



Calling All Yeast Inspectors

“Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. (Exodus 13:7)

A concept carried across both Testaments is how leaven—an older term for yeast—is a representation of the way sin works when allowed to go unaddressed. Even before the formal giving of the Law through Moses, it was one of the first requirements given by God in the course of the Passover when Israel was still in Egypt. An important aspect of Passover, where they were literally saved by the blood of the lamb as they were coming out of the old life and into the new, was the accompanying command to deal with the expulsion of sin as symbolized by purposely addressing the eradication of leaven not just from the meal, and but the whole household. When instructions were given to annually observe Passover, the need to expunge this symbol of sin extended to “*all your borders*”—it was not just necessary for the individual or just one’s household, but the **whole** of God’s people.

This aspect of the Passover observance served as a basis for the greater purpose God would demand of His people in that they needed to expunge not only the leaven of the surrounding nations who would corrupt them with their sinful lifestyles and false religious practices, but in general must always be on guard against allowing any opportunity for sin to gain entrance either individually or corporately. In God’s economy, sin is always a very big deal which is not limited to each individual’s initiative, but the corporate whole as well. Dealing with the existence of sin in the world is not the commandment, but the world is not supposed to see it practiced either by the individual Christian, nor the Church at large. We responsible within our self and borders.

When there are new beginnings recorded in Scripture, there always seems to be a significant accompanying aspect of sin. There is, of course, the initial conflict in the Garden at the very beginning with Adam and Eve, but some aspect is present in nearly every biblical milestone in the whole of history. Sometimes it is a positive lesson in how to deal with sin such as when God supplied Abraham a substitute for Isaac or in the

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Passover when the blood of the lamb provided an exemption from death, but often we see the consequences of unaddressed sin in such examples as Sodom and Gomorrah, Saul's taking matters into his own hands, or the cycle documented in Judges of the futility of tolerating a coexistence with world's ways. It is probably a testimony to the lack of biblical teaching in the Western Church at present that sin is a topic no longer regularly visited as to why so many Christians and their organizations in so many cases are indistinguishable from the world. To study any event or person in Scripture without including the major accompanying theme of sin requires not just deliberate omission of some of the critical text, but in all likelihood a complete departure from Scripture altogether. In such cases, it is understandable why the worst imitations of the Bible have experienced wholesale adoption.

But the biblical use and illustration of leaven does not end simply with sin proper as it affects the whole world whether one is a believer or not, but has a powerful conduit by which it is hyper-directed specifically at God's people. It turns out that false teaching is not merely a working of misinformation licensing bad behavior, but especially where believers are concerned, is the inseparable other side of the same coin, one of its most prolific delivery systems.

¹¹"How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹²Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:11-12)

¹⁵And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." (Mark 8:15)

This is a great example of the axiom, "Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture". We know that Jesus equates the leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians with false teaching because he plainly states it. Whereas the use of leaven in the Passover and Old Testament sacrifices is a teaching about dealing with sin while living in a sinful world, and the need to remove those influences, Jesus expands this to teach how to deal with sin which is originating from sources within the Church. As it turns out, false teaching cannot be found in a vacuum working apart from sin. It is never a purely intellectual conflict subject to mediation or polite debate; it is the satanic influence which has completely deceived the world and yet allowed to enter and work within the walls of the Church

proper to achieve the same thing. And it loves to work in three delicious flavors: Pharisee, Sadducee and Herodian.

The leaven of the Pharisees works in their character, which is actually often much more subtle than that of either the Sadducees or Herodians. Whereas Scripture never shows Jesus either in agreement or personal fellowship with a Sadducee or Herodian, many times he not only agreed with a Pharisee but was found in their company. Pharisees such as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and, of course, Paul would actually become authentic followers. Such is never recorded of the others. At the first documented council meeting of Early Church leadership, a sizable number of Pharisees who had come to faith in Christ were present. (Acts 15:5)

So we have to understand that a Pharisee is someone who is going to engage in what Peter designates as “*pareisaxousin*”—that is, they don’t present outright or completely false teachings, but adroitly introduce the false by laying truth next to error. (2 Pe. 2:1) In the same manner that a single drop of poison renders an entire glass of otherwise drinkable water unsuitable and unsafe, they serve deception side-by-side with something true to give it the appearance of perhaps being palatable.

This was especially accomplished by creating commentaries and interpretations of God’s Word which at one time may have been understood as the opinions of man, but over time were leveraged to actually supersede the authority of Scripture as it stood on its own. Their congregants became so influenced to the point that such believed the truth could not be imparted without the Pharisees’ prism of writings and interpretations through which they filtered God’s Word. The remaining elements of truth were not just diluted but eventually so polluted that Jesus would repeatedly challenge such a setting aside of God’s Word and ways in favor of the traditions of men. The presence of **some** truth never sanctifies the accompanying error.

