

'A little leaven'

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Recently many of us concluded an observance of the seven days of Unleavened Bread. There are various lessons concerning leaven about which believers focus during this time period.

We have read the phrase in the Bible that says "a little leaven leavens the whole lump." The author of that expression was the apostle Paul. In fact, he mentioned the phrase two times, in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9.

In both instances Paul used the analogy of leaven to discuss the subject of sin. A little bit of sin can ultimately lead to a whole lot of sin.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul used leaven to describe sin in two different ways.

First he discussed how unchecked sin in a congregation led to a huge problem (1 Corinthians 5:1-6). The initial problem mentioned by Paul was fornication.

Certainly, Paul was displeased with the fornication. However, he seemed more irritated with members of the congregation glorying in their tolerance of the sin. Permissiveness can masquerade as forgiveness.

He said in verse 6: "Your glorying is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"

Second, Paul used leaven to describe malice and wickedness (verse 7-8).

In his letter to the Galatians Paul used leaven to describe aspects of bondage (Galatians 5:9).

Of course, Paul was not the only person in the Bible to describe sin as leaven. Jesus Christ warned the people about the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matthew 16:6-12). He was not talking about bread. He was talking about their sinful doctrine.

So we have great examples of how leaven pictures sin. A little sin can easily explode into massive sin. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

But there is more to the story of leaven.

Leaven does not always picture sin. While Jesus walked the earth in His physical existence, He gave a parable with the opposite description of leaven.

In Matthew 13:33 (and Luke 13:20-21) Christ used the analogy of leaven to demonstrate the Kingdom of God.

Just as sin entered the world by one man (Romans 5:12), the gift of grace came by one man, Jesus Christ (verse 15).

Just as a little leaven can easily explode into massive sin, God expects a little leaven to explode into the Kingdom of God.

A major step in the plan occurred with the Son of God. Now the plan continues with called-out believers who seek to follow their Savior.

We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

There is a remnant according to the election of grace (Romans 11:1-5).

What actions should we be doing to help the explosion of the Kingdom of God? Let me briefly mention two principles.

- We can plant and water to allow God to give increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). We don't have to cram ideas down the throats of people. We should certainly not be condescending.

- We can relate to people in their world. Paul described using freedom to be servants (1 Corinthians 9:19). Paul did not teach people to ignore the law of God. But he did explain the importance of reaching people where they are (verses 20-22).

Those of us who observed the seven days of Unleavened Bread will remember some lessons about leaven. Sometimes we will view leaven as sin, and at other times we will view leaven as the Kingdom.

Sin grows. The Kingdom of God grows.

When we examine the sins in our life and when we consider the actions that can better represent the Kingdom of God, we remember the lesson.

A little leaven . . .