

Chapter XIII

The Flesh and the Spirit in the Church Age

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

The fourth parable in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew is about leaven. Our Lord was still speaking to the multitude when He said: *The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world* (Matthew 13:33-35).

Our Lord's statement, *The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven*, has been misinterpreted by some to be a good thing. They have represented the leaven to be the gospel. Postmillennialism holds the position that the whole world will be converted by the gospel, just as leaven causes a loaf of bread to rise, and then the Lord will come to His Kingdom.

This theory fails of sound interpretation in many respects, even though the gospel will be

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preached in all of the world before the coming of our Lord. First, leaven is never used in the Scriptures in a good, ethical sense. For example, Paul referred to the false gospel of the Judaizers as leaven. He wrote, *A little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump*; and after our Lord's feeding of the four thousand *when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisee and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees (Matthew 16:5-12, emphasis mine).* Further, in the account recorded in Mark's gospel, our Lord *charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15, emphasis mine).*

By putting these two accounts together it is easily seen that our Lord warned of three kinds of leaven: the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod. The leaven of the Pharisees was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1) born of legalism and self-righteousness; the leaven of the Sadducees was a denial of spiritual truth; and the leaven of Herod looked to establish the kingdom of God on earth by political means. The leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees is easier to recognize in the Scriptures than the leaven of Herod. Even so there is Scriptural and

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historical evidence to suggest that at least two members of the house of Herod (Herod the Great and Herod Agrippa I) believed themselves to be the Messiah; and even though it cannot be stated with absolute certainty, it is likely all of the Herods believed this of themselves. They were Idumaeen usurpers. Their authority to reign over the Jews was given to them by the Romans. Thus, contrary to God's promise to David and the curse placed upon Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24-30), they reigned where only Christ (because of His virgin birth) should reign.

The Pharisees were fundamentally sound in their beliefs. They believed in the authority of the Scriptures; they believed in heaven and in hell; they believed in a literal, physical resurrection from the dead, and many other fundamental truths from the Word of God; but they believed they could establish their righteousness before God by a system of Rabbinical interpretations of the law, which made the law of none effect. Thus they trusted in themselves that they were righteous:

And [our Lord] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14, emphasis mine)

While the Pharisees might be termed the *fundamentalists* of Judaism, the Sadducees could be called the *modernists*. They denied virtually everything the Pharisees believed. They did not believe in heaven or hell; nor in angels or spirits; and most certainly they did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. Even so, like the Pharisees, they trusted in themselves that they were

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righteous and could be compared today to the intellectuals under the canopy of Christianity.

The third form of leaven came from the Herodians, who believed that Herod was the Christ. This made them unpopular with the Pharisees and with most of the common people. Despite this, about fourteen years after the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as the Christ and crucified Him, the majority of the nation accepted the view of the Herodians and believed Herod Agrippa I to be their Messiah. The Roman emperor Claudius wrote extensively about his friend Herod Agrippa I in his history translated by Robert Graves and entitled by Graves, *Claudius the God*:

Let me first tell in what an exalted mood King Herod Agrippa came up from Jerusalem to Caesarea to the festival that had been prepared there in honour of my birthday....

He had already revealed himself, in secret, to the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, and they had all with one accord bowed themselves to the ground and glorified God and acknowledged him as the prophesied Messiah. (*Claudius the God*, Robert Graves, Random House, New York, 1935, renewed 1962, pages 315-316)

The apostle Luke, in Acts chapter twelve, also wrote about the occasion when Herod came to Caesarea: *And when Herod had sought for [Peter], and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode. And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the*

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ghost (Acts 12:19-23, emphasis mine).

After Herod was smitten of worms, it took him five days to die. This information is supplied to us by Claudius, who received a letter from Herod apologizing for his attempt to take over the eastern half of the Roman empire as the Messiah. Claudius wrote the following account:

The Jews put on sackcloth and lay in their tens of thousands prostrate on the ground about the Palace, even in the terrible heat. Agrippa saw them from the window of the upper room where his bed was laid and began to weep for them. "Poor Jews," he said, "You have waited a thousand years, and must now wait a thousand more, perhaps two thousand, before your day of glory breaks. This has been a false dawn. I deceived myself and I deceived you." (op. cit. pg. 320)

The second thing that prevents leaven from representing the gospel is that the world is not going to be wholly converted to Jesus Christ before Christ returns to establish His kingdom on the earth. In fact our Lord promised the revelation of the antichrist and the great tribulation (*the time of Jacob's trouble*) before His return:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because [the] iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor

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ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matthew 24:4-30, emphasis mine)

It is true that the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all of the world before the return of our Lord to this earth; but the inhabitants of this earth, for the most part, are not going to receive the gospel. Conditions will get worse and worse before the day of the Lord, when our Lord returns to establish His kingdom on this earth; and the day of the Lord, when He returns to the earth with all of His saints, will be a terrible day of judgment.

