

# The Leaven of Addition and Subtraction

Matthew 16:1-12

## Summary

In Matthew 16:1-12 we see Jesus' interaction with some hard-hearted religious leaders and His forgetful disciples. The Pharisees and Sadducees tried to test Jesus and get Him to prove Himself with a sign (like Satan did in Matthew 4). After leaving them, He warns His disciples about the "leaven" of the Pharisees and Sadducees, which represents the dangerous teachings of adding to or subtracting from Scripture. Like sourdough starter/yeast, these spiritual compromises work invisibly, gradually, and absolutely to corrupt the heart and turn it inward toward self. Ultimately, by grace through faith in Jesus, this leaven is rooted out, freeing us to depend entirely on the true Bread of Life.

**Main takeaway:** Editing God's Word blinds you, but embracing God's Word opens your eyes to His Kingdom.

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## Sermon Outline

### The Demand for a Sign and Spiritual Blindness (Matthew 16:1-4)

1. The Pharisees and Sadducees unite to test Jesus by demanding a sign from heaven.
2. Jesus exposes their spiritual blindness. They expertly read the weather but completely ignore the obvious signs of the Messiah.
3. He will offer only the "sign of Jonah," which is His upcoming death and resurrection.
4. God is incredibly patient, but His patience is designed to lead us to repentance, not to excuse hard-hearted, willful rebellion.

### The Warning to the Disciples (Matthew 16:5-12)

1. The disciples forget their physical bread and completely misunderstand Jesus' spiritual warning about leaven.
2. Jesus left the arrogant religious leaders, but He patiently stays with His weak, forgetful followers to correct their vision.

### The Leaven of Addition and Subtraction

1. **Addition (The Pharisees):** They added thousands of man-made rules and oral traditions outside of Scripture to keep people from breaking God's law. For us today, it is seen in adding human rules, political tribalism, and cultural checklists to the gospel. This creates a religion of external performance and self-righteousness.

2. **Subtraction (The Sadducees):** They took scissors to the Bible, cutting out teachings like the resurrection to protect their wealth and keep favor with Rome. For us today, it is seen in functionally denying parts of Scripture to fit in with modern culture and protect earthly comforts. This builds a secular, self-preserving worldview.
3. **The Dangerous Results:** Both teachings act like leaven. They work invisibly, gradually, and absolutely to draw hearts away from Jesus and towards...
  - a. **Self-righteousness:** I become the standard of truth, causing me to judge others who do not follow my rules or live/look like me.
  - b. **Self-reliance:** I trust my own efforts and moral resume for my right-standing rather than God's grace.
  - c. **Self-preservation:** I compromise on the truth to protect my reputation and live only for worldly comforts (as if there will be no resurrection)
  - d. **Self-worship:** I am on the throne to seek praise and glory for the kingdom I have built.

### **Embrace the Word and Enjoy the Bread of Life**

1. Heed the warning, and hear the word: editing God's Word blinds you, but embracing God's Word opens your eyes to His Kingdom
2. The Gospel of grace roots out the leaven of addition and subtraction (see Phil 3:7-11)
3. Jesus is creating a New Covenant community where...
  - a. Instead of self-righteousness, we trust in Him for righteousness.
  - b. Instead of self-reliance, we depend on Him for everything.
  - c. Instead of self-preservation, we die to ourselves and find life in Him.
  - d. Instead of self-worship, we worship Him and say, "your kingdom come, your will be done...not mine."