

Date : 10 August 2025
Theme : Servanthood in Mark's Gospel
Topic : God's Servants to beware of the hardness of heart.
Key passage : Mark 8
Key verse : ... Then He charged them, saying...Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.
Mark 8:15 nkjv

Introduction

The Lord warns against defilement in Mark 7, pinpointing this as a heart issue. He further examines what defilement does by introducing the *leaven of Pharisees* in Mark 8 to help us identify how defilement looks like in our behaviour.

... *leaven*... = yeast used in baking bread.

It speaks of

- Polluting effects of evil
- Permeating impact on many

...*take heed* =*watch out*... (root word *eidon*)

To be alert, think deeply (mind), be discerning.

Eidon, perceive, call attention to.

...*beware*... (root word *blepo*)

Be careful, intentional, understand, what is right / wrong.

The term *Pharisees* (= teachers of the law) is used metaphorically of self-righteousness and hypocritical conduct.

Jesus warns us, as His servants, to be very careful to recognise the *leaven* of hypocrisy which undermines sincere service to God.

1. What does the *leaven of the Pharisees* look like?

- Self-righteousness
 - full of truth, no grace.
 - superiority complex, always correcting others' mistakes.
 - tries to teach what they themselves have not experienced.
- Self-glory trying to impress.
 - faking things for show eg fasting
 - showing off their piety (make large phylacteries).
- Critical spirit
 - fault-finding
 - judgmental
- Vindictive
 - fond of casting out from the synagogues those with opposing views.
- Hypocritical
 - does not practise what they preach.
 - pretend to be what they are not.
 - not authentic.

- Focus on the trivial, miss the important example, tithing—dividing everything into 10 parts to set aside 1 part to God. (they even apply this to spices used in cooking)
- Supersede God's Word with men's tradition

2. When can hypocrisy also happen to us?

- a) Testing God by asking for signs instead of trusting His Word.
...The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test Him, they asked Him for a sign from heaven... Mark 8:11

- When is asking for a sign not testing?
 There are several instances of individuals asking God for a sign, example Gideon *Judges 6:36*, Ahaz *Isaiah 7:10-16*. These requests were for guidance rather than testing. They wanted to do God's will and they needed direction.

The Lord Jesus repeatedly performed signs to authenticate His claim to be Israel's Messiah *John 2:11*.

- When is it wrong to ask God for a sign?
 When the Word and testimonies are available. Despite all the miracles Jesus had done, the Pharisees still asked for a sign from heaven to trip Jesus. They had already chosen unbelief.

The attitude of the Pharisees was one of hostility, not humility and demanding further evidence to discredit rather than delighting to do the will of God.

- b) Disregarding the miraculous signs Jesus already performed.

Mark 2:5, 10 They had seen Jesus healed the paralytic and proclaimed His authority to forgive sins.

Mark 2:28 They had heard Jesus proclaimed His Lordship over the Sabbath.

Mark 3:5 In the synagogue, at close range, they had seen Jesus heal a man on the Sabbath.

Mark 6:44 They had heard that Jesus fed 5000 from a very small amount.

Mark 8:2 Jesus also fed 4000 from very little food because He had compassion for the masses.

- c) How does Jesus' respond when we test God out of unbelief? *Mark 8:12*
 On the Pharisees' unbelief, Jesus had sighed deeply; these were sighs of great disappointment and sorrow over their unbelief.
- It reveals how deeply He felt about our hardness of heart. He was grieved that even His own disciples showed signs of hardness of heart *Mark 8:17*
 - Jesus' walking away is the most terrifying pronouncement of all.

3. Why should Jesus' servants be warned of the consequences of unbelief?

The Pharisees taught in the synagogues and exerted great influence over people. Those who followed them would demand special signs from heaven, gradually increasing in unbelief and rejecting what Jesus taught.

- Did the disciples reckonise the danger of having hard hearts. *Mark 6:52, 8:17*
 - They were distracted with bread. *Mark 8:17*
 (instead of the spiritual issues of the heart)
 - Having eyes but not seeing (= understanding) how defilement and hardening of the heart develop. *Mark 8:18*
 Having ears but inability to hear spiritual truth.
 - They were concerned about the inadequacy of food but could not understand God's abundance and sufficiency through the two miracles of 5 / 7 loaves to feed 5,000 / 4,000, respectively. *Mark 8:19-21*
- Feeding of 5000, 4000
 Jesus did 2 mass feeding miracles to undercore the disciples' lack of understanding regarding:
 - God's provision of sufficiency and surplus.
 (But we must offer what we have to begin the process.)
 - His ability to multiply from the little they offered to Him.
 There was abundance from the 12 and 7 baskets of leftover.
 - His compassion on the hungry.
 He wanted His servants to perform beyond the ordinary just as He had done. ...*He has done all things well...* *Mark 7:37*

We are not to fit God's Word to suit man-made traditions nor allow our limited wealth or position determine the extent of our influence.

- Why did the Lord highlight the warning ...*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees...*? What lesson did the Lord try to impart through this warning?

It is about forewarning us of the serious consequences resulting from living a life of deceit that the leaven represents. The Lord finds obnoxious when His servants resort to deception under a cloak of fake piety.

The Lord wants us, as His disciples, to have clean hands and pure hearts. It is offensive to Him that His servants, who serve Him, should become like *Pharisees*. He wants authentic servants who will not allow defilement or hardening of heart to render them powerless in their service. He has given us enough authority to do His work.

Application

1. Check your own attitude for hypocrisy

- I attend church regularly but am I no different from the rest of world? ☐

- Do I often feel that I must always correct mistakes made by others? ☐

- If I were to write a letter to myself, what would I write to warn myself of areas reflecting *the leaven of the Pharisees*? ☐