The third thing that prevents the leaven from being the gospel is the fact that it was a woman who took three measures of meal and hid leaven within the meal. This woman is out of place if the leaven represents the gospel, for women were never ordained of God to preach the gospel. In fact they are specifically commanded not to usurp authority over the man:

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (I Timothy 2:8-14. emphasis mine)

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Additionally, while there is a good deal of Scripture which speaks to the qualifications of those who are to oversee the church of God, there is not one word of qualifications for women for this same task:

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (I Timothy 3:1-7)

Our Lord's parable declared that the woman took three measures of meal and hid leaven in the meal. Since we have discovered three different types of leaven in Scripture -- the doctrine of the Pharisees, the doctrine of the Sadducees, and the doctrine of Herod -- it would seem that the three measures of meal is a reference to this fact.

The fourth thing about the leaven and the action of the woman that prevents it from representing the gospel is that the woman hid the leaven in meal; whereas the preaching of the gospel, by its very nature, is an overt, not a clandestine, operation. Our Lord said: *All power [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Matthew 28:18-20).

The fifth and final thing that prevents the leaven from representing the gospel is that the leaven was placed in three measures of meal. The meal is a product of the seed that was sown in

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the first two parables, so that the wheat has now been ground into meal. Thus it seems to represent an assembly of believers in Jesus Christ, which suffered for a while by its faithful ministry, but was then corrupted with false doctrine by a woman, perhaps the whore, Babylon the great, of the seventeenth chapter of the Revelation.

It is certainly true of the Roman church, which is the woman of the seventeenth chapter of the Revelation, that she has corrupted many under the canopy of Christianity. This ultimately produced the protestant reformation movement and a separation from her. Despite this, the ecumenical movement of these last days is causing a return to Rome of the churches that separated from her during the reformation movement. Perhaps these churches are the ten toes of Daniel two, or the ten horns of Revelation seventeen. Further there is no question that the Roman church is steeped in self-righteousness, the denial of spiritual truth, and has sought to rule over the kings of this earth.

Since the leaven is the false doctrine of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Herod, we can expect false doctrine to be preached in the body of Christ until the whole body has been affected by it. The apostle Paul spoke of the apostasy of the church in the eleventh chapter of the book of Romans; and in his letter to the Thessalonians, he taught that apostasy within the church would be one of the signs of the soon return of our Lord to this earth:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first [an apostasy], and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. (II Thessalonians 2:1-4, emphasis mine)

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In this parable about leaven, our Lord was teaching His disciples that in the realm of that which is called the kingdom of God (Christendom), before His return to this earth the so-called church of Jesus Christ will be permeated with false teaching of three different varieties: hypocrisy, born of self-righteousness by the adding of the commandments and doctrines of men into the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ; denial of spiritual truth, born of so-called scholarship which has replaced the clear teaching of the Word of God with the so-called wisdom of men; and finally the incorporation of civil law upon the inhabitants of this earth to make them subject to laws of *touch not, taste not and handle not*: to establish a moral society -- what they believe to be the kingdom of God upon this earth.

From what I have been observing in the flyers and papers I receive, this permeation of leaven has also included an attempt by man to preserve the environment to the exclusion of using the resources God has given us. There is a vast difference between the proper use of the resources of the earth and the maniacal declaration that virtually everything is on the endangered species list. Further I believe this explains the judgments that will come upon the earth during the great tribulation period when, in a moment of time, one-third of all sea life will perish, as will one-third of the trees and the vegetation of the earth. Rather than using (not abusing) the resources of this earth as God has commanded, man is bent on preserving them in denial of the Word of God. This is merely a reiteration of the truth, *Man by wisdom knows not God*.

Thus, in closing this chapter, I have one final thought on the statement, *till the whole was leavened*. This totally leavened condition cannot exist as long as there remains a testimony to the truth upon this earth; but when the Lord resurrects the true church out of this world, the whole

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of professing Christendom that remains will be leavened.