In our times, we might better understand the Sadducees as the most liberal clergy and scholars on the doctrinal spectrum. The Sadducees only endorsed a narrow portion of God’s Word—in other words, they picked and chose what they personally deemed appropriate, ignored the rest, and thus did not subscribe to crucial tenants such as life after death. They are the embodiment of what happens when something is transformed into “religion”, something completely divorced from an actual faith in and relationship with the Living God, and settles for some form of ritualized, selective philosophy.

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While this obviously encompasses Christian cults who at their center substitute something else for God's Word in their pursuit of some form of a false Jesus such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, this has been observed taking over congregations and even whole denominations so as to arrive somewhere theologically divorced from their original doctrinal roots. Today, like then, the Sadducees far outnumber the Pharisees.

That which calls itself "Christian" in present-day America is far more often belonging to the character of the Sadducees. This is borne out by repeated surveys showing that those claiming to belong to the Christian demographic no longer hold a majority view that God's Word is inerrant, nor that hell or Satan are real (and often even heaven), and frequently subscribe to the notion that every religion worships the same God albeit with their own name and in their own way.

Pharisees keep enough of the truth active to produce a clever counterfeit of the authentic, but Sadducees go the distance to replace it with something else entirely.

At the core of the Herodian is a complete rejection not just of the authentic, but even a disdain for the counterfeit in favor of completely embracing the world so as to take their place among them. They have a shared delusion that they will conquer the world by becoming one of them.

Herod the Great and his many offspring sharing his name were not actually Jewish by ethnicity but descendants of neighboring Edom. But they weren't satisfied with that status alone and acquired dual citizenship as Romans. They enhanced their Gentile roots by attaining to what the world considered the most favored status of Roman citizenship and combined it with a religious appearance of following Judaism. In Herod's ability to cross the borders, so to speak, and be universally and simultaneously accepted as Jew, Gentile and Roman, he cultivated a following which defined success by the world's standards. He was only Idumean or Jewish when it fit with his Roman agenda, and had no problem battling them as outright enemies when such infringed on his Roman interests.

The Roman Empire conquered far more nations and city-states by negotiation than outright military conquest. You could keep your local citizenship and still become a Roman citizen of the Empire too; you could keep your religion by adding your god(s) to the Pantheon as long as you acknowledged the Emperor as ranking above them all; you could adopt the Roman infrastructure, currency and methods for your own. They provided a

license to be all things to everyone at all times. Ethnicity and religion were never a barrier to being welcomed into the Roman fold.

Having just come off an election cycle, we saw so many of these elements present within factions calling themselves “Christian”. Some want to change the world by electing more Christians, by getting legislation passed which is Christian-based, by variously using secular modes and methods to take charge and run it all. There are those who will protect religious freedom for anyone and everyone even at the expense of God’s Word and ways, and those who are merely using the various platforms of Christendom to leverage a desirable place in the world’s own system. Ultimately, they get rid of anyone who inhibits in the least their desire to elevate their self in the world’s eyes. This is also regularly in view in social “ministries” which attempt to address the real problems of the poor, illiterate and even diseased without also providing the Gospel. They have more in common with a government program than biblical Christianity.

While we find Christian conclaves or even entire institutions or movements affixed in the influence and working of one of these three avenues of false teaching inducing sin, it is not unusual to find those who followed the progression of first diluting the truth, then abandoning the truth, to ultimately pursuing the world as dogmatically and completely as the world does itself. But they all have one thing in common: *none* of them see these avenues as a focused, personal pursuit for their self alone; they are obsessed that everyone else is obligated to follow their chosen charge regardless of where it leads.

And that is what is interesting about the opening verse, where it is not just a divine requirement for each individual, but “*in all your borders*”. (Ex. 13:7) This is not something which is limited to personal choice, but carries a mandate to vigorously pursue this within the whole of God’s house. We are not supposed to sit idly by in detached empathy that it’s such a shame other Christians are allowing this to happen to their selves, their families, and even their whole fellowship, movement or organization to which they belong. Spiritual by-standing is prohibited.

Yes, Jesus provided specific guidelines for fellow believers as to handle issues of personal sin between them. Yes, Paul points out that when dealing with fellow believers who are holding to a position of error that we are not to be quarrelsome, but teaching with kindness, patience and gentleness to facilitate their spiritual recovery. (2 Ti. 2:24-26) But these are not the rules for false teachers. Christ never handled them in the course of His

own ministry by these standards. He publicly and steadfastly treated them like the leaven they are. It always came about in the character of what was taught by John, the last Apostle standing, whom we often call “The Apostle of Love”:

⁸Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. ⁹Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; ¹¹for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (2 John 8–11)

This is how we are supposed to deal with the leaven of false teaching.

But most importantly, we have to realize this is not just an issue of self-protection, but a call to act for everyone’s benefit. If we don’t, sooner or later it spreads to the point when it inevitably leavens the whole lump. There is no special gift or office identified in Scripture as “Yeast Inspector” because it is a basic duty assigned to everyone.

In Him,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org