

Matthew 23:23 (AI)

23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Matthew 23:23 warns against **hypocrisy by prioritizing minor religious rules over matters of the heart**. Jesus condemns the Pharisees for meticulously tithing tiny garden herbs (mint, dill, and cumin) while completely neglecting the "weightier" principles of God's law: **justice, mercy, and faithfulness**.

The verse challenges believers to balance outward obedience with inner integrity, emphasizing that compassion and righteousness are more important to God than empty ritualism.

Core Principles of Matthew 23:23

- **The "Weightier" Matters:** Jesus highlighted three core virtues that represent the true spirit of the Law:
 - **Justice:** Treating others fairly, standing up for the oppressed, and acting with righteousness.
 - **Mercy:** Showing compassion, forgiveness, and grace to those in need.
 - **Faithfulness:** Being loyal, trustworthy, and keeping your commitments to God and others.
- **Outward vs. Inward Obedience:** The Pharisees used tithing as a moral scorecard to look righteous to others. Jesus clarified that while obedience to minor commands has its place, it should never come at the expense of love and moral character.
- **Doing "Both":** Jesus noted that they should practice justice, mercy, and faithfulness *without neglecting* the other. God desires wholehearted devotion that includes both external discipline and inward love.

The Context: The "Seven Woes"

Matthew 23 contains a series of severe rebukes ("woes") Jesus delivered to the scribes and Pharisees. Immediately following this verse, in Matthew 23:24, Jesus uses a famous hyperbole: "*You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.*" This metaphor points out that they went to extreme, almost absurd lengths to avoid minor religious offenses (gnats) while entirely ignoring massive moral failures (camels).