

Beware Of Spiritual Leaven

Britt Williams

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

·1 Corinthians 5:6-8



Yeast or leaven, is a bacterial fungus and is, therefore, an appropriate symbol for sin. It grows in bread just as sin grows in an individual life or a local church.

Leaven: { Webster's 1828 } A mass of sour dough, which, mixed with a larger quantity of dough or paste, produces fermentation in it and renders it light.

In the natural, a little yeast will affect the whole loaf, just as a little sin can ruin the spiritual life of a soul or a church in which it's tolerated. Jesus often used this term to draw a picture of the effects of spiritual compromise. I believe Jesus used such illustrations because He knew that making bread was a weekly, if not daily, activity for most families. By using familiar activities as a teaching backdrop, the Spirit of God was able to easily quicken and reveal spiritual truth to the people.

In this article, we will examine what the Bible says about spiritual leaven. We will examine the types, the characteristics, the components within the leavening process, and the effects of spiritual leaven. And finally, we will learn the remedy, as well as the preventive for leaven.

The Bible teaches there are three types of spiritual leaven, namely: false doctrine, sin, and hypocrisy. If these are not progressive, as they ordinarily are, then they will always be associated. In other words, where you find one, you will also find the others...

I. SCRIPTURAL TYPES OF LEAVEN.

1 Cor. 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

a. First, the leaven of false doctrine.

Matthew 16:6, 12 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees...Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Contrary to popular theology, Jesus is concerned about doctrine, or what is being taught and what is being heard.

1 Tim. 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

To whatever degree our notions of God are perverted is to what degree we will lack in our own spiritual lives. Now, false doctrine can be defined as that which is contrary to, subtle or otherwise, the Word of God. The most effective false doctrine is generally a mixture of truth and error. The leaven of false doctrine is transferred by the mouth, which is symbolic of the preacher.

Rev. 16:13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

Speaking things contrary to Scripture is dangerous because it only takes "a little leaven" to leaven the whole lump.

Titus 2:1 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine...

But generally, the Devil's servant doesn't come levitating down the aisle with a bone in his nose. No, as the Bible warns...

2 Cor. 11:14-15 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Doctrinal error often springs from a life of sin and compromise as justification. The leaven of false doctrine will manifest in one of two forms: In adding or taking away from the Word of God.

Rev. 22:18-19 ...If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.

To add or take away from God's Word represents the two extremes of perverted Christianity.

Incidentally, only two times in the N.T. is this phrase, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" used: once is used in Galatians 5:9, when the Apostle is addressing legalism, or adding to God's Word; the other is found in our text, where the issue is obviously the tolerance of sin, or taking away from God's Word. To add to the Word of God is to divert men's faith away from Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross. To take away from the Word of God is to seek to turn the narrow way into a broad way.

The first form of leaven will often lead to the next...

b. The leaven of sin.

1 Cor. 5:1-2, 6 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you...Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

In the first chapter Paul had addressed the less than perfect doctrine of the Corinthian church and here he addresses the results, sin. The theology we believe shapes the sort of Christians we are, this is inescapable. Hence, the principle holds true: as truth makes free, so error always fosters bondage to sin, as sin always brings death. Sin is always strengthened and encouraged by false doctrines. Case in point: once saved always saved, or unconditional eternal security is eagerly embraced/promoted by those who live in sin. And remember, it only requires a little unconfessed, unrepentant sin to bring spiritual destruction. The Apostle rebukes the Corinthian church saying, "...your glorying is not good." Simply meaning, their over-confidence while violating the clear directives of Scripture is not good, but bad. So it is today, men suppose they can overlook sin and survive.

1 Cor. 15:33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

c. The Spiritual leaven of hypocrisy.

Luke 12:1 ...beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

As we mentioned, false doctrine usually leads to sin and sinful religion evolves into hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy: { Webster's } Simulation; a feigning to be what one is not; or dissimulation, a concealment of one's real character or motives.²

Now, hypocrisy occurs when either or both of the first two forms of leaven are allowed to continue without correction. When the church teaches error, sin abounds, and the perversion of Scriptures is cited as justification. The full cycle of leavening is complete. Hypocrisy is the most dangerous spiritual state a man/church can be found in.

