The Leaven We've Grown Used To

~ How unexamined traditions quietly shape Christian belief and why Jesus warned us about it. ~

Preface

Why This Post Exists

This post did not arise from hostility toward the church, nor from a desire to dismantle faith, tradition, or fellowship. It arose from a growing awareness that many deeply sincere Christians—including myself at one time—hold convictions that have never been carefully examined in light of Scripture and history.

As study deepened, certain tensions became impossible to ignore: Scripture appeared to say one thing, while popular teaching, church language, and inherited frameworks often suggested another. The difficulty was not simply recognizing these discrepancies, but knowing **how to speak about them** in environments where questioning is often discouraged or misunderstood.

Yet Scripture repeatedly calls believers not merely to believe, but to **examine**:

- *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."* (1 Thessalonians 5:21)
- *"The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going."* (Proverbs 14:15)

This post exists to provide language, structure, and biblical grounding for those who sense that clarity matters—and that Christ is honored not by silence, but by truth.

Part A: The Leaven of Herod

How Questionless Christianity Took Root

When Jesus warned His disciples, *"Beware of the leaven of Herod"* (Mark 8:15), He was not speaking of bread. He was identifying a **corrupting influence** — subtle, political, religious, and incremental. Leaven works silently. It does not announce itself as falsehood. It spreads by **normalization**.

Herod's power did not rest on truth. It rested on:

- political accommodation
- religious appearance
- crowd management
- and the suppression of anything that threatened stability

The danger of Herod was not brutality alone, but **compromise cloaked in legitimacy**.

This is why Jesus did not merely oppose Herod's actions — He warned against his *leaven*.

Jesus' Questions as Antidote to Leaven

Leaven thrives where questions are discouraged.

Jesus, by contrast, **asked more than 300 questions**. That was not coincidence. Questions expose leaven. They slow consumption. They force inspection.

- *"Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"* (Matthew 15:3)
- *"How readest thou?"* (Luke 10:26)
- *"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46)

These questions do something dangerous to institutional religion:
They place responsibility back on the **individual conscience before God**.

Herodian systems cannot survive that.

The Leaven of Herod and the Birth of Religious Tradition

Herod rebuilt the temple while murdering prophets.
Rome tolerated Jewish religion as long as it produced order.
Priests preserved their positions by avoiding disruption.

This same pattern reappears whenever the church:

- inherits customs it did not examine
- celebrates practices it cannot defend scripturally
- resists inquiry by appealing to history, unity, or sentiment

This is not merely ancient history. It is a **recurring strategy**.

Christmas as a Case Study in Leaven

The issue with Christmas is not whether one day can honor Christ.
The issue is **how unquestioned tradition becomes sacred**.

- Scripture gives **no command** to observe Christ's birth
- The date arises from **Roman calendrical and religious context**
- The church absorbed and repurposed existing pagan festivals
- Over time, questioning the practice became taboo

This is leaven.

Not because Christ is named — but because **examination is forbidden**.

When believers are told:

- "Don't overthink it"
- "Everyone knows this"
- "The church has always done this"
- "Why does it matter?"

They are being conditioned — not taught.

Jesus never taught this way.

Why the Church Resists Questions Today

A church shaped by Herodian leaven prefers:

- declarations over dialogue
- slogans over Scripture
- unity over truth
- emotional comfort over conviction

Jesus’ questions threaten this balance.

A questioning believer:

- is harder to control
- cannot be satisfied with surface answers
- cannot be pacified with tradition alone

This is why questioning is often mislabeled as:

- divisive
- prideful
- rebellious
- unloving

Yet Scripture says otherwise:

> *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”*
> *(1 Thessalonians 5:21)*

Closing Exhortation

Beware the Leaven You’ve Been Eating

Leaven does not announce itself.
It works best when unnoticed.

The question is not whether a practice feels Christian —
but whether it **survives the questions of Christ**.

If Jesus walked into the modern church and asked:

- *Why do you do this?*
- *Where did this come from?*
- *Who told you this honored me?*
- *Have you read what is written?*

Would our answers come from Scripture — or tradition?

The greatest danger to the church is not persecution from outside,
but **conditioning from within**.

Jesus asked questions because He wanted disciples who could stand before God — not institutions that could stand before men.

