

The Gospel of Mark records one of those interesting stories of the disciples completely misunderstanding Jesus. Jesus told His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15). The disciples started talking about only taking one loaf of bread and wondering what Jesus meant. The account ends with Jesus telling them they didn't learn the lesson of the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000. God supplies all our need and can multiply what He gives us. That is a very important lesson of faith. But Mark never elaborated on what Jesus meant concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians.

The Pharisees were men that tried to live the letter of the Laws of Moses along with all the oral traditions surrounding the law. They wore special clothes to set themselves apart from others. We'd call them the ultra-conservatives. Surely many of them lived like this because they wanted to do everything God asked. They truly desired to please God. There is nothing wrong with that. It is highly commendable. Wouldn't it be great if that was everyone's heart? However, in living by all the regulations that had been handed down, many of which Jesus taught were excessive and contradicted the written Word (Mark 7:13), they felt themselves superior to others. They did not want to be touched by common people for fear of being defiled. Many of the Pharisees became proud of the sacrifices they made to live by all their rules. **Spiritual pride was the leaven of the Pharisees** (Matthew 23:23). They ignored the fact that we are all sinners in need of God's grace. They reveled in the respect of men (Matthew 23:5-7). People gave them honored titles and the best seats in the synagogues. That fed the spiritual pride that infected their souls. That prideful attitude was contagious in that others thought that the more they too obeyed the rules the more superior they were to those who didn't try as hard.

The leaven of the Herodians was in some ways just the opposite but with the same resulting pride. These backers of the Herod dynasty thought compromise with the world for power was approved by God. If they were among the Greeks they would worship in the Greek temple. With the Jews they would live according to the Jewish laws they thought were convenient to show they were spiritual. But since they believed God had chosen them to rule, they thought they were above everyone, and above the Law. **Earthly power was the leaven of the Herodians.**

From the times of the Exodus, God compared leaven to sin because leaven puffs up, which is a picture of pride (Exodus 12:15). It increases the volume but not the substance. The Pharisees and the Herodians were still fallen humans in need of the grace of God like everyone else. The sin of pride puffed them up so that they thought

Commented [notes1]: Mark 8:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Commented [notes2]: Mark 7:13 (ESV)

¹³ thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do. E

Commented [notes3]: Matthew 23:23 (ESV)

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."

Commented [notes4]: Matthew 23:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

Commented [notes5]: Exodus 12:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

they were above everyone. In our passage today the Apostle Paul will give us a balanced view of what our attitude about ourselves and others should be.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Paul begins this portion of his exhortation by exemplifying what he is about to teach. What he is sharing comes from the grace of God he has received. It was not from within himself or because he is superior to everyone. All the credit goes to God's grace. My introduction to this message was from the grace of God given to me. I was working on a devotional from the passage I referred to in Mark. Then I sat down to work on the sermon and saw that grace of God had already provided the introduction for the sermon. We call that a god-incident. **God-incidents remind us that everything is the grace of God.** God has ordained good works in advance that we just walk into by faith (Ephesians 2:10). He gets all the glory.

That is why Paul goes on to tell everyone not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. Our intellect, our opportunities, our abilities, our health, the place we live, the teachers we meet, and even our very life is all from God. We should acknowledge that. It is a humbling thing to realize that if God stepped back from us for a moment we would cease to exist. The very atoms in our body hold their course at His will. In another letter Paul asks if we have anything that we did not receive (1 Corinthians 4:7). We would have to answer "No." Everything we have and are is from God. The soul that keeps this in mind will be humble.

Now Paul inserts a necessary conjunction, "but". But to think with sober judgment, each according to the faith that God has assigned. Some people are proud of their humility. Every time anyone compliments them, they have to say that it is all God. There is nothing wrong with crediting God, but it may not be honest with the fact that God called and equipped them and that they are being faithful to exercise their gifts. There is a balance between realizing all is from God and that you have been given gifts to exercise by the freewill God has given you. A sober judgment recognizes the gifts God has given and one's own willingness by the grace of God to use those gifts for God's glory. It is being honest.

