

# The Danger of False Teachers

## Matthew 16:1-12

(The following text is taken from a sermon preached by Gil Rugh.)

1. Jesus Is Opposed by the Jewish Leadership
2. The Jewish Leadership Asks for a Sign
3. Jesus Identifies Their Lack of Spiritual Perception
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10. Believers Need the Pure Teaching of the Word

In Matthew 14 and 15, one lesson is being reemphasized as Christ ministers to His disciples: the adequacy of Jesus Christ in every situation. Though the settings are different and the details vary, the point being driven home is that Jesus Christ is sufficient. If one learns that lesson, then the next time difficult circumstances arise, it is possible to simply draw upon what has been learned. Trusting Christ is the basis for maturity as a believer.

The other side of the coin in that lesson is that His character is being revealed in the person who learns the lesson because that person has learned to trust Him more. The Spirit continues to work in lives of believers to conform them to the character of Christ. As believers learn lessons from the ministry of the Spirit in their lives through the Word, their spiritual lives exhibit maturity. As one becomes more mature in Christ, the natural result will be to trust Him more and recognize His adequacy.

Jesus' ministry among the Gentiles was described in the last half of Matthew 15. This demonstrated His adequacy to meet the needs not only of Jews, but also of Gentiles. In Matthew 16, Christ again ministers among Jews, and immediately He faces conflict as the leadership of the nation Israel opposes Him and looks for ways to stop His ministry. This is an indication of the spiritual decadence of the Jews who should, of all people, be responsive to the Messiah's ministry.

Matthew 16:1-12 is easily divided into two sections. The first section deals with the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leadership. The second section includes the instruction given the disciples as a result of the confrontation.

This passage causes me to take heart. The disciples are a group of twelve men, eleven of whom are truly believers. You might think that these men were brilliant intellects since the world was transformed by the power of Christ through them. You might assume them to be the quick starts, so to speak. But in Matthew 16 Christ says that those men were really slow learners. He let them know that they did not get the point even after repeated emphasis.

This is a good reminder as well as an encouragement. Christ did not give up on them. Even though they did not grasp the lesson which you would think they should have understood by that time, Christ did not abandon them and look for some men who would be a little quicker to learn the lesson. He continued to work with the disciples and minister to them. This is a reminder that God works with ordinary people, and He is very patient. As believers, we are to learn the lessons He wants to teach us, but it may take repeated emphasis before those lessons sink in.

### 1. Jesus Is Opposed by the Jewish Leadership

Two groups of people in the leadership of Israel are given immediate attention in Matthew 16:1: **"The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven."**

The unique element that has joined the Pharisees and Sadducees together is their effort to discredit Jesus Christ. That is a significant alliance because the Pharisees and Sadducees were bitter enemies who had almost nothing in common theologically. The Sadducees were the theological liberals of the day while the Pharisees were the conservatives. They disagreed on nearly everything.

The theological positions of the two groups are outlined in Acts 23:6-10. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, in the existence of spirit beings or in life after death. They were the anti-supernaturalists, also known as the liberals. On the other hand, the Pharisees believed in all of these things. They believed in the resurrection, the existence of spirit beings and in life after death.

Although these groups had almost nothing in common theologically, they are joined together in their opposition to Jesus Christ. One commentator stated that *all error has this in common, that it is hostile to Christ*. That is true. One common bond unites all unbelievers no matter how diverse they may be in other areas: opposition to the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is true even today. People who have almost nothing in common join themselves together when the issue becomes the Word of God or the person of Jesus Christ.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees joined together to oppose Christ as they did on this occasion, that was an indication that the opposition to Jesus Christ was solidifying. By that time their opposition to Christ had become more united and cohesive and would build to the climax. Both elements agreed not only that Christ must go but also on how His death must be accomplished.

The purpose in the Pharisees' and Sadducees' coming to Jesus is very simple; they want to test Him. They do not come as the leadership of Israel trying to determine if He might be the Messiah. They do not come to analyze Him and His ministry in light of the Word of God to see if He fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. They have come to test Him, to oppose Him and to discredit Him.