> ***"And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod."*** *Mark 8:15*
>
> *That warning was not for bread. It was for the church.*

Part B: From Assumption to Clarity

Why Questioning Feels Necessary—and Why It Should

Introduction: When Clarity Creates Tension

There comes a point in serious Christian study when silence becomes harder than speech. Many believers reach a place where they begin to notice contradictions—between Scripture and sermon, between history and theology, between what is assumed and what is actually written. The difficulty is not merely

recognizing these tensions, but knowing **how to speak about them** in a church culture that often equates questioning with pride or division.

Yet Scripture does not portray discernment as dangerous. It portrays *unexamined belief* as dangerous.

- *"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."* (1 Thessalonians 5:21)
- *"Search the scriptures."* (John 5:39)

The very discomfort that arises when assumptions are challenged is often the beginning of clarity.

Jesus' Method: Questions as a Path to Truth

One of the most overlooked features of Jesus' ministry is **how He taught**. Rather than issuing constant declarations, Jesus asked questions—hundreds of them. These were not casual inquiries. They were deliberate instruments designed to expose assumptions, reveal motives, and force personal engagement with truth.

Examples include:

- *"How readest thou?"* (Luke 10:26)
- *"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"* (Matthew 15:3)
- *"Who do men say that I am?"* (Matthew 16:13)

Jesus' questions consistently shifted responsibility back to the hearer. He did not allow truth to remain abstract, inherited, or safely theoretical.

The Leaven of Herod: How Assumptions Take Root

When Jesus warned His disciples, *"Take heed, beware of the leaven of Herod"* (Mark 8:15), He was identifying more than a political figure. He was warning about a **corrupting mindset**—one that blends religious legitimacy with political power and social stability.

Leaven works invisibly and gradually (cf. Matthew 13:33). Herod's authority rested on:

- Roman approval (Luke 23:7–12)
- religious appearance (Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.11)
- suppression of anything disruptive (Mark 6:17–29)

Jesus' warning was not merely historical—it was diagnostic.

Christian Zionism and the Assumption of Compatibility

One modern expression of this leaven appears in **Christian Zionism**, where many Christians align themselves uncritically with the modern state of Israel. This alignment is often justified by the assumption that **Judaism and Christianity are compatible religious systems**.

Scripture does not support this assumption.

- *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."* (John 1:11)
- *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father."* (1 John 2:23)

If Christ is central to Christianity—and He is—then a system that formally rejects Him cannot be theologically compatible with Christianity.

The Problem with "Judeo-Christian"

The popular phrase *"Judeo-Christian"* suggests a shared theological foundation that Scripture itself does not affirm. Christianity emerged from the Hebrew Scriptures, but not as a continuation of post-biblical Judaism.

The New Testament presents a clear transition:

- *"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."* (John 1:17)
- *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."* (Romans 10:4)

This language of fulfillment, not parallelism, defines the apostolic worldview.

Dispensationalism and the Lens That Shapes These Assumptions

Much of the perceived compatibility between Christianity and Judaism is reinforced by a **dispensational, futurist framework**, which separates Israel and the church into parallel redemptive tracks.

Yet the apostles consistently emphasize unity in Christ:

- *"There is neither Jew nor Greek… for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:28)

- *“He is our peace, who hath made both one.”* (Ephesians 2:14)

Identity in the New Testament is covenantal and Christ-centered, not ethnic or political.

“Jesus Was a Jew”: A Statement That Requires Precision

The statement *“Jesus was a Jew”* is often repeated without definition. In the first century, the term *Jew* could indicate residence, religious affiliation, or political identity.

Scripture makes important distinctions:

- Jesus was known as *“Jesus of Nazareth of Galilee”* (Matthew 21:11)
- Judean leaders dismissed Him with, *“Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet”* (John 7:52)
- His lineage, however, traces to Judah (Matthew 1; Luke 3)

Precision matters, because imprecision fuels theological confusion.

Why This Matters for the Church

When Christianity embraces unexamined assumptions about Israel, Judaism, or identity, it risks subordinating Christ to frameworks He never authorized.

Scripture is unambiguous:

- *“Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 3:11)

Christian unity cannot be built on ambiguity about Christ.

Conclusion: From Silence to Faithful Clarity

The journey from assumption to clarity is rarely comfortable. But Scripture does not commend silence born of fear.

Jesus asked questions because truth demands engagement (Luke 10:26).
He warned of leaven because corruption often feels familiar (Mark 8:15).
He called disciples, not conditioned adherents (Matthew 28:19–20).

