

## Phylacteries and Tassels: Part 1

Jesus rebukes the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5, **“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;”** It is long been believed that Jesus is saying that phylacteries and tassels are wrong. I am not so sure this is true. Jesus wasn't a European man in the midst of middle eastern men like the television and movies would like to portray. He was Jewish just like the Pharisees. In fact, Jesus agreed with the Pharisees more than any other religious group. **So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach** (Mt 23:3).

*4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.[a] 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

Did you notice verse eight? God commanded them to put symbols, or phylacteries (sometimes referred to by their Hebrew word: *tefillin*), on their hands and head to remember that God is good and that we should love Him with all of our being. While I believe this is more likely a figurative command and not literal, the principle remains. We should be doing all that we can to seek after and remember God's covenant. The world is full of stimuli to make us think about other things. God wants His people to be constantly thinking about Him. What kind of things can we be doing to keep our minds on our Savior? I knew a guy who had God's name tattooed on the inside of his wrists. He said, “Whenever I look down to do anything with my hands, I remember I am using them for the Lord.” He took them commands of God seriously.

Whereas we tend to take the commands figuratively, many Jews take it literally. Jesus doesn't condemn the Pharisees for wearing phylacteries. He only condemns their reasoning. Instead of using them to help focus their attention more on God, they enlarged them so that there would be more attention on themselves.

Figuratively or literally, what kind of things are you doing to remember that the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you should love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength?

Next week we will talk about the tassels that Jesus mentioned.

-Alex Swango