

Chapter 16

A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENETH THE WHOLE LUMP

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. 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. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. (Galatians 5:2-12)

In the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ (if we consider the accounts in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke), He warned His disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees and the leaven of Herod. They were puzzled and supposed He had warned them because they had forgotten to bring bread with them when they had crossed the Sea of Galilee:

Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand,

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neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. (Matthew 16:8-12, emphasis mine)

The best information available to us concerning the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians is found in the Scriptures. The Bible reveals the Pharisees were orthodox in their beliefs, but they were steeped in legalistic self-righteousness and a life-style which had been generated by extensive rabbinical interpretations, handed down from generation to generation. These interpretations had provided them with a legal tradition of which our Lord said:

... Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Mark 7:6-9)

The Bible also reveals the Sadducees' doctrine denied the orthodoxy of the Pharisees by denying the existence of angels, the resurrection of the dead and other spiritual truths. Our Lord told them, *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.* Even so they were also steeped in *the commandments and doctrines of men.* Paul used their denial of the resurrection in his defense before the Sanhedrin:

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. (Acts 23:6-8, emphasis mine)

The third group, the Herodians, were followers of the doctrine of Herod (who was a

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usurper king, an Edomite, sitting in the place where Christ will one day sit in His kingdom). The doctrine of Herod teaches the kingdom of God will be produced on this earth through the political efforts of men. It is implied, though not stated in Scripture, the Herodians regarded Herod to be the Christ. We do not have direct information to suggest the earlier Herods regarded themselves to be the Christ, but Herod Agrippa I most certainly believed he was (*Claudius the God*, Graves, Random House, 1935: pages 317-323).

The first of the Herods, Herod the Great, was responsible for the renovation of Zerubbabel's temple. The reconstruction provided a structure that possessed a glory, similar to the glory of Solomon's temple. It was this temple that the Jews claimed had been forty-six years in building when Jesus said, *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. But he spake of the temple of his body.* Herod's reign as king over Israel and his long-term plan to provide the Jews with a glorious temple convinced the Herodians he was the Christ, according to the prophecy of Zechariah:

... Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. (Zechariah 6:12-13, emphasis mine)

The Scriptures do not state Herod the Great regarded himself to be the Christ, nor is such a position (understandably) included in the primary history of the period from the Jewish historian Josephus. Even so it is implied in his actions following the arrival of the magi, who inquired, *Where is he that is born king of the Jews?* Herod's order to slay *all of the children that were in Bethlehem, and all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under*, strongly implies he believed

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he was the Christ. It is evident that by this order, he removed any possibility of a threat to his authority to reign, which might arise from the birth of Christ.

The position of the Herodians was not a popular position in Israel. The Jews resented the domination of the Romans and counted the Herodians traitors. Neither the Pharisees nor the Sadducees cared for them. Despite this, there was common ground between each of the Jewish sects. They were steeped in self-righteousness. Consequently it was not difficult for them to agree to the trial and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, our Lord said, *The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.* In this parable there were three elements as there were in our Lord's warning concerning leaven. The three elements in His warning were the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees and the leaven of Herod. The three forms of leaven, our Lord warned of, are implied in the number of measures of meal the woman leavened. The final results of the parable of the woman who hid the leaven and our Lord's warning concerning the leaven are seen in II Thessalonians chapter two:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of [the Lord] is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of [the] sin be revealed, the son of [the] perdition. (II Thessalonians 2:1-3)

The Lord's instructions and His parable concerning leaven predicted *the falling away* of which Paul wrote in the above text. The term *falling away* is a translation of the Greek word *apostasia*, which is a departure from the truth. The leaven will have leavened the whole lump

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when the apostasy has come to its full end within the realm of professing Christendom. The *falling away* of the church, along with the revelation of the man of sin, must take place before Christ can come in His second coming.

If we were to continue reading in second Thessalonians, we would learn that the man of sin cannot be revealed until that which hinders is taken away. We believe this is the true church, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which alone can discern the truth of the Word.

The Scripture says, ... *the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned* (I Corinthians 2:14). Consequently when the remnant church, with its ability to discern the Word of God, is removed from this world in the first resurrection, the whole lump (all of professing Christendom) will then be leavened, and there will remain no one (until the one hundred and forty-four thousand of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel and the two witnesses appear upon the earth) to warn the world of the lie of the Devil and of his false christ. The antichrist will then come, unopposed, performing all kinds of signs and lying wonders to testify that he is Christ.

