

**SEPTEMBER 2018 DEVOTIONAL:
THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES
By Lori Shuck**

“There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two small fish: but what are they among so many?” John 6:9, *The New King James Version*.

“Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up?
Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up?
How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matt. 16:9-12, *The New King James Version*.

Evidently, Jesus waited on purpose until the miracles of the feeding of five thousand and four thousand had been accomplished before talking with His disciples about the leaven, or doctrine, of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He must have wanted the picture of vast crowds of people eating from the piddling loaves and fish of a boy to be uppermost in their minds when He made the connection between *leaven* and *doctrine*. Specifically, doctrine He did not want them to have anything to do with.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were two groups of men that had distinctive characteristics. They were quite different from each other. To follow the analogy, they were like two different strains of leaven. They got things stirred up and bubbling around them, fed on people, and infected their environment. Luke plainly labeled the “leaven of the Pharisees” as *hypocrisy* in Luke 12:1.

JESUS WAS UNLEAVENED. He didn’t identify with either group, though His followers called Him, “Rabbi” or Teacher. Perhaps because He was doing what the Pharisees were *supposed* to be doing. He contained zero percent of “the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees”. His ultimate business of giving His unleavened body to be broken for His students had

nothing to do with religion or politics and everything to do with love, forgiveness, and rescue.

“**Religion**,” is represented by the “leaven of the Pharisees”. Pharisees were typically synagogue preachers and teachers, as opposed to high priests at the Temple. I envision old-timey, traveling “hell, fire, and brimstone” evangelists, but with bushy beards and long black curls dangling in front of their ears. They evidently tended to be ritualistic, nit-picky, and legalistic—among other things.

“**Politics**,” is represented by the “leaven of the Sadducees”. Sadducees tended to be slick lawyer-types, shmoozers, favor-carriers, loophole-lovers, political aspirants, king’s fanny-kissers, and oddly enough to me, high priests in the fancy Jewish Temple. There was evidently a kind of “theme park” atmosphere around the Temple, as the Sadducees were known to be active in the “Temple cult”. Being the high priest evidently didn’t *require* personal holiness.

Pharisees tended to be ultra-conservative, while Sadducees tended to be ultra-liberal. Polar opposites. Polarizing. Hating each other, perhaps. To put it mildly, these two groups do not present well in the New Testament. The Sadducees had the visible, governmental power, under the *Roman* government, of course. But the Pharisees had the power of the people. So, the Sadducees were often afraid of the Pharisees and acquiesced to their demands. I think Jesus used the Pharisees and Sadducees as *archetypes* of religion and politics.

DOCTRINE OF PHARISEES & SADDUCEES VS. DOCTRINE OF JESUS

- 1. PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** leave out, distrust, or make light of the miraculous/supernatural. **JESUS** capitalizes on the miraculous and supernatural as a means to help others understand God’s love.
- 2. PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** are man-powered. **JESUS** is Love-powered.
- 3. PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** commercialize, religionize, and politicize. Translation: Slick stuff up. **JESUS** simplifies, is authentic and transparent, and brings people together. Translation: Opens thing up.
- 4. PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** forget to be tender, forgiving, and accepting of people. **JESUS** is tender, forgiving, and accepting of people.

5. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** ignore the big picture. **JESUS** often emphasizes that the big picture is that people need saving.
6. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** foment, confuse, and accuse. **JESUS** calms, converses, and forgives.
7. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** are bigoted and hard-hearted. **JESUS** is open-hearted and kind.
8. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** are narrow-minded and cold. **JESUS** is honest and warm.
9. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** are idealistic. **JESUS** is philanthropic.
10. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** major on partisan ideals. **JESUS** majors on commonalities and compatibilities.
11. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** pass critical judgment. **JESUS** has respect for fellow members of the human race.
12. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** are dog-eat-dog. **JESUS** is brother-feeds-brother; God-feeds-man.
13. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** are heavy on following rules, tradition, and earthly kings. **JESUS** follows the Golden Rule, His heavenly Father, and is fresh and gracious.
14. **PHARISEES/SADDUCEES** believe “those across the aisle” are whacked/crazy/evil/dirty, rotten liars/100% wrong/ugly/mean/trashy/just plain stupid/going straight to hell. **JESUS** *steps* “across the aisle,” converses honestly, seeks to understand; offers to save all who come to Him; is never repulsed or surprised by a person’s past or beliefs. Jesus didn’t wax political and had scathing names for the religious exacto-heads. The closest thing to a political/religious manifesto He left was this comparison of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees to His miraculous feeding of thousands of people *from every imaginable life situation*. All they had to be was *human and hungry*.

