

Forms vs. Spirituality (Part 1)

By Grace We Are Saved

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I am going to go into an aspect of a subject that has produced about as many arguments in the church down through the centuries as perhaps any other topic. It is one about which people have a tendency to have very firm opinions and can seemingly get bent out of shape quite easily because of the high regard they have for what they believe about it. In fact I believe this subject has produced what was probably the most emotional point of doctrinal contention in the first century church. It of course is not the most important doctrine at all, but it is one that seems to get us in a place where we have pretty strong emotional feelings about it, and leads sometimes to very great offense.

This subject is in an area of doctrine that has been largely responsible for the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God and our scattering to the four winds, as it were. I think we had better take this subject seriously and address it so that we are all on the same page.

I will have to admit to you that I have never approached this subject from this perspective before, so these sermons I am going to give are completely new. I have not drawn on any other subjects or any other sermons that I have ever preached on it in the past.

Let me say right at the outset here that I firmly believe Herbert Armstrong had this subject correct, but either he was inadequate in explaining it, or the ministry did not help him explain it to their local congregations, or many in the church simply misunderstood it, or maybe did not pay a great deal of attention to it. I really do not know why so many seem to misunderstand. Perhaps it was because there were so many tares within the congregation, or maybe perhaps we had not matured enough. Maybe the time has come now for us to consider this more seriously than we ever had in the past so that we can come to discern it.

I have titled this sermon "Forms vs. Spirituality." That probably does not tell you very much at this point, but if I ask you, "What do Old Testament laws have to do with the New Covenant?" perhaps it will begin to ring a bell.

Now let me ask some very pointed and clear questions. Is the Sabbath only a ritual? What about the Holy Days? The Worldwide Church of God says that is all they are, that they are not required. They keep them only because of church tradition because they want to, and so in their magnanimity they are going to keep them and please God in that way.

I do not know whether you can grasp this at this point, but this approach essentially leads them free to develop their own religious agenda to the extent that such obviously pagan holidays as Christmas and Easter, which have come from paganism and not the Bible, have become (at least in the thinking processes in most cases, but in some cases in actual reality) a part of the Worldwide Church of God's worship of God. In Big Sandy there was an Easter sunrise service held.

Let us begin to stretch this out a little bit further. What about tithing? We receive papers, it

seems like every couple of months, where people claim that tithing is no longer in force, basically because it is something that is part of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, and has no application to the New Covenant. They try to tell us that we should only tithe on things that grow out of the ground, and that anything manufactured does not have to be tithed on. Think about that a while.

What about clean and unclean meats? The WCG says, "Do not be concerned about it." What about getting the leaven out of your homes just before the Days of Unleavened Bread? Again, the WCG says, "Do not worry about it." What about eating blood and fat? What about the sanitation laws? What about the laws regarding quarantine? What about becoming unclean from contact with pigs, dead people, or dead animals, or those people who have infectious diseases? There are laws that cover those things in the Old Testament, and these questions are alive in the 20th century.

The question facing us is: How important are these and other related issues to us spiritually? What should our approach be? Do we throw the baby out with the bath water? That is essentially the approach that Protestantism has taken, and that is essentially the approach that the WCG has chosen to follow. Is everything that appears to be a part of the Old Covenant obsolete? If it is obsolete, how can we live by every Word of God? Is that not saying that the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, is not the Word of God? It is to me.

Now what is important in terms of the subject right at this time is that this subject involves sin, and this is what the Days of Unleavened Bread are all about.

We are going to turn to Acts 15:1 to touch on this briefly to lay a little bit of a foundation. We will not spend a great deal of time on it, and this may actually become more important in the sermon next week than it is this week, but the sermon is growing out of this dispute that took place in the first century church.

Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved.

The issue here was, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved." Is it possible that we can have salvation without being circumcised? Circumcision is part of the Old Covenant. It is a major doctrine under the Old Covenant.

Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful [necessary, obligatory] to circumcise them [Gentiles who were being converted to Christianity] and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

I want to touch on this because I want you to see who one of the major protagonists was. It was the Pharisees. We know they had a very strong emotional feeling about Old Testament laws. Verse 9 is part of a response to the arguments that were put up by those who believed it was

necessary to be circumcised.

