

## **Legalists and Liberals (147)**

**Read** = Matthew 16 v 5-12

**Intro-** Boat trip north. They come to the other side of the sea of Galilee, to Bethsaida. This is our Lord's famous journey to Caesarea Philippi a 30 plus mile journey from Bethsaida.

However we are not at Caesarea Philippi yet. They make the 8 mile journey by boat from Magdala to Bethsaida taking about 3-4 hours, and when they get to the other side, then the disciples remember they had forgotten to take bread! Remember they could be in the desert or wilderness for days so they normally brought provisions with them.

But this time they have forgotten!

As they land on the far shore the Lord after a peaceful journey of thinking about the previous event in vs1-4 (The argumentative Scribes and Pharisees) decides to teach the disciples a we lesson.

Read v 5-6

Now immediately the disciples hear this they feeling guilty because they had forgotten to take bread immediately begin reasoning and thinking among themselves, 'Is the Lord teaching us a lesson because we have forgotten to take bread?' And we see from this that they have a guilty conscience over making this small mistake. Which leads to my points:

### **1. What Does a Guilty Conscience Lead too?**

**( v 5-7)**

### **2. How to Strengthen Faith( v 8-11)**

### **3. Beware of False Doctrine ( v 12 )**

### **1. What Does a Guilty Conscience Lead too?**

**( v 5-7)**

We see that a guilty conscience leads to a defensiveness

-reading bad motives into others and seeing slights when there are none thinking *'he is getting at me'*

MH says, *'They thought Christ hereby up braided them with their improvidence and forgetfulness.'* (p227)

We see that their guilty conscience led them to reading bad /negativity into Christ's words.

An excessive literalism- Oh leaven is in bread and we forgot bread so he is talking about bread. It's a hinting rebuke.

The guilty conscience does that it leads us to a rigged literalism because Christ is not talking about bread at all He talks about the leaven of the Pharisees. They read too much into it, more than what he says which he does not say, he says *'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.'*

Let us remember that if we feel guilty about something that it is the easiest thing in the world, because we feel guilty to read into another person's words a rebuke, a slight to imagine that they are getting at us, intently telling us off when quite often that is not the case at all.

Guilt makes us act defensively but more importantly and seriously it can cause us to think bad of another person by reading bad into their words and motives when they do not mean that at all. Guilt makes us super sensitive and easily offended by the slightest thing.

It was wrong for the disciples to read bad into Christ's words which he spoke no to rebuke but to help them. So it is wrong for us to read bad into another's words that they do not mean just because we feel guilty about something. In fact the Bible teaches we are to think good, the best in others, if at all possible.

## **2. How to Strengthen Faith( v 8-11)**

When the Lord perceived/understood that they were thinking about bread he does rebuke them gently by saying they have little faith, why are you reasoning about bread? Then he gives them a brief history lesson and says more importantly, *'Do you not remember?'*

The Greek word means to be mindful to call to mind

Do you not remember the absolute negation the five loaves and the five thousand, and then he asks them a question, how many baskets did you gather up?

Do you not remember the seven loaves and the four thousand? How many baskets did you gather up?

You see the Lord is emphasising our remembrance of past events, past blessings that He has bestowed upon us, past miracles that He hath done for us!

If we remember these things, as if the disciples had remembered these things their faith would not have been small or little.

So we see here the Lord is teaching them three things in this section.

1. Forgiveness
2. Encourage dependence upon Him

### 3. Think for yourself

The first is forgiveness.

Yes, the Lord reproves them gently in the passage but his reproof is not for forgetting bread but for distrusting His willingness to supply their needs.

The small oversight of forgetting bread is not an issue and is easily forgiven them by Christ.

Let us be like Christ in this matter and be forgiving and not angry at small oversights or forgetfulness at others.

Indeed as one Puritan says, *"Parents, and masters must not be angry at the forgetfulness of their children and workers more than is necessary... (We should be gracious and think) . . . peradventure it was an oversight"* (p227)

The second is, What encouraged dependence upon Him? The Lord wants to strengthen the disciples faith by teaching them to remember what he has already done in the past with the five thousand and the four thousand. If they had remembered those

events their faith would have been a lot stronger, and indeed they would not have worried at all about bread seeing He had provided bread for nine thousands men plus women and children.

Yes, indeed their faith would have been a lot stronger because they would have been totally dependent upon the Lord.

The third thing then is, think for yourself.

