

The Corrupting Influence of False Doctrine

📖 Matthew 16:1-12

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📅 March 30, 2016

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Turn to Matthew 15. Last time we studied two selections. In Matt 15:29-31 Jesus healed a crowd of Gentiles for three days and in 15:32-39 He fed 4,000 Gentiles in the same way He had fed 5,000 Jews. Both reports are intensively Gentile and signify that in light of that generation of Israel's rejection Jesus is training His disciples for their future ministry to Gentiles in the coming Church age.

In 15:29 Jesus departed from Tyre where He had cast the demon out of the Canaanite woman's daughter, moved north through Sidon, east toward Dan and south into the Decapolis region along the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, apparently to avoid coming into the district of Antipas "the Fox." There He went up on the steep cliffs alongside the Sea of Galilee. The parallel in Mark 7 says that while He was sitting there they brought a man who was both blind and mute to Him and He took him aside and healed him ordering them not to tell anyone. However, the more He ordered them the more widely they continued to proclaim it. Possibly as a result, 15:30 reports that large crowds came to Him bringing with them many Gentiles who were physically disabled and laying them at His feet He healed them all. The crowd was astonished as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, the lame walking and the blind seeing. Jesus had compassion on those suffering from the negative effects of the Fall but more importantly He was demonstrating that He was able to alleviate those effects by bringing in the kingdom on earth. As a result, these Gentiles glorified the God of Israel.

In 15:32 we have the feeding of the 4,000. By direct statements of Scripture and comparison of this feeding to the feeding of the 5,000 we conclude that these were two distinct events. The first feeding was of Jews, the second of Gentiles; the first occurred near Bethsaida-Julias, the second in the Decapolis, the first was of 5,000 men, the second of 4,000 men; the first started with five loaves and two fish, the second with seven loaves and a few small fish. In 15:32 the setting was that after healing them for three days the people were hungry. He was about to send them away but knew that after three days without food they might faint along the way. In 15:33 the disciples responded with a bad question, "Where would we get so many loaves in this desolate place to satisfy such a large crowd?" Such a question reveals that they had forgotten the lesson Jesus taught by feeding 5,000. They were lagging behind in their training, not keeping up with the King. This time Jesus was very patient and in 15:34 said, "How many loaves do you have?" This is the same as before. "And they said, "Seven, and a few

small fish." In 15:35 He directed the people to sit down on the ground. In 15:36 He took the seven loaves and fish, gave thanks, broke them and started giving them to the disciples who gave them to the people. In 15:37 they all ate and were satisfied and the disciples picked up seven large baskets full. In 15:38 the number who ate is stated to be 4,000 men, besides women and children so that the number could easily have been 20-30,000. In 15:39 He sent them away and went by boat across the lake from Decapolis to the region of Magadan. Magadan is probably the same as Magdala, named after the supposed birthplace of Mary Magdalene. Mark says they went to Dalmanutha and Dalmanutha was the harbor of Magadan. This was Jewish territory most likely located on the NW shores of the Sea of Galilee. So whereas before the setting was Gentile, now the setting in Matt 16 is Jewish.

Back in Jewish territory what should we expect? Jewish opposition. Every time Jesus comes out into the open in Jewish territory the leadership oppose Him. It should be obvious that He is perceived as a growing threat that must be silenced. So the pattern we have seen in this section continues. That pattern is opposition, withdrawal, training and miracles. It has now repeated itself three times since Matt 12:15. Tonight in Matt 16 we see the opposition from the leadership but there is a break in the pattern in that instead of withdrawing He abandons the leadership. So the plot thickens. Jesus' abandonment of the leadership of Israel marks a significant turning point in the progress of Matthew's Gospel. For the first time Jesus will reveal something entirely new called the Church and He will speak directly about His crucifixion. So new things are coming to the ears of the disciples and they still have a lot to learn and they are still lagging behind. They will have to play catch up if they are to keep going further in His intense training curricula.

In 16:4 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up. Technically they did not come up as if elevation is in mind but simply "came" (*προσερχομαι*). The prepositional prefix on the word may serve to intensify the coming as if to say they came with a definite purpose. What is the purpose? This purpose is stated to be testing Jesus. They wanted to test Him in order to trap Him. They did not want to test Him in order to be convinced to believe in Him. They had already decided against Him and wanted to find adequate cause to arrest and kill Him. This desire was already in the works as early as Matt 12. Turn back with me to Matt 12:1-13. Here we see that the Pharisees had already tried to trap Jesus but on that occasion Jesus had turned the tables and trapped them. This really angered the Pharisees and Matt 12:14 reports that "The Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." The phrase, "conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" means they gathered in order to decide how to kill Him. Significantly, the parallel in Mark 3:6 adds that they had conspired with the Herodians. This was a most unlikely alliance since the Herodians followed the Herod's and the Pharisees opposed the Herod's. However, both agreed that Jesus had to be silenced and so an alliance was formed.

