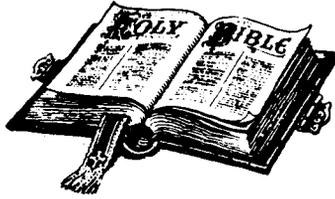


THE INSTRUCTOR



"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." 2 Timothy 3:16

Volume 24

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Number 3

STRAIN THAT GNAT

Is it straining the gnat to say that we ought to strain the gnat but not split the hair? Oh, there is a big difference in gnat straining and hair splitting (as almost everyone who thinks about it will realize). There is absolutely no profit in hair splitting . . . unless you need a split hair for some purpose, which is very doubtful. But gnat straining! — now that's something else. Or have you never had a gnat fall in a bowl of soup or a glass of iced tea? For such little critters, gnats can be awfully big floating around in something you are planning to eat or drink.

The only person I ever knew who did not believe in gnat straining proved it by an unpalatable demonstration — he didn't have a gnat handy at the time, but the fly he caught was quite sufficient. He convinced me that he did not believe in straining gnats out of his food. I heard of a fellow who proved the same point with roaches. But most of us, I suppose, still believe in and practice straining and picking out gnats, mosquitoes and even the ants that try to garnish our meals.

Gnat straining is just as important in religion as it is at the dinner table. A

"fly in the ointment" (Ecclesiastes 10:1) can be ruinous. Some liberal minded and loose living people have the idea that Jesus condemned gnat picking. But not so. Read the reference. **"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel."** (Matthew 23:24). Swallowing camels (tail, fleas and all) is the thing condemned! Jesus' illustration presents a humorous caricature of the ridiculous figure men cut when they are hypocritical and biased, not really loving the truth. Such men show disregard for the truth when they swallow the camel, and their hypocrisy when they feign concern over a gnat.

But what will be the course of the sincere lover of pure foods? Will he deliberately eat the gnats and flies that fall into his soup because somebody else eats even worse and thinks nothing of it? And just so it is that the lover of truth always employs the word of God to strain out the gnats and flies of error. The Bible gets so "gnat conscience," for example, that some inspired arguments are based on less than a single

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THE INSTRUCTOR

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Editorial . . .

Religious, But Lost

Many people seem to be of the opinion that all religious people will be saved eternally. They encourage people to "be religious." They openly express the idea that it does not matter what a person is, religiously, just as long as he is sincere. It seems that many people are afraid to reprove or rebuke any one who is sincerely religious. It is a common thing to read or hear someone say, "Join the church of your choice." Frequently we hear someone say, "One church is just as good as another one."

Some people will make contributions to different religious organizations in an effort to "do good works" and to show others that they are "broad-minded."

Does the Word of God teach that all religious people are saved? Does it teach that one should "join the church of your choice?" Really, is one church just as good as another church? Can a person be religious, but lost?

Let us consider some people who are mentioned in God's Word who were **religious, but lost!**

1. **THOSE MENTIONED BY JESUS IN MATTHEW 7:21-23.** Jesus tells us that "**Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: de-**

part from me, ye that work iniquity." It is obvious that those mentioned in this passage were religious. They will claim to have prophesied, to have cast out devils and to have done many wonderful works. However, their claim will be false! The Lord will say to them. "**I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity,**" These religious people are workers of **lawlessness.** They work without law. They do **not** work by the authority of Christ.

Many fall into this category. **They are religious, but lost!** Are you religious? Are you lost? How can you know?

2. **THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES IN MATTHEW 23.** No informed person (who is honest) would question the fact that the Scribes and Pharisees were religious.

Here are some of their traits which indicate that they were religious.

- (1) They sat "**in Moses' seat.**" (v. 2)
- (2) They loved "**the chief seats in the synagogues.**" (v. 6)
- (3) They loved "**to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.**" (v. 8)
- (4) They made "**long prayer.**" (v. 14)
- (5) They compassed "**sea and land to make one proselyte.**" (v. 15)
- (6) They paid "**tithe of mint, anise and cummin.**" (v. 23)
- (7) They appeared "**beautiful and righteous outwardly.**" (v. 27-28)
- (8) They built "**the tombs of the prophets and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous.**" (v. 29)

Although the Scribes and Pharisees were religious, they were in a lost condition. The following traits indicate their lost condition.