POSSIBLE REASONS RELIGION AND POLITICS MAY HAVE BEEN ODIUS TO JESUS

Religion may have been odious to Him because of His strong drive to “be Himself” rather than trying to fit in. Religion often thrives on *judging people who don’t fit in*. Extracting Jesus from religion frees Him up. Suddenly, He’s a commoner with an uncanny power of “knowing”. The religionists are the Pharisees, and He hammers them hard. They are suspicious and judgmental of His behavior. He hangs around bars and hookers and drug-addicts. He seeks out bookies and embezzlers to be His friends. Still, *He’s*

not a drunkard or a wild thing—He’s a virgin. *He* never does drugs (not even sour wine for His pain from getting the holy crap beat out of Him, and then the whole crucifixion thing after that). *He* never gambles or embezzles money. He may or may not wash his hands before he eats, yet He knows the “Law and the Prophets” better than the most skilled scribe or Pharisee. He doesn’t have anywhere to live, but travels around Columbia, Hattiesburg, Sumrall, Purvis and the surrounding countryside, sleeping in the woods or parking lots with twenty or thirty other people. But then, at times, thousands may be trying to get to Him to hear what He has to say or to get healed. He goes to “church” and offers to read the text for the day or drives everybody out with a whip for trying to make a quick buck in the church house.

The only thing He judged anyone for was for being a hypocrite. The people who could admit that they had a habit of doing things they weren’t supposed to do didn’t seem to have a problem with Him. Can’t say I’ve ever encountered anyone quite like Him before.

Politics may have turned Him off for the same reasons it turns some people off nowadays. Politics often thrives on the *polarization of the masses*. Polarization of the masses keeps them awfully busy with hating each other. But can the masses afford to hate each other? Did Jesus hate *anybody*? Shouldn’t the commoners be looking out for each other? Working together? Helping each other? Keeping politics out of loving each other? Lifting each other up? Not deciding whether someone deserves air based on which news channel they watch?

Jesus didn’t want His little band to be divided by their opinions of the current or past king, aspirations, ambition, making a bunch of extra rules and cramming them down everybody’s throats and saying He’d told them to do it. He didn’t want His people getting so focused on “today in the news” that they make light of things like the Golden Rule or sage advice like my daddy’s favorite to my brother and me: “Be a friend to somebody today.” (I love so much that he never specified who we could make friends with.)

Personal Observations. We will likely *never, never, never* change one little thing in this world *unless* we pray a lot, forgive even more, help others without judging their political beliefs—or any other beliefs, for that matter—

and be willing to be inconvenienced by how much of our time/money/energy/patience we may use up helping others. If we commoners loved and bonded more with one another because we're human beings, *all* the politicians would have to up their games. As long as we are polarized, it's business as usual for them. Can we please get back to being human before being an elephant or a donkey?

It isn't talking heads who change the world. It's the worker bees who get up every single morning and go out looking for nectar. They don't look for dirt. They look for flowers. They don't berate, hate, froth at, and suspect the other worker bees. They kindly pollinate and buzz and carry useful, healthy food back home to their families. And if anything ever happens to kill them off, *we all die*. If anything ever happened to shut up the talking heads, the bees and flowers would probably dance with glee for all the peace and quiet.

"I believe that our Lord delivered this solemn warning for the perpetual benefit of that Church which He came to earth to establish. He spoke with a *prophetic* knowledge. He knew well the diseases to which human nature is always liable. He foresaw that the two great plagues of His Church on earth would always be the doctrine of the Pharisees and the doctrine of the Sadducees. He knew that these would [be] like two large rocks, between which His truth would be perpetually crushed and bruised until He came the second time. He knew that there always would be Pharisees in spirit, and Sadducees in spirit, among professing Christians. He knew that their succession would never fail, and their generation never become extinct, and that though the *names* of Pharisees and Sadducees were no more, yet their *principles* would always exist. He knew that during the time that the Church existed, until His return, there would always be some who would *add* to the Word, and some who would *subtract* from it, some who would tone it down, by adding to it other things, and some who would bleed it to death, by subtracting from its principal truths. And this is the reason why we find Him delivering this solemn warning: "Be careful and be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees!" 2

References:

https://www.gracegems.org/23/Ryle_pharisees_and_sadducees.htm. Web. 15 Sep. 2018. J. C. Ryle lived from 1816-1900.