Acts 15:9-11 And put no difference between us [Israelites] and them [the Gentiles who were being converted] purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt you God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Everybody, I think, knows the decision that was reached in this emotional circumstance, but perhaps we have never really understood that decision in the clarity that we should. The following terms are going to be important to these sermons: (1) circumcision, (2) cannot be saved, (3) Pharisees, (4) law of Moses, (5) purified by faith through grace, (6) through grace shall we be saved, and (7) a yoke unable to be borne. What are all these making reference to?

These terms and how they apply to this subject will occupy these sermons. As I go through these terms and through these sermons, I will also be answering some of those questions I posed at the beginning of the sermon. Before I can do any of that there is something I must establish as a very valid and true biblical principle concerning man's laws and God's laws.

Man's laws, in a way, are a very clear illustration of this point that I am going to spend a great deal of time on, and that is that everything is not on the same level. Everything biblically is not on the same level. There are some things more important than others. Now just apply that to law. There are some laws of God that are more important than others.

Are there other things pertaining to God that are not laws necessarily, but maybe judgments that are more important to Him than other things are? By nature I think it is part of our way of thinking that we would like everything pertaining to God to be absolute, simple, straight-forward, and clear. I am talking about sin. I am talking about righteousness, obedience, holiness, and justice. This makes for easy judgments; easy, brethren, but not always correct, because God's Word shows very clearly, that whether it is an act or a thing, He values some things more than others. Therefore, if we are going to be in His image and make the correct witness to each other and to the world, then we too should value some things more highly than others.

We are going to begin this explanation in I Corinthians 13:13. I chose this one to begin with because it is so clear.

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abides faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest [superlative] of these is love.

If you have ever believed or had been told sometime in the past that faith is the greatest of all qualities, you are wrong. Nothing exceeds love in importance to God. It is right at the top of the list, and therefore love ought to be on the top of our list as to what we are to shoot for in our lives. I am going to show you how thoroughly Paul examined this issue so that we can see that there is nothing in life, to God, that is more important to Him than love. Everything else is less

important, almost to the point of almost being insignificant. So the greatest gift, the greatest quality or attribute of mind, character, or personality is love. Notice the way Peter words this in I Peter 4:8.

I Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love among yourselves:
for love shall cover the multitude of sins.

Above everything else in life, we are to strive to love. Let me say right here that love is far more than keeping the commandments. It involves other qualities of conduct, other qualities of mind than merely keeping the letter of the law. People can be moral in the sense that they are keeping the commandments of God and yet be absolutely cold in their attitude towards other people. They can be frigid, rigid, and have no heart, no warmth, and no kindness. Whom am I describing? I am describing that group which was named there in Acts 15. Nothing is excluded.

Above all things in life, we are to strive for love. The apostle John used one word to describe God. He said, "God is love," not God is wisdom, not God is righteousness, not God is morality, not God is anything else. "God *is* love." If there is one word that can catch the essence of what God is, it is love. Now certainly He is holy, and certainly He is righteous, and certainly He is moral, but it is only love that gathers all those things and puts them into the right form that will describe God's greatest attribute, and so that is what we are to shoot for in life.

In I Corinthians 13 Paul deliberately contrasts love with a number of very highly respected qualities that men esteem as being very important.

I Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels....

Eloquence of speech enables one to be persuasive. It is said that one of the qualities that leaders have is an ability to be persuasive, to be eloquent in a manner that captures people's interest. It captures their ear. It captures their mind. It captures their heart. A person can have eloquence of speech and can be a real rat! Adolph Hitler is coming to mind. He had a way of moving the German mind, and so even though he was up to no good, they still followed him. They esteem that highly because it gives them power over others. But Paul says:

I Corinthians 13:1....and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

How persuasive is that? It might drive you away.

I Corinthians 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries....

Yeah! I am able to know the future so that I can rightly direct my steps in wisdom, I have great intellect and a photographic memory to absorb information and to be a fount of all kinds of

knowledge and understanding.

Paul also says:

I Corinthians 13:2 And though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

Faith compared to love is nothing. What a description! See, the power of faith to effectively accomplish is nothing if it is not accompanied with love. It has almost no spiritual value at all.

I Corinthians 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing.

