

Beware of the Leaven
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Text: Mark 8:14-21 (see also Matt. 16:5-12)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod

Central Idea of Message: Beware of contaminants to the Christian faith.

Introduction: Over the last 150 years or so people have become much more aware of protecting themselves from contaminants by using basic methods of hygiene. We wash our hands with soap and water. We cleanse our cuts with soap and water and perhaps also with an antiseptic. We wear masks when we mow the lawn or work in dusty environments. We wear masks when we are around people who are sick with the flu, COVID, or any other communicable illness. We lift toilet seats with the toe of our shoe, not our bare fingers, if at all possible, because we know the seats might have "cooties"!

While "cooties" is a completely fictitious childhood disease, germs are real, yet, not usually visible.

But Jesus was concerned that his followers not become infected with a different type of "germ": leaven. Namely, the leaven of the Pharisees, Herod, and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:6).

I. Beware of the Leaven (vv. 14-15)

- A. The disciples forgot to take bread (v. 14)
 - 1. Isn't it comforting to know that we aren't the only ones to forget to take something along with us!
 - 2. The Twelve, collectively, did not remember to bring enough bread with them to eat
 - 3. Mark says that they did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them
 - 4. One loaf was apparently insufficient to feed all thirteen of them adequately
 - a) Unless some ate far less!
 - b) Unless Jesus dialed up another miracle!
- B. Then Jesus repeatedly [imperfect tense] began to give orders to the Twelve to beware of leaven (v. 15)!

1. Leaven
 - a) Generally represents bad influence, even evil which appears charming
 - b) It swells, ferments, inflates, and sours
 - c) **Leaven is a symbol of corruption, malice, and wickedness (see also 1 Cor. 5:6-8) and represents all that must be removed from life (see also Exod. 12:15-20)**
 - d) **Evil, like leaven, is often small and somewhat hidden, but rapidly spreads throughout the dough into which it has been placed**
2. Beware of the leaven [teachings, example, request for a sign] of the Pharisees!
 - a) Evil influence in the form of mere external religion and the pride that goes with it
 - b) Hypocrisy dressed up in legalism, emphasizing the letter of the law over the spirit of the law
 - c) Bad theology and bad politics (cf. Robertson 1:332)
3. Beware of the leaven [teachings, example, request for a sign] of Herod [and the Sadducees]!
 - a) Evil influence in the form of irreligion expressed as worldliness and skepticism
 - b) Moral decadence [decline, deterioration]
 - c) Bad politics (cf. Robertson 1:331)
 - d) Herod lived like the Romans!
4. Both the Pharisees and Herod had demanded a sign from Jesus to validate his divine authority
 - a) Such a demand showed faithlessness!
 - b) Don't make the same mistake!
 - c) **Faith, not signs, produces recognition that Jesus is the Christ, the one bringing God's salvation to mankind, but Jesus had already provided more than adequate testimony to his divine authorization!**
5. **The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herod did not have a lot in common, but they did share one commonality - they all rejected Jesus and influenced others to reject Jesus as well**

II. Becoming Accountable (vv. 16-21)

- A. The Twelve began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread except one loaf (v. 16)

1. Not enough to go around for all
 2. Certainly thinking in material terms, locked in on the fact that they were running far short on their bread supply
- B. Jesus was aware of their discussion (v. 17)
1. "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread?"
 - a) Jesus could apparently have not cared less about their bread shortage
 - b) The fact that there was only one loaf of bread in the boat had nothing at all to do with his use of the word "leaven"
 2. "Do you not yet see or understand?"
 3. "Do you have a hardened heart?"
- C. Seeing, hearing, remembering (v. 18)
1. "Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?"
 2. This statement by Jesus clearly establishes some parameters for accountability
 - a) **Seeing and/or hearing something makes us responsible for that information and should make a lasting impression on us that we remember**
 - b) The issue here is neither lack of information nor lack of experience
 3. We are not held accountable for what we don't know (see John 15:22-24), but we certainly are held accountable for what we have seen and/or heard, therefore, we are without excuse
- D. Jesus reviews the two feedings (vv. 19-20)
1. "When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" "Twelve," was the answer of the disciples (v. 19)!
 2. "And when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" "Seven," was the answer of the disciples (v. 20)!
- E. "Do you not yet understand?" (v. 21)
1. Jesus was disturbed by the slowness of his own disciples to recognize the significance of his miracles in general and of the two feedings in particular
 - a) Why are you worrying about where your next meal is going to come from as long as you're with me?

- b) "Here the Twelve appear to be no better than the crowds who profit from Jesus' miracles without reflection and who seek his teaching without applying it to themselves" (Lane 282)
2. Understand what?
- a) That Jesus is the Son of God in human flesh
 - b) That God is One with Jesus
 - c) That Jesus has all power and all authority in the universe
 - d) That Jesus is the Christ [Anointed One/Messiah]

Conclusion: Principles.

- (1) Beware of contaminants to your Christian faith.
- (2) Beware of the corrupting influence [leaven] of the world [secularism], because it inflates, ferments, and charms as it lures toward evil in the forms of pride, skepticism, and more, and away from righteousness, toward immorality and away from morality.
- (3) Do not be like the Pharisees and Herod - unsatisfied with the signs God has already given!
- (4) Discernment [spiritual perception] should develop as we mature in Christ.
- (5) Lack of discernment shows spiritual immaturity or stubbornness and can generate much long-term grief because of poor decisions. It is far better to exercise discernment in making decisions and, thereby, avoid unnecessary consequences.
- (6) Too many Christians, or so-called Christians, today live like the "Romans," meaning worldly! Don't be one of those!
- (7) Those who have heard the gospel, and other biblical truths, like those having to do with morals and righteousness, are inexcusable when not acting in accordance with the gospel and other biblical truths.
- (8) As with the twelve disciples, Jesus expects Christians to be growing in their faith, which includes discernment, not regressing or stagnating in neutral.