

CAUTION AGAINST FORMALITY AND INDIFFERENCE

Matthew 16:6-12

Introduction: Every object around us is capable of giving us much important instruction. Our Lord took occasion from all the common affairs of life and all the things that presented themselves to His view, to lead His disciples to the contemplation of heavenly things. It happened that the disciples had not taken enough to eat with them and consequently they would have to get some food on the other side of the lake.

In reference to this circumstance Jesus bade them beware of a certain kind of leaven. They, not knowing His meaning, supposed that His words were to be taken in literal sense. However our Lord, bringing to their remembrance the miraculous supplies of bread which He had recently given them, showed that His caution had a "spiritual" import, and that it referred, not to physical bread, but to certain doctrines of which they were to be beware of.

I. WHAT JESUS WAS CAUTIONING THEM ABOUT

1. Jesus was cautioning the disciples against a formal, hypocritical religion.

The Pharisees laid a very great stress on forms and multiplied them, not only beyond what the law of Moses prescribed, but even to the subversion of moral duties (*Mark 7:8-13*). At the same time they were extremely negligent in matters of more importance, (*Matthew 23:23*). Amidst their high professions of religion, they sought only the applause of men (*Matthew 23:5-7*), and their own temporal advantage (*Matthew 5:14, 25*). With respect to real piety, they were not only destitute of it, but adverse to it in the highest degree (*Matthew 23:13; 31*). Some few among them indeed were more upright, but in general they were proud, worldly, hypocritical. (*Matthew 23:25-28*).

- So, what is the religion of the generality among ourselves? Do not the greater part of those who appear to respect religion, rest in some outward observances?

- They attend the public worship some, they read the scriptures, occasionally, and say their prayers, some times, but their hearts are glued to the world and they are more anxious to be thought religious than to actually be so, and to gain the applause of others than to secure the honor that comes of God.

- Whether such a condition can be acceptable to God - what do you think?

2. Jesus was cautioning the disciples against the indifference about all religions.

The Sadducees were the "free-thinkers" of their day. They denied the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul (*Acts 23:8*) and formed their notions of religion without any just regard to the scriptures. Whatever was contrary to their preconceived opinions, they ridiculed as enthusiasm. Their lives, as might be expected, were in perfect consistency with their sentiments.

-"Behold, in them, as in a mirror, the present generation." There are so many like this today. They have never searched the Scriptures for themselves, they are as confident of the truth of their sentiments as they could be. If they had labored ever so diligently to ascertain the mind of God. They make light of all serious religion and represent the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of a true Christian as symptoms of melancholy, and as the offspring of a heated imagination.

- Can we wonder that our Lord cautioned His disciples against such a state as this? Or can any of us be too much on our guard against such as this?

II. REASONS JESUS WAS CAUTIONING HIS DISCIPLES

1. Jesus was cautioning His disciples against such behavior because of their (our) proneness to the evils around them (us).
 - We need only notice the habits of all around us from youth to adulthood, from maturity to old age. We shall then see to what every person is by nature inclined. Some, indeed, are more inclined to the evils around than others, but all of us to a certain extent yield to some degree.
 - Where do we find those who are of themselves inclined to unreserved love? Who ever was by nature contrite? Who every by nature hatred all kinds of sin and delighted in the exercise of Godliness?
 - Is not this then a reason why the caution should be given? Surely, if all our natural instincts lead to one or other of the evils against which we are cautioned, it becomes us to be on our guard against them.
2. Jesus was cautioning His disciples against such behavior because of the evils themselves..
 - The nature of "leaven" is to ferment till it has pervaded and changed the whole mass into which it was put. Well may these errors be designated by such a name. We have seen already that the heart of man by nature is impregnated with dispositions adverse to true religion and how do these dispositions operate? Do they not blind our understanding, and pervert our will and sensualize our affections and cause every part of our conduct to misunderstand Godliness?
 - Look at the manner in which they operate on those who turn away from the truth. For a season they have felt the influence of a better "leaven," the grace of God, but being drawn aside by temptation they begin again to yield to their former corruption. How soon do they begin to lose all their spirituality of mind and become formal in their devotions, and indifferent, at least, if not adverse, to all which they had before esteemed and relished.
3. Jesus was cautioning His disciples against such behavior because of the ultimate effect.
 - What must be the issue of a life spent in pride or indifference is almost needless to suggest but surely every person's own reflection should make him/her careful how he/she admits such "leaven" into his/her soul or yields to its influence - for eternal happiness and eternal misery are too important to be trifled with. The very word ETERNITY is sufficient to make very person thoughtful and cautions.

III. THE WAY OUT OF SUCH THINGS

1. Doubtless it is the Spirit of God only that can apply the Word to our souls and therefore we must above all things implore His almighty aid, bit it may be useful to suggest some hints for the carrying into effect the caution in the text.
 - Get your soul deeply impressed with the principles of the Gospel.
 - The Gospel is "*..the rod of God's strength..*" wherewith He has wrought the most stupendous miracles and it is that which He delights to make effectual to our salvation. It declares to us our lost estate and proposes to us a Savior, who bought us with His blood.
 - Be careful whom you choose as your associates.
 - A person will, for the most part, do as his/her associates do. If they are formal and worldly, one can scarcely hope to escape the infection. "*...evil communications will corrupt good manners...*" (2 Corinthians 15:33), "*...a little leaven will leaven the whole lump...*" (Galatians 5:19). If on the other hand one's companions are living in the fear of God, one will be instructed by their conversation and edified by their example.

-Endeavor to realize the thoughts of the future judgment.

- In the last day every thing will appear in its proper colors. Vital Godliness will then no longer be seen through the medium of prejudice. Its light will shine out of obscurity. Then, too, the Sadducean scoffers and the Pharisaic formalists will find how awfully they have been deluded. **"...evil will no more be put for good, nor good for evil..."** but the quality of every person's actions will be determined and a suitable recompense will be given to him/her either in the joys of heaven or the miseries of Hell.

- Could we but keep alive in our hearts the expectation of that day, we should determine through grace, to think and act for ourselves. We should not follow a multitude to do evil, but should take a decided part in the cause of Christ. We should not participate. **"...the leaven of error or hypocrites..." (Luke 11:2), "...eat the unleavened bread of sincerity and trust..." (1 Corinthians 6:8).**

CONCLUSION:

1. Jesus pointed out to His disciples that all was not "well" that seemed "well" when He pointed to the very religious Sadducees and Pharisees. They weren't all that they wanted others to think that they were.
2. Christians need to be very careful who they "pattern" their life styles after.
3. The best example for a Christian is not another "Christian" but the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. Christian, remember that one day you will stand before God in judgment and you will be standing alone, so be careful how you live your life.

(A sermon preached by my father many years ago)