Matt 16:1 is an advance because now the Sadducees have also joined Pharisees and Herodians in the plot to destroy Him. This was also an unlikely alliance since the Pharisees¹ and Sadducees² opposed one another on many points of doctrine. Yet, the grammar shows clearly that the two were joined in purpose. Constable says,

“Matthew introduced the Pharisees and Sadducees with one definite article in the Greek text. Such a construction implies that they acted together.”³ Walvoord adds this important observation, “This was the first time the Pharisees and Sadducees, usually in disagreement, joined hands to trap Jesus.”⁴ So the various sects that grew up during the intertestamental times and usually opposed one another are now joining forces in plotting to kill Jesus. The mounting opposition may be the reason that after this brief encounter Jesus, in verse 4, abandons them and issues the strong warning in vv 5-12 that His disciples beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

So tonight we look at this encounter and then Jesus’ teaching after the encounter. Remember, in 16:1 they came to Him with the purpose of testing Him and this is a test to trap. They are not interested in being convinced to believe. We might point out that there is nothing wrong with being convinced to believe. The root of the word “believe” involves the process of being convinced so that one has confidence or trust in some object. Jesus had tried to convince others that He was the Messiah by doing miracles and later Paul sought to convince people to believe in Him. But the intent of the Pharisees and Sadducees request is not to be convinced but to find adequate cause to arrest and destroy Him.

In 16:1 Matthew notes that they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. Of the sign Wiersbe says, “The word translated *sign* means much more than simply a miracle or a demonstration of power. It means “a wonder by which one may recognize a person or confirm who he is.”⁵ No doubt Jesus did signs to authenticate that He was indeed the Messiah. But their asking for such a sign is a rejection of all the previous signs by which they should have recognized Him as the Messiah. Walvoord is exactly correct when he states, “Their asking for a sign indicated that they were unimpressed by the miracles and teaching of Christ, the very credentials predicted in the Old Testament.”⁶ This indicates the chief problem, a lack of belief in the OT. However, note that they did not merely ask for “a sign” but a sign from heaven. The mention of heaven has significance. Alford says, “...in the Jewish superstition it was held that daemons and false gods could give signs *on earth*, but only the true God signs *from heaven*.”⁷ By a sign from heaven they referred to such things as the bread which came down *from heaven* by Moses or the sun and moon standing still *in the heavens* as by Joshua or the lightning coming down *from heaven* as by Elijah. These signs were assigned a special class of miracle by the rabbis so that is the kind of sign they are requesting here. Shepard elaborates, “There had been signs enough in the miracles of Jesus to convince an open mind, but these they had attributed to the prince of demons, Beelzebub. A sign from heaven would be different. If He would make a rainbow span the world; or like Joshua make the sun stand still; call down thunder or hail like Samuel, or fire and rain like Elijah, or if He would make the sun turn back like Isaiah, they would believe that the King-Messiah had come.” Or so it might appear. But were they really looking to believe? From Jesus’ response we see that they were not looking to believe. They had all the evidence before them and if they were open to viewing it from the standpoint of Scripture they would see that He was the Messiah. However, they were not open to viewing it from the standpoint of Scripture but only from their false religious system and this caused them to be closed to the evidence. People have to be open to hearing and learning the Scriptures if

