



Matthew 16:1-12

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING: AVOIDING DECEPTION

“Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” Let us mark well what those words contain. To whom was this warning addressed? To the twelve apostles—to the first ministers of the Church of Christ—to men who had forsaken all for the Gospel’s sake! Even they are warned! The best of men are only men, and at any time may fall into temptation. “Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.” If we love life, and would see good days, let us never think that we do not need that hint, “take heed, and beware.” Against what does our Lord warn His apostles? Against the “doctrine” of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. The Pharisees...were self-righteous formalists. The Sadducees were skeptics, freethinkers, and half infidels... The Great Physician knew well that Pharisee-doctrines and Sadducee-doctrines would prove the two great wasting diseases of His Church, until the end of the world. He would have us know that there will always be Pharisees and Sadducees in the ranks of Christians. Their succession shall never fail. Their generation shall never become extinct. Their name may change, but their spirit will always remain. Therefore, He cries to us, “take heed and beware!”
—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

The Messiah has come. The kingdom has been offered. The nation has rejected it. Thus, beginning in Matthew 13, there is a shift in Jesus’ teaching and in His ministry. Though Jesus will continue to minister to the multitudes, His focus is now on training His disciples.

Jesus has taught His disciples several key truths in Matthew 14-15:

1. We live in an immoral world.
2. We face an impossible task.
3. We have an omnipotent Savior.
4. We can easily be side-tracked by popular movements.
5. We will encounter fear-producing storms in life.
6. We can walk on water if we keep our eyes on Jesus.
7. We must beware of the dangers of religious legalism.
8. We must always see the absolute centrality of the heart.
9. We must confront our prejudices in order to love like Jesus.

In 16:1-12, Jesus trains His disciples with another key truth: *Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.*

WHO WERE THE PHARISEES & THE SADDUCEES?

Pharisees

Separate!

Sadducees

Cooperate!

*Ever since the Romans arrived on the scene in 64BC, the Jewish people were divided over how to respond to their rule. The **Zealots**, an ultra-nationalistic group, proclaimed revolution to be God’s solution. The **Essenes** withdrew, waiting anxiously for the Messiah to lead a violent overthrow of the Romans. The **Sadducees** practiced cooperation since it was Rome who kept them securely in their position over the temple and over the people. The **Pharisees**, condemning Rome’s pagan excesses, viewed the foreign oppressors as God’s hand punishing his people for their unfaithfulness to Torah.*

—Ray Vander Laan

Pharisees. From Hebrew, *paras*, “to separate.” They believed in angels, miracles, and the afterlife. They strictly obeyed the law and added to it their oral tradition.

Sadducees. Wealthy elitists who were part of the priestly ruling class. They denied angels, miracles, and the afterlife. They only accepted the five books of Moses.

WHAT IS THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES & THE SADDUCEES?

Jesus warned His disciples about the “leaven” or the “doctrine” of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What they taught and how they lived would be a potential danger for Jesus’ disciples throughout history.

- To be religious but remain _____.
- To know many things but be _____ of the truth.
- To seek after signs or spiritual experiences, to practice religious rules and rituals, to know Scripture, to be politically and socially active but still have a heart _____ to Jesus Christ.

HOW SHOULD JESUS’ DISCIPLES RESPOND?

Jesus and the disciples get in a boat and cross the Sea of Galilee. On the way, the disciples realize that they have not brought enough bread (cf. Mark 8:14). Jesus’ warning about leaven initially goes over their heads.

- Be _____ to the pervasiveness of deception.
- Be _____ of your own weaknesses.
- Be _____ to discern truth from error.
- Be _____ in your relationship to Jesus Christ.
- Be _____ in your local church and in your relationships with other believers.

These great politico-religious parties (Pharisees and Sadducees) had immense influence. The disciples had been reared to respect them, and so Jesus takes occasion to give a warning against their teachings and influence.

—John A. Broadus (1827-95)

"Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning." From many years of observation men learned that a red sky in the evening is usually followed by good weather, whereas a red sky in the morning is often followed by a storm.

—John MacArthur, Jr.

It is involved and declared in the very word ["sign"] that the prime object and end of the miracle is to lead us to something out of and beyond itself: that, so to speak, it is a kind of finger-post of God.

—Richard C. Trench (1807-86)

Spiritual adultery is the forsaking of God's love and the embracing of the world's values and desires. It includes any form of idolatry.

—gotquestions.org

Hyper-conservatism and hyper-liberalism in religion and politics share the common features of dogmatism and judgmentalism and remain an insidious threat to the true church of Jesus Christ.

—Craig A. Blomberg

False doctrine; which is fitly called leaven, because it sours, swells, spreads, corrupts the whole lump, and all this secretly [1 Cor. 5:6].

—John Trapp (1601-69)

Biblical orthodoxy without compassion is surely the ugliest thing in the world. —Francis Schaeffer