

Beware Of The Leaven

Introduction. We are warned to “beware of the leaven” (Matthew 16:5-12; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Why? Because when it is mixed in, it corrupts the whole, and we are to keep the church pure (Ephesians 5:27). There are various forms of leaven: corrupt practices or worldliness such as immodest dress, materialism, drinking, dancing, etc. (Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 2:11).

But there is another form of leaven: corrupt doctrine. When the people of God tolerate corrupt doctrine, it will corrupt us. We have done pretty well identifying the corrupt ideas from without of denominationalism. Such ideas could be expressed as, “Attend the church of your choice,” “We’re all on different roads to heaven,” “It does not matter what you believe if you are sincere,” and “Teach the man and not the plan.”

But what about corrupt doctrine from within? We are warned about it in the New Testament (Matthew 7:15-16; Acts 20:30; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). There are a lot of prevalent forms of corrupt doctrine in churches today.

I. Divorce And Remarriage

- A. There are a number of false theories on divorce and remarriage:
 - 1. One theory is that the put away fornicator can marry a new mate.
 - 2. A second theory says that the innocent put away spouse may subsequently put away their spouse and remarry after the original spouse remarries.
 - 3. Another theory says that if an unbeliever divorces a believer, and there has been no fornication, the believer can get a new mate.
 - 4. A fourth theory is that Matthew 19:9 is “kingdom law” — it applies only to the marriages of Christians and does not apply to the world.
 - 5. A fifth theory claims that baptism sanctifies an adulterous marriage.
 - 6. A sixth theory redefines adultery as non-sexual covenant breaking, which means the adultery occurs in the process of the divorce procedure, the new marriage ceremony, or both, but does not involve the sexual relationship.
- B. Matthew 5:32, 19:9, and Romans 7:2-3 teach that two people joined by God in marriage are bound for life, the only exception being that an innocent partner may put away a spouse guilty of fornication and remarry.
- C. Too many brethren are bristling at the true teaching of divorce and remarriage because they do not hold to the truth on this issue or they have friends/family that despise the revealed truth of God.

II. Scriptural Fellowship

- A. In the late 1980’s, Ed Harrell wrote a series of 17 articles in Christianity Magazine that have also more recently been reprinted regarding bounds of fellowship. These were in response to controversy arising from the discovery of Homer Hailey’s false teaching on divorce and remarriage. These articles attempted to justify what had been an ongoing fellowship by many brethren with Homer Hailey for many years (even though they disagreed with his teaching) by placing it into Romans 14.
- B. Brother Harrell wrote, “Within certain limits, God grants to Christians the right to a private conscience in matters of faith. I believe that right is discussed in

Romans 14. However, whether or not one accepts my exegesis of that passage (Romans 14), honest minds must acknowledge the reality of a past and present world that tolerates contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions” (Ed Harrell, CM, 5/90, p. 134). In order to be fair, many other brethren have accepted these points of view.

- C. This has led to many espousing that “as long as a man is honest and sincere, we may have fellowship with him even when we differ on matters of moral and doctrinal importance.” This has also led to questions about the identity of a false teacher and asking men who hold these views to hold gospel meetings.
- D. Fellowship in the broader context of the Bible.
 - 1. Have no fellowship with works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11).
 - 2. No fellowship with one going beyond doctrine of Christ in action, teaching or support (2 John 9-11).
 - 3. Reprove teachers of error who lead astray (1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:16-18).
 - 4. Contend for "the faith" when others oppose (Jude 3-4).
 - 5. Throughout the Bible:
 - a) Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive teachers of error.
 - b) Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive practice of sin.
 - c) Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive diversity of morals.
 - d) Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive doctrinal diversity.
 - e) Whether the Old Testament or the New Testament, God’s people were always told to correct their doctrinal or moral problems.

III. The Days Of Creation

- A. In 1995, Shane Scott wrote an article in Sentry Magazine where he stated that the days must be ages. He wrote, “But over what kind of time frame did God create our universe? Some Bible believers insist that the world must be only 6,000 years old, because the world was created in six days, according to Genesis 1. In this article I will argue that the Bