

A LITTLE LEAVEN

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There are a number of agents that are commonly added to dough to cause a foaming action that makes bread rise. This is known as *leaven*. In fact, the English word “leaven” is derived from a Latin word that also gives us our word *lever*, as something that raises. The Hebrew word for leaven means “to swell up.” Leaven occupies a prominent place in scripture. For example, several times God’s word uses the fact that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” to make an important point, usually as a warning.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump

“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” is a phrase that is found in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9. The principle that is captured by those words is also applied to God’s kingdom in one of Christ’s parables. Christ taught that his spiritual kingdom is his church, which he came to build (Matt 16:18-19). In Luke 13:20-21, Christ said, “Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (see also Matt 13:33). The teachings and spiritual fruits that pertain to the kingdom of God are to be within us (Luke 17:20-21). The entire lump (all Christians) are to be leavened by it. This is a case in which the principle of “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” is used in a good sense. In 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9, the words are used to warn against wickedness. In 1 Corinthians 5:1-4, we learn fornication was being practiced among the church of Corinth and nothing was being done about it by the congregation. The church was commanded to deliver the guilty one to Satan (1 Cor 4:4-5). One reason for this commandment was to bring the sinner to repentance that he might “be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 5:5). Another major reason the church was commanded to “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (1 Cor 5:13), was to preserve the spiritual purity of the church. “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” (1 Cor 5:6-7). “Malice and wickedness” are types of spiritual leaven, whereas having sincerity and truth is equated with being spiritually unleavened (1 Cor 5:8). If the practice of any form of immorality

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(continued)

(sin) is allowed in the Lord's church, the behavior will spread and the congregation will become completely corrupted and destroyed. False doctrine stands as a similar threat. There were false teachers among the churches of Galatia who were perverting the gospel of Christ by commanding that Gentile converts to Christ must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses (Gal 1:7; 2:3-5; 3:1; 4:17; 6:12-13). Following this doctrine would cause them to be removed from Christ (Gal 1:6), and fall from grace (Gal 5:1-4). Concerning this threat to their faith, Galatians 5:7-10 says, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." This is why false teachers must be marked and avoided (Rom 16:17), rejected (Titus 3:10-11), and withdrawn from (1 Tim 6:3-5).

The leaven of the Pharisees

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. Jesus said "they say, and do not" (Matt 23:3). The Pharisees taught for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt 15:9). Their commandments and traditions transgressed the commandments of God (Matt 15:3). The result was that they drew near to God *with their mouth*, and honored Him with their lips, but *their heart was from Him*" (Matt 15:8). 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.