



Scripture says, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump."
The choice is ours: We can be the leaven of unrighteousness or

The Leaven of the Kingdom

BY ERN BAXTER

I returned a few years ago to a city where I had once pastored to officiate at the funeral of an old friend. I had been away for a long while, so many people wanted to greet me. After the service, as I embraced one friend, I noticed a young couple that had not spoken to me moving away from the scene. I asked my friend, "How are they?"

"Not too well," he said. "After you left the city they were bitter.

Their parents served them roasted Baxter for breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day until they became so bitter against both you and the church that they turned their backs on Christianity."

Whether their parents had right reasons for roasting me three times daily is beside the point. The point is, they infected those young people with hatred, which eventually turned them against God.

Our words, our actions, and our lives are all like leaven, or yeast, which cannot remain inactive and isolated—it permeates every part of the substance in which it is put. Those parents let the yeast of hatred work in their children until it destroyed them spiritually. We can be like those parents, or we can be the leaven of righteousness—the choice is ours.

In the Scriptures, Paul ad-

dresses two churches that were infected with bad leaven, and gives us keys for ridding ourselves of it. Jesus, on the other hand, shows us a picture of good leaven and the potential it has—the potential we have for accomplishing His purposes on the earth.

Gifts and Sin

Looking first at how we can clean out the bad leaven, we turn to the Corinthians. One New Testament scholar bluntly said there are two things for which the Corinthian church is noted: spiritual gifts and sin.

If someone asks about spiritual gifts, we read to them from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. If someone asks, "What is carnality?" we turn to the same book. Is it possible that a church could be so spiritually gifted and so sinful at the same time? Yes, because a little leaven—the sin of carnality—worked slowly but steadily on the Corinthians until it permeated the entire community. Yet they never saw what was happening; they judged their spiritual condition by their gifts, not by their sin.

The Corinthian condition is still at work in many churches today. Thousands of people believe that just because they are charismatic, that is, endowed with spiritual gifts, they are automatically sanctified. But one doesn't necessarily follow the other. Charismatic gifts are just that—gifts from God. We cannot earn them. The issue is how we use them and how we grow in them.

A child who doesn't grow up becomes arrogant, self-centered, and irresponsible. A carnal Christian is one who is born again, but who hasn't grown up behaviorally. The Corinthians never grew in the use of the gifts that God had given them. "Grace is cheap," they said. "We like it because we can do what we want."

It was Paul who had brought the gospel to Corinth, and for a time the people saw him as their spiritual father. But when he tried to warn them about their true spiritual condition, they turned on him. Their arrogance against apostolic authority came out of a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching on the grace of God. They thought he was saying that God saved them so that they could do what they wanted.



The leaven of carnality permeated the Corinthian community.

What he taught was that it was God's predestined purpose for them—and for us—to be conformed to the image of His Son. God didn't save us by grace so that we could develop in disgrace. He saved us by grace so that it could touch every area of our lives until we become walking manifestations of His beauty.

A Corrupt Congregation

The leaven continued to work in

the Corinthians' lives. Once it produced an arrogance against apostolic authority, the next result was corruption in the membership. Paul admonishes them:

In spite of all your spiritual gifts—five people prophesy at the same time while twenty-seven are all talking in tongues—everyone knows there's fornication and illicit sexual activity among you. There is even a man living with his stepmother! Even worse is your attitude—puffed up and arrogant. "How can it be wrong?" you say. "Did you hear those prophecies this morning? Did you ever hear a congregation talk in tongues like this one does?" (1 Cor. 5:1-2, free translation).

Paul never suggests for a moment that their spiritual gifts are not valid. Instead, what he says is, "Your gifts are genuine, but you are rotten."

When he warns them to take action, he metaphorically speaks of leaven. "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" (v. 6 NAS). He knew that if the leaven of carnal boasting and permissiveness was not stopped, it would ultimately contaminate everything it touched.

Correcting Carnality

How do we deal with the problem? I would suggest the key to correcting carnality is found in three steps. First, we must reverse our conduct. Paul says, "Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump" (v. 7 NAS). We cannot harbor the old leaven, because by its very nature it will not stay dormant. Just as yeast permeates an entire lump of dough, the old leaven in our lives will color our entire personality. The only way to get rid of it is to repent and change our ways. It is never too late to do

this. It might be extremely difficult and cause us pain, but God offers us the constant opportunity to reverse our conduct.

The second step of correction is to *relate* to Christ, the Pass-over Lamb sacrificed for us (see verse 7). It is not self-effort that gets rid of bad leaven. It is the fact that at the cross, Jesus Christ took our unrighteousness and sin and vicariously bore them away. Sin has no legal claim to any part of us—not our personality, our family, our business; not our thinking or our activities; not our church or city or nation. By His death on the cross Jesus Christ legally outlawed unrighteousness forever. He trampled sin under His feet. He ground the skull of Satan under His holy heel and said, “You’re finished forever.”

