

## TWO KINDS OF YEAST

When I was a kid my mother used to bake bread. Maybe yours did too.

If she did, you know what I mean when I say that the aroma of baking bread is one of the great pleasures of life..

It is rivaled only by taste of the bread itself—with butter, of course.

The thing that makes baking bread smell so good, of course, is yeast.

Yeast puffs up the dough, making the bread soft and delicate inside while the crust gets chewy.

Yeast is one of the wonders of God's creation.

So it's interesting that Jesus uses the example of yeast to illustrate something dangerous to his disciples.

*“Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Saducees,”* he tells them.

At first his disciples misunderstand him completely and give him a response worthy of Larry, Mo and Curly:

*“Is it ‘cause we forgot to bring any bread?”*

*“No, you morons,”* Jesus replies (this is my own translation). *“That’s not what I meant. I meant that you should beware of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”*

Well, what *were* the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and why should we beware of them?

The question is problematic because the two parties held to very *different* teachings.

They were bitter rivals who argued constantly over how to interpret the Scriptures.

The Pharisees observed a large number of rules and regulations in addition to the laws that God had instructed Moses to write down at Mount Sinai.

They believed that God had given these additional instructions to Moses and that they had been passed down orally from generation to generation.

They were called the “traditions of the elders” and the Pharisees considered them just as important as the written law.

They included rites of purification, prescribed ways in which animals that would be used for food were to be

slaughtered, specific regulations for following the Ten Commandments—and so on.

They ended up with over 600 of these rules and regulations.

In contemporary Judaism they define what is meant by “keeping Kosher.”

The Pharisees tried to keep them scrupulously—just as contemporary Orthodox Jews strive to keep Kosher.

Jesus told the Pharisees that they had become so engrossed with observing both their oral traditions and written laws that they had lost sight of the heart of their religion, which was God’s grace and lovingkindness.

The attempt to earn God’s favor by keeping His oral laws became the sum and substance of their religion, rather than trust in God’s grace—His willingness to forgive their sins..

They were basing their hopes for salvation on their ability to please God rather than on God’s mercy.

In other words, they were trying to earn what they could only receive as a gift.

They were basing their hopes for salvation upon what they could do for themselves rather than upon what God could do for them.

The result was that they had burdened themselves with a mountain of rules and regulations they could not possibly hope to obey perfectly.

Yet the Scriptures said that he who breaks the law at one point breaks all of it.

So they were living in a soul-wrenching tension between the demands of the law and the severity of God's judgment upon those who could not meet those demands.

They had lost sight of God's grace and ended up with a religion of works.

The Sadducees were almost the opposite.

The only part of the Word of God they accepted as authoritative were the five books of Moses.

They discounted the importance of the prophets and the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and rejected the oral laws and traditions of the Pharisees.

Their exclusive focus was on the Mosaic Law and they paid little heed to what the Old Testament had to

say about heaven, hell, demons, angels, and the coming Messiah.

As a result, they denied that there even were such things as angels or demons or heaven or hell or a bodily resurrection.

There was only the moral law and the absolute need to obey it.

Those who did so would be blessed in this world with wealth, status and happiness and those who failed would be cursed.

The Sadducees were regarded as the aristocratic party among the Jews and they exerted considerable power and influence with the Sanhedrin—the Jewish ruling council as well as with the priesthood and with their Roman governors.

So the Pharisees and the Sadducees had taken different paths but they had both ended up with a religion of works rather than a religion of grace and they had both gotten there by tampering with the Scriptures.

The Pharisees had added to the Scriptures and the Sadducees had subtracted from them, but in both cases they had altered God's word, and this was the "yeast" which Jesus warned his disciples against.

The urge to tamper with God's word is dangerous yeast indeed.

It was the yeast Satan used to deceive Eve.

His words to Eve still worm their way into our thinking to this very day: "Did God *REALLY* say that?"

To which all too often the response is: "*I don't think that God would have said that because it doesn't seem right TO ME.*"

Or my favorite dodge: "*MY God wouldn't have said that.*"

When we refuse to bow to the authority of Scripture, we make ourselves lords OVER Scripture.

That yeast may have an attractive aroma, but it produces a poisonous bread.

It has lured many people away from the truth and enslaved them to lies for nearly two thousand years—which is why God's judgment on those who tamper with His word is severe.

He states it clearly and unequivocally in the final words of the Bible: "*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words*

*away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”*

End of story. Case closed. Divine copyright. Honor it!

Still, ever since Jesus ascended into heaven, men have tampered with his word.

Some, like the Mormons, have added to it.

Others, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, have subtracted from it.

But the Scriptures have withstood such attacks time and time again and remain inviolate: their truth and beauty still shine forth in a darkened world.

As St. John wrote, *“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.”* (John 1:4)

Or as someone once said, *“The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many a hammer.”*

This is not to make an idol out of the Bible.

Let us be clear: we are not saved by the Bible.

It was not the Bible that was nailed to a cross.

We are saved by Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for our sins and rose again to give us eternal life.

And we are sanctified and made fit to live in heaven with God by the Holy Spirit Who dwells in our hearts and gives us faith, hope and love each and every day.

God alone delivers us out of our sins and gives us eternal life: not the Bible.

But God has chosen to communicate with us THROUGH the Bible; His Word is the means through which he makes his salvation known to man.

Through His Word He creates faith in the hearts of His people and opens their minds to the truth.

*As Jesus says, "If you continue in my word you are really my disciples; then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

So we don't WORSHIP God's Word, but we do treasure it and jealously guard it against being distorted because God's Word is the instrument of man's salvation, the means through which HE makes Christ our Savior known to mankind.

The temptation to alter it so that it will make more sense to us or be less offensive to the world at large is evil yeast.

It may smell good, but it makes poisonous bread.



But just as there is evil yeast, there is also good yeast.

Jesus described this good yeast when he said, *“What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”*

Interesting, huh? There is good yeast and there is bad yeast and both of them have the power to leaven our lives—one for the better and the other for the worse.

The bad yeast, the yeast of tampering with the Word of God and basing our hopes on what we think He should have said instead of what He did say, puffs us up with pockets of hot air and leads to a collapse of the entire lump of dough.

The good yeast, the kingdom of God sown in human hearts through the proclaiming of the God’s Word, leavens us with faith, hope and love, and prepares us for eternal life in paradise.

So we have two kinds of yeast working on us at the same time—and they both smell good!

We have the yeast of humanistic doubt which leavens us with rebellion and puffs us up with pride until God puts His thumb in the loaf and we collapse into a lump of useless dough.

*“Pride goeth before the fall.”*

But we also have Kingdom yeast working and growing in us.

When we sin it leavens us with repentance and inspires our faith to take hold of God’s grace and mercy and we are borne upwards again.

The trick is to keep your eyes trained on the good yeast.

As long as we keep our gaze fixed upon Christ and His gifts and His word, He will leaven our spirits by strengthening our faith, securing our hopes and increasing our love.

But when we hearken to the aroma of the bad yeast and taste its bread, we find that it is all hot air.

It soon collapses into a lump of guilt, fear, remorse, despair and death.

One can only take an analogy so far, and I’ve probably pushed this one past its rightful limits.

But I have fallen in love with Christ’s metaphor of the two kinds of yeast—especially the good yeast that leavens our lives with the aroma of the Kingdom.

Like the aroma of Momma's bread as it was baking, it makes me hunger for the final product.

I hope it does you too.

Amen.