Even sacrifice and martyrdom in service of a great cause, compared to love, is nothing.

Before we slide away from this chapter, remember that this statement is coming from God. Yes, it appears in the writings of Paul, but Paul was merely the means through which God expressed this most fundamental of truths regarding how we are to love. In practical application it means that regardless of who one is in the body of Jesus Christ—whether an apostle, or whether a lay member, a recent convert, or an elderly widow—every single one of us has the means to express in one's own experience this most important of all qualities.

Maybe it is a little bit difficult for us to think of this in these terms. A person could be chosen of God to be an apostle, and God would back him up in doing that work. But if that apostle did not have love in doing what he was doing, some little old widow back there in Podunk somewhere could be greater in God's eyes than that apostle, regardless of what he was being used to accomplish.

So when a one-on-one comparison is made, when all other things are equal in the eyes of God, the person who loves is greater than the person who moves mountains or heals. The person who loves is greater than the person who knows the intricacies of prophecy. The person who loves is greater than the person who speaks in tongues, or eloquently preaches. You see, some things are greater. Some things are more important in the eyes of God than others.

As I said, I only chose this one because it was so obvious. This sets the tone for the direction that I am headed because I want us to see that this theme runs all through the Bible. God effectively, mostly through Jesus Christ, sorts things into their proper priority. He says, "This is more important; this is less important. This I want you to do. When there is a choice between this and that, I want you to do this, and not that, even though both might be considered to be righteousness."

Believe me brethren, in life, in submitting to God's way, you are going to be brought to the place where you are going to have to make a choice between two things, both of which might be righteous, but one is more important than the other. God is training us to be judges, and a judge has to be able to discern between two things that might be wrong or right. It matters not. We have to make a choice between which was more right than the other. I think we will see

some of these things in next week's sermon where that happened in the ministry of Christ. We will see how He judged things so that we can make right choices along this line.

I John 5:16-17 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

Romans 6:23 says "For the wages of sin is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now do we have a conflict here? John says that there is a sin that is not unto death, and Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death. Does not that statement in Romans give you the impression, that regardless of the sin, the death penalty hangs over our head each time we break the rules? Well, it does *if* we make our judgment based only on that one scripture in Romans 6:23. I am going to pick up another scripture in John 10:35. Jesus said the following:

John 10:35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken....

Jesus is there backing up the literal inspiration of the scriptures. Here we have John clearly stating in Scripture there are sins that do not bring the death penalty upon us, but there are others that do. Obviously then, just as in man's laws, God does not judge every offense on the same level. Some laws are more important than others. In man's law, if you get a parking ticket, is it more or less important than killing somebody? Do you get the death penalty for the parking ticket? Obviously not. You might get fined \$25.00, but for murder you are liable to get the death penalty.

It is obvious that men look at this in such a way that some law-breaking is worse than others. What we are going to see here is that God judges in exactly the same way. God's judgment may not be exactly as man's because man's judgment is not all that good all the time, but the principle of judgment is the same. God too puts degrees of guilt upon people, and there are some laws that are less important than others. They are in the category of getting a parking ticket, as compared to the category of murder.

I might add here that if you want to pursue this subject, looking into Protestant commentaries on this subject is not going to help very much, and there is a reason why. They do not consider sin in anywhere near as broad a light as we do. To them sin is restricted to only breaking the Ten Commandments, and to them therefore sin is basically on the same level. They do not look upon breaking any Old Testament laws, other than the Ten Commandments, as sin, so they just wipe that out. Can we afford to take that liberal of a view? I do not think we had better do that. It is that approach which allows the WCG to set their own agenda because they really do not consider it a sin to break the Sabbath. To them, keeping Sunday would be just as good. That is why they say that they only keep it by tradition. It is the same with the other things. They give people the liberty to decide whether they will obey the laws of clean and unclean, or whatever,

so they can basically set their own agenda.

Let us go back to I John 5 again. There are sins that do not lead to death. Verse 17 says that "All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." Before we leave this we want to get a definition established. We are going to see here, that pertaining to righteousness or unrighteousness, there is an equality in all of God's laws.

Psalm 119:172 My tongue shall speak of your word: for all your commandments are righteousness.

