

“A Little Leaven”
Galatians 5:7-9
(Preached at Trinity, June 23, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As I've stated, **Chapters 5-6** are the practical application of the first four chapters. In **Chapters 1-4** Paul argued passionately in defense of the Gospel. Jews from Jerusalem had arrived teaching that the Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to truly become one of God's people.
 - A. In **Verse 1** Paul encourages the Galatians to stand firm upon the truth of the Gospel. Don't allow these false teachers to enslave you to the Law.
 - B. In **Verses 2-4** Paul warned them that adding works to the Gospel is to make void the cross of Christ. It is to fall from grace and deny the faith.
 - C. In **Verse 5** he reminded them of the hope of our righteousness which is by faith alone which has been imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. We have been justified and we will be justified on the Day of Judgment.
 - D. In **Verse 6** Paul reminded them that circumcision or uncircumcision is not the source of our confidence. It is faith that is demonstrated through love. We are not justified by love, but love is the fruit of true saving faith.
2. **Verses 7-12** serve as a sort of parenthesis. Timothy George quotes that they consist of “a rambling collection of pointed remarks, rhetorical questions, proverbial expressions, threats, irony, and, climaxing it all, a joke of sarcasm.”
3. In **Verses 7-9** Paul warns of the great danger of allowing even the smallest amount of false doctrine to enter the church. He begins with an open-ended question.
 - A. Of course he knew the source of these damning lies. They were coming from the Judaizers – the Jews who had arrived from Jerusalem insisting on obedience to the Law as an essential requirement for salvation.
 - B. But the question brings us back to the beginning of **Chapter 3**
Galatians 3:1 NAU - "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?"
The implication was that some lying bewitching spirit had set a spell upon them. You were doing so well. You were progressing in the faith. Who has come in to set these lies before you in such a convincing manner that you are believing them?
4. The smallest amount of corruption to the Gospel destroys the Gospel.
Galatians 5:2-4 NAU - "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. ⁴ You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."
5. In **Verse 9** Paul uses a familiar proverbial statement that must ring loudly in our ears.
Galatians 5:9 NAU - "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough."

6. Leaven or what we call yeast brings about the fermentation of grain. It has the particular characteristic of beginning small but it expanding quickly to affect the whole. A pinch is all that is necessary to leaven a whole loaf of bread. Because of this quality of leaven Jesus often used it as an example in His teaching.
- A. Sometimes He used it in a positive sense to describe the nature of His Kingdom which though it had a small beginning, it would grow and fill the earth.
Matthew 13:33 NAU - "He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."
- B. Most often, however, leaven carries a negative connotation in the Bible.
- C. Jesus used it to warn of the corrupt teaching of the Pharisees
Matthew 16:11-12 NAU - "But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹² Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."
7. Paul used this metaphor of leaven in **1 Cor. 5** to describe the danger of allowing sin to corrupt the church.
1 Corinthians 5:6-8 NAU - "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."
- A. Paul was making reference to the observance of the Passover meal.
 It was essential that they remove every single speck of leaven from their home.
- B. This was symbolic of the purity they were to maintain. They had to sweep their houses clean so that no leaven remained as a sign they were God's holy people.
Exodus 12:19-20 NAU - "Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* an alien or a native of the land. ²⁰ 'You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."
8. Now Paul is using Leaven to describe the corrupting nature of false doctrine. Their small adjustment in the Gospel was actually destroying the whole Gospel.
 We must never underestimate the power of little things.
- A little leaven leavens the whole lump.
 - A single candle flame is said to have caused the great Chicago fire.
 - The splitting of a single atom can cause a chain reaction capable of destroying an entire city.
 - Benjamin Franklin – "For the want of a nail the shoe was lost; for the want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost; and for want of a rider the battle was lost.
9. This is why a church must carefully guard against corrupting influences. This morning I want to direct your attention to the danger and why it is so important for us to zealously maintain purity.

