

The Leavening Effects of Sin

“Leaven is used metaphorically in the Bible of an influence that can permeate whatever it touches. Leaven is used as a symbol of either good or bad influence,” **New American Bible Dictionary**, by Nelson. In one parable, the Parable of the Hidden Leaven, Jesus likened “*the kingdom of heaven*” to “*leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened,*” Matt. 13:33. This parable depicts the influence of the gospel, which is to be preached to “*all the world,*” Mark 16:16, and its leavening influence upon the world. Sinful as this world is, can you imagine what would be the state of society if the gospel had never been preached, if the world had never been influenced by the message pertaining to “*Jesus Christ and Him crucified,*” I Cor. 2:2?

As already stated, Leaven is also used in a **bad** sense. For example, Jesus exhorted His disciples to “*beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees,*” Matt. 16:6. At first, they did not understand what Jesus was referring to. But after hearing a further explanation, they then understood that Jesus was not speaking “*concerning bread,*” but that He was warning them of the “*doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees,*” Matt. 16:12. Their “*doctrine*” was false, but it had a leavening effect which, if left unidentified and unopposed, its influence upon society as a whole would have been a disaster.

In this article we are discussing “the leavening effects of sin,” but **what is sin?** “*Sin,*” the word, is translated from the Greek, *Harmatia*, which basically means “missing the mark.” In a broad sense, man’s basic responsibility can be summed up in such Scriptures as Eccl. 12:13 and Matt. 6:33. In Eccl. 12:13 Solomon said “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.*” In Matt. 6:33 Jesus said “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*” Anything short of fearing God and keeping His commandments involves sin (*harmatia*), a missing of the mark. Anything short of seeking “*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” involves sin (*harmatia*), a missing of the mark.

More specifically, as we further define “sin,” we note that sin is described as “*lawlessness,*” I John 3:4 (NKJV), or “*the transgression of the law*” (KJV), referring to the “*law*” of God. Hence, anytime, or in any way, a person transgresses or violates the “*law*” of God, then he is guilty of “*sin.*” In I John 5:17, the apostle John said that “*all unrighteousness is sin...*” “*Unrighteousness*” is translated from *adikia* (Greek), which is a comprehensive term for wrongdoing between persons. God has given us rules to govern our conduct toward one another (Tit. 2:11-12; Jas. 1:27; Matt. 7:12, etc.), and any time one violates those rules, sin, or “*unrighteousness*” is committed. In Romans 14:23 the apostle Paul said that “*whatever is not from faith is sin.*” “*Faith,*” as contextually used in that verse, is subjective in nature. Though one’s conscience is only a safe guide insofar as it is guided by the Scriptures, the fact remains that when a person violates his conscience, or his understanding of what is right, then sin is committed. In James 4:17, the writer stated that “*to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*” In this verse we learn that one can sin by **omission** as well as by commission. One doesn’t have to openly violate the “*law*” of God in order to sin; he can sin by doing nothing when he knows that he ought to “*do good.*”

A person sins when he yields to temptation. Please note James 1:14-15: “*But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin: and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death.*” Those “*desires,*” translated “*lust*” in the KJV, fall into three categories, “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of*

the eyes, and the pride of life,” I John 2:16. All three of these lusts, or desires, were present when the first sin was committed. With this in mind, please observe Gen. 3:6: “*..when the woman saw that the tree was good for food* (lust of the flesh, bw), *that it was pleasant to the eyes* (lust of the eyes, bw), *and a tree desirable to make one wise* (the pride of life, bw), *she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*” At this point, insofar as man was concerned, sin entered the world, and it resulted in all the terrible consequences which have plagued mankind in succeeding generations.

Satan, of course, was the **first** sinner. He “*was a murderer from the beginning,*” “*he is a liar and the father of it,*” John 8:44. He was the “*adversary*” of Adam and Eve, even as he is our “*adversary,*” and even today he “*walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour,*” I Peter 5:8. And we must “*resist him, steadfast in the faith,*” I Peter 5:9, or else we will suffer the tragic consequences both in time and in eternity!