## 2. The Jewish Leadership Asks for a Sign

Their motives are evil as is revealed by their request. They ask Jesus to show them a sign from heaven. This is not simply asking for proof, it is an indication of unbelief. They are, in effect, rejecting all of the signs and miracles that Christ has done up to this point. They are saying that He has done nothing they will accept. The problem is not that He has failed to give them signs or to prove Himself. The issue clearly is their unbelief. In fact, every time Jesus does a miracle in their presence, it antagonizes them and increases their resistance to Him.

In the presence of the Pharisees, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath Day in the synagogue, but the Pharisees reacted negatively. **“But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him”** (Matt. 12:14). The impact of this miracle on them is clear. The Old Testament said that when the Messiah came, He would bring healing. But they did not see this as an indication of His being the Messiah. Instead they were antagonized because He had done something before the people which they could not deny.

Their request for a sign from heaven was more literally a request for a sign out of heaven. They may have been asking for a sign different from all the rest. They may have been asking Christ to bring down manna from heaven like Moses did, to give them a heavenly sign as Joshua did, to stop the sun, to have the sun go back or to demonstrate some sign they could see in the heavens. But the point of their request was a total rejection of His ministry up to that point. It was a reminder that the unbeliever never has enough proof. Evidence is not what is lacking. The real issue is an evil heart that is unwilling to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Hebrews 11:6 says **“he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”** It is important that we as believers are reminded of this as we present the truth of the Word of God to people. Even if we could call down fire from heaven, that would not settle the issue. The issue with unbelievers is the unwillingness to believe in Jesus Christ, not a lack of evidence or proof.

The Jews were consumed with the desire for signs. Paul wrote, **“For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom”** (1 Cor. 1:22). The Jews were always asking for another miracle, but when the sign was given, they failed to believe it. Jesus' response to them reveals the real issue: they are sinful people with a corrupt character.

### 3. Jesus Identifies Their Lack of Spiritual Perception

After their request in Matthew 16:1 for a sign from heaven, Jesus answers: **“But He answered and said to them, ‘When it is evening, you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.” And 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?’”** (Matt. 16:2,3).

Christ draws a contrast by showing that they have physical perception, but they lack spiritual perception. They can look at the sky and tell what the weather is going to be, but they cannot look and see what God is doing and recognize where they are in His program.

When Jesus referred to their not being able to **“discern the signs of the times,”** He used a word which indicates God’s divine program. The word translated **“times”** does not indicate simply a length of time, but indicates that they fail to recognize where they are in God’s program. Jesus says, in effect, that the signs are there, but they cannot discern them. The issue is not a lack of evidence. It is a lack of spiritual perception to recognize the evidence.

What were some of the signs they should have recognized? The ministry of John the Baptist provides a sign in that he is the prophet who was prophesied in the Old Testament. **“For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness, “Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’”**” (Matt. 3:3). Isaiah 40:3 had been fulfilled in the life and ministry of John the Baptist, but the Jews did not have the spiritual perception to see that sign. Still relating to John the Baptist, Jesus said in Matthew 11:10, **“This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.’”** John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy from Malachi 3. Jesus continued in Matthew 11:14, **“And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.”** The Jews did not perceive in John the fulfillment of the Old Testament signs. The sign was there, but they were unable to discern it because they had no spiritual perception.

In the multitude of miracles which Christ had done, the religious leaders were blind to the purpose of those miracles and to the impact of what was taught by them. Jesus had cast out a demon, but the people accused Him of being demon-possessed in Matthew 12. Jesus responded in Matthew 12:28, **“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”** His power and authority over the demonic world was the testimony that He was the Messiah. As a result He was there offering the kingdom to them. But the Jewish leaders did not perceive that sign. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the multitudes **“were amazed at His teaching”** (Matt. 7:28). But they did not perceive in that sign that Christ was indeed the Messiah or that they were in the times of the Messiah.

One clear sign these Jews had missed was given in Daniel 9:24 where Gabriel told Daniel that seventy weeks were determined for his people and the holy city Jerusalem. The Jews could have sat down and calculated from the giving of the commandment to rebuild the temple in Nehemiah 2 to their day that they were just about at the end of the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel, or four hundred eighty-three years. But they did not have the spiritual perception to know where they were in God’s program and to recognize that the Messiah may be present. They had an abundance of signs of the times, but spiritual perception to interpret and understand those signs was lacking.

