

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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Blind Guides

Knowledge of the Scriptures is a good thing, but it can get us into trouble if we misuse it to elevate ourselves above others.

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' . . . Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:16, 24).



A guide is someone who not only possesses a superior level of knowledge about a course of action, but is also able and willing to help others navigate the terrain before them. Whether in academia, finances, or adventure treks, a seasoned guide is a godsend to the ignorant.

But what if the guide is blind? What if the "expert" whom we trust to lead us can't see the terrain, or is just as ignorant of the subject matter as the one he is trying to help? The idea of a guide with such a handicap trying to help others is ludicrous: "If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matt. 15:14).

So when Jesus called the Pharisees "blind guides," He was leveling a serious charge against them. The Pharisees saw themselves as highly trained specialists in the Law, theological experts

who helped the unwashed masses find God. But Jesus accused them of being just as lost as the people they were trying to lead. Why would He say such a thing?

We see clues in the context. Notice, for example, the fine distinctions the Pharisees used in their oaths. In their view, the binding force of an oath depended on whether the oath was based on *the temple* or *the gold* that encased the temple. Which is another way of saying, when you're making a deal with a Pharisee, you'd better read the fine print carefully, because he may have left an opening for himself to wiggle out of his obligations. Integrity was not a bedrock character trait for these people, but a legal game to be played at the expense of others.

Jesus summarized their approach to truth as "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel." The Pharisees would expend enormous intellectual effort to tease out the tiniest distinctions in applications of the Law, yet let major indiscretions pass by unchallenged, *depending on how it benefited themselves*. They

were *hypocrites*, people who preached respect for God's Law but abused it shamelessly to suit their own selfish interests. It was a label that Jesus used often in this chapter, because it best described who they were—scholars who did not practice what they preached.

Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees should serve as a warning to the rest of us. It is good that we study hard and learn well the deep things of the word of God. But that learning carries a risk of feeding *pride*, a sense that our deeper knowledge has given us the ability to recognize distinctions where God intended none. The hypocritical behavior that grows out of this mindset can be seen by everyone except us. And that blindness makes us look foolish.

God's word is not a regulatory minefield that can be navigated only by experts with years of specialized training. It is a practical guide to life available to anyone who has the desire to know God's will. We can and should help each other along the way, but must never let our knowledge deceive us into thinking we're smarter than God.

— David King



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