

THE CHRIST-CENTERED LIFE

Beware the Leaven of the Pharisees

Matthew 16:6, 11-12; Luke 12:1; Matthew 15:1-9

INTRODUCTION: Three times the Lord Jesus warned us to beware of certain doctrines and practices.

Matthew 16:6 NKJV Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

These insidious maladies are more deadly to the soul than COVID, yet they often occupy mind and heart without a person giving them notice. That is why Jesus called them leaven.

There is no unusual cough or sore throat. There is no loss of taste or smell. There is no sniffing nose or aching body. These philosophies that are destined for hell can become a lifestyle for a person, with little to warn them of the downfall they bring.

Last week we examined the first of the three, the warning of our All-Knowing Master against the Leaven or the Doctrine of the Sadducees, which is known in today's language as Theological Liberalism.

Theological Liberalism is a worldview that says that everything in the universe can be explained by the forces of nature and the intelligence and power of men and women. It dooms people to thinking ...

- The Bible is a book about how people perceived God in ancient times, but they completely miss the important understanding that the Bible is God's perfect revelation of Himself.
- They try to explain away the miraculous actions of God recorded in the Scriptures and come up with fanciful explanations like the drowning of Pharaoh's army in a shallow marsh.

It is the Leaven of the Sadducees, the Doctrine of Theological Liberalism that leads so many in our world, so many of our fellow Americans to be among those of whom the Holy Spirit spoke in ...

Romans 1:22 NKJV Professing to be wise, they became fools,

This morning we turn to Jesus' warning of the Leaven or the Doctrine of the Pharisees.

Interestingly, these demonically-designed worldviews, like the doctrine of the Sadducees and the doctrine of the Pharisees, seldom overlap.

Usually if one is infected with one of these three types of leaven, he or she is not infected by the others. It is as if Satan and his forces of destruction are practicing an efficiency of temptation. Falling for one of these destructive doctrines is all it takes to utterly ruin you, so why waste their deceitful schemes to cause you to fall for two or all three.

So, my friend, if you have not been nor never shall be a Sadducee, drawn away into theological liberalism, rejecting the power of God and the Word of God, still you need to TAKE HEED (pay attention!) and BEWARE (this is dangerous).

Beware the leaven of the Pharisees. Beware the doctrine of the Pharisees.

WHAT WAS THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES?

- Matthew 15:1-9 offers a clear picture of the Leaven of the Pharisees.

Matthew 15:1–9 NKJV 1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”

3 He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?

4 For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”—6 then he need not honor his father or mother.’

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

- The Pharisees would have been the last people to say that the Scriptures were not the Word of God.
 - **They believed in angels.**
 - They believed **in demons and the spirit world.**
 - They believed **in the resurrection.**
 - **They could not only recite the Ten Commandments, they could recite the 613 commandments of God written in the Torah, what we call the first five books of the Bible.**

- And over the years the Pharisees wrote additions to these laws in an attempt to clarify their meaning and application. This was called the Mishnah. The Mishnah added literally thousands of additional regulations.
- You remember how the Pharisees were always on Jesus' case because of what He did on the Sabbath (Saturday) or what He allowed His disciples to do.
- Well, they would have said, "We are just trying to obey God's law to keep the Sabbath holy. God said not to work on the Sabbath." All true enough.
- But the Pharisees had defined 39 categories of work, and many sub-categories as well.
 - So you could give bread to a beggar as long as he carried it out of your house. But if you carried it out of the kitchen and gave it to him on your doorstep, you just violated the Sabbath.
 - If your rope broke on the Sabbath, you could tie the two ends back together with a temporary knot, but you could not tie a permanent knot until the Sabbath had passed.
- So, **all of these detailed regulations became the tradition of the Pharisees.**

Matthew 15:3–6 NKJV 3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"

4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 5 But you say, '**Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"**'—6 then he need not honor his father or mother.'

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

- Now in all this minutia were the regulations regarding honoring your father and mother. The Pharisees had a regulation that children could declare their money to be pledged as a gift to the Temple and that pledge would exempt them from paying for the care of aging parents who had fallen on bad times – another part of the tradition of the Pharisees.
- Jesus said, "By keeping your tradition, you shatter the actual law of God which He Himself has given!"