- (1) They said, and did not. (v. 3)
- (2) They bound heavy burdens on others. (v. 4)
- (3) They did all their works to be seen of men. (v. 5)
- (4) They would not enter the kingdom. (v. 13)
- (5) They shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. (v. 13)
- (6) They devoured widows' houses. (v. 14)

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(7) For a pretence they made "**long prayer.**" (v. 14)

(8) Those proselyted by them were made children of hell. (v. 15)

(9) They were "**blind guides.**" (v. 16)

(10) They were "**fools and blind.**" (v. 17, 24)

(11) They left off "**judgment, mercy and faith.**" (v. 23)

(12) They were "**full of hypocrisy and iniquity.**" (v. 28)

(13) They were serpents, a generation of vipers who could **not** "**escape the damnation of hell.**" (v. 33)

Here we have an example of some people who were **religious**, but in a **lost** condition. We learn from this example that the fact that people sit in a place of religious authority, tithe, are zealous in making proselytes, make long prayers, are called of men Rabbi, Reverend, Master, Father, etc., and appear righteous does **not** prove that they are saved!

Today, there are many religious people who are characterized by some (or all) of the traits that characterized those scribes and pharisees who, although they are religious, are lost!

Unless "**your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**" (See Matthew 5:20).

3. THE PHARISEE IN LUKE 18:9-14. The record says: "**And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be**

merciful unto me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

Please observe the following facts about the Pharisee discussed in the above passage (if his testimony is true).

1. He was not an extortioner.
2. He was not unjust.
3. He was not an adulterer.
4. He was not like the publican.
5. He fasted twice a week.
6. He gave tithes of all his possessions.
7. According to Jesus, he prayed.

Without doubt, the Pharisee was a **religious** man, but he was in a **lost** condition. Why? Obviously he was self-righteous and was guilty of despising others. He exalted himself, but Jesus indicated that he would be abased.

Today, there are many who are like this self-righteous Pharisee. They trust in themselves and despise others. They exalt themselves. Although they are **religious**, they are in a **lost** condition.

Humility precedes exaltation. Are you self-righteous? Do you exalt yourself? If you do, although **religious**, you are **lost!**

4. WORSHIPPERS OF BAAL. Baal, it seems, was "**a Phoenician deity**" (an idol — CRS) that many of the Israelites worshipped.

We learn from 1 Kings 16:30-33 that Ahab, son of Omri, who reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years, "**went and served Baal, and worshipped him.**" Ahab built the house of Baal in Samaria and "**reared up an altar for Baal**" there in and "**made a grove.**" It seems that many of the Israelites became "**prophets of Baal.**" (See 1 Kings 18:17-40). Although Ahab was religious, he "**did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him.**" He was **religious**, but **lost!**

If you worship an idol (be it Baal or some other idol) **you are religious**, but **lost!** Paul exhorted Christians,

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saying, "**Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.**" (1 Corinthians 10:14). John warned, saying, "**Little children, keep yourselves from idols.**" (1 John 5:21).

When we consider the **truth** as revealed in God's Book we see that one can be **lost** although he is **religious**.

(CRS)

(To be continued)

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word — on a single letter! — and on the significance of that one letter strained out a Jewish idea on the nature of Christianity. (See Galatians 3:16). The Bible commands that we "**prove all things**" and plainly declares that the addition of human traditions to divine truth renders one's worship as vain and empty. (See 1 Thess. 5:21 and Matthew 15:9).

The real reason the world screams about gnat picking is because, right on top of the broth, they have a big fat camel floating around. That puts them further down the ladder than the Pharisee. At least he did get the insects out. This is not criticized! May God

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grant us the honesty of heart and love for truth in its purity to reject all ideas not authorized in the Scriptures. There is no substitute for being right and obeying the truth, and nothing the world can say about straining at gnats can change that.

-- **Jere E. Frost** in
MOORESVILLE MEMO, March, 1968

HEAR THE GOSPEL

You are invited to hear brother **Eston Vandever** preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in a series of GOSPEL MEETINGS.

These meetings will be conducted at the building of the **East Albertville** congregation.

Our building is located at 1107 Highway 431 South, in Albertville, Alabama.

The meetings will be conducted **MARCH 27-29, 1987** at 7:30 p.m. on Friday and Saturday evenings and at 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on the Lord's Day. **All are welcome!**

— SENTENCE SERMONS —

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

* * * * *

The more we count the blessings we have, the less we crave the luxuries we haven't.

* * * * *

A lot of people who see their duty look the other way.

* * * * *

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