

## Matthew 23.16–28

“You’re hopeless! What arrogant stupidity! You say, ‘If someone makes a promise with his fingers crossed, that’s nothing; but if he swears with his hand on the Bible, that’s serious.’ What ignorance! Does the leather on the Bible carry more weight than the skin on your hands? And what about this piece of trivia: ‘If you shake hands on a promise, that’s nothing; but if you raise your hand that God is your witness, that’s serious’? What ridiculous hairsplitting! What difference does it make whether you shake hands or raise hands? A promise is a promise. What difference does it make if you make your promise inside or outside a house of worship? A promise is a promise. God is present, watching and holding you to account regardless.

“You’re hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You keep meticulous account books, tithing on every nickel and dime you get, but on the meat of God’s Law, things like fairness and compassion and commitment—the absolute basics!—you carelessly take it or leave it. Careful bookkeeping is commendable, but the basics are required. Do you have any idea how silly you look, writing a life story that’s wrong from start to finish, nitpicking over commas and semicolons?

“You’re hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You buff the surface of your cups and bowls so they sparkle in the sun, while the insides are maggoty with your greed and gluttony. Stupid Pharisee! Scour the insides, and then the gleaming surface will mean something.

“You’re hopeless, you religion scholars and Pharisees! Frauds! You’re like manicured grave plots, grass clipped and the flowers bright, but six feet down it’s all rotting bones and worm-eaten flesh. People look at you and think you’re saints, but beneath the skin you’re total frauds.