they are ever to come to faith. The Pharisees and Sadducees had this opportunity but they would not believe because they were not willing to consider the Scriptures. They had already decided that their religious system was the truth and from there they wanted Jesus to fit into their religious system. That is what they are asking Him to do right here, do a sign from heaven, a specific classification foreign to the Bible invented by rabbinic Judaism. Hagner acutely said, "It is surprising that in a wide variety of different fields of knowledge human beings can be so knowledgeable and perceptive, yet in the realm of the knowledge of God exist in such darkness. The explanation of the latter sad state is not to be found in a lack of intellectual ability—no more for the Pharisees and Sadducees than for today. The evidence is there, examinable and understandable for those who are open to it and who welcome it. The issue in the knowledge of God is not intellect but receptivity."⁸ We would add, receptivity to the word of God. They are not open to examining and understanding the word of God. That is what Paul meant in 1 Cor 2:14 when he said, "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." The words "accept," "understand" and "spiritually appraised" all refer to a refusal "to welcome" and "examine closely" the things of the word of God. They do not mean that unbelievers cannot understand the things of the word of God. That idea is not in the original languages. All Paul is saying is that unbelievers do not welcome the things of the Spirit of God such that they examine them up close. The reason stated is that "they are foolishness to him." And the reason they are foolishness to him is because He does not accept the authority of God, only his own authority. The bottom line is that they are not open and receptive to the authority of God and the things of the word of God. It doesn't mean they can't be; when someone is open to and receptive to the things of the word of God that is a sure sign that you should keep working with that person. John 6:45 says that when a person is open to hearing and learning the word of God they come to see the evidence correctly. But if you see a person who is completely closed off to hearing and learning the word of God you are wasting your time continuing to work with them at that time. That is the boat the Pharisees and Sadducees were in at this time. Jesus had given them many signs predicted in the OT word of God but since they were not open to the OT word of God they were rejecting and now Jesus reveals how willfully blind they were to spiritual realities.

In 16:2, When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? In other words, they would perceive natural things like the weather but they would not perceive spiritual things like the signs of the times. Wiersbe states the relationship this way, "They could examine the evidence in God's world and draw valid conclusions, but they would not examine the evidence He had presented. His enemies *would not* believe, and therefore they *could not* believe (John 12:37ff). The Pharisees and Sadducees did not lack evidence; they lacked honesty and humility."⁹ This is exactly the correct order. They would not believe, therefore they could not believe. The incongruity of their willingness to draw valid conclusions about the weather with their unwillingness to draw valid conclusions with respect to the signs of the times is a striking revelation about men. They would observe signs in the sky and predict the

weather patterns fairly well but they would not discern the signs of the times. The Greek word times is *καιρος* and refers to a fixed period of time. As Toussaint says, "They are so blind in the realm of spiritual things that they fail to discern the signs of the times. The Lord very significantly uses the word "time" (*καιρος*) here (verse 3). He is not thinking of a mere space of time, but of a divine program. This is evident since *καιρος* denotes a fixed period of time."¹⁰ Jesus uses the same word in Luke 19:43-44 when He predicted the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD70 because "...you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

What were the signs of the times that they should have been able to discern at the time of their visitation? There are three things that should have signaled to them that Messiah had come. First, the 70 weeks of Daniel calendar in Daniel 9:24-27. In this remarkable prophetic calendar seventy groups of seven years or 490 years are predicted to run their course before the kingdom of God comes on earth. A break is predicted between the 483rd year and the 484th year during which the Messiah would be crucified. No matter what your view of when this calendar countdown began all the views have the first 483 years completed by AD33. Therefore, if the Pharisees and Sadducees had been studying the OT they would have keyed in on the Dan 9 prophecy and been looking for the Messiah. But they would not. Second, the coming of John the Baptizer. John had come in the likeness of the OT prophet Elijah preaching a message of repentance and claiming to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the forerunner of the Messiah in Isa 40:3, if they received him. He preached this message directly to the Pharisees and Sadducees. If they had been tuned in to the OT they would have seen this as a clear sign but they would not. Third, the messianic credentials predicted in the OT. The miracles He did from heaven were clear signs that He was the Messiah. The particular miracle in Matt 12 of healing a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was viewed as a particularly vexing case. Jewish exorcists could cast out demons that they could make verbal contact with. But only the Messiah could cast out a demon that was blind and mute. If they had been accepting the OT the healing of that man would have been clear evidence of His messianic credentials. So these three signs, the 70 weeks of Daniel calendar coming near to the completion of the 483rd year, the coming of John the Baptizer as the fulfillment of the Isaiah prophecy, if they received him, and the messianic credentials predicted in the OT would have been perfectly clear to them if they had been accepting prior revelation of the word of God, but they were not. They were the leadership of Israel, the covenant people of God and they were responsible to know the OT and to teach it to the nation so they might believe, just like we are culpable to know the OT and NT and to teach it so that people are convinced to believe it.¹¹

In 16:4 Jesus says to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign;" The expression adulterous generation looks to that generation as committing spiritual adultery. Spiritual adultery is spiritual idolatry. They were not worshipping YHWH but another god of their imagination. If they had been worshipping the one true God they would have been recognizing Jesus as the Son of God. Wiersbe says, "These men were worshipping a false god of their own manufacture, and this was spiritual adultery. Had they been worshipping the true God, they would have recognized His Son when He came."¹² Jesus said earlier in Matt 12:43-45 they were actually

worshipping demons. Whenever we are worshipping a false god we are actually worshipping a demon. As you can imagine then, the world is full of demon worshippers.