These miracles and the testimony of the false prophet will convince the apostate church and the world that the man of the sin is the Christ. After that, the Lord will bring the one hundred and forty-four thousand to Mount Zion (where, prophetically, they are seen in Revelation chapter seven), and they shall be His witnesses during *the time of Jacob's trouble* (the great tribulation period). They will preach the gospel of the kingdom within the borders of Israel as our Lord prophesied. Thus, in speaking to the twelve, He spoke to them (the twelve times twelve thousand) saying, ... *when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye*

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shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come (Matthew 10:23).

It is evident, then, that our Lord was describing the church age, and particularly, the latter part of the church age, when He said that the kingdom of heaven (i.e., the realm of those who profess to know the truth) is like a woman who hid leaven in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. It is not possible that this parable speaks of the evangelization of the world, as some teach, because of our Lord's use of leaven as a description of the doctrine of the Pharisees, of the Sadducees and of Herod, and because the woman is out of place in this parable. Remember, the apostle Paul wrote:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (I Timothy 2:11-14)

In the typology of Scripture, leaven was never used in any sacrifice or offering that represented the Lord Jesus Christ in His Person or in His work. However it was used to describe the sin nature of the Jews and the Gentiles (who, in this age, make up the church) in the two loaves, *baked with leaven*, that were waved at the feast of Pentecost. This feast speaks of the church age, because it was observed between the first three feasts of the Jews, which represent the first advent of Christ, with His crucifixion, burial and resurrection, and the last three feasts, which speak of the second advent of the Lord, with the rapture of the church, the return of the Lord to this earth, and His millennial reign upon this earth. In fact, throughout the Scriptures, leaven is never used in a good ethical sense. It is used to describe sin or false doctrine. Hence Paul warned, *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*.

The three forms of leaven, described by our Lord, have been active throughout the church

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age. As we come to the end of the church age and the modern ecumenical movement, we find that the three forms of leaven have leavened the whole, except for *a very small remnant*. Thus, within Christendom, we find many who are dependent upon ritual and law for salvation; we find many who deny spiritual truth, such as, the virgin birth of Christ, the deity of Christ, the necessity of a blood atonement, etc; and we find many who are constantly petitioning their governments for *blue laws* to control man's conduct and produce an idyllic society.

We no longer have debates between the fundamentalist and the modernist under the canopy of Christianity over the truth of the Word of God, nor do we hear apologetical sermons defending the great doctrines of the Bible. Rather we have heard catch phrases like, *Together, we can!* and we have seen the minimizing of Scriptural truth for unity, a so-called *unity of the Spirit*. Consequently the church is lukewarm concerning the truth of the Word of God and is willing to compromise doctrine for accelerated growth and riches, deeming these things to be the approbation of God. Many of the churches of our day boast, *I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*. Nevertheless the Lord will tell them:

... and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:17-22)

Paul's battle against the *other gospel* of the Judaizers and the present-day condition of churches that bear the name of Christ, but not *the doctrine of Christ*, certainly bears testimony to

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Paul's warning, *a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*. Yet, ironically, any of these churches, if confronted by the leaven, would simply, like the Laodicean church, justify their position by their numbers and wealth. It never seems to occur to them that our Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, said:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matthew 7:13-14, emphasis mine)

It is interesting to have noted the differences in the leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees and the leaven of Herod. It is also interesting to note their common ground. As with all of the commandments and doctrines of men, expressed in the various religions of the world both inside and outside of the canopy of Christianity, each one had its roots in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and is an expression of *a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*

When Paul referred to those who were circumcised, he referred to those who as a matter of religious conviction had submitted to the rite of circumcision as a responsibility of the law and not to those who, at any time, have been circumcised for purposes of hygiene, rather than religious reasons. This latter condition, though prevalent in this age, was not something Paul faced in that age, because the only ones who were circumcised in that age were Jews, Jewish proselytes, or Gentiles who professed faith in Christ but were beguiled by the *other gospel* of the Judaizers. It was this last group that Paul addressed in this fifth chapter of Galatians.

Paul made it clear to them that if they had embraced the rite of circumcision, demanded by the Judaizers, this made them *debtors to the whole law*. So that, *Christ is become of no effect*

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unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. This is not a declaration that those who were truly saved were, in some way or other, lost. That is a Scriptural impossibility, since our Lord said, *I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.* What Paul meant by his statement, *ye are fallen from grace*, was simply that they had taken a position that was not a grace position, by making themselves responsible to the *whole law* through the rite of circumcision.