Corrie Ten Boom exemplified this balanced approach of accepting thanks from people for her willingness to use the gifts God had given her, while at the same time giving God all the honor for what was done. When people would thank her for her encouraging talks, she would accept the thanks. Then at the end of each day of ministry, she would take each comment of thanks and praise and offer it as a bouquet to the Lord. It was her way of acknowledging that it was all of God. On the one hand she acknowledged the thanks for her willingness to exercise the gifts of God and share the experiences through which God had led her. On the other hand she acknowledged

Commented [notes6]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [notes7]: 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

that it was all from God. She did not think more highly of herself than she should, but she made a sober judgment according to the measure of faith God provided.

Now the Apostle will go into the design of God in the church and the different gifts He has given. He has just shared how as individuals we are to surrender our individual bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Now he explains what that looks like within the corporate body of believers. *⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.* Paul describes the church as a body with many members. He went into more details in 1Corinthians 12. Some denominations think everyone should have the same gift. In numerous ways Paul tells us that we are all unique and that God divides the gifts among the members of the church as He sees fit (1 Corinthians 12:11). In the Corinthians passage he asks, *¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.* 1 Corinthians 12:17-18 (ESV) We are encouraged to ask for the best gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1), but God knows who is best able to handle which gifts. We need the variety to function as a body to the fullness of which God intends. Surely God could enable a few individuals with numerous gifts, but the more members that bring a variety of gifts the more individuals are blessed by being God's instruments. The more appreciation we have for one another when our gifts are complemented by one another. There is interdependency and harmony that comes out of a multitude of gifts (Psalm 133:1). It is the same Spirit moving in each of us to bring about His purposes through us all (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Sadly, many churches today expect the pastor to do it all. He preaches, leads, does the janitorial work, visits the sick, counsels those in need, visits guests, wins souls, and sometimes leads the music. We could add another dozen duties to that list and some do in the contract. In larger churches, there is a paid staff member to perform each of these roles. The congregation may see its role as being ministered to, the recipients of all these gifts. That is not what Paul is describing. He is describing a church where everyone sees themselves as ministers of one gift or another. That is why there are deacons and deaconesses, evangelists, care givers, Bible study teachers, trustees, and those who are ready to help whenever there is a need.

⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; We often discover our gift by stepping out when there is a need and discovering there is a supernatural wind beneath our wings. We usually enjoy exercising the gift God gives because there is a sense that we are doing what God designed us to do. However, it is not always fun or it wouldn't be a sacrifice. We often have to put our agenda aside (Matthew 6:33).

Commented [notes8]: Romans 12:1 (ESV)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Commented [notes9]: 1 Corinthians 12:11 (ESV)

¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Commented [notes10]: 1 Corinthians 14:1 (ESV)

¹ Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Commented [notes11]: Psalm 133:1 (ESV)

¹ Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

Commented [notes12]: 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Commented [notes13]: Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When we discover that gift we should look for opportunities to use it. You may have more than one gift until someone steps up to fill the need. The grace of God has gifted you to build up the body of Christ by your participation at the leading of His Spirit. By serving at God's leading you lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20). Isn't God good? He gives you a gift and then rewards you for using it!

Prophecy is interpreted a number of different ways within the church. I will refer us to Vincent as quoted by Wuest. "Prophecy in the New Testament, as in the Old, the prominent idea is not prediction, but the inspired delivery of warning, exhortation, instruction, judging, and making manifest the secrets of the heart."¹ I agree with that synopsis though I would add that there was the office of prophet in the Old Testament, but now there is a gift in the New (Luke 16:16). The difference is that in the Old, the prophet had the authority to speak the very words of God (2 Chronicles 20:20). They were unquestioned unless a near term prophecy did not come to pass. In that case they were stoned for presuming to take the office upon themselves (Deuteronomy 18:20). Under the New Covenant, those with an inspired word they believe is from God may speak that word, but then others will judge what was said to see that it aligns with the Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:29). The major difference is that the Spirit has been poured out on all who receive Christ and therefore they should be able to discern whether the gift is used at the leading of the Spirit, or as is also mentioned in the Old Testament, those who prophesy from the deceit of their own heart (Jeremiah 23:26).