At the end of verse 4 Jesus answers them in the exact same way that He answered them on the day of rejection in Matt 12. That generation desired a sign but no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah. What is the sign of Jonah? The sign of Jonah is resurrection. Jonah did not really die and rise again but he was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster as a picture of resurrection. Thus, Jesus really would die and rise again after three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Ironically, Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites and they did believe; but Jesus will be a sign to that generation and they will not believe. That is why the Ninevites qualified to stand up in the day of judgment and judge that generation of Israel. In any case, the sign is that of resurrection. The resurrection is the greatest sign of all and that is why the emphasis in preaching in the Book of Acts is on the resurrection.

The final phrase of 16:4 is the vital one. And He left them and went away. Before when we have seen opposition from the leadership we have seen Jesus withdraw using the word *αναχωρευω* (e.g. 12:15; 14:13; 15:21). Now Jesus left them using the word *καταλειπω*. Toussaint says, "Heretofore Matthew has used the verb "to withdraw" (*αναχωρευω*); now he employs *καταλειπω* which means "to forsake, to abandon, or to leave." The Lord turns His back on these religious leaders for the simple reason that they were hopeless and incorrigible."¹³

In 16:5 He departs with His disciples. And the disciples came to the other side of *the sea*. On the basis of Mark 8:22 Pentecost thinks they went to near Bethsaida near where Jesus had fed the 5,000. Walvoord held that they went "to the eastern shore" where food was more scarce. In any case, the scene is set by the phrase, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. The parallel in Mark 8:14 says they "did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them." They noticed their lack of bread while they were still in the boat before they got to the other side. In the context of their thinking about their lack of physical bread, Jesus said in verse 6, Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And in 16:7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread." The imperfect tense they began to discuss means that they did not really understand what He meant and discussed it for some time before deciding that He was rebuking them for not bringing any bread. As Pentecost said, "...the Twelve...took this to be a rebuke for their forgetfulness."¹⁴

So in 16:8 Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets full you picked up? Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets full you picked up? How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? This rebuke is aimed at their neglect of spiritual matters. As is so often the case, man is fickle, constantly anxious about where he is going to get his next physical meal but as a result neglecting spiritual things. The disciples reveal that they have been neglecting the spiritual things and cannot understand the spiritual import of His words. This was a common

problem then and now. Wiersbe says, "Often in the ministry of Jesus, people misconstrued His words by interpreting them literally rather than spiritually. Nicodemus thought that Jesus was talking about an actual physical birth (John 3:4), and the Samaritan woman thought He was referring to material water from the well (John 4:11). The Jewish crowd in the synagogue thought Jesus was speaking about eating actual flesh and blood (John 6:52ff) when He was describing a spiritual experience (John 6:63)."¹⁵ Even though the disciples were believers (except for Judas Iscariot), they were hardly any better than unbelievers. In verse 8 Jesus rebuked them as men of little faith. This had become almost Jesus' favorite title for His disciples (cf 6:30; 8:26; 14:31). The point is they could only trust over a very small area. Wiersbe says, "The disciples had many lessons to learn before they would graduate to "great faith."¹⁶ Yet the fact Jesus rebuked them shows that they should have already graduated to "Great faith." They had been given multiple opportunities to expand their faith with the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 and many more, things that had never happened in the history of the whole world. So the point is that here we see again that they are lagging behind. They don't understand His words and their misinterpretation of His words reveals that they had still not understood the two lessons on the multiplication of the loaves. This was a serious blunder. They were not advancing spiritually.

In the rebuke Jesus focuses on two things they still lacked. First, understanding. They still did not understand what had happened in the multiplication of the loaves and fish? How many times would they have to witness a multiplication to get spiritual understanding? Yet the fact is they did not yet understand. Second, remembering. They had forgotten the multiplication of the loaves and fish. They were not keeping these things in mind so that they made an indelible imprint in their mind. How many times did they need to witness this lesson to have that indelible imprint? So lack of understanding and forgetfulness are pointed out as serious deficiencies in His disciples. Yet are they any less deficient than we? Which of us has not had years of Bible teaching and still evidenced lack of understanding? Which of us has not had years of Bible exposition and still evidenced forgetfulness? Why are we so deficient? Because we are neglecting spiritual matters. According to Christ these are inexcusable deficiencies.