- I. We must understand the importance of maintaining doctrinal purity for both ourselves and the church
- A. False doctrine left unchecked will infect the whole church
1. Remember, false teachers can be very convincing – and very dangerous
Matthew 7:15 NAU - "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."
2 Corinthians 11:13-15 NAU - "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."
Ephesians 4:14 NAU - "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;"
 2. Paul warned Timothy that false doctrine can spread like a cancer
2 Timothy 2:16-18 NAU - "But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ *men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some."
 - a. Gangrene is a disease by which any part of the body suffering from infection becomes so corrupted that, unless an immediate remedy is applied (often amputation), the infection spreads, attacks other parts, and at last eats away the bone"
 - b. Just like a disease false doctrine can begin small but will soon grow and weaken the body – it can be gradual
Melanoma can begin with a freckle
West Nile Virus begins with the tiny prick of a mosquito
 3. The results of error may endure for years – Healing can be a slow process. This is why it is so difficult to reform a church. Long after the false teachers have been removed it is difficult work to cleanse the minds of the membership of the errors that they have embraced.
- B. Incorrect understanding in one portion of doctrine will have a rippling effect upon other doctrines.
1. For example, an improper view of election will result in an improper view of salvation which will result in an improper methodology in the gospel.
 2. We can see the effect that weak doctrine has had upon the SBC
 - This is what has happened in the SBC and the demise of reformed theology. What used to be the mainstream doctrine of the SBC is now being viewed by many to be heresy.
 - This is why few churches in the SBC ever practice church discipline.
 - This is how the Charismatic movement has continued to grow.
 - This is why observance of the Sabbath seems so antiquated
 - This is how the easy believism of our day has crept into the church
 3. False doctrine starts small and then consumes

- II. We must be careful as a church to guard our doctrinal soundness
- A. The danger is always present
1. Paul told Timothy
1 Timothy 1:18-20 NAU - "fight the good fight, ¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme."
 2. The Christian life is a marathon. It demands diligence. Many have been drawn aside by some error that has consumed them.
 3. This is particularly true today with the internet. False doctrines easily find their way into the homes of our members. We have to be diligent
Galatians 5:7 NAU - "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?"
 4. Weak Christians are easily led astray.
 This is one reason God gave pastors
Ephesians 4:12-15 NAU - "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ,"
- B. Our confession of faith is essential
1. It doesn't replace the Bible but provides the foundation for our interpretation of the Bible
 2. This is why all of our leaders must be "full subscription." This means they must fully subscribe to our confession of faith.
 This includes pastors and deacons and teachers.
 3. A person doesn't have to fully subscribe to our confession in order to be a member but they are clearly taught in our NMC that these are the doctrines of our church.
 4. We will never allow disagreement with these doctrines to be a source of division. The Bible is clear that we must not tolerate dissension over the doctrinal positions of our church. We will discuss differences in doctrinal positions but we must never tolerate divisions over what we have determined to be false doctrine.
Titus 3:10-11 NAU - "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned."
 The word for "factious" is the word from which we get our word heretic - αἰρετικός

Romans 16:17-18- "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. ¹⁸ For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting."

5. There are many non-essential issues that come up. Each member is free to hold to these positions but not cause division. Example: KJV
 We lost a family because we were too family focused
 We've lost families because they thought we weren't family focused enough
 And we've lost families on confessional issues – particularly over the Sabbath.
 But is far better to lose a family than to allow the church to be consumed by strife and division.

- C. We must always hold our pastors and teachers to doctrinal accountability
 1. A teacher that holds erroneous doctrines is particularly dangerous because, like leaven, he will spread the doctrines to others who will then spread them to others. This has been the seed that has destroyed many a church.
 2. This is one of the benefits of plurality. The pastors hold one another to doctrinal accountability.
 3. We are continually studying and seeking doctrinal accuracy. This doesn't mean we are always right but we make it a high priority.
 4. If at any time one of our pastors ceases to hold to our doctrinal statement he is morally bound to bring it to the elders. If a resolution cannot be reached he will be asked to resign.

Conclusion:

1. Doctrine has fallen upon hard times. Many feel that doctrine is bad because doctrine causes division. That is opposite of what the Bible says.
Acts 2:42-44 KJV - "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all that believed were together, and had all things common;"
2. The chief reason we must guard against the leaven of corruption in our church is it will affect our relationship with Christ. We desire our doctrines to be pure because they point to Christ. There will always be a direct correlation between theological integrity and spiritual vitality. This will be Paul's emphasis for the remainder of this book.
3. May God grant us diligence to guard against the leaven that will infect the purity of the church.