

A little leaven

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By Lenny Cacchio

LEE’S SUMMIT, Mo.—Along the New York State shores of Lake Erie are some of the finest wine-making facilities in the world. To my personal taste neither California nor France can hold a glass against the quality that comes from the vineyards of New York.

I had the fortunate experience of spending my first two years of college in the middle of that wine-making area and came to know the local beverages well. I even tried my hand at making my own. On the excuse that making wine is a wonderful way to earn extra credit, I obtained some simple equipment from the chemistry lab. I then concocted a mixture of ingredients that included the perfect proportion of grape juice and sugar water.

Wine-making requires a chemical reaction that changes sugar into alcohol. In the natural world, yeast spores gather on the grape skins, and when the grapes are crushed the spores mingle with the juice and a natural fermentation begins. That’s just the nature of things. Yeast spores permeate our environment and they infect everything from wine to sourdough to allergic reactions.

In my little chemistry experiment (for extra credit, of course), my bottle of pasteurized grape juice was devoid of natural yeast spores, so I added a bit of baker’s yeast to my concoction and assembled my apparatus. In a month or so I had two very palatable bottles of red wine.

My *Funk and Wagnalls* describes fermentation as “chemical changes in organic substances produced by the action of enzymes,” and I can vouch that my wine was chemically different from the grape juice I started with—and it was all started with just a few grams of yeast.

To mix metaphors with James’s, “Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” Or, mixing metaphors with Paul’s, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,” or in my case, two fifths.

When Paul mentioned the leaven issue to the Corinthians, he was using leaven as a metaphor for a certain egregious sin that had infected their church. Their failure to deal with the couple involved was infecting their entire congregation, just as leaven grows and spreads and chemically changes whatever it infects.

Paul chose an appropriate illustration in using the example of yeast to describe how sin operates. Just as yeast changes the nature of what it touches, so does sin change what it touches. Unless the people purged themselves of sin, they would become something other than what they were. In the case of Corinth, their church had already changed drastically, and not for the better (1 Corinthians 5).

Just as yeast spores are everywhere, so are the seeds of sin.

At the end of the fermentation process, the juice develops a high enough alcohol content that it kills the yeast spores and the fermentation stops. Death is a part of the process, and the yeast spores bring it upon themselves.

That's the same way sin works. "Each is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and is enticed. Then when desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

As it turned out, I got no credit in chemistry class for my little experiment, but the project had a reward of its own. The wine itself was gladly consumed, yet that wasn't the real reward.

I believe the world around us speaks of the truth of God. In observing how yeast works, I had a better understanding of how sin works, and I determined not to let the process of corruption change me and instead to purge out the leaven in my life.

Sadly, I'm still purging, but, happily, the blood of the Lamb, the wine that is wine indeed, purges the unwanted yeast from our lives and sets us on a course anew.