Now at the end of verse 11 Jesus deals with these deficiencies, but not as one might expect. Rather than explaining what He meant He merely repeats it saying, But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Constable points out, "Jesus did not explain His metaphor to the disciples, but as a good teacher He repeated it forcing them to think more deeply about its meaning."¹⁷ They should have known exactly what He was referring to when He first stated this. They had just set sail from Jesus' intense spiritual conversation with the Pharisees and Sadducees who could interpret the weather but could not interpret the signs of the times. The disciples were no better than the Pharisees and Sadducees on this point, they had forgotten the spiritual conversation and further, Who they had with them in the boat. So Jesus does not explain to them the answer but challenges them to think more deeply about the statement.

Beware of the leaven. Leaven is always used of a negative influence in the Scriptures despite the fact that some commentators argue that leaven is used of the gospel's penetrating influence in one of the parables in Matt 13. That is a false interpretation. The gospel is never combined with leaven in any passage of Scripture. It is never viewed positively. Leaven is corrupting by definition. The corrupting influence here is the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus knew how corrupting and widespread their doctrines were since they led to their attitude of unbelief. From His disciples lack of understanding He perceived that even they had been influenced by them. Therefore, they needed to become more aware of the dangers of its influence into their own lives lest the same attitude of unbelief that led the Pharisees and Sadducees to reject Him creeps into their lives. The application is that we need to be more aware of the dangers of false doctrine in our culture as well. False teaching is an ever present danger and most Christians are heavily influenced by it. This is corrupting them by inculcating in them an attitude of disbelief in the Scriptures as indicated by the statistics Mark Beall mentioned a few weeks ago in his lesson on the beliefs of 18-30 year olds.

So, after thinking about this statement a second time, in 16:12, Matthew remarks, Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. It was the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees that was so dangerous. What was the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees so that we may know what is dangerous? First, it is notable that both the Pharisees and Sadducees referred to Scripture as an authority. These are not religious systems that rejected the Scripture. They are religious systems that claimed to accept the Scripture. Second, the Pharisees added tradition to the Scriptures. They began to do this in order to build a hedge around the Law so that no one got close to breaking the Law. Over time these traditions became more authoritative than the Scriptures. This invalidated the Scriptures. This is why the Scriptures themselves warn against adding anything to them. An addition introduces a fundamental change to the Scripture. Third, the Sadducees subtracted from the Scripture. They did this two ways; one way was to say that only the Torah, the first five books, were true Scripture, thus rejecting all the other books, a second way was to take an overly literal interpretation of the Torah so that certain doctrines that are implied, such as the promises to Abraham implying resurrection, were rejected. They rejected the doctrine of resurrection. So any subtraction from Scripture fundamentally alters Scripture. Fourth, both the Pharisees and Sadducees changed the Scripture. They did this by taking liberties in their interpretations of Scripture. Rather than accepting the authorial intent of the Scriptures they distorted them by making themselves the authority. Hence, any change to the authorial intent of the Scriptures is a fundamental change of Scripture itself. That is why Jesus said in verses 6 and 11, Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. There doctrines were and are corrupting. They work into our lives and develop an attitude of unbelief. Jesus' disciples were not insulated against this corrupting influence and neither are you. You need to beware of the voices you are listening to.

In summary, in 16:1 the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus for the purpose of testing Him in order to trap Him. They asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. This was a specific type of sign classified by rabbinic