Matthew 15:7–9 NKJV 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

- **The traditions of the Pharisees caused them to become hypocrites.**
 - **They said they believed everything in the Scriptures.**
 - **They said it was the Word of God!**
 - **But they kept their traditions, even when the keeping of them conflicted with God's commands.**

So now, let me raise a question.

IS TRADITION ALWAYS BAD?

- What is tradition? It is that which is done repetitively; especially that which is passed from one generation to another.
- **No**, tradition is not always bad. **God commanded some traditions.**
 - The feasts of Israel were God-commanded traditions.
 - The Passover is a good example of a God-ordained tradition that God gave to help Israel remember their redemption from Egypt by the blood of the Passover Lamb.
 - Jesus told us to make the taking of the Lord's Supper a tradition that would cause us to remember His body, broken for us, and His blood, shed for the remission of sins, and to remind us of His promise to come again.
- **Some traditions are traditions of men.**
 - These may be good.
 - Christmas is a man-made tradition that is intended to celebrate the birth of Christ.
 - Easter is a man-made tradition that Christians have used to remind us of Christ's resurrection.
 - Man-made traditions can also be bad.
 - I am confident that there are parts of the typical celebration of Christmas that cause no joy in heaven.
 - The elevation of Santa Claus above the Lord Jesus as a focus of Christmas dishonors our Lord.
 - The origin of the Santa Claus tradition began with a believer, Saint Nicholas, who gave gifts to poor children, a practice that surely honored the Lord.

- But the fable of Santa Claus living at the North Pole surrounded by working elves and riding in a sleigh pulled by reindeer, only detracts from the beauty of the truth of our Lord being born in a stable and laid in a manger, so that He could come to this world to save us from our sins.
- Likewise, man's traditions have tainted our Easter celebration of Jesus rising from the dead.
 - Maybe the worst of these is our tradition about the Easter Bunny.
 - This did not even originate with any celebration of the resurrection.
 - Now before you crucify me for criticizing a fun-filled, seemingly harmless activity, let me confess that I loved Easter egg hunts when I was a kid. I bought Easter baskets with candy eggs and chocolate rabbits for my children when they were little. So I stand as guilty as most of you.
- But honestly, is this not the exact kind of thing that our Lord is addressing?
- Shouldn't we make our traditions line up with the teaching of the Scriptures?
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians of the centrality of the resurrection to our faith. Paul said that without the resurrection, our faith is empty. So shall we continue to empty our tradition to focus on the resurrection of our Lord by emphasizing bunnies and eggs? I'm just asking!

OF WHAT MUST WE BEWARE?

- **Of man-made traditions that move us to violate the commandments of God.**
- **Even religious traditions can violate the commandments of God.**
 - Praying to the saints or to Mary violates the biblical teaching that we are to pray to the one intercessor between God and man, Jesus Christ.
 - The tradition that the authority of the church is equal to the authority of Holy Scripture has led to many doctrines that are contrary to the commandments of God.
 - Doctrine of immaculate conception (Mary born without sin)
 - Doctrine of purgatory
 - Doctrine of sacramental grace

- **We Baptists are not without our struggle with tradition.**
 - The biblical doctrine of soul liberty which states that every soul must respond for himself to God without subjecting himself in spiritual matters to the conscience of another man was expanded by many into a tradition in which some souls would not subject themselves to the authority of the Word of God. And those of that tradition are without authority, and liberty has become license.
 - Our American tradition written into the Bill of Rights said that the government should not establish a state religion or prevent anyone from practicing their religion (Separation of Church and State). But this tradition has been further developed by some (including some Baptists) to mean that religion should have no influence on government, a contradiction of the principles of God that says that God will bless the nation whose God is the Lord.
 - But probably the greatest place Baptists have trouble with tradition is in our worship practices.
 - Bible says praise but our tradition says watch.
 - Bible says shout joyfully but tradition says to sit quietly.
 - Bible says to lift hands but tradition says not to call any attention to self.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus said beware the doctrine of the Sadducees for they do not believe the Word of God or the power of God.

He said beware the doctrine of the Pharisees because they substitute their words for God's Word by following their tradition rather than obeying God's commands.

Are you struggling with that anywhere in your life?

Some people remain lost because of their traditions.

“Always believed man was good” – All have sinned.

“Always believed just be good and do good” – repent and believe.

“Always believed faith is private” – confess before men.