I have been in charismatic circles and count them my brothers and sisters in Christ. I have never heard a specific prophecy of a future detail that came to pass. It may happen (Acts 11:28). I just have not experienced it. I have even warned others about individuals that continually prophecy details that never happen, and yet in every case those I have warned continue to listen to those prophecies. I can't explain why, except that these false prophecies often feed the vanity of those to whom they prophesy. On the other hand, I have heard warnings or exhortations that were given as a prophetic utterance that I believe were from God.

My own personal interpretation of the gift of prophecy today is: a divinely inspired message to a given people for a specific time. I rarely see people take heed to such messages. Warnings usually come because people have their heart set in a direction that is destructive. Rarely will they soften their heart and heed the message. I have also witnessed a word given revealing the secret of person's heart to cause them to repent and seek the Lord. It is wonderful gift and one that Paul says we should desire. I believe this gracious gift of prophecy is only entrusted to those who wholeheartedly live the first two verses of this chapter. Those with this gift are to do so in proportion to their faith. If they are somewhat unsure they should say so. (Also see 1 Corinthians 14:3)

Commented [notes14]: Matthew 6:20 (ESV)

²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Commented [notes15]: Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Vol 1. P. 211

Commented [notes16]: Luke 16:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

Commented [notes17]: 2 Chronicles 20:20 (ESV)

²⁰ And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa. And when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed."

Commented [notes18]: Deuteronomy 18:20 (ESV)

²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. E

Commented [notes19]: 1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

Commented [notes20]: Jeremiah 23:26 (ESV)

²⁶ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart,

Commented [notes21]: Acts 11:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

Commented [notes22]: 1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)

³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

⁷ *if service, in our serving;* Greek authors usually start with the most important names or items and move to the least important. Though Paul uses another order in other passages (Ephesians 4:11), I find it interesting that prophecy is immediately followed by service. This can include the use of almost any gift. Jesus exalted serving and said it was what He had come to do, and that was played out by teaching, washing feet, healing, casting out demons and many other ways, even laying down His life (Matthew 20:28). It is to give yourself to the need at hand by the enabling help of the Spirit.

Commented [notes23]: Ephesians 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

...the one who teaches, in his teaching; The Greek here implies staying within that gift (locative sphere). In other words, keep exercising that gift and don't try to branch out to other things. There is such a need for teachers that are knowledgeable of the Word. The prophet Hosea said the people destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). Part of the reason for the lack of this gift is so few will dedicate themselves to the study of the Scriptures (2Timothy 2:15).

Commented [notes24]: Matthew 20:28 (ESV)

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

⁸ *the one who exhorts, in his exhortation;* This gift is also one in which the believer so gifted is to stay within. The word has multiple meanings, to comfort, to invite, or to urge, as we saw in verse one. It is to call others to the will of God.

Commented [notes25]: Hosea 4:6 (ESV)

⁶ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

Commented [notes26]: 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

...the one who contributes, in generosity; Giving is a gift. It should be used judiciously and yet with a generous spirit knowing you are laying up treasure in heaven (1Timothy 6:18-19).

Commented [notes27]: 1 Timothy 6:18-19 (NIV)

¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

...the one who leads, with zeal; Leadership is a gift. It is the zeal of the leader that inspires others to follow. Of course the one who leads should be led by the Holy Spirit.

...the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. If you can't be cheerful about an act of mercy, it is probably not your gift. As we went through these gifts you may have thought they could apply to anyone. You are right. However, as believers we are to find which ones are God's empowered gifts for us. Paul hasn't given us the complete list here. His emphasis is on doing what God has gifted us to do as living sacrifices with the right attitude for the glory of God knowing that we are storing up for ourselves eternal treasure which can't fade or be stolen. **Our humble service empowered by God is the way the body of Christ as the church should function in this world.** Think soberly about the gift God has given you. Together we unite in giving our bodies as living sacrifices that the world might see Jesus through our sacrificial service.

Questions

- 1 What is the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod?
- 2 What did they have in common?
- 3 How did Paul exemplify what he was about to teach?
- 4 How did Mrs. Ten Boom be sober minded?
- 5 Why do we all have different gifts?
- 6 What is prophecy?

- 7 Why is service second in the list?
- 8 Why should teachers and those who exhort continue in their gift?
- 9 What are the other gifts mentioned?
- 10 Do you know what gift the Lord has given you? Are you using it?