

Gnats and Camels

Romans 14:1-23; Matthew 23:24 NIV "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."

- I. Defining gnats and camels.
 - a. Camels are essential truths while gnats are preferences, opinions, or human traditions.
 - b. Camels – Jesus said in John 17:16-17 NIV "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by^{the} the truth; your word is truth."
*We are to be set apart from the world's system by the truth of the gospel. Jesus says the weightier things are "...justice and mercy and faithfulness."
 - c. Gnats are smaller issues that threaten to divide us. When a gnat becomes a camel it blinds you spiritually. Blind guides - We can take great pride in the smallest thing and then not be able to see spirituality in others if they disagree with us. *My friend who didn't think I could be saved because I wasn't baptized the right way. *We are called to unity – John 17:23 NIV "I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Pride blinds – unity implies diversity which will require humility.
- II. Gnats and camels in the church at Rome.
 - a. Paul is writing because of a division between Jews and Gentiles in the church at Rome. Started Jewish led, 49 AD the Jews left (Suetonius) including Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18); when Claudius died and Nero became Emperor in 54 AD the Jews all came back including Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's friend who are in charge of a house church.
 - b. The camels are that we've all sinned, that Christ has died for us all pouring out mercy on those who believe, and that each of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. *He has dealt with the sin of the Gentiles and the sin of the Jews and how all have fallen short. He has emphasized our response which is to be living sacrifices that think differently than the world. Now he is addressing the things that are dividing them: Gnats:
 - i. Foods – ceremonial foods of the law for Jews.
 - ii. One day more important – the Sabbath day and the Jewish feasts.
 - c. They are genuinely saved but struggling with what to do with their culture and traditions. They are rejecting those who aren't doing it the way they are and dividing the body. Paul believes himself that they are free of the ceremonial law that was fulfilled in Christ, but here he doesn't even bring

up his position. Col. 2:16 NIV “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.”

- i. If some want to keep the Sabbath on Saturday and only eat certain foods that's fine but be careful not to condemn everyone else who doesn't have your conviction. Salvation is a gift, not earned. *It's easy to have an attitude: “Real Christians don't work on the Sabbath (whatever day they've set aside) or real Christians worship on Saturdays or don't eat pork – yeah, they might still make it to heaven but they're not as pleasing to God as we are.”
- ii. Those Paul calls those weak in faith who are struggling with the full implications of the gospel. Christ has done it all for me, but my conscience hasn't quite caught up.
 - 1. Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial law which includes the Sabbath.
 - 2. The Sabbath day of the Old Testament points to a person – we rest from all our works and put our trust in Him. Hebrews 4:9-11 ESV “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.” The great paradox; we don't earn with our effort, we enter. God has woven our need to rest a day a week into our emotional and spiritual health – He made the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath.
 - 3. It is the only one of the ten commandments that is a ceremonial law – the gospel in the ten commandments.
- d. The strong are those that grasp the gospel but are in danger of flaunting their freedom.
 - i. Having an opinion or preference is fine and it's alright to discuss it: 14:16 “Do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil”; 14:22 “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”
 - ii. Don't split the church over minor things. 14:20 “Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.”
 - iii. Don't flaunt your freedom in a way that might make someone else stumble. 14:15 “If your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love.”

III. Gnats and Camels today.

- a. "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."
- b. Let's talk about... Christians discussing non-essentials – understanding each other and accepting each other. People who love God and the Bible; people who Jesus died for; have a different opinion than us.
 - i. Creation – Camels: Who created and why He created; Gnats – how old the earth is and what means God used to create.
 - ii. Redemption – Camels: Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead so we could be saved through Him. Gnats – predestination; communion; water baptism.
 - iii. The Holy Spirit – Camels: the Holy Spirit given by the Father and the Son to live in those who accept Christ; necessary for salvation and to be the engine of the Christian life. He is the source of all fruit and gifts. Gnats: let's talk about healing, and the prophetic.
 - iv. The End Times – Camels: Jesus is returning for those who are living ready for Him; Gnats: premillennial or amillennial; pretrib or post-trib or mid trib or prewrath? Do we meet Him in the air and come immediately back or do we have the wedding feast first? Pastor Heckman was pan-trib.
- c. When gnats become camels there is division.
 - i. Kicked out of my first church because of tongues.
 - ii. People have left our church because of my association with certain leaders in the body of Christ who they felt were dangerous even though I agreed that some things they said weren't right on.
- d. Your gnat can be someone else's camel so be careful. Heb. 12:1
 - i. Entertainment. What may be okay for you may lead someone else into sexual temptation.
 - ii. Alcohol. What may be a legitimate pleasure for you might lead someone else back into addiction. *25 verses imply that drinking alcohol in moderation is a legitimate pleasure believers can enjoy. Jesus was called a "winebibber and a drunkard." 75 verses that warn against abuse of alcohol and many of them point to the wisdom of abstaining completely from alcohol. My journey with alcohol – "I want you to lay down your right for the sake of My bride." I would never want people to feel that they can't have a drink in my presence, and I hope they don't judge me as being self-righteous for not joining them!

IV. Three reasons not to judge other people's gnats.

- a. God accepts them. Vs 3 NIV “The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.” If God accepts them as His child who are you to reject them as your brother or sister? They are trying to please God even with what you think is their wrong belief or wrong practice – eating to please God; not eating to please God - we all know in part aren't you glad God accepts us before we have it all right?
- b. Jesus is their judge, not you. Acts 17:31 ESV “He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” God has given all judgment to Jesus not to us. “Before their own master they stand or fall and God is able to make them stand.” God is voting for them, maybe we should to.
 - i. They're legalistic I don't know if they'll make it. *They're treating the Sabbath like it's a work; water baptism; tongues – they're trying to please God – trust that God will help them make it.
 - ii. They're worldly I don't know if they'll make it. *They drink a glass of wine with their meals, they watch too much TV, or are playing too many video games; she shops too much and he watches sports too much – trust that God is going to help them make it.
- c. You will be judged. 14:10 “For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.” Make sure you make it and trust God for everyone else. *My revelation from Matt. 7:1-4 and Matt. 5:7. *The gnats of this world compared to the camel of the gospel. Mark 8:36 “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” *Do you know Christ?