

## Don't Major in Minors

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Jesus sharply criticized the religious elite of His day. As their name indicates, the Pharisees were Jewish separatists. Their origin was well-intentioned. They wanted to restore the Law of Moses to Israelite society, the likes of which had occurred in the days of Josiah. However, they went wrong.

The Pharisees fell prey to the perils of leadership. Rather than shepherding the people, they became oppressive and self-serving. Shockingly, they had used the Law of Moses to commit horrible spiritual abuse for the sake of their power. Jesus attacked some of these abuses of the people in the following passage.

“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!” (Matt. 23:23-24).

In this text, Jesus makes a finer distinction within the commands of God. He contrasts the tithing of spices with weightier matters of the law. This may seem strange to hear Jesus say. Did Jesus think some parts of the Law were insignificant? He was accused of destroying the Law. Perhaps statements like these contributed to this perception of Jesus.

Of course, Jesus was not teaching that some parts of the Law of Moses did not matter. He did not come to destroy the Law, but to keep and fulfill the Law in its totality (Matt. 5:17-20). Jesus expressed the overall purpose of the Law.

God did not give the Law to Israel because He really liked mint, dill, and cumin and wanted Israelites to give Him some. God gave Israel the Law, all 613 commands, to shape a people who are known for justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These traits are characteristic of God. These traits would equip Israel to be a light to the world.

The sad truth was that the Pharisees failed to understand this. They enforced the smallest details of the Law for injustice, cruelty, and self-preservation. Another way to state their problem is that they “majored in minors.” Their focus was wrong. They were warped in their thinking and perverse in their character.

We are often quick to judge the Pharisees. Their flaws are obvious to readers. But, what about us? Are we guilty of similar misrepresentations of Scripture? Do we major in minors in the interest of ego or self-preservation?

Want to start a new religion or form a new church? Major in minors. Obsess over the tithing of spices and a new religious sect will be sure to form. Major in majors and something different will be produced. But, the result will not reflect Christ. Like the Pharisees, what we make will only reflect a cold heart.

But what is major and what is minor? What must we emphasize in our efforts to serve Christ? There are some statements in the Bible that help answer this question.

## **Majors**

**1). Love.** In the same encounter with the religious elite, Jesus was asked about which commandment was the greatest. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40).

Love was the foundation of the Law of Moses. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness rested on love. Even the tithing of spices rested on love. Love for God. Love for our neighbor. Of course, love was not new with the Law of Moses. Love did not end with the Law. Love remains. Love is unending. This is why love is the greatest (1 Cor. 13).

Sadly, love is often broken by sin. Love is replaced with lust and selfishness. This is why love must be the major focus of our lives. The love of Jesus is to reshape our hearts and transform our lives. Nothing else will do the job. If we neglect love, we will become like the Pharisees.

**2). New creation.** As Christians, we are prone to distractions. The Christians in Galatia had become distracted by false teaching. Paul reaffirmed the truth of the Gospel. Near the end of his letter, he wrote, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:14-15).

What mattered the most in Paul’s life was becoming a new creation. This is what must matter most to us. We need to obsess over becoming new in our thinking and feeling. This transformation comes through faith in the cross of Jesus.

**3). Stewardship.** By the love of God in Jesus, we can become new creations through faith. Then, we are to use our new lives to share in God’s work of new creation. Sometimes Paul called this work the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:16-21). Other times, he stressed how we are to use our abilities to fill God’s earth with love, virtue, and goodness (Phil. 4:8-9). We must seek and promote justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Peter explained this purpose when he wrote, “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

### **Conclusion**

We need to be careful not to major in minors. Such obsession produces self-righteousness and alienation from God and one another. Majoring in minors caused the Pharisees to miss the Messiah who stood before their faces.

Instead, we must focus on the love of God in Christ. By faith in this love, we can become new creations. Then, we can use our new lives to reflect the glory of God through faithful stewardship of His grace.