A strong faith thinks for itself it doesn't need to be spoon fed like a baby. Someone who is strong in the faith is someone who thinks and from the information in the Scripture, from the words Christ gives cant think and reason and work out the truth of what is being talked about.

We see this from (verse 11 {read}) We see from this verse that the Lord does not explain to the disciples what He was talking about but just repeats what He had said before and tells them, they were wrong in thinking about literal bread.

You see, He wants them to deduce from His words or think for themselves what is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

You see, the Lord was using the word 'leaven' in a metaphorical sense, yes literally leaven mixed with water and flour makes bread, but according to the Greek dictionary it is used metaphorically here for, *'Mental and moral corruption'*.

Summing up this point then:

The Lord forgives them easily for the small mistake of forgetting bread (He was not talking about that anyway only their guilty conscience made them think He was).

The Lord wants to strengthen their faith, and therefore He admonishes them gently by encouraging them to do two things:

-firstly, remember past events.

-secondly, think for yourself/work it out/use your brain.



When we remember what God has done for us in the past then in the present our faith will be strengthened and we will be encouraged, because faith becomes stronger when it depends upon the Lord and thinks for itself.

Which brings us to the third point:

### **3. Beware of False Doctrine ( v 12 )**

Then the disciples understood for themselves what the Lord was talking about and he was talking about, beware of the teaching/doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Its Christ who warns us of this. Beware of permeating heresy as Christians don't accept it nor become used to it and tolerate it as normal.

The pernicious permeating influence of false teaching that Christ warns His disciples and us about comes in 2 extremes: Legalism and Liberalism. We see here in the passage-

#### 1. Legalism of Pharisees

There were over six thousand Pharisees in Israel and they had great influence under certain rulers. They were very strict more strict indeed than God's law. They added 613 other rules to God's laws and then hedged them with other rules for example:

The fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath they had to define that with 39 other Sabbath laws. (Now, many of these laws were sensible with practical applications, they were not all bad and indeed the motive behind them was good, but the effect was to bring people into bondage.)

The Pharisees in their application became proud and pompous legalists who believed that they did not sin because of their law keeping, and despised others whom they saw as despicable sinners. This is a frequent problem with legalists.

Another example would be that Pharisees came to the point where they would only buy and eat food that was provided by other Pharisees. In case the sellers of the food had not tithed it correctly.

The Pharisees were as JC Ryle says, '*Self righteous formalists.*' (p153)

The main sin of legalism, of which we must be aware, is thinking that we can work up our salvation. That is what legalism means that we do good works and therefore earn/deserve salvation.

Legalism is so dangerous because it totally negates grace. Salvation is a thing that we do not deserve and no good works can ever earn it. Our sins need to be forgiven and cannot be worked away.

## 2. Liberalism of Sadducees

The Sadducees were the complete opposite. They were liberal in their doctrine, as Ryle says, '*Sceptics free-thinkers and half infidels*' (p153)

Or as Matthew Henry says, '*The Sadducees who pretend to a free and impartial search after truth.*'

The Sadducees were the ones who did not believe all of their own Bible, they were liberal,

selective, and only believed the bits they liked. They denied

1. The permanent delivery of the Pentateuch. They looked upon Scripture as culturally bound and hence what was written from God through Moses does not have any permanent application to others who live in different times and cultures. (We see the very same thing in many Bible commentaries today written by liberals who say that the Bible in certain sections does not apply to us, it was only to the church at Corinth, blah, blah)
2. They denied the resurrection of the body.
3. They denied the immortality of the soul.
4. They denied the existence of spirits and angels.
5. They denied divine predestination. They believed that there was no such a thing as fate, or that God had ordained anything that must happen they were very strong on teaching human free-will. (Lol, they were the first Armenians)

So we see great similarities between many professing Christians today and many Sadducees. Saying they are Christians but not believing most of the Bible.

Let us remember to beware of the 2 extremes of doctrinal error

Legalism- good works salvation

Liberalism- unbelieving libertarianism

It is Jesus that warn Christian about these 2 dangers, in other words the Church is susceptible to theses things.

So

## **Conclusion and Application.**

### **1. What Does a Guilty Conscience Lead too?**

**( v 5-7)**

### **2. How to Strengthen Faith( v 8-11)**

### **3. Beware of False Doctrine ( v 12 )**

**Any application?**

**Beware**

**-Supposed free impartial, search for truth**

**-Not angry at mere forgetfulness.**

**-Remember Past blessings**

**-Depend upon /have faith in Christ**

**-Think for yourself**

**-Legalism**

**-Liberalism**

**Intercessory Prayer**