

## THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

Matthew 13:33

### I. INTRODUCTION

A. Many people who look at the visible Christian Church say, “Where is the power and dynamic the Christian Church is supposed to display? Why is the church so cold and lifeless? Why is it that Christians talk about supernaturalism but live as naturalists? The Twentieth Century Church claims to be theistic but often act like athiests because they are not trusting the sovereign, loving God they claim to follow.”

B. The Parable of the Leaven gives us an explanation as to the low spiritual condition of the visible church in our day. Please remember that the interpretation of this parable comes from my own understanding, but I cannot be absolutely dogmatic that my understanding is correct because the Lord does not give us an interpretation to this parable.

C. By way of review, let us remember that our Lord is setting forth some truths about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. There is a mysterious working of the kingdom in this present age with the King and His earthly kingdom absent. The Parable of the Leaven is designed to teach something about the development of the kingdom between the first and second advents of Christ.

### II. THE PARABLE 13:33

### III. THE INTERPRETATION

A. Intro: This parable tells us about a woman who pulls off a sneaky trick; she does something that is not right. She puts leaven into three measures of meal. Now this may not mean much to you and me but it would have great meaning to a Jew, for he would relate this incident to his Jewish background and tradition.

B. The meal:

1. A Jew would probably make a connection of the three measures of meal with something in his religion. The crowd of Jews to whom Christ was giving this parable would probably connect it up with the meal offering. The meal offering in the Old Testament consisted of three measures of meal, precisely prescribed to be unleavened. That is, the meal was not to have any yeast in it at all. The meal offering spoke of God’s fellowship with the people.

2. Three measures of meal is very common in the Old Testament. First, the Jew would probably think back to Genesis 18 where three measures of meal is first mentioned in the Bible. Abraham was in his tent by the Oaks of Mamre one day, and he looked out the door and saw three strangers approaching. He went to meet them and offered them hospitality. He welcomed them and offered them three measures of meal baked into bread which Sarah had made. During their conversation, it suddenly dawned on Abraham that God himself was visiting him, accompanied by two angels. Second, in the Book of Judges, Gideon was confronted with the Angel of God, and he brought the angel an offering of three

measures of meal. Third, when Hannah, the mother of Samuel, went to worship God in the temple she took with her an offering of three measures of unleavened meal.

3. The symbol of the three measures of meal speaks of their fellowship of God with His people and their fellowship one with another. It is a picture of the people of God sharing the life and fellowship of God. NOTE: This principle of sharing the life of God with one another is true of the church (I Cor. 1:9; I John 1:3). It is God's will that Christians should love one another, accept one another, bear one another's burdens, uphold one another and share together the life of Christ. NOTE: The early church had "all things in common" and the word "common" means "fellowship." They had oneness and communion in the Body of Christ. We have lost much of this spirit in the church because leaven has entered into the church.

***I Cor. 1:9: God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

***I John 1:3: What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.***

C. The Leaven

1. The Jew would quickly recognize the meaning of leaven. Leaven is used 98 times in the Bible and only in two references does it refer to anything good. In almost every case it refers to something evil or bad (Exodus 7:14, 15). NOTE: Leaven (yeast) permeates the meal and causes the meal or bread to swell, to puff up and destroys the original purpose for the meal. Leavened bread also is more quick to go stale than unleavened bread, so we can also see that leaven has a disrupting and corrupting influence.

2. Everyone in this crowd of Jews knew that the woman had no business putting leaven into these three measures of meal because the leaven would mess up the meal. NOTE: Symbolically the leaven or evil permeates the meal which speaks of the fellowship of God with his people and His people's fellowship with one another. Evil corrupts, breaks up and destroys the fellowship of true believers.

D. The Woman

1. In the Bible a woman is often used to symbolize religious authority and this is especially true in the New Testament (Rev. 2:20; Rev. 17:3-5). This woman may symbolize a false religious system. In our present stage of the kingdom, this refers to the false, professing church which is not genuinely Christian. The false church uses the title "Christian" but it is really anti-Christian.

***Rev. 2:20: But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches the leads my bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.***

***Rev. 17:3-5: And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."***

2. This woman is doing something that is sneaky or crafty. She is hiding leaven in the meal, which just was not done by a Jew. Symbolically we might say the woman is trying to destroy God's fellowship with His people and God's people with one another. NOTE: The professing church is constantly sowing evil into the true church with a view of destroying the fellowship of God's people with one another. The false church is trying to destroy the true church and will use any and every means to accomplish this end. NOTE: As we go on down towards the end of this age, the conflict between the true and the false church will grow more intense and at the end time the false church will predominate over the true church (II Thess. 2:3-10).

***II Thess. 2:3-10: Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all deception of wickedness for those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.***

#### IV. THE EVIL OF LEAVEN

A. Introduction: The false church will use the evil of leaven to permeate, corrupt and destroy the true church. Leaven in the New Testament is used symbolically five times and it is through these five methods that the false church is seeking to do away with the true church.