The word "righteousness" means "right doing." A less common English word we use from time to time is "rectitude." It is "right doing." This verse says that all of God's commandments are righteousness. All of God's commandments are right doing. All of them. Everyone of them is right doing. We are not going to exclude any of them. I am going to give you a phrase from I John 5:17 from a couple of translations.

The *Williams Translation* says, "Any wrong doing is sin." Righteousness is right doing. Unrighteousness is wrong doing. So they have translated it right up into modern English: All wrong doing is sin. The *Twentieth Century New Testament* says: "Every wrong action is sin, and there is a sin that is not deadly."

With this understanding we should then be able to see that since all of God's commandments are right doing, and God gave all Old Covenant laws, then the breaking of any of those laws can rightly be labeled *sin* in their context, though it does not matter whether we might say it is—for lack of a better word—a minor regulation, or a major one. Both of them are right doing within their context, but they are both sin if broken.

Let me translate this another way. All unrighteousness is *missing the mark*, or *turning aside*. I think that the word *sin* has a stronger, harsher impact on our minds than the term *missing the mark*. You see, when God wrote the Bible He did not use the term "sin." That is an English word. He used the term *missing the mark*, and it is translated into the English word "sin." But *missing the mark* actually comes closer to God's intent to get across to us what we have done when we sin. It means *to turn aside*.

Let me try to illustrate it in another way. Let us get the idea of a modern highway going straight off across the plains into the distance. Most of our modern highways in the United States have as part of their design a line right down the middle of the road. Then there will be two white lines that are right on the very edge of the paving before you go off onto the shoulder of the road. When you are driving down that road, as long as you stay between that middle line and that white line on the side of the road, you are going to be pretty safe. You are doing *right driving* down that road. But what happens if you cross over the center line and get into the other lane going against traffic? Now you are in danger of killing yourself. You have turned *out of the way*.

Now what if you go off on the other side, cross the white line, and go onto the berm or the shoulder? Maybe only one wheel goes off. You catch yourself, and you come back on again. Maybe two wheels go off, but you catch yourself and get back on *the way* again. On the other hand, you could go off on the right side of the road, and go all the way over into the ditch, and

maybe you do not get back onto the road.

I hope that this will illustrate the way that all unrighteousness can be sin; that is, we go *out of the way*, but there are degrees to which we can go out of the way. We can go so far out of the way we kill ourselves or others, or we can go just a little bit out of the way and we catch ourselves, and we get back into *the way*. In either case, we have missed the mark. We have gone *out of the way*, but the degree, the seriousness of what we have done, can be vastly different.

Another way of illustrating it would be this: In marksmanship competition, whether shooting with a pistol or a rifle, a person is so many feet or meters, or whatever it is, away from the target. The object is to hit the bull's-eye. If the person shoots and he plunks that thing right in the middle of the bull's-eye, he hit the mark. He has done it right; perfectly.

What if he was not quite as accurate as that, and the bullet just missed the center circle and went a little bit to the right. Now he fires another shot. This bullet misses the target entirely. If he was just a little bit off it was not quite so serious you see, and maybe he even got some points. But if he misses the bull's-eye and target entirely, he gets nothing, and maybe has put himself entirely in jeopardy.

Now all analogies break down, but I think that there is enough in that illustration to get you thinking along the line that I am thinking. All unrighteousness—all the *missing of the mark*—is indeed sin. But that does not mean that all sin is on the same level because all laws are not on the same level. The person committing the sin, and the attitude motivating the sin, are not on the same level. In fact there are quite a number of factors one must consider in order to judge this issue correctly.

We are going to turn to Mark 12 because we are going to see a very obvious reference that all law is not on the same level.

Mark 12: 28-34 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The LORD our God is one LORD: And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is none other commandment greater than these. [This is right out of the mouth of our Creator and God.] And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, you have said the truth: for there is one God, and there is none other but He: And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

When we compare this with Matthew's account in Matthew 22, Matthew says that those who came to Him and asked this question were Pharisees. Some commentators say the question was, "Which is the greatest commandment?" The translators chose to translate what Mark recorded here as the *first* commandment. That is fine, because it is saying the same thing—"Which is the greatest commandment?" Which one comes first in importance? It is good to know why those commentaries say that it should be worded " *the greatest commandment*," because at the time this took place within the context of Jesus' life, there were arguments raging among the Jews on this issue. Some of them held to circumcision as being the greatest of all commands of God. To others it was the sacrificial laws. To others, the washings and the purifying, and other aspects of law. When Jesus gave His answer, our Creator quoted Deuteronomy 6: 5, and then Leviticus 19: 18. He said Leviticus 19:18 is like Deuteronomy 6: 5. He meant *similar to*.