- *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* (John 17:17)

From Assumption to Clarity is not about dismantling faith. It is about ensuring that what remains is truly built on Christ—and not on assumptions that Scripture itself commands us to test.

Appendix A

Why Jesus Asked Questions More Than He Gave Answers

The Gospels reveal a striking pattern in the teaching method

of Jesus Christ: He asked far more questions than He gave direct answers. Conservative tallies place the number of His questions at over three hundred, while inclusive counts reach even higher. This was not incidental. Jesus' questions were deliberate, purposeful, and spiritually diagnostic.

Jesus did not ask questions because He lacked information. As the incarnate Son of God, He already knew what was in man. Rather, His questions were instruments of revelation – not revelation of new facts, but revelation of the heart. Questions force engagement. They bypass rote learning, inherited belief, and surface-level agreement. They require the hearer to reckon with truth personally.

Questions as a Means of Exposure

Many of Jesus' questions were aimed at exposing false confidence:

- *"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46)
- *"How can ye, being evil, speak good things?"* (Matthew 12:34)

These are not requests for information. They are verdicts framed as questions. Jesus was confronting a religious culture that had mastered doctrine, ritual, and tradition, yet remained unrepentant and unchanged.

Questions as a Challenge to Tradition

Jesus consistently questioned traditions that had replaced obedience:

- *"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"* (Matthew 15:3)

This question alone undermines the assumption that religious

longevity equals divine approval. Jesus did not appeal to institutional authority or majority consensus. He appealed to truth — and then questioned why that truth had been abandoned.

Questions as Invitations, Not Coercion

Unlike authoritarian teachers, Jesus did not force conclusions. He invited response:

- *"Believest thou this?"* (John 11:26)
- *"Will ye also go away?"* (John 6:67)

These questions allowed space for genuine faith or honest rejection. Christ never manipulated belief. His questions honored moral agency while still pressing truth upon the conscience.

Questions That Still Confront the Church

Jesus' method remains deeply unsettling to modern Christianity. Systems built on certainty, slogans, and unquestioned doctrine are threatened by questions. Yet Christ's kingdom advances not through indoctrination, but through illumination.

Those who resist questioning often do so not because truth is clear — but because truth is costly.

Jesus asked questions because truth must be **received**, not merely **repeated**.

Appendix B

Jesus vs. the Pharisees

Questions vs. Declarations: This comparison reveals two fundamentally different approaches to authority, truth, and teaching.

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1. Source of Authority

Jesus

- Appeals to Scripture rightly understood
- Questions interpretations rather than asserting position
- Invites examination

> *"Have ye not read…?" (Matthew 12:3)*
> *"What is written in the law? how readest thou?" (Luke 10:26)*

Pharisees

- Appeal to tradition and precedent
- Assert authority without examination
- Resist scrutiny

> *"Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders?" (Mark 7:5)*

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2. Teaching Method

Jesus

- Uses questions to awaken conscience
- Allows truth to confront internally
- Engages the individual

“What will ye that I shall do unto you?” (Matthew 20:32)

Pharisees

- Use declarations to enforce conformity
- Demand external compliance
- Speak at people, not to them

“They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne…” (Matthew 23:4)

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3. Relationship to Truth

Jesus

- Truth is living, relational, and convicting
- Truth exposes motives

“Why do ye not understand my speech?” (John 8:43)

Pharisees

- Truth is static, managed, and selective
- Truth is subordinated to control

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth…” (Matthew 15:8)

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4. Response to Challenge

Jesus

- Welcomes scrutiny
- Questions accusers
- Turns traps into revelations

> *“The baptism of John, whence was it?” (Matthew 21:25)*

Pharisees

- Avoid direct answers
- Respond with silence or accusation
- Escalate to violence when exposed

> *“They could not answer him again to these things.” (Luke 20:40)*

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5. End Result

Jesus

- Produces repentance, faith, and transformation
- Leaves no room for neutral ground

Pharisees

- Produce hardened hearts
- Preserve power at the expense of truth

> *“They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John 12:43)*

Final Integrated Insight

The Pharisees made statements to **control behavior**.
Jesus asked questions to **reveal the heart**.

One system required submission to authority.
The other required surrender to truth.

This contrast explains why Jesus was not merely opposed — ***He was crucified.***
