

JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT INFLUENCE

Matthew 16:5-12

Key Verse: 16:6

"'Be careful,' Jesus said to them. 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'"

In today's passage Jesus teaches his disciples about the influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees. There is good influence. There is also bad influence. Influence is invisible. So, many people do as their sinful desire directs, thinking, "Nobody sees me." However, they become men of bad influence. In this lesson Jesus teaches us the importance of influence. May God give you an open heart to hear what Jesus has to say. May one word of God convict your heart so you may be a man of good influence.

First, Jesus said, "Be careful of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (5-6). In Jesus' time the Pharisees and Sadducees were the most prominent societists of Judaism. The Pharisees' origin was in the most strict sect of the Jews (Ac 26:5). People generally say their origin came out of the Maccabean revolt (165 B.C.). But when we study the Bible, we find that when the Babylonian captivity was over [the Jewish](#) people found the Scriptures and read them and wanted to live in God's way. They came to know that they were chosen people. They studied the Bible from early morning to late night every day for a long time. At that time Ezra and Nehemiah were the leaders of the community. Many Jewish people repented before God of their godless lives in a foreign country. Still, there were men of Judah who had [married women](#) from Ashdod, Amnon and Moab. So half of their children could not speak their own language. They also could not read the Scriptures. Then Nehemiah rebuked them and called curses down on them and beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. In Nehemiah 13:25 he said, "I made them take an oath in God's name and said: 'You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage....'" Nehemiah rebuked them in such a terrible way not because of their intermarriage, but because they could not read the Scriptures, so they did not know God Almighty. Nehemiah prayed in Nehemiah 13:29, "Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites." Nehemiah was most sorry that they had abandoned their mission as a royal priesthood and a holy nation and lived like animals. From Nehemiah's time on, the most excellent and devout people gathered and studied the Bible until they mastered the Bible as the Bible. They also lived up to the teachings of the Bible. Then they were qualified to be Pharisees. Therefore, the Pharisees were not always as bad as we read about in the New Testament. At the beginning, their endeavor to come back to God and master the Bible and worship and serve God was indeed remarkable. But as time passed by, they gradually became habitual. What was worse, they made use of the precious [practice](#) of the law of God, and what they called the law of God turned out to be their traditions. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." But they did not keep the law of God.

In Jesus' time, in order to become a Pharisee, one had to memorize all kinds of laws and regulations, especially detailed and mountain-like

traditions, from the age of twelve. But it was for the sake of passing the test of becoming Pharisees, not to become a royal priesthood and a holy nation. As their motive in becoming Pharisees became corrupt, their practice of law and regulations was not right, but diabolic.

The Sadducees were the same as the Pharisees. But their view of life was different. They were ungodly, political, earthbound and pleasure-seeking. It is irony that they were unspiritual people, but historically they obtained the position of the high priesthood.

Second, Jesus' disciples' oblivion (7-10). Not long before, Jesus had healed various kinds of sick people. And out of his great compassion, he fed them. Their number was four thousand. After that Jesus was demanded by the Pharisees to perform a miraculous sign. Jesus rebuked them that they had the sense of the weather forecast, but did not have spiritual insight. After that Jesus and his company crossed the lake. On the way the disciples realized that they didn't bring the bread that was left over after feeding the four thousand. Their stomachs were growling, making many noises. Finally they were so worried about bread that to them everything sounded like "bread." When Jesus said to them, "Be careful. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees," it meant, "Be careful of the Pharisees' and Sadducees' bad influence." But they didn't understand exactly what Jesus told them. So they had a conference for quite a long time and came to a conclusion that Jesus said this to them because they did not bring any bread. Jesus rebuked them in verse 8. It says, "Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, 'You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?'" Jesus was sorry that whatever he said, they understood that he was talking about bread. So he rebuked them again in verses 9-10. "Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?" Jesus reminded them that not many days before he fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Again, Jesus reminded them that he fed four thousand people with seven loaves and several fish. So they didn't have to worry about bread. But they were men of little faith. So they were worrying about bread. Whatever they heard, it sounded like someone was talking about bread. Jesus talked about the bad influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees. But they understood that Jesus was talking about bread.

After they were rebuked severely, they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Third, the bad influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their traditions came from the law of God. The main point of their tradition was how to live according to the teachings of the word of God. But they made use of these traditions to make money. They had many ritual ceremonies. A typical one was the Passover ceremony. At that time all the people of Judah had to go up to Jerusalem and have a cleansing ceremony and a sacrifice ceremony, and finally they were pronounced "clean." In order to do that, poor people had to bring a pair of doves or two young pigeons. Rich people brought many bundles of money; they offered one bundle at one ceremony and another bundle at another ceremony, until the Passover ended with the lighting ceremony. Not only so, but the Pharisees and Sadducees also took a lot of money from each family. For example, when a baby was

born he had to be ordained by the priest or Rabbi. The ordination fee was pretty expensive. When a couple was engaged and one year had passed-during which they kept themselves clean-and they were going to marry, then they had to be ordained by the priest or Rabbi. For this, they had to pay a fee. Especially the wedding fee was very expensive. To get a job, people had to have the recommendation of the priest or Rabbi. For a recommendation they had to bring money. If people wanted to be exempted from army duty, they had to get a special letter from the priest or Rabbi. For this, they had to pay money. When someone died, he had to have last rites. Otherwise, he was known to have gone to purgatory or to hell. So his relatives had to pay a fee to have the confidence that the deceased went to heaven.