Judaism as being expansive, as with Joshua's commanding the sun and moon to stand still in the heavens or Elijah's calling down fire from heaven. In 16:2, Jesus, knowing that they were not open to accepting any miracle and that they would merely assign it to Satan replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky but cannot discern the signs of the fixed times? The first 483 years of the Daniel 9 prophecy had about run their course. The forerunner of the King, John the Baptizer, had come to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 40, if they would receive him he was Elijah, and Jesus had evidenced messianic credentials by accomplishing the healing of a demon possessed man who was both blind and mute. In 16:4 Jesus refers to that generation of Israel as "evil" and "adulterous." They worshipped a god of their imagination and not the one true God. With "evil" intent they sought a sign but no sign would be given them except the sign of Jonah, which is the sign of resurrection, being cut off from the land of the living for three days and three nights and then returning to the land of the living. This was the ultimate sign and the emphasis of the proclamation in the Book of Acts. At the end of 16:4 He broke the pattern and rather than simply withdrawing He abandoned the leadership of Israel. They were beyond hope, they had willfully rejected all the evidence on the basis of their self-invented religious system and now were unable to believe. In 16:5ff Jesus used this as an opportunity to warn His disciples of the dangerous influence of the doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees that would foster unbelief in their lives. As they went across the sea they noticed that they had forgotten to bring any bread. In 16:6 Jesus said to them "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Upon these words in 16:7 they began to have a conversation among themselves as to what this meant and concluded "He said that because we did not bring any bread." In 16:8 Jesus scolded them saying, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?" They had made a significant mistake. In 16:9 they revealed they did not have spiritual understanding or could not remember the two occasions that revealed that wherever Jesus was ample food was because He was sufficient to provide for all their physical needs. In 16:11 it is almost incredulous that they did not understand that He was not speaking of bread. And rather than explaining to them what He was speaking of He merely repeats what He said before, challenging them to think about it more deeply. "But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." Finally, in 16:12, "they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees." It was their doctrine that was leaven. Leaven is always a picture of negative, corrupting influence. Since their teaching led to their attitude of rejection and unbelief the disciples needed to beware of it since that same attitude could infect them and hinder their belief.

In conclusion, what can we learn? What principles can we extract from this important section? First, the Pharisees and Sadducees had more than sufficient evidence available to conclude that Jesus was the Messiah but they were not willing to hear and learn the OT Scriptures and so they could not believe. One must be willing to hear and learn if they are to be convinced and believe. Second, unbelievers can interpret certain things fairly well in the universe even if they are in rebellion against the things of the word of God. This is because they can't escape

living in God's world and are made in His image. God has made truth not only accessible to men but something they are necessarily confronting all the time. They simply have no way of accounting for it in their worldview. Only if they are open to hearing and learning spiritual truth can they come to Christ in faith and then be able to account for why the universe is the way it is. Third, many religious groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees claim the Bible as an authority but add, take away, or change it to undermine it. Judaism does this, Islam does this, Mormons do this, Jehovah's Witnesses do this, Roman Catholicism does this, Covenant Theology does this. They all use the Bible as a jumping off point for propagating their religious system. But they are all extremely dangerous because they all add, take away or change the meaning of the text. Judaism has added rabbinic tradition to the text, Islam has added the Quran, Hadith and Reliance of the Traveler to the text, Mormons have added the Pearl of Great Price, Jehovah's Witnesses change the text in their *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, Roman Catholicism has added Church tradition to the text through their councils and popes, and Covenant Theology has added Church History and Creeds as interpretive guides to the text. None of these religious systems simply accepts the text. That is why Christians should do just what Jesus said and "Beware of the leaven of these groups." They are a corrupting influence and their teaching should be rejected outright in light of the fact that you have the faith once for all delivered in this book and I teach as clearly as I can line-by-line, verse-by-verse, showing that I have accessed the Hebrew and Greek but with minimal mention of them so that you can see exactly how I am handling the text. The Hebrew and Greek are vital; I'm not denigrating them. I teach Greek in homeschool and use the languages in preparing for every lesson, every week. But out here I try to teach you in such a way that you can access the truth and not get the thought that it is beyond your reach. No one should come to the thought that they can't understand the Bible and that it has to be left to an expert. If you get that impression it will deter Bible reading, it will generate a cult following of the teacher and pave the way for them to teach strange doctrines that are accepted on his authority alone. This is very dangerous. So to avoid that I try to maintain a balance and encourage you to stay in the text and watch what I am doing.

¹The Pharisees were the religious conservatives, following all the rules and regulations that had been added over the centuries by the scribes.

²The Sadducees were the religious liberals, following only very literal rules found in the Torah, allowing plenty of wiggle room.

³Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 16:1.

⁴John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 121.

⁵Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 56.

⁶John Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p 121.

⁷ Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament, Vol I. The Four Gospels, Vol II. Acts -Corinthians*, p 169.

⁸ Donald Hagner quoted by Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 16:2.

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 56.

¹⁰ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 198.

¹¹ These signs did not go overlooked by all in Israel. Anna the prophetess and Simeon are good examples of those who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah and recognized Him at His birth. There is always a remnant of believing Israel.

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 56.

¹³ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, p 199.

¹⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p 247.

¹⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 57.

¹⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 57.

¹⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 16:8.