The third step of correction is to *restructure* our convictions. Too many gospels being preached today leave room for a little sin. But the scripture says, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Jesus did not say, “I am going to take away all your major sins; some of these minor ones are okay.” The minor ones can become major overnight. He dealt with *all* sin.

If He hadn’t—if He had left even one small sin—it would have pinned Him to death. He would have pulled and strained at death and said, “I’m supposed to rise. What’s holding Me?” And a Holy God would have thundered from His throne, “You missed one little sin at Calvary.”

But in reality, Jesus didn’t miss anything. He dealt with sin so completely and effectively that when the time came for Him to rise from the dead, sin, Satan, and unrighteousness all stood judged and chained, helpless to impede Him. With holy glee, He laughed at them, and casting aside the fetters of death, He strode triumphantly into the

future to become the man on the throne of God destined to lead a new humanity into eternal life.

In responding to the grace of God, we cannot harbor the slightest violation of the divine desire for us. There is no place for continuing in sin. If we do, it is at the risk of having it permeate our personality and the whole context of our lives. Many Christians are so much less than they could be because they did not



The leaven that permeated the Galatians was the sin of legalism.

deal with certain sinful leaven years ago, leaven that has continued to pervade and paralyze them.

Galatians and Grace

The Corinthians had said, “Oh, I like that gospel of grace. You can do what you like.” But the Galatians had a different response to God’s offer of free grace. The leaven that permeated their ranks was not the sin of

license but the sin of legalism. They looked at the Corinthians and said, “Your answer is too easy. There has to be a catch somewhere. No one gets something for nothing. Sure, Paul told us to simply trust Jesus and freely receive the Holy Spirit and walk in His light, but we’d feel much better if we could depend on something more than the grace of God—just to make sure.”

When we fail to fully accept God’s offer of free grace and salvation, when we feel that we must do something “extra” to ensure it, that is legalism. Then we are relying on our “works” and not solely on Jesus’ atoning work on the cross. Paul says if we are relying on grace, it must be one-hundred-percent grace. If it’s works, it’s one-hundred-percent works. The two cannot be mixed. Grace gives everything and although it demands a response, it requires nothing in payment. Works, on the other hand, demand to be paid for. If we believe anything we are doing is eventually going to merit our salvation, then our salvation is payment for works, not a gift of grace.

Paul is blunt in his statement to the Galatians:

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?...Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal. 3:1, 3 NAS).

The Galatian error was threefold: a false view of Christ’s atonement, a false view of the Holy Spirit, and a false view of themselves.

False View of Christ

Paul says, “If righteousness comes through the Law, then



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THE PURPOSE

The speakers and workshop leaders will teach on the theme of the *power* of the Lord. There will also be ample time given for ministry and prayer, for "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20). Again and again the word came to us during the planning of this conference: *less talk, more power*. We believe that the Lord has it in His heart to manifest Himself in sovereign power so that every person who attends will leave with a new aware-

ness that God is indeed a *living* God.

The Lord will undoubtedly have some surprises for us. Our understanding and experience of spiritual power may come in for some divine revision! We believe that the Lord has prepared wonderful things for us to walk in together at the Fourteenth International Lutheran Conference on the Holy Spirit.

Larry Christenson,
Conference Chairman

THE PROGRAM

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6

- 1:00 P.M. Registration opens at the Minneapolis Auditorium
7:15 P.M. Opening Service at the Minneapolis Auditorium
Speaker: Larry Christenson

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 7

- 8:30 A.M. Prayer Service—Central Lutheran
9:30 A.M. Sessions—Minneapolis Auditorium
Bible Study: Michael Harper
Speaker: Del Rossin
1:30 P.M. Workshops—Minneapolis Auditorium
3:00 P.M. Workshops—Minneapolis Auditorium
7:15 P.M. Evening Service—Minneapolis Auditorium
Speaker: John Wimber

THURSDAY, AUGUST 8

- 8:30 A.M. Prayer Service—Central Lutheran
9:30 A.M. Sessions—Minneapolis Auditorium
Bible Study: Michael Harper
Speaker: Winkey Pratney
1:30 P.M. Workshops—Minneapolis Auditorium
3:00 P.M. Workshops—Minneapolis Auditorium
7:15 P.M. Speaker: Terry Law

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9

- 8:30 A.M. Prayer Service—Central Lutheran
9:30 A.M. Sessions—Minneapolis Auditorium
Bible Study: Michael Harper
Speaker: John Wimber
1:30 P.M. Workshops—Minneapolis Auditorium
3:00 P.M. Workshops—Minneapolis Auditorium
7:15 P.M. Speaker: Jim Roberson

SOME OF THE PARTICIPANTS

John Wimber: Pastor, Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Vineyard Ministries; adjunct faculty in church growth, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

Winkey Pratney: Well-known author and lecturer from New Zealand, currently residing at the Agape Force Ranch, Lindale, Texas.