They were chosen people, a royal priesthood and a holy nation. God chose them and set them apart to bear much fruit. They were chosen to take care of God's flock of sheep. But they squeezed God's flock of sheep until they lost the joy of life to live in the world. So Jude rebukes the Pharisees and Sadducees vehemently in Jude 12-13. It says, "These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm-shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted-twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever." The Jewish leaders were chosen to take care of God's suffering sheep under the Roman occupation. But they did not take care of God's sheep. Rather they harassed God's flock of sheep to the maximum degree. Here, their bad influence is that they did not become good shepherds, but robbers. If they were ordinary people, being robbers would not mean much. But they were chosen people. They became robbers instead of being shepherds of God's flock. It was indeed evil and their influence was bad.

These days many of God's servants are like the Jewish leaders. They do not work to take care of God's sheep. They work to make a beautiful church building by squeezing money from God's children. They are a bad influence. One of the big churches invited tenor singer Pavarotti and enjoyed his singing at their Christmas worship service. But they didn't say a word about the newborn baby Jesus. It is indeed a bad influence, not because they had a concert at Christmas, but because they did not feed the flock of God's sheep with the living word of God welling up to eternal life and they did not introduce who Jesus really is. So in Jude 14-15, Enoch condemns these hypocrites recklessly. He says, "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."The doom of hypocrites is horrible. We must not remain as hypocrites.

Fourth, men and women of good influence. Influence is invisible, but all people can see the spiritual condition of any person. One of the shepherds in Korea worked hard. So he thought it would be okay even if he went to graduate school to study for three years, emptying his pasture. But as a result, he became a bad influence. Of course, we cannot decide who is a good influence and who is a bad influence. But even a dummy sheep can know who is a good influence and who is a bad influence.

As for influence, we cannot but talk about Jesus. Jesus worked only three

years for his earthly messianic ministry. But his influence continues many centuries. It was because he renounced his glory and was humbly laid in a manger of a stable. According to John 1:14, his incarnation is full of grace and truth. The grace and truth of incarnation moves the heart of any person, whether he is good or bad.

Jesus' earthly messianic ministry was mainly healing the sick and preaching the kingdom of God, and as time permitted he trained his disciples, mostly through common life together. He did not train his disciples by giving special lectures in a gorgeous lecture hall. It was discipleship training through his common life together with his disciples. In short, his discipleship training was through his influence itself.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem for the last time to become the Paschal Lamb, he was bracing himself because of the upcoming crucifixion. But he woke up early in the morning and at the temple area taught the Bible to those who came to him (Lk 21:37,38). It is indeed the amazing work of God. It is indeed endlessly beautiful forever. Finally he was crucified on the cross. Beneath the cross were Mary the mother of Jesus, many other Marys and other women, crying endlessly in their deep sorrow. But Jesus did not come down from the cross to save himself or to comfort the crying women. Rather, he stayed on the cross. On the spur of the moment, a Roman soldier hurled his spear into Jesus' side. Much blood and water gushed out. Jesus cried, not for himself, but for the sin of the world. At the moment he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a).

Finally, as he had promised, Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. But he did not demonstrate his power and authority as the Risen Christ. Rather, he visited despaired Peter and put on an apron and cooked a delicious breakfast and gave it to Peter and the others. Then their eyes were brightened and they could see the Risen Jesus. At the moment, the love of God circulated from their hearts to their souls and they were filled with a living hope in God's house, the kingdom of God. In quantity Jesus did not do much. But his quality of influence is matchless. His influence is nothing but divine influence. We Christians must all learn Jesus' influence.

Dr. Joseph Chung does not speak much. But after night shift work he sleeps just one hour and then comes out to take care of God's sheep under his care. It is not for one or two days that he has done so, but for so many years. Dr. John Jun is a man of embracing grace. He gives to any patient only aspirin. Anyway we can say that they were all treated. Dr. Jim Rabchuk was very popular among women internationally, but he was not a good influence to them. Since Jesus came to his heart he became a man of good influence. So he never chases sheep; rather, many sheep come to study the Bible with him because he is known as a man of influence. Dr. Helen was known as a woman of no influence. But now people hang around her to be loved by her. She received many invitations from renowned universities for a professor's position. But she gave them all up. It was not she who did that, but God who influenced her to become a blessing. Shepherdess Yvonne Timlin was a person who wanted to be the first woman president of the United States. But God worked in her mightily; her ambition disappeared and Jesus' influence came into her heart. She has been faithfully taking care of Kristin St. Lawrence and many others.

Today we studied Jesus teaching his disciples about influence. Influence is the best education. We want to educate our children as excellent and promising children. But without our influence they cannot be good children. We know about the end of the Roman Empire. They wanted to maintain the best empire with military power. But it was impossible because they were all corrupt people. But men and women of influence from among Christians conquered the Roman Empire and made it a Christian nation. This happened not only in the Roman Empire, but in so many other nations as well. May God make us men and women of good influence. May God help us get out of being men and women of bad influence. Lord, we ask your mercy.