### 4. Jesus Reveals Their Character

Jesus revealed their problem in Matthew 16:4: **“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah.”** The problem was their own wickedness and the evilness of their own hearts.

Jesus said almost exactly the same thing on two other occasions. **“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet’**” (Matt. 12:39). The other similar statement was made on a later occasion and is recorded in Luke 11. The contrast noted in Luke 11:28,29 is important: **“But He said, ‘On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.’ As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, ‘This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.’”** The contrast is between those who hear the Word of God and observe it and those who are members of the wicked generation who do not believe the Word of

God. They want signs which is an indication of wickedness. They are really saying that the Word of God is not adequate, so they need some spectacular, miraculous proof because they are not willing to believe what God says. His Word is not enough for them. That is a sign of wickedness and spiritual decadence.

The focal point in each of these occasions is Jonah. In Matthew 12 the sign was unfolded saying that as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's great sign, the culminating miracle of miracles to prove that His Son, Jesus Christ, is the Messiah of Israel. Romans 1:4 says that Jesus **"was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead."** So the greatest miracle and sign that could be given was given: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Did that result in spiritual transformation of the nation Israel? When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, did the people of Israel collapse to their knees in acknowledgment of their own sinfulness and recognize that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel? Not at all. The leadership of Israel paid the guards at the tomb to spread a lie that His body had been stolen away. The issue was not a sign, not even a great sign like the resurrection from the dead.

This point is developed in Luke 16 with the deaths of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man went to Hades and was in torment. Lazarus, the beggar, was carried into Abraham's bosom, the place of blessing. A conversation is then recorded between the rich man and Abraham. **"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead'"** (Luke 16:27-31).

God's statement is clear. If people will not believe the Word of God, then the greatest of miracles, even the resurrection of someone from the dead, will not change their minds.

The evidence of that is that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead two thousand years ago. Do the majority of human beings on earth believe in Christ as their Savior today because of that great sign given by God? No, the majority of religious people do not even believe it. The issue is not a sign or a lack of a sign. The greatest sign was given, but people do not have the spiritual perception to understand it because of their stubborn, unbelieving hearts.

The response of Jesus to this situation in Matthew 16:4 is very clear: **"And He left them and went away."** This is a strong expression meaning to abandon someone. Christ turned away from the leaders of the nation and abandoned them to their condemned, sinful condition in which they had chosen to be. The nation has rejected Him, and now He has rejected them. Christ will bring into the picture in Matthew 16 the first teaching found in the New Testament about the church. Since Israel has rejected Him, He is abandoning them. As He turns away from them, it becomes more and more evident that the kingdom will not be established at this time.

By His rejecting them, Christ is carrying out what He said in Matthew 7:6: **"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."** Christ did not argue with the Pharisees and Sadducees, because they were not open to consider the truth of the Word of God and the person of Christ. So He did not continue to scatter the truth of God before them that they might tear it and misuse it. He abandoned them and left the area. After this Christ begins the time of instruction for His disciples. The basis for this instruction is found in the events which occurred with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

## 5. Jesus' Instruction for His Disciples

Jesus and His disciples cross the Sea of Galilee again. Every time the opposition builds, Jesus has to move to another area, so this time He crosses the Sea of Galilee.

The immediate occasion for the teaching by Christ was that the disciples forgot to take bread when they left. **"And the disciples came to the other side of the sea, but they had forgotten to bring any bread. And Jesus said to them, 'Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, 'He said that because we did not bring any bread'"** (Matt. 16:5-7).

The other side of Galilee was a barren region. Because of the confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus and His disciples evidently left quickly. The disciples forgot that they should take provisions with them to eat. Christ used this incident to warn them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The disciples were occupied with food. As Jesus told them to watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, their attention was focused on their physical needs. It is often true that the immediate thing that gets our attention is the physical need. Jesus has been conveying to them a great spiritual truth, but they did not perceive it at all because they were occupied with their physical circumstances. They assumed that He must have been warning them not to take bread from the Pharisees and Sadducees because they used leaven in their bread. They thought He was advocating a boycott. Their minds were so occupied with the physical that they missed the spiritual truth.