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

If men refuse to allow God to correct them, they surely will not allow us to do so.

The spiritual progression for leaven is expressed in...

James 1:14-15 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

We see the same pattern in the fall of man.

Genesis 3:1, 4 ...yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden...And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die...

First comes, the lie, or false doctrine. Then the sin, or the practicing of the lie, follows. Finally, hypocrisy, or the refusal to repent and return to the truth. Seeing these things are so, isn't it amazing that a zeal against heresy, sin, and hypocrisy is thought uncharitable in this hour?

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LEAVENING PROCESS.

Imagine yourself preparing a loaf of bread. What actually takes place during the leavening process? There are some absolutes, in the natural, that take place during the leavening process. These absolutes can also be applied in the spirit to the leavened church or individual...

a. Mixture.

Leaven is not part of the original but it must be added for the desired effect. Bread will never rise without adding yeast. This is also true in the spirit.

b. Fermentation.

Or, the breakdown of complex molecules in organic compounds.

Fermentation: { Webster's } It may be defined, in its most general sense, as any spontaneous change which takes place in animal or vegetable substances, after life has ceased. The term is also applied to other processes, as the fermentation in the raising of bread.

The application in the spirit? Leavening cannot take place apart from spiritual death.

c. Unnatural Growth.

Yeast in bread will cause it to unnaturally rise or grow. I say "unnaturally" because without the effects of the leaven there would be no growth. The only way bread would legitimately grow would be to add more ingredients, like flour. Growth due to leavening is caused by gases produced by fermentation. Leavened bread will increase 3 - 10 times the original size. This gives the appearance of solid growth due to added mass when actually the growth is light and lacks substance. This should make us wonder about those 100 fastest growing churches in America.

D. Modification.

Typically, leaven will spread through the entire substance causing change. However, it takes hours for bread to rise; it is not instantaneous. Hence, the change in a life/church will more than likely be gradual and will be undetected by the undiscerning eye. Leaven, in the natural, is a bacteria, or something living independent from what it leavens. Likewise, spiritual leaven operates among its subjects as though something living, moving with a distinct purpose and tenacity.

e. Only A Small Amount Is Required To Influence the Whole.

Galatians 5:9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Only a fraction of heresy, sin, or hypocrisy is required to defile even a large group. This is why it is so important to know "those who labor among you"!

Hebrews 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

This Scriptural warning admonishes us to beware, alert, and watchful for just a little leaven. In this hour it is popular to be a sin friendly church. There is a tendency to overlook doctrinal error or hypocrisy under the guise of love.

"If you refuse to limit your message, you will be required to limit your fellowship." -An Unknown Wise Pastor

Today, to overlook sin is somehow viewed as good, merciful, and holy. But can we be more merciful than God Himself? Are we to violate His Word in order to fulfill our call to mercy? Absolutely not..

1 Cor. 5:6 Your glorying is not good...

III. THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF THE LEAVENING PROCESS.

Now, there are certain conditions and elements that are essential to the leavening process. A lack of one or more of these components will hinder, if not completely stop the entire mechanism. And remember, as in the natural, so it is in the spirit.

a. The First Component Is Lukewarm Water.

Rev. 3:15-16 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Warm water is necessary for the process. It must be between 80 - 100 degrees F. If the water is too cold the leaven will not grow. If the water is too hot it will kill the yeast. The application is clear. The spiritually dead, cold, sinful world cares little for religion. They don't

want truth, but neither are they interested in false religion. On the other hand, the fiery hot zeal of a holy people will not allow leaven to exist. Spiritual leaven requires a people with a divided or mixed heart: those who want to go to heaven but who refuse to forsake this world.

b. Leavening Requires Flour.

Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat..

This is the primary ingredient. Obviously, the "wheat" in Luke 22:31 refers to a soul whom Satan desires to confuse, riddle and sift. No doubt, Satan desires to defile that which is holy and hungry after God. Can anyone doubt that Peter was spiritually hungry? Nevertheless, hungry people are sometimes the easiest prey to deception because they tend to eat anything that is set before them.

Proverbs 23:1-2 When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee: And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.

c. Leavening Also Demands Sugar.

