

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-03-18—MEANING OF LEAVEN

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

When it comes to leaven, it has been taught for decades that it pictures all sin; however, that does not square with Scripture. Can you think of any verse in the Bible that directly connects leaven with sin? You might think about 1 Corinthians 5, but read it carefully:

1 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8 Your glorying *is* not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Therefore, purge out the old leaven, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with **the leaven of malice and wickedness**, but with *the* unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

Verse 8 is the go-to place for claiming that leaven represents all sin, but it does not say that. It says, **leaven represents “malice and wickedness.”** While malice and wickedness are sins themselves, it never says that leaven represents *all* sin. To understand more, look at the definitions for these words:

DEFINITIONS:

Malice = desire to do evil unto others.

Wickedness = conduct that is evil.

Malice and wickedness are a type of *leaven*. Saying it another way, *leaven* is the result of malice and wickedness so it is a **type** of sin. Why? Because people whose conduct is evil or who have a desire to do evil can cause others to also commit serious sins. Remember what Paul said, “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (v6). Malice and wickedness is a quality or state of the heart and mind that can **spread to others**. But this is not the only type of leaven. Notice something Jesus Christ said:

MATTHEW 16:6 And Jesus said to them, “Watch out, and be on guard against the **leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees**.”

This statement puzzled the disciples who imagined that He was referring to bread. Jesus then reminded them of feeding 5,000 people from only a few baskets of fish and bread. He then flat out said that He was NOT speaking about bread:

MATTHEW 16:11-12 How is it that you do not understand that **I was not speaking of bread** when I told you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?” 12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of **the doctrine [teachings] of the Pharisees and Sadducees**.

Instead of referring to bread, Jesus said leaven is the result of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. How can teachings be leaven? Because the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were hypocrites! In Matthew 23 we find a harsh condemnation of them where Jesus tells them over and over, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!**” A hypocrite is one who says one thing but does things that contradict what they say. The Greek word for hypocrite is *hupokrites* and it is a compound of “under” (*hupo*) and “condemnation” or “judgment” (*krisis*), so it literally means someone who is “under condemnation”. Interestingly, it is what they called *actors*. So, **leaven also represents hypocritical teachings**. Again, that is something that can *spread to others*.

Do you see a pattern here? **Leaven represents serious sins that are spread to others**. It is not **all** sin. Sin is the transgression of the law, but when it spreads to others, it becomes leaven. Now “leaven” makes a lot more sense, right? This exactly portrays what happened in Corinth with the man who was fornicating with his stepmother.

Also, *leaven* is an AGENT! It is not bread by itself. It is put into dough when making bread but the dough itself is not bad. It can become leavened OR unleavened bread. We are like dough. We have all sinned so we are leavened to some extent but we need to continue in a state of being unleavened by NOT putting any more leaven into our “dough.” Leaven portrays serious sins that are intentionally spread to others just like deliberately adding leaven to dough. The Corinthians were puffed up because they allowed fornication to continue in their midst:

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2 *It is commonly reported that **there is sexual immorality among you**, and such immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—allowing one to have *his own* father’s wife. 2 **You are puffed up** and did not grieve instead, so that he who did this deed might be taken out of your midst.*

The Corinthians all knew about their brother in Christ who was committing fornication (*porneia* = sexual immorality) and his actions affected the entire group. He continued in his sin even though everyone knew it. Such sin can spread—and THAT is why it is called leaven. It is much worse than a sin that does not involve the brethren.

Now, what about the opposite of leaven; that is, what is “unleavened bread”? Look again what Paul said:

1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8 *Therefore, purge out the old leaven, so that you may become a new lump, even as **you are unleavened**. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with **the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**.*

We ARE unleavened because we are no longer putting more leaven into our lives. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and we are to be *unleavened* by sincerity and truth. (It is *unleavened*, not unleavened bread—*bread* was wrongly added.) To be *unleavened* is

not adding any more leavening. So, *unleavened* is living without leaven and having a heart and mind of sincerity and truth! What do those words mean?

DEFINITIONS:

Sincerity = conduct that is free from deceit or hypocrisy.

Truth = a quality or state of being pure or unconcealed.

To be *unleavened* is to have a heart and mind that is free of deceit and hypocrisy. If we are unleavened, our hearts and minds are pure before God and Jesus Christ is LIVING in us¹! Of all who ever lived as flesh and blood, only Jesus Christ is unleavened. In contrast, we ALL are leavened because once leaven is added to dough it can never be removed. Since we all sinned and were enemies of God², we all have leaven in us. It is not something we can change at this point. However, we are to stop adding leaven and allow Jesus Christ to live in us so we move forward in an unleavened state. Now we have all the pieces to understand what leaven and unleavened means:

DEFINITIONS:

Leaven = represents the spreading of serious sins to others. It is the result of a heart and mind filled with deceit, malice, wickedness, or hypocrisy.

Unleavened = represents a heart and mind that is pure. Unleavened does not mean that a person is without sin, it is staying sincere and true to God even when we do sin. Such a heart and mind does not intend to spread sin to others.

Now, this topic would not be complete without addressing “old leaven:”

1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8 Therefore, **purge out the old leaven**, so that you may become a new lump, *even* as you are unleavened. For Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. 8 For this reason, let us keep the feast, not **with old leaven**, nor with *the* leaven of malice and wickedness, but with *the* unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

When Paul mentioned “old leaven,” it was in the context of the sexual immorality of the man and his stepmother. The Corinthians were gentiles and their entire culture was one of idolatry and sexual immorality and they were struggling to come out of it. The “old leaven” was referring to the practicing and spreading of idolatry and sexual immorality that the Corinthians lived with before their conversion.

This is similar to the ancient Israelites in Egypt. They lived in a culture that taught and spread the sin of idolatry. Why do we keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

¹ Gal. 2:20.

² Rom. 5:10.

EXODUS 12:15, 17 Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall **put away leaven** out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. ... 17 And **ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt:** therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.

God brought the ancient Israelites out from a nation that worshipped false gods. In fact, a reason for the 10 plagues was to judge their gods³. The plagues destroyed their idolatry (even if it was only temporary)! God then brought the Israelites out of Egypt desiring that they would no longer follow after idolatry. They saw God destroy the Egyptian gods and that way of life. That should have humbled them because God certainly showed there is “none other gods before Me⁴”. The “old leaven” was the idolatry of Egypt that had spread into the lives of the Israelites. Just like their bread that did not have time to become leavened, God wanted them to come out from the source of the “leaven” and stop adding more of that “leaven” into their lives.

Paul told the Corinthians to “flee idolatry”⁵. This seemingly does not fit the context because he begins talking about the Passover symbols (read all of 1 Corinthians 10). But fleeing idolatry fits perfectly in Paul’s discussion because the “old leaven” of Corinth was affecting the God’s people the same way Egypt affected the ancient Israelites. They “lusted after evil things”⁶ and it was intentionally taught (spread) as a part of their culture. The same thing was happening with the Corinthian brethren so Paul’s warning was very appropriate to the discussion of keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

All are leavened except Christ. After conversion, we are to put away our “old leaven” and stop adding more leaven of serious sins through the deceit, malice, wickedness, or hypocrisy of others. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is about remaining steadfast in an unleavened state through Jesus Christ living in us!

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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³ Exod. 12:12.

⁴ Deut 5:7.

⁵ 1 Cor. 10:14.

⁶ 1 Cor. 10:6.