Originally man could have been justified before God by observance of the commandment of God, which was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Only two persons could in this way have been justified before God. Adam and Eve were given just one law and they both failed to perform it. Eve was deceived into breaking this one commandment and Adam broke it willfully.

Failure to perform this one commandment resulted in death. Consequently they immediately died spiritually and they began to die physically. Since Adam was, by judicial reckoning, the federal head of the human family, when he died, we died. Consequently, apart from redemption in Jesus Christ, the whole human family is dead in trespasses and in sin. After the fall of Adam, everyone born into this world has been born with a sin nature. Man does not become a sinner by sinning, he sins because it is his nature to sin. Therefore, having failed the first method of justification before God, there remains but one way that man can be justified before God and that is through faith in the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It is:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5-7)

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God did not give the ten commandments to the nation of Israel to show man how to live, nor to offer a means of justification before God: *the law was added by reason of transgression till the seed should come*. So that, Paul wrote:

Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:18-21)

One of the arguments of the legalist is you cannot control the behavior of people without the rules and regulations which the law provides. The truth is you cannot control people with the rules and regulations of the law, because man in his fallen state is in rebellion against God, and the saved man still has a sin nature. All that can be obtained by the rules and regulations of the law is condemnation and death, if one views himself honestly, or self-righteousness and a sense of superiority, if one views himself dishonestly.

Our Lord denounced the Jewish leaders in the twenty-third chapter of the book of Matthew: *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess*. It is common, as with these Jews, for those who think they can be justified by the law to put up a facade of righteousness. More often than not, this entails accusing others and excusing themselves.

Our text speaks of another way man's behavior can be modified, but not be made sinless: *... in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love*. The true believer is reckoned dead to the law, but alive unto God by Jesus

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Christ. Consequently he is motivated by the love of Christ, which constrains him, as it constrained Saul, on the road to Damascus, to say, *Lord, what would you have me to do?*

Consequently Paul questioned those in the churches of Galatia concerning their change of mind:

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. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you. (Galatians 5:7-12)

Throughout his letter to the Galatians, Paul had not forgotten the zeal the Galatians had once showed for the grace of God. He questioned, *Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?* Paul had some serious doubts about the Galatians, but he was not yet willing to write their faith off as being spurious. He desired rather that they be *none otherwise minded*. That is, that they would stand fast in the truth of the grace of God. He knew that they could not have come to their legalistic position without a deceptive outside influence. He told them this legalistic persuasion had not come from God. Then he said, ... *but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be*. And, indeed, false prophets, such as the Judaizers, will come to judgment, as John declared in the book of the Revelation, *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*.

Paul had compassion for the Galatians. He knew it was not easy to oppose popular opinion and to take a stand for the truth. He had been a man-pleaser in Judaism and so he understood the temptation very well. He wrote, *And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble*

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you. The truth is, no one will ever suffer persecution by stating that a moral life is necessary for a right relationship with God, because, no matter who the world deems God to be, it believes *in a way which seemeth right unto a man*.

Paul understood, with the Jews, *the offense of the cross* was the curse it declared. The law stated, *Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree*. It also stated, *Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*. Thus the cross declared Israel's failure, as well as the world's failure before the law, and this is, most certainly, an offense to one who feels he is justified by the law.

The Judaizers' demand for ritual and law for salvation was an absurdity. In viewing their demands, in the light of the ultimate price paid by the Lord Jesus Christ to effect salvation, Paul showed his disgust by stating, *I would they were even cut off which trouble you*. In our English Bible Paul's point might easily be missed, but not in the Greek text of the book of Galatians. Paul's statement was clear. Very clear. If the Judaizers thought the removal of the foreskin of a man's penis could make the difference whether a man was saved or lost, *Don't stop with the foreskin, remove the entire penis!*

This statement by the apostle might shock someone with a phony sense of righteousness, but it states the case in the clearest of terms. It is difficult to add anything to Paul's statement because it says it all. No one in Judaism or the church would be willing to go that far, but the Lord paid a greater price than that! He willingly bore the curse of sin for His enemies, the ungodly and sinners, that they might be justified by grace through faith. Thus, John wrote:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of

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God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of [the] truth, and the spirit of [the] error.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. (I John 4:1-11)