Jesus is now about to give the disciples an explanation which starts out with a stern rebuke. **“But Jesus, aware of this, said, ‘You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?’”** (Matt. 16:8). I sometimes wonder how often the Lord looks in on our discussions and asks why we spend so much time talking about physical needs. That is, in effect, what Christ has said here. The disciples were probably thinking that there is a time to be practical and that time is when you are hungry and have no food. But that is not what Jesus was saying. Notice that He said, **“You men of little faith.”** This is the fourth time this expression has been used by Christ in the Gospel of Matthew. It does not indicate a total lack of faith, but rather an unwillingness to take the next step in faith and trust Christ in this circumstance.

That is how we grow. We trusted Him before, but now we are more mature in our faith. We grow by taking steps and trusting Him in new situations. There is an important connection here that I do not want you to miss. The disciples’ focus on physical things keeps them from having spiritual perception and understanding in this situation. It is a blinding thing when we fail to trust Him.

## 6. **“You men of little faith.”**

I want to review the four uses of this expression: **“You men of little faith.”** The context in which it is used is important.

The first use is in Matthew 6: **“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’”** (vs. 30,31). The context is a failure to trust Christ in the context of what we eat, drink or wear, the context of physical needs. When faith breaks down in this context, it indicates that we are men of little faith.

The second occasion is recorded in Matthew 8 as Jesus and His disciples were in a boat and a storm came up on the sea. They were in danger of being overwhelmed by the storm, so they awakened Him saying, **“Save us, Lord; we are perishing!”** (v. 25). There is a definite element of faith as they turned to the Lord and believed He could save them. But this was only a small amount of faith because they should have had the total confidence that He had all things under control even when He was sleeping. But they could not trust Him in the midst of the violence of a storm. He arose and said to them, **“Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?”** (v. 26).

The third occurrence is in Matthew 14 when Peter got out of the boat to walk to Christ on the water. **“But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’”** (vv. 30-31). The context again is regarding physical needs.

In each of these situations, the concern is for physical things. In Matthew 6 it was food, drink and clothes. In Matthew 8 and 14 it was physical storms. In Matthew 16 the need again is for physical provision. In each of these incidents there is rebuke for a lack of faith and it is in the context of being unwilling to trust Christ in the midst of physical needs. That is where a believer’s faith is to grow. If I do not learn to trust Him with all the physical circumstances that surround me, whether it is physical needs for food, drink and clothing or whether it is in the midst of a particular personal storm that seems to overwhelm me, I will not grow in my faith. If I begin to doubt and think I am not going to make it or that He is not going to come through, it simply indicates that I have little faith. The areas of physical need are the basic areas.

## 7. Jesus Reminds the Disciples of His Provision

Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 16 that the breakdown often occurs in the area of the physical. He notes that they have failed to remember what He has already done. His reminder is in Matthew 16:9,10: **“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?”** The disciples had seen Christ take five loaves and two small fish and feed five thousand men plus the women and children in Matthew 14 and still have twelve baskets left over. They had also seen Jesus take seven loaves and some small fish and feed four thousand men plus women and children in Matthew 15 and still have seven large hamper-sized baskets left over. Did they not remember that? Of course they remembered, but they did not understand.

The point Christ had been trying to teach them was not just that on one occasion he could feed five thousand men plus women and children and on another occasion He could feed four thousand men plus women and children. The spiritual lesson He wanted them to learn was that He is adequate for every circumstance. But they missed it.

Think back to what was happening. When Jesus fed five thousand men plus the women and children, that would have been at least ten or twelve thousand people. Then He fed the four thousand men plus the women and children, that would be another seven to ten thousand people fed. Do you know how many men there were on this occasion in Matthew 16? Just thirteen! Did the disciples think that the One who fed thousands on at least two different occasions could not feed the thirteen at this time? This is a major failure. The problem before them was not seventy thousand people to feed. If that had been the case, their faith would really have needed to be stretched. But in this situation there were only thirteen to feed.