In verse 31, Jesus said, "There is none other commandment greater than these." Putting His two statements about loving your neighbor as yourself together with this one, He is saying that they stand together. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart," and so forth, stands together with "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He means that they are on a level all their own.

These two commandments are the *greatest*, and everything else is beneath them. He says they stand together. They are on a level all their own. They are the guide to other laws. Neither is to be raised above the other, because each depends upon the other for the fullest effect, and this is what we are seeing in the sermons on the sacrifices.

When we got done with the meal offering, one of the things that I said to you was that the meal offering was always made with the burnt offering. The burnt offering represents, above all things, Christ's total devotion to God. A meal offering represents Christ's services to man. The two of them together teach us that one without the other is not acceptable to God. They both have to be done together, and that is why Jesus answered the way He did. They both stand on the same level, and one without the other is unacceptable. And on these two, Matthew tells us, everything else in scripture hangs. Interesting translation, because if it hangs from these two commandments, then they must be below them in importance. This in no way means that they do away with other laws, but it means that all other laws of God are coherent, or understandable, or make sense only in the context of these two commandments.

Please understand what Jesus was saying to these rigid rules-bound men, because it is of very great significance. He is saying that the expression, the manifestation of true religion, the true worship of God, revolves around loving God and men as expressed by the Ten Commandments, and all other laws like circumcision, sacrifice, purification, food laws, are of less importance. This is confirmed by what the scribe's reply was to Jesus, because what did he refer to? Sacrifice. He knew what Jesus was talking about, and that is why Jesus replied to him, "You're getting it!" This is what we are to shoot for.

We can reach at least a part-way conclusion here. We have already seen two things, that of all laws, those two great commandments supersede everything else. In the keeping of them they

become the basis and the foundation for the true expression of love because love is greater than merely keeping those two laws. But they are the major steppingstones to love, and everything else is of lesser importance.

In Isaiah 1:11 we have an illustration out of Isaiah's day. He was describing the worship of these people of God. Isaiah came along in a period of time maybe two generations before Judah actually fell, but they were well on their way down.

Isaiah 1:11 To what purpose [God is asking through Isaiah] is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Says the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

We begin to get an idea of what is of importance to God here. These people *were* sacrificing. They may have been going through those laws very diligently. In fact I believe that they were doing it, because Amos witnessed to the same thing to Israel about another generation or so before Isaiah, only to the northern ten tribes. They were doing the sacrificing.

Isaiah 1:12-13 When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

This is getting more serious. Their keeping of the commandments, even the keeping of the Sabbath, is not acceptable to God.

Isaiah 1:14-15 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood.

Now we are beginning to see some of the problem. These hypocrites were going through the motions of keeping the law of God. They were dutifully making the sacrifices. They were even dutifully keeping the Sabbath, but what were they doing the rest of the week? How was their business conducted? In what kind of an attitude was it conducted? What was the motivation behind the conduct of what they were doing? Where was the social justice? Where was the kindness, the generosity, meekness, mercy, and justice? You see, we are beginning to step beyond law per se and into an area that requires judgment, mercy, tolerance, faith, and generosity.

Isaiah 1:16-17 Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the

widow.

We have stepped in a way beyond the Ten Commandments. Sacrifice is acceptable only if it is preceded by acts of love, and it is the keeping of the Ten Commandments by the power of God's Spirit from which holiness comes. Spiritual holiness comes in part from keeping spiritual laws, not physical ordinances, as Paul referred to these laws in Hebrews 9:10 when he called those things forms. He called them carnal ordinances; fleshly, physical.

Now is the fleshly, is the physical, is the carnal going to be on the same level as the spiritual? No way Jose! Well, these people were doing these things. Those Pharisees in Jesus' day would not have touched in their mouth a piece of pork, or shrimp, or scallops, or oysters, or octopus, or whatever. They would not have come near it with a ten-foot pole. They were doing those things, but what they were doing was minor, as we are going to see when we get back into the New Testament, compared to what Jesus wanted them to do.

