

The Doctrine of Leaven

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These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God."** (John 3:16–18). **"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!"** (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). **If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness** (1John 1:9). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

This doctrine was taken directly from **Exodus 12** ([HTML](#)) ([PDF](#)) ([WPD](#)).

Leaven speaks of a corruption in the Scripture. Jesus Christ, during His incarnation, was uncorrupted by an old sin nature and by personal sin. It would be best to go over the **doctrine of leaven** at this time to see how it is actually used in the Bible.

The most vicious attacks on God's Word are attacks from corruption (or, *leaven*) from within. The most evil of the religions often imitate Christianity and many so-called Christian religions (such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses) are great perversions of the faith.

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1. Surprisingly enough, there are three or four words in the Old Testament which are rendered by "leaven" in the English. However there is but one equivalent OT word for "unleavened." To most people, the word *leaven* probably has very little meaning. The Hebrew word is...
 - a. Châmêts (חָמֵץ) [pronounced *khaw-MATES*] (Strong's #2557), means *to ferment, to be sharp or sour*. Strong points out that it figuratively means "extortion," but it is not ever translated that way.
 - b. Matstsâh (מַצָּה) [pronounced *mahts-TSAWH*], (Strong's #4682), means *sweet or sweetness, not made bitter with yeast*. We recognize this word and it is used even today to describe unleavened bread.
2. We find "unleavened" occurring only one time prior to Exodus, and that is in Gen. 19:3. When two angels visit Lot, he serves them unleavened bread. It is likely that this is all he could put together for them for a quick meal.
3. It would help if we had a clue as to why leaven is forbidden during certain religious feasts and unleavened bread is required. The majority of the passages in the Old Testament deal with the

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prohibitions but not the rationale behind them. We can certainly get a better understanding from the New Testament as to the meaning of leaven and unleavened, figuratively speaking, but how were the Hebrews to grasp their meaning? As we have seen, the Old Testament and New Testament take on something can be quite different.

- a. Prior to the flood, there was no active bacteria found in close proximity to man. Whether it was deeply buried or how it came into being after the flood, we do not know—perhaps it was the result of so many dead bodies (animals and human) as a result of the flood. Whatever the reason, there was no wine or leavened bread prior to the flood. Sometime after the flood, Noah planted a vineyard, harvested a few grapes and drank the wine which fermented from it (some things just happen by accident; Noah certainly did not know what he was making the first time).
 - b. During one binge, Noah was so drunk that he ran around naked in his tent. Where his wife was, we don't know, but most women do not find a drunken husband to be too entertaining, so she probably stepped out. If she were there, his drunken behavior may have which repulsed her. Ham, his son, walked in afterwards; very possibly he was listening or saw the commotion and found his father naked. Rather than give him the respect he should have as a son and cover him up and walk out, Ham made light of the situation and told his brothers about it. As a result, Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan. So fermentation was, from the beginning, associated with drunkenness and cursing. Gen. 9:20-26.
 - c. Later, Lot, Abraham's nephew, was given enough wine to be seduced by his own daughters at the end of Gen. 19. Lot, although a believer in the Revealed God, led pretty much a worthless life as a believer and spent the last few years of his life hiding in a cave with his two daughters. When they seduced him, they produced two sons, Moab and Ben-ammin, both of whom fathered tribes which gave Israel trouble for centuries. So here we find fermentation, or leavening, associated with incest and drunkenness. These are the only two recorded incidents of fermentation. These incidents, in addition to what we have come to associate with drinking, gave a strong negative connotation to fermentation.
 - d. In both cases, the corruption of the grape juice led to poor judgement, lack of self-control and errant behavior.
 - e. Wine, as a drink, is presented in the later portions of Scripture as both a cursing and a blessing.
4. Precept Austin provides an excellent explanation: *The specific symbolism of the passover required the absence of leaven, which symbolizes a corrupting influence. Leaven is associated with fermentation which is a process of decay (thus representative of God's curse on the earth) and is also connected with the production of the toxic substance, alcohol.*¹
 5. For our own understanding, we should turn to the New Testament, where many Old Testament symbols are properly interpreted.
 - a. Jesus warned several times of the *leaven* of the Pharisees (Matt. 16:6,12 Mark 8:15 Luke 12:1). The Pharisees were the religious establishment of that time. They were the so-called conservative theologians. They claimed to believe in the Holy Scriptures; or at least gave lip service to them. However, they did not understand God's Word and they were at best, actors (hypocrites) when it came to following God's directives (Matt. 23). They were whitewashed tombstones—that is, a clean appearance on the outside but filled on the inside with dead men's bones. In other words, they were unregenerate with a sin nature always functioning.
 - b. Jesus associated leaven with the corruption of the Scriptures by the false teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They added their own twist or interpretation to the

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Scriptures; that addition being corruption.

- c. Leaven is also mentioned in 1Cor. 5. Here, a Christian is living in incest with his mother (or step-mother). The Corinthians, living in a city of debauchery, boasted about this. We may not understand this, but it was a source of pride to them to be associated with such a person; to be able to say so-and-so was a Christian. Paul corrects them on their false concept of separation (you separate from believers who are involved in overt, immoral behavior; not unbelievers). Paul points out that this kind of overt immoral behavior would corrupt, or *leaven*, the entire church if left unchecked and this person must be excommunicated. Paul also lists the kinds of believers with whom we are not to associate: immoral, covetous, swindlers, idolaters, revilers and drunkards. As an aside, this is why a pastor, backed by his board of deacons, would not tolerate immoral behavior during church meetings. Although that seems like a given, I have been in a Lutheran church where lesbian couples expressed great affection towards each other during the service. There is a proper balance which must be struck here—people with anti-Bible sexual proclivities are certainly not to be barred from attending church. They can be saved and they can grow spiritually. However, their overt behavior on church grounds should not reveal to anyone what they do behind closed doors. So, even a male gay couple could attend church together, but there should be no signs of affection between them in the church or in the parking lot, as that is a perversion.
- d. The problem with the Galatians is that after salvation, they were infiltrated with the legalists who enjoined them to keep the law for spirituality. All the Judaizers had to do was to get the Galatians to concede to them in one point; to follow the Sabbath or to get circumcised in order to maintain their salvation or to further their spirituality, and this would corrupt the Galatian church. Paul points out in Gal. 5:9, **A little leaven leavens the whole lump**. To make this simple for someone who does not cook; it only takes a small amount of yeast to cause a large loaf of bread to rise (a teaspoon of leaven would be more than enough to make an entire loaf of bread rise). In this situation, it only takes a small amount of legalism to corrupt the entire congregation.
6. In Leviticus 7:13, we have the introduction of leaven into one of the offerings. This instance of leaven (or yeast) in the bread did not violate the prohibitions found in Exodus 23:18 or Leviticus 2:11 because this was not an offering which was burned at the brazen altar; in other words, it did not represent Christ's death upon the cross. Jesus Christ had no old sin nature, so anything offered in conjunction with the brazen altar had to be without leaven. However, when the offering speaks of us and our fellowship with God, we do carry an old sin nature within us and therefore should be offering up bread with leaven.
7. Our conclusion is simple: leaven is associated with corruption of true doctrine with false; of proper behavior with immorality; of a congregation dedicated to God by those who are not. Leaven is associated with the old sin nature, which is why it is never found in burnt offerings (signifying the death of our Lord) but it is found in other offerings.

¹ From <https://www.preceptaustin.org/exodus-34-commentary> accessed March 31, 2021.

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