

concerned about right and wrong in our relationships.

Mercy is kindness and good will toward mankind, especially those who are less fortunate than are we. Over and again God shows this to be one of His traits that we must imitate.

Faith in this instance most likely means fidelity, faithfulness, the character of one who can be relied on (Thayer). These are characteristics of a godly person. No matter how many legalistic duties we perform, we cannot be righteous without these godly traits in our lives. Do we strain out gnats, but swallow camels?

Do you stress cleanliness in the home and in meal preparation? Of course such is vital. You are straining out the gnats. However,

many families who are so fastidious in food preparation will allow themselves and their children to feed on moral filth and corruption via the television or magazines or movies. This is indeed swallowing the camel.

Some brethren are so concerned about attending every service of the church. And all ought to be! But sometimes these who stress attendance so emphatically will go out on Monday and mistreat their employees or customers or fellow-workers. Some will cheat on their jobs, scream at their kids, browbeat their wives and yet claim to be faithful Christians because they "attend every service." Swallowing the camel!

Some of Jesus' greatest lessons had to do with relationships between one another. Certainly, jus-

tice, mercy and fidelity involve our relationships with God and with mankind. Applying the golden rule is a master lesson on relationships. The Spirit guided Paul to write: "... put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:12-13). Important matters? Of course.

What is the solution to a right relationship with God? Ignore the gnats? Absolutely not. But do not be so engrossed with the gnats that you blindly swallow the camel!

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A Golden Text on Conversion



"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

This text describes the marvelous conversion that some of the members of the church in Corinth had experienced. From grossly immoral individuals who were on

their way to eternal perdition they had been transformed into justified saints and heirs of the kingdom of God. The text reveals several significant facts about such conversion:

The Necessity of Conversion.

This text makes it exceedingly clear that no one who is guilty of the sins listed can "inherit the kingdom of God." To miss the kingdom of God is to spend eternity "with the devil and his angels." The list includes sins involving sexual uncleanness, dishonesty (both legal and illegal),

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drunkenness and pride. These were the very sins for which Corinth was noted.

Paul particularly warns against being deceived on this point. There are at least three other similar warnings in the New Testament. As Satan lied to Eve, saying, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4) his servants have continued throughout history saying the same thing about other sins of which God has warned.

We can almost hear Satan's servants in Corinth saying, "Don't be alarmed by Paul's dire warnings. His training in Jewish culture explains his strait-laced narrow mindedness and homophobic bigotry. Our Greco-Roman culture is much more open because we have advanced far beyond the old fashioned Jewish culture based on a law supposedly handed down by their god 1500 years ago." We can almost hear what they were saying then because of what we are hearing now. And to believe these servants of Satan today is just as surely to be deceived. Right and wrong do not change with changing culture or with passing centuries. If the teaching of Christ and His apostles regarding morality in the first century was to be heeded then, it must be heeded now. If the practices of which they warned are unthinkable in heaven, they are unthinkable for citizens of the kingdom of God on earth, regardless of how common they may be in any given society.

The Possibility of Conversion

Some tell us that homosexuals or drunkards are born that way and cannot change. If the Corinthians could cease such practices and

become saints why is it impossible today? For arguments sake, we may allow that one person might be more tempted by such practices than another, but this is no excuse for submitting to the temptation. Even persons who are unquestionably heterosexual must control their desires. Under some circumstances they may have to abstain even for a lifetime; but heaven will surely be worth it. For every desire God has given us He has given us the power to control it. We are not slaves of our bodies' desires. Paul said, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The Process of Conversion

Despite a very popular doctrine that God does it all, it is clear from this passage that man has a part. That the Corinthians had repented is unquestionably implied by the fact that they were no longer practicing the sins of which they had been guilty. Repentance is a change of mind that produces a change of conduct. God "commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). True, God provides the motivation (Romans 2:4) but man decides whether he will obey or disobey. The Corinthians decided to obey.

Furthermore, they were baptized (Acts 18:8) and in doing so they were washed. Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures notes the following regarding the tense and voice of the verb washed: "First aorist middle indicative, not passive, of *apolouō*. Either direct middle, ye washed yourselves, or indirect middle, as in Ac 22:16, ye washed your sins away (force of

apo). This was their own voluntary act in baptism. ..." This was something they did. Their action did not merit or complete their conversion but their actions were the conditions on which God extended His mercy.

What they did in repentance and baptism, however, gave them no ground for boasting or claim of credit for their conversion, for without God's grace, they would not have ceased the practice of sin (Titus 2:11-12) and without His love there would have been no forgiveness. No man can sanctify Himself – this is the work of the Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2). No man can justify himself – this is the work of God (Romans 8:33). The glory must be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit Who are once again united in verse 11 as instruments of our salvation. "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

~ by Sewell Hall

Matthew 18.3

"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Swallowing Camels



"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law; justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:23-24).

In the context of this chapter, Jesus is showing the hypocrisy of the harsh, legalistic Pharisee who very carefully strains a tiny gnat out of a glass of water or wine and then turns around and swallows a whole camel, hump and all! A gnat was an insect and, therefore, unclean for the Jews. So was a camel. "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. This is one of the instances of humor which must have raised a laugh. For it is the picture of a

man carefully straining his wine through gauze to avoid swallowing a microscopic insect, and yet cheerfully swallowing a camel. It is the picture of a man who has completely lost his sense of proportion" (Barclay).

These hypocrites were very careful in making sure that they minutely counted every little herb in the garden in order to give 10% of it to the priests and Levites to whom the tithe was paid. They gloried in their tithing as is seen in the case of the Pharisee in

Luke 18:12: "I give tithes of all that I possess." They felt so godly because they were so meticulous.

Yet, Jesus charged them with a serious offense. They left undone "the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith." He did not tell them to leave undone these little things (tithing), but He emphasized the need of their practicing in their lives the "weightier matters." Thayer says that the "weightier matters" are of "great moment," thus, of great importance. Justice, mercy and faith (faithfulness) are of great importance before God.

Justice has to do with anything concerning justice and injustice, right or wrong. No matter how careful one might be to tithe of the smallest herb and yet showed injustice to fellowman, he is a sinner before God. We must be