Proverbs 20:17 Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

Sugar helps in browning, adds to the flavor, and provides food for the yeast. What does sugar represent in the spirit? Nothing more than positive, flattering, ear-tickling, sin excusing preaching.

Proverbs 2:16 ...the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words.

d. Surprisingly, Salt Is Also Needed In Leavening.

Salt adds flavor, but mainly controls the yeast's action. Without salt, the leavening process can run amuck. In the Bible, salt represents truth. Hence, this is typical of Satan maintaining just enough "truth" to disguise the leavening process. I've been in churches where the spiritual red flags were flying and alarm bells were ringing. The evidence of error and the sin were so obvious that saints were beginning to wake up to their demise. However, just when it seemed like action would be taken, the pulpit would deliver a doctrinally sound message to settle the troubled hearts back into complacency and apathy. Yes, just a little salt in the spirit to curb the process.

e. And Finally, Yeast Or Leaven Is Necessary.

When yeast, a living substance, is placed with lukewarm water, fed sugar, salt and flour, it grows and it multiplies. The right conditions always allow this supernatural, demonic activity of leavening.

IV. WHAT THEN, ARE THE EFFECTS OF LEAVEN?

a. First, an ever increasing tolerance of false doctrine, which gives place to sin, and except for repentance, will bring forth hypocrisy.

As the old saying goes, "Give the devil an inch and he'll take a mile." A little error, a little sin will always open the flood gates of demonic influence.

b. An appearance of success or prosperity.

Leaven will obviously cause unnatural growth (it is true, everything alive grows but not necessarily in size). Don't underestimate the potential attraction of a church with an atmosphere that accommodates sin, worldliness, and the flesh.

1 John 4:5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

This is truly what sinful, unrepentant men, who are bound by the sin nature, want. Should this surprise us? On the exterior, such people/places, will have the appearance of life, but underneath the religious veneer there is only death and decay. Now, growth doesn't always indicate compromise or leaven (on the day of Pentecost 3000 souls were added to the church.) But there was fruit of repentance and changed lives in that growth. Hence, growth with little substance is a sign of leaven. Moreover, remember, what is true for the church is true for the individual.

c. If tolerated it will destroy and bring ruin to the whole.

It only takes one person who lives in unrepentant sin (hypocrite), or who embraces false doctrine to begin the leavening process in the spirit. We can never tolerate this condition.

V. THE PREVENTATIVE AND REMEDY FOR LEAVEN.

1 Cor. 5:6-7 Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us...

a. Purge The House.

Purge: {Greek} ek-kath-ah'ee-ro, To cleanse thoroughly.

In the authority and power of the Holy Ghost, we are to cleanse our temples, both individually and corporately.

1 John 3:3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

When Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem He used a message and a whip, which tells us it requires both. The message represents "preaching."

2 Tim. 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

"Deal with the sin and not with the sinner is a maxim of popular acceptance, but like most popular maxims when adopted by the pulpit it makes havoc of truth and righteousness. The sin and the sinner are inseparable. Sin is not an abstract entity. It has its being through the sinner. Sin is not an accountable thing. The sinner is accountable for the sin. The only way to destroy the sin is through the sinner. Our gospel is a personal gospel. 'Thou art the man' is the epitome of its purpose. To separate and purge the person from his sins is the chief aim of the gospel....All forms of sin and wickedness grow up and luxuriate under the eye and voice of preaching that never disturbs consciences nor awakens opposition. The preaching that has no repellent power will not have attractive force. The preaching that is not direct in its aim is a blank cartridge fired in the air."

-E.M. Bounds

Ephes. 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word...

The "whip" Jesus used to cleanse the temple represents "church discipline." Not a popular concept in today's loose and immoral church-world, nevertheless, it is Scriptural...

1 Cor. 5:3-5 For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In John's Gospel, Jesus drove out the money-changers, but in the other gospels it says He cast them out.

Genesis 1:4 ...and God divided the light from the darkness.

Darkness must never be negotiated with, it must be dispersed. Are we committed to an unleavened testimony? In an hour when men mistakenly believe all it takes is just a little right to redeem the wrong and a little truth to overcome gross error, perhaps we should humbly return to God's Book.

-B.W.