

# THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

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In Luke 12:1, Jesus Christ “*began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*” There were many times that the Lord exposed their hypocrisy. The Pharisees’ hypocrisy was manifest in many ways, in their words, their actions, and their teachings. We must understand this evil leaven and not have it in ourselves, to avoid becoming children of hell as the Pharisees were (Matt 23:15).

## **Pretenders of righteousness**

Matthew 16:1-4 says, “The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah. And he left them, and departed.” This is one of many occasions in which Jesus directly called the Pharisees hypocrites to their faces. They were asking for a sign, but not sincerely, as Christ had already performed many miracles, and they refused to believe in him anyway (John 12:37). They were faking their interest in him to try to ensnare him in some way. Immediately following this, Jesus warned his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees (Matt 16:5-12). Luke 20:20 says that “they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor.” The word there for “feign” is the Greek word *hupokrinomai*, which Strong’s Bible Dictionary defines as “to decide (speak or act) under a false part.” This is the root word from which our English word hypocrite comes from. Literally, these Pharisees pretended to be

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righteous men in their efforts to try to entrap the Lord. This same situation is also described in Mark 12:15, where it says that Jesus “knew their hypocrisy.” A “righteousness” that is only a pretense is not righteousness at all but unrighteousness. For this reason, Christ said, *“That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt 5:20). True righteousness is demonstrated by deeds: *“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous”* (1 John 3:7). Of course, Jesus said of the Pharisees that “they say, and do not” (Matt 23:3).

## **Hypocritical actions**

Jesus warned his disciples to “take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt 16:6). The disciples came to understand “that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt 16:12). In Matthew 16, the leaven of the Pharisees is their doctrine, whereas in Luke 12:1, the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. These two things are related, because the doctrine of the Pharisees led them and their followers to become hypocrites. The Pharisees taught for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt 15:9). Their commandments and traditions transgressed the commandments of God (Matt 15:3). Their doctrines pertained strictly to the outer man, and were completely blind to the inner man (Matt 5:1-18; 15:1-20; 23:1-36). They left out the weightier matters of the law (Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42), and thus they were full of ravening and wickedness in their hearts (Matt 23:25-28; Luke 11:39-44). To be one thing on the outside and another on the inside is the epitome of hypocrisy and the doctrine of the Pharisees helped to make them that way.