he comes home from work instead of staying there overnight, which he has been doing more and more frequently. He always buys her nice gifts for special days and even picks up some memento on days that have no special meaning. He especially buys her gifts after he has slapped her during one of their fights. He has promised to never leave the house without saying, "I love you." He never does. He especially makes sure to say, "I love you," on the way out the door when he's heading over to his mistress's house to have an afternoon tryst.

Do you see a problem with this husband? He's definitely getting some of the details right. In fact, during their one trip to meet with the marriage counselor all he could talk about was how he gets those details right and how she just doesn't appreciate what he does for her even when he doesn't really like her. But that's the problem isn't it. God hasn't asked him to get a list of details right; He has asked him to love his wife (**Ephesians 5:25**) and live with her in an understanding way (**1 Peter 3:7**). He's missing the boat.

This is essentially what Jesus was saying about a lot of religious people when He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" (**Matthew 23:23-24**, ESV).

Consider five lessons we can learn from this:

- 1) Of course, we should strain out gnats.
- 2) Straining out camels is more important than straining out gnats.
- 3) Straining out gnats won't make up for swallowing camels.
- 4) Straining out gnats is tempting because they are easily quantified.
- 5) If we strain the camels properly, we'll strain the proper gnats (but it doesn't work the other way around).

Think about the husband above. He was straining out gnats, but it wasn't making him a good husband. Let's make sure to strain the proper camels in our surrender to God, then we'll get the proper gnats.