Do you see what happens when we fail to learn the spiritual lessons from the trials we go through? Surely the God who fed thousands could feed a dozen hungry men. That should not be a big deal, should it? It really is not even worth discussing. But on this occasion, none of the disciples piped up saying, *“It doesn’t matter that we forgot to take bread, because Christ is with us and He will take care of us.”* They seemed to have forgotten that He had taken care of them in every situation.

We as believers often fail to remember in the same way. That is why this lesson is repeated here for our benefit, because that is exactly what we go through. We are all well fed and clothed. The Lord has met our needs. No matter what storms you have come through, you are now through them. Has Christ been faithful? Has He demonstrated that He is adequate? God has blessed us above what we could have dreamed and provided far beyond what we could have imagined. Has He ever failed to come through?

The same things that happen to believers personally also happen to believers as a body. As the church faces new challenges we sometimes think the circumstances have changed. We see the church body as a little older and the conditions as a little different. We see that jobs are scarce or that the economy is tight. We think that it was one thing to have had financial needs ten years ago because there were ways to get around it, but it is quite another thing to have financial needs today! We also conclude that if we had a physical problem fifteen years ago, it is quite another thing to have a physical problem today. But what has changed?

Some of the details may have changed, but has the adequacy of Jesus Christ changed? Has His sufficiency in every circumstance changed? Unfortunately, we often fail to learn the lesson we should have learned. We praise Him and rejoice that He met our past needs. We thank Him for the way He strengthened us and brought us through those difficulties. But when we confront another situation, we seem to forget. We can almost hear the Lord saying, *“Don’t you remember about the previous situation?”* “Yes,” we reply, *“but Lord, it is different now.”* “Yes,” He says, *“this is different, but I am not.”*

Christ wanted to convey to the disciples the truth of His sufficiency in every situation.

When we have learned that Christ is sufficient, then we don’t need to worry about the situation, the economy or the physical changes. We have learned the lesson and know that He is totally trustworthy, so we need not be worried. These disciples are in a different location with a different group of people, but they have the same Lord. So what is the problem?

It is important to see how the disciples have become blinded by the physical situation to the spiritual truths Christ is emphasizing. He continues in Matthew 16:11 to summarize the problem: **“How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”** Christ was not speaking to them about bread. He is the One who is sufficient for every need. But this word of warning he gave was about spiritual conditions.

## 8. The Disciples Learn the Lesson

Christ has not said anything different. He has not given them an explanation of leaven. But He has reminded them to get their eyes off the physical things and on Him. Matthew 16:12 suddenly reports, **“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 is amazing that He simply repeated what He had already said. He never did explain that as though it were difficult to understand, but when He told them to quit thinking about the physical things and trust Him, all of a sudden it became clear. Nothing had changed except He had reminded them of His sufficiency. They learned that His adequacy applied to every situation. Then all of a sudden they could see the spiritual truth that He was teaching them.

We need to remember that as well. We get so blinded and caught up in what we see around us and the pressure pushes in so that we miss the spiritual truth God is conveying to us. In fact, many people get themselves into trouble in those very situations because they begin to grope, blinded by the physical circumstances, so that they open themselves up to all kinds of wrong doctrine. This is the point Jesus is teaching here. They are to avoid wrong teaching, and they can do that by trusting Him with all their physical needs. How many people under physical pressures of one kind or another have turned to wrong doctrine?

There are two strong applications from this section. It is not quite as easily understood in English, but the grammatical construction of the Greek joins the Pharisees and Sadducees together as one group. It has been noted that they are doctrinally at opposite ends of the theological spectrum. They are bitter opponents, but from Christ's perspective, they are one group. This is because they have one common characteristic—they are opposed to Him and His Word. Even the conservative Pharisees, who prided themselves in adhering to the Old Testament and their traditions by which they invalidated the Old Testament, are lumped together as being the same kind of people as the Sadducees, because what characterizes both groups is their opposition and resistance to Christ.

The second application is that it does not matter what kind of unbelieving doctrine is at hand, God lumps them all together. How do they relate to His Son and to His Word?