Terry Law: President and founder of Terry Law Ministries, Tulsa, Oklahoma. This ministry has a daily radio broadcast, teaching tapes, publications, crusades in the United States and Canada, and worldwide outreach with Living Sound national teams.

Michael Harper: Internationally known author and keynote speaker; executive director, Sharing of Ministries Abroad, West Sussex, England.

Mrs. Jeanne Harper: Michael's constant companion and supporter.

Larry Christenson: Director of the International Lutheran Renewal Center (ILRC); internationally known author and speaker.

Del Rossin: ILRC coordinator of pastoral and parish renewal; pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Geneva, Illinois.

Jim Roberson: Pastor, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Albany, New York.

Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21 NAS). If there is anything in us that could give us the right to get into heaven, then the Father did not need to send Jesus. Christians who hold the Galatians' view of grace and salvation will forever analyze their every move and motivation, desperately trying to measure up.

When Peter walked on water, he was fine until he decided to analyze what he was doing—the analysis nearly killed him. Like Peter, for a while we may get along fine in our Christian walk because we're looking straight ahead and keeping our eyes on Jesus. But someone says, "Watch your walk, Brother. Watch your walk!" So we take our eyes off Him and look at our feet to analyze what's going on—and we fall in a heap. Analyzing our walk and striving to add our own good works to it will not carry us across the finish line. Only God's redeeming grace will give us the victory. The Bible gives us the whole principle:

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes [not on ourselves and our good works, but] on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2 NAS).

False View of the Spirit

The second Galatian error was a false view of the Holy Spirit. "This is the only thing I want to find out from you," Paul says. "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" (Gal. 3:2 NAS). God didn't fill us with the Holy Spirit because we deserved it. He gave us the Holy Spirit as a free gift to enable us to walk in the same kind of victory our Lord

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Jesus Christ walked in. Such a victory requires utter dependence on the Holy Spirit.

We cannot fulfil the lusts of the flesh while walking in the Spirit, because we cannot be in two places at the same time. Many people believe we must fight the flesh. But we don't have to—it is already dead in Christ's cross. We are simply to walk in the Spirit, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody...to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19 NAS). Then we won't have to worry about fulfilling the works of the flesh.

False View of Self

The third Galatian error was the false view they held of themselves. Take it from one who knows, we're never going to be a success in ourselves! Our disappointment with our failures really says we are still expecting something from ourselves. "Oh, I did it again," we say. Sure, we did it again. We will do it again and again and again until we acknowledge that we are totally dependent on God's grace. Don't ever forget it. The moment I begin to think, *I've been doing pretty well lately, so I'll try it on my own again*, I'm on a road to failure and defeat.

The solution to the Galatian error is the same as the solution to the Corinthian error: We must purge the old leaven. Galatians 5:1 exhorts us to "keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (NAS). We must get back to the liberty of the gospel. We must get back to Christ. We must accept once more the adequacy of His sacrifice. We must receive again the fullness of His Spirit. We must acknowledge once more that we are descendants of Adam. In ourselves, we don't have the power to do anything. We are powerless, broken, and beaten! But Jesus raised us

and filled us with His Spirit! He set us on the path to victory. He is still the answer. We must keep our eyes on Him and go where He is heading and purge out that other leaven.

When we have purged out the old leaven of carnality and returned to a walk in the Spirit, when we have purged out the leaven of legalism and accepted the complete work of Christ on our behalf, we can go on to become the leaven in the Kingdom that God intends us to be.



**Kingdom leaven
will work until the
kingdoms of this
world become the
kingdoms of our
God.**

The Good Leaven

Finally, we need to see that the Scriptures offer not only negative uses of leaven as a symbol—as we've seen in Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Galatians—but also positive uses. Jesus gave us a marvelous parable showing that leaven can also be good: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened" (Mt. 13:33 NAS).

This is the only passage in

which the permeating qualities of leaven are mentioned without any negative connotations. Jesus declared that the kingdom of God, His gospel, and His redeemed subjects have been sown in the dough of human society and that their leavening effect is at work. His leaven will permeate the whole. By its very nature the kingdom of God cannot be resisted forever. Eventually, the nations will fall prostrate at Jesus' feet and crown Him Lord of all. Kingdom leaven will work until the whole of creation is leavened, until the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God. The leaven will continue working until the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea, and until the nations walk in the light of the redeemed community's radiated glory.

On, O blessed leaven, on with your silent, secret, successful journey! On to Africa and India and South America. On through the western hemisphere, through the eastern hemisphere, through the islands of the sea. On, O blessed leaven! Circulate through city government, county government, state government, national government, and international government. God speed you on your journey! Permeate the whole until all creation joins in praise to the triumphant grace of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who sits forever upon His throne. Amen. □



Ern Baxter, a long-time leader in the charismatic renewal, is a member of the Integrity Communications Board of Directors. He and his wife, Ruth, live in San Diego, California, where he is involved with South

Coast Christian Fellowship. His time is divided between working with the fellowship and traveling in ministry.