Already, as has been stated, in this article, we are discussing “The leavening effects of sin.” We have noted that leaven tends to permeate the entire substance of whatever it comes into contact. This is illustrated in I Cor. 5:6, wherein with reference to the sinful brother in the church at Corinth, the apostle said, “*Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump;*” hence, they were commanded to “*purge out the old leaven*” (v. 7), or to withdraw from the brother in the church, the brother who was guilty of incest, the one who had “*his father’s wife,*” I Cor. 5:1! Such evil conduct was not to be tolerated, for its leavening effect for evil would permeate the entire church

The leavening effects of sin can be seen in what it does **to nations**. Solomon said that “*Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people,*” Prov. 16:38. Sin is what resulted in the Assyrian Captivity of Israel, the northern kingdom, 2 Kings 17. Sin is what brought on the 70-year Babylonian captivity of Judah, the southern kingdom, Jer. 52; 2 Chron. 36. Read Jeremiah, chapters 46-51, and you will note God’s judgment which fell upon such nations as Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Elam, and Babylon — all because of sin! The leavening effects of sin resulted in the Genesis flood, Genesis 6-8, Sodom and Gomorrah being destroyed by fire and brimstone, Genesis 19, the destruction of Jerusalem, and it was the initial cause of the pain and death which has been visited upon the entire human race, Gen. 2:17; 3:22-24; Rom. 5:12. Indeed, sin is no laughing matter!

The leavening effects of sin can be seen in what it does to **individuals**. Sin, as already noted, brought on physical death, Gen. 3:17-19. Sin also brings on spiritual death, or the separation of the individual from God, Isa. 59:1-2; Eph. 2:2-3; Rom. 6:23. Sin produces slavery, for “*whoever commits sin is a slave of sin,*” John 8:34; cf. Rom. 6:16-17. Sin destroys innocence, even as it did in the case of Adam and Eve, Gen. 3:7-11. Sin destroys marriages, Matt. 19:9, and it is responsible for the strife, bitterness, and hostility so evident in so many homes, 2 Sam. 12. Sin is responsible for those feelings of guilt which plague the human race, Rom. 7:17-24. And sin is what will cause most of the human race, both past and present, to agonize eternally in hell! Matt. 7:13-14; Rev. 21:8. Sadly, the story of the human race is a story of sin and its leavening and devastating effects.

However, **the story of the Bible** is not just about sin and its consequences. In the very chapter which informs us of the first sin, we also read of the **first promise of a redeemer!** The “*seed*” of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, Gen. 3:15. From that time onward, God’s ultimate plan for the redemption of sinners began to unfold. Thus we read about the “*seed*” of Abraham through Whom all nations would be blessed, Gen. 12:1-3, and of its ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, Matt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16,29. Finally, “*when the fullness of*

the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,” Gal. 4:4-5. Jesus, in His death, fulfilled the law and the prophets, Matt. 5:17; Col. 2:14-14, and became the “mediator of the New covenant,” Heb. 9:15-17. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, we have the “gospel,” I Cor. 15:1-4, which is “the power of God unto salvation,” Rom. 1:16. Through one’s obedience unto the gospel, he becomes a part of the “saved,” whom God adds to His church, Acts 2:47, and wherein one is reconciled unto God, Eph. 2:16. And, by then being “faithful unto death,” one can receive that “crown of life,” Rev. 2:10, and thereafter bask eternally in the glorious presence of God in that glorious abode which is void of sin, pain, sickness, sorrow or death, Rev. 21:4,27; 22:1-4. Friend, it is far better for you to obtain redemption through the blood of Jesus, Eph. 1:7, than to suffer the agonies of an eternal hell because of the leavening effects of sin. Consider ye well!

—Bobby Witherington