## 9. Christ's Analogy of Leaven

The analogy of leaven is used in Christ's teaching. The outstanding characteristic of leaven is its permeating and pervading quality. You cannot put leaven in a small part of the dough and expect it to stay there. Given time, it will spread through the whole lump. So Jesus is warning the disciples that the false doctrines of the Pharisees and Sadducees are to be avoided because they will permeate and spread. He is telling the disciples that they must trust Him with all of their physical needs and be on guard for false teaching. Isn't that simple?

We sometimes tell the Lord that we have a lot of physical things to be concerned about. When we tell Him that, I wonder if He reminds us that we are men of little faith. We sometimes feel that if we do not worry about something, who will? Well, surely someone will!

Taking our eyes off the physical simplifies life. It enables us to trust Him. Then we can be alert for twisted and perverted teaching. We should not expose ourselves to it because it is like leaven and begins to influence us in subtle and imperceptible ways and spreads through us.

That is the danger of false teaching. You cannot expose yourself to it without being affected by it. That is why Jesus uses the analogy of leaven. Some people find themselves in an unbelieving group, which is called a church, wanting to be a testimony and spread the Word of God there. But false teaching is like leaven which pervades and influences in subtle ways that are often not even realized. God's way is always right. We do not need to sit down and try to come up

with alternatives. We cannot introduce a little bit of leaven by exposing ourselves to false teaching without being influenced by it.

## 10. Believers Need the Pure Teaching of the Word

There are a few passages of warning along this line. Peter speaks of our growth as believers, **“like newborn babies, long (have an intense desire) for the pure (unadulterated) milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation”** (1 Pet. 2:2). God’s pattern for growth is exposure to the pure, unmixed Word of God. So the Devil takes the Scripture and has someone include it with twisted teachings of error. Some Christians think that if a teacher uses the Bible and quotes some Scripture, he must be preaching the truth. But when the truth of the Word of God is mixed with error, it does not nourish. That is the point Jesus is making here.

Peter also wrote in his second epistle, **“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves”** (2 Pet. 2:1). The Devil introduces false teaching and false doctrine subtly like leaven and then allows it to spread.

Jude wrote in his epistle: **“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ”** (Jude 3,4). False teachers sneak in unnoticed. False teaching is subtle in that its influence permeates, spreads and corrupts. I believe that is one of the major reasons why the Christianity of the United States makes no more impact than it does. It is a corrupted form of Christianity, not true to the purity of the Word of God. It is a compromised Christianity, and the power of the Word of God is nullified when it is mixed with error. Yet we have failed to learn the lesson that Christ impressed upon His disciples in Matthew 16.

Christ spoke to the churches in Revelation 2. He addressed the church at Pergamum saying: **“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans”** (Rev. 2:14,15) His instruction to them in Revelation 2:16 was **“repent.”** It was essential that there be a change.

Christ continued addressing the churches by writing to Thyatira in Revelation 2:20: **“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”** Christ rebuked the church because they tolerated false teaching and false teachers.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: **“I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me. For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ”** (2 Cor. 11:1-3). The danger was in their opening themselves up to false teachers and false doctrine. Paul says that false teaching will begin to lead believers away from the purity and simplicity of devotion to Christ.

He continues in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 to talk about how Satan works in disguising himself as an angel of light. So do his servants. They come claiming to have the truth, but they come with a corrupted message.

As believers, we also must beware of the leaven of the “Pharisees and the Sadducees” of our day. It does not matter what spectrum the false teachers are in—the left or the right—corrupt teachers and false doctrine are to be avoided at all costs.

The lesson Christ has been teaching is twofold. He has made an application of a previous lesson He had taught the disciples. We must trust Him with all the physical circumstances of our lives. We must learn that He is adequate for every situation. If we can learn to trust Him with the physical circumstances, then we can trust Him with spiritual matters as well.



The second lesson He is teaching is that we must be careful that the teaching we are exposed to is true to the Word of God. It must honor the person and work of Jesus Christ so God can use that teaching to nourish us and bring us to maturity in our relationship with Him.