B. The Leaven of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:): Luke tells us that this leaven is hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). Hypocrisy is pretending to be something we are not. A hypocrite is a phony who has the external veneer of religiosity but internally his life is filled with rottenness. Hypocrisy is putting on a mask but inwardly we have the same old bitter moods and critical attitudes. The Pharisees had religion down pat - they prayed, they read scripture, they did good deeds but these things were done mechanically with no heart for the living God. Their hearts were filled with bitterness, anger, hatred, lust and fear but they kept up the outward appearance of being religious. NOTE: Phariseeism leads to formalism, ritualism and a critical spirit. It produces an air of formality without having a heart for the One, true and living God. Phariseeism produces cold and hard Christians. NOTE: The false church is constantly influencing the true church towards a Pharisaical spirit. The false church says that being good, going to church, giving money and doing kind deeds is real Christianity and men become very proud of their religious feats. NOTE: The false church stresses church power which includes mammoth church

buildings and massive church organization. There is much ritual to lull men to sleep but there is no reality of Christ. The false church tells the true church to be satisfied with nominalism and not to go overboard on Christian commitment. NOTE: God intended His church to be real, honest, open, warm, friendly and vital with real love and concern among the members, but the false church says that Christianity is formalism and ritualism, which is destructive of the real thing.

***Matthew 16:6: And Jesus said to them, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”***

***Luke 12:1: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”***

C. The Leaven of the Sadducees (Matthew 16:6): The Sadducees were the religious rationalists in Judaism. Sadduceeism is the idea that life consists of only what you can experience with your five senses - touch, smell, sight, feeling and taste. They claim there is nothing beyond the natural realm. There is no supernatural activity of God - no creation, no resurrection, no angels and no life beyond the grave. NOTE: The false church propagates a philosophy that says the supernatural is a lie and this was the lie of Satan from the beginning. The false church is filled with the Sadducee spirit and it is constantly hurling a barrage of atheistic missiles against the true church. Rationalism always destroys true Christian fellowship.

***Matthew 16:6: Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.***

D. The Leaven of the Herodians (Mark 8:15): The Herodians were followers of King Herod and their leaven is materialism. A Herodian believes the most important value in life is to be powerful and wealthy. Acquiring material things is the secret to a happy life. To them, the possession of things makes life worth living. NOTE: The false church says a man can pursue power and wealth as the ultimate goal of life and still be a good churchman. A Herodian says that Christ does not have to be put before money. NOTE: It is true that a man can be a Christian and be rich too but riches cannot be the consuming passion of his life. Christians must be careful not to succumb to materialistic pressures, for the Lord promised to take care of His children. NOTE: The spirit of materialism destroys the sweet fellowship of Christians because men are too busy “making a buck” to fellowship.

***Mark 8:15: And He was giving orders to them, saying, “Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”***

E. The Leaven of the Corinthians (I Cor. 5:1, 5, 6): In I Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul cites the case of a man who was actually living in incest with his father’s wife. Paul says that this sexual immorality is leaven within the church. NOTE: Sexual immorality is destructive to one’s own body and to the Body of Christ. Sexual immorality is running rampant among our young people. Yet, any honest, knowledgeable psychologist can tell you that sex practiced outside of marriage is the most harmful and dangerous way to wreck and ruin a relationship. People in sexual sin are not in fellowship with Christ or with other Christians, for sexual immorality is destructive to real, vital and living fellowship among Christians. NOTE: The false church constantly bombards our Christian young people with the new morality, telling them that there can be meaningful sexual relationships outside of marriage. The worse thing the true church can do is to put its stamp of approval on all this sexual looseness and perversion in our day. We must not

listen to the false church which says you can have repeated sexual experiences outside of marriage and be a Christian too. Not so, God has called His people to holiness of life (I Thess. 4:3, 7).

***I Cor. 5:1, 5, 6: It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife . . . Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 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.***

***I Thess. 4:3, 7: For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality . . . For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.***

F. The Leaven of the Galatians (Gal. 5:9): The leaven of the Galatians is legalism. Legalism is a spirit that makes a person live by the Mosaic Law rather than by the grace of God and the law of Christ. It also involves making a long list of manmade taboos and making people adhere to them. Legalism places people under rules and regulations and expects men to keep them by their own efforts. Christ has come to set us free from legalism. Every effort to obey a rule and thus satisfy God even with internal obedience, let alone external, is doomed to failure before it begins if we are depending upon ourselves for the necessary power. NOTE: Legalism always results in a critical spirit on the part of those forcing it on others and a rebellious spirit by those who are being forced. NOTE: The false church tries to cram down the throats of the true church a legalistic spirit so as to make men think that keeping external laws by the flesh is real Christianity. NOTE: Legalism kills the spirit of Christ and breaks and destroys true Christian fellowship.

***Gal. 5:9: A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.***

G. Conclusion: The Parable of the Leaven is a warning to us not to let the leaven of evil disrupt and corrupt the sweet fellowship of God's people. Hypocrisy, rationalism, materialism, libertineism, and legalism are to be kept out of the true church, and the true church is to fight these evils with all her might.

## V. CONCLUSION

A. Do you have a true picture of Christ? Do you see that Christ came to die for sinners and to give men eternal life? Do you understand that Christ can radically change your life and give you new desires in God?

B. Salvation is a free gift. The moment you believe in Christ you will be saved by God. The Bible solemnly declares, "For by grace are ye saved through faith." God grants the grace to believe and you must believe in Christ if you are to have your sins forgiven and be granted eternal life.