To be truly religious is to love God and men whom God made in His own image, not with any nebulous sentimentality, but with total commitment in devotion to God *and* practical service to man, mixed with the right attitude in doing what we are doing. Again, this is what the burnt and the meal offerings reveal. The burnt offering—the man Christ totally devoted to God. The meal offering—the man Christ, because of His devotion to God, burning Himself up in service to man, regardless of their intolerance, their hatred, and their jealousy of Him. He served us to the utmost.

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. He did not wait until we were good to serve us, and yet so frequently we do not want to give ourselves in service to others because they did not treat us nice. If Jesus did the same thing we would have no Savior. He went beyond merely the keeping of the commandments. That is why this love that we are to shoot for is beyond the keeping of the Ten Commandments. Our righteousness has to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, who incidentally were doing a pretty good job morally, on the surface. Speaking of them, let us go back and look at Matthew 23. Again I chose this verse because it is so clear.

Matthew 23:23-24 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment [justice is a better translation], mercy [is correct], and faith [is more accurately faithfulness, or we might say today fidelity—being true to your word], these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone. You blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

I think it would be very difficult to find a clearer statement than this of the relative importance of things. Meticulously tithing of obscure income is not as important as justice, mercy, and fidelity. Notice though He did not say that this negated carefully tithing, but according to our Savior, the tithing that they were doing had not the same degree of importance as justice, mercy, and fidelity.

One of the major problems of the Pharisees was that their sense of proportion as to what was important and what is less important was all out of whack. The tragic thing about this is that it led them to make judgments of both people and conduct that were very unbalanced.

A Pharisee might have had a whole field of wheat which he dutifully and rightfully carefully tithed. At the same time he usually would have had a small herb garden in which maybe there would be some dill, some cummin, some mint, or some anise. It is entirely possible that the number of each plants he had would be very small. From this small number of herbs he would carefully tithe, but at the same time he would be a hard, cruel, arrogant person having no mercy toward the sick and the weak.

He would take oaths and pledges with the deliberate intention of breaking them in order to take advantage of other people. So Jesus drew the conclusion that they strained at gnats—tithing of mint, anise, and cumin—and swallowed camels. Incidentally, both the gnats and camels were unclean. They missed the more important things of life. They missed what was more important to God.

In God's eyes it was more important for them to be fair in their dealings with others. It was more important for them to be kind, gentle, and merciful toward those who were weak, poor, sick, or whatever, and to take oaths or vows and *keep* them. If a person can do both at the same time—to be careful in tithing *and* at the same time be merciful, just, and fair, and to keep his word—the two of them together is the best. God would rather have a person who had justice, mercy, and faith than one who tithes scrupulously but was hard, cruel, merciless, and an oath-breaker—a covenant breaker. There are things that are more important than others, and so what we see here then is Jesus showing us the relative value of things.

We are now going to get into an area that I will just touch on as we get close to the end of this sermon. It will give you something to think about before next week. We are going to go to Numbers 15.

Numbers 15:22-24 And if you have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD has spoken unto Moses, Even all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations, [I want you to understand that we are talking about sin—the breaking of God's commandments.] Then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation....

Note the term *ignorance*.

Numbers 15:29-31 You shall have one law for him that sins through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourns among them. But the soul that does ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproaches the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from

among his people, because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

Presumptuously means *with a high hand*. It indicates the raising of a clenched fist, as though the person is defiantly challenging God and His command.

When we begin the next time we are going to start with the premise to show you that God judges differently by attitude, whether a sin is done by a person presumptuously, or whether it is done in ignorance. We are also going to see that it makes a difference *who* commits the sin, and to me that one gets a little scary.

I think you can already begin to see that everything is not on the same level. If we are going to judge correctly—to judge what we are doing, and judge what others are doing, and judge what we should do, or what we should not do—it takes a great deal of understanding of God's law and connection with God by means of His Spirit to reach a right conclusion, a right judgment. We are supposed to judge *righteous* judgment. That is a command from our Savior Jesus Christ.