

“Beware of the Leaven”  
Mark 8:15  
(Preached at Trinity, June 29, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last time as we entered **Chapter 8** we once again found Jesus surrounded by a crowd of people. In **Verse 1** Mark describes them as a great multitude. In **Verse 9** Mark records that the number as about 4000.
2. The scene has much in common with the feeding of the 5000 in **Chapter 6**. Jesus miraculously by His power takes 7 loaves and a few fish and feeds them all with 7 baskets full remaining.
3. In **Verse 11** Mark records yet another confrontation with the Pharisees:  
**Mark 8:11** – “And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.”
4. After rebuking the Pharisees Jesus returned to the boat with His disciples and began their journey to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As they were departing Jesus warned His disciples:  
**Mark 8:15** – “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”
5. Last week I addressed the spiritual slumber of the disciples. They demonstrated complete spiritual dullness.
  - A. First, they had completely forgotten that Jesus fed 5000 people with only five loaves and two fish.  
**Mark 8:4** – “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?”
  - B. Then they were concerned over the fact they had forgotten to bring bread in preparation for their trip. They only had a single loaf.  
Look at **Verses 14-16**  
Do you see the foolishness of their conclusion. If Jesus had fed 5000 with five loaves and 4000 with seven loaves, could Jesus not feed 12 with one loaf of bread?
  - C. They completely missed what Jesus was teaching about the leaven.
6. Tonight I want to set this subject before you. Leaven has the particular characteristic of beginning small but it expands quickly affects whole. A pinch is all that is necessary to leaven a whole loaf of bread. Because of this quality of leaven Jesus often used it as an example in His teaching.
7. Sometimes He used it in a positive sense to describe the nature of His Kingdom which though it had a small beginning, it would grow and fill the earth.  
**Matthew 13:33** – “He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened.”

- a. Jesus taught that before He returns the Gospel will have been preached across the entire earth.  
**Matthew 24:14** – “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.”
- b. God’s Word will continue to grow mightily
8. Most often, however, leaven carries a negative connotation in the Bible.
- A. It is often used to describe the corrupting nature of sin.  
**1 Corinthians 5:6-8** – “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*? <sup>7</sup> Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”
1. Paul was making reference to the observance of the Passover meal. It was essential that they remove every single speck of leaven from their home.
  2. This was symbolic of the purity they were to maintain. They had to sweep their houses clean so that no leaven remained as a sign they were God’s holy people.  
**Exodus 12:19** – “Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* an alien or a native of the land.”
- B. Leaven in Scripture is also used to describe the corrupting nature of false doctrine.  
**Galatians 5:7-9** – “You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup> This persuasion *did not come* from Him who calls you. <sup>9</sup> A little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*.”
9. We must never underestimate the power of little things. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.  
A single candle flame is said to have caused the great Chicago fire.  
The splitting of a single atom can cause a chain reaction capable of destroying an entire city.  
Benjamin Franklin – “For the want of a nail the shoe was lost; for the want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost; and for want of a rider the battle was lost.
10. This is why a church must carefully guard against corrupting influences. This is why church discipline is essential. To allow sin to run unchecked in a church will destroy it.  
J.L. Dagg – “When discipline leaves a church Christ is soon to follow.”
11. Tonight I want to direct your attention to the two chief areas of danger and why it is so important for us to zealously maintain purity.  
Jesus says here, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”
- A. Remember, the Pharisees were guilty of substituting the law of God for their own traditions.
  - B. And don’t forget the wickedness of Herod who married his brother’s wife and then had John the Baptist beheaded at her request.
  - C. In other words:  
Beware of the doctrinal corruption of the Pharisees.  
Beware of the moral corruption of Herod.

- I. We must understand the importance of maintaining moral purity for both ourselves and the church – God commands us to be holy, separate, distinct – we are to flee all evil.  
<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 1:15** – “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,”
- A. Sin allowed to continue in the church will quickly affect the whole  
 Remember, the Bible gives specific sins that are particularly detrimental to the church and should never be allowed to go unchecked
1. Sin has the effect of lowering the church’s standard of holiness  
**1 Corinthians 15:33** – “Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.”
    - a. When you sin you demonstrate that you have been deceived into believing that God has a different standard for you
    - b. When your sin goes unchecked in the church others might also buy into your false standard
    - c. We tend to become like the people we surround ourselves with
  2. Sin has the effect of hardening our hearts and numbing our consciences so that we become insensitive to the sin. It seems normal
  3. We should always ask ourselves if there is sin in our church.  
 We must remember the Church of Laodicea – they were absolutely blind to their corrupting sin.  
**Revelation 3:16-17** – “So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> ‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”
- B. Sin will have other effects upon our church
1. The witness of our church will be weakened
    - a. Our best witness is our high standard of holiness
    - b. Why should the world take notice of a group of people just like them?
  2. The ministry of the Holy Spirit within our church will be hindered  
**Ephesians 4:29-30** – “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”
    - a. The preaching will cease going forth with power
    - b. The distribution of the gifts will be weakened
    - c. Our worship will become meaningless because the Holy Spirit will not be here  
**John 4:24** – “God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.”
    - d. Every pastor must understand the importance of both his life and his doctrine.  
**1 Timothy 4:16** – “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

So, what about the importance of doctrine?

- II. We must understand the importance of maintaining doctrinal purity for both ourselves and the church
- A. False doctrine left unchecked will infect the whole church
1. Remember, false teachers can be very convincing – and very dangerous  
**Matthew 7:15** – “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”  
**2 Corinthians 11:13** – “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”  
**Ephesians 4:14** – “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;”
  2. Paul warned Timothy that false doctrine can spread like a cancer  
**2 Timothy 2:16** – “But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, <sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,”
    - a. Gangrene is a disease by which any part of the body suffering from infection becomes so corrupted that, unless an immediate remedy is applied (often amputation), the infection spreads, attacks other parts, and at last eats away the bones”
    - b. Just like a disease false doctrine can begin small but will soon grow and weaken the body – it can be gradual  
 Melanoma can begin with a freckle  
 West Nile Virus begins with the tiny prick of a mosquito
  3. The results of error may endure for years – Healing can be a slow process. This is why it is so difficult to reform a church. Long after the false teachers have been removed it is difficult work to cleanse the minds of the membership of the errors that they have embraced.
- B. There is one more type of leaven that can enter a church – the leaven of division. This is a combination of both moral and doctrinal corruption
1. A person who causes division and dissension can bring great harm to the church
  2. They tend to think only of themselves - Their ideas – Their feelings
  3. Satan is very cunning – he has destroyed churches using just one or two  
 Discord must be dealt with swiftly  
**Romans 16:17** – “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. <sup>18</sup> For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”  
**Titus 3:10-11** – “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, <sup>11</sup> knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”

- C. We must remove the source of corruption in our lives, in our church – nothing should be considered too precious
- Matthew 18:8-9** - “And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. <sup>9</sup> “And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell.”

Conclusion:

1. So what is the chief reason we must guard against the leaven of corruption in our church and in our personal lives?  
It will affect our relationship with Christ.
2. We desire our doctrines to be pure because they point to Christ.  
We desire our lives to be pure because we desire to be conformed to the beauty of Christ
3. May God grant us to be radical in sweeping our lives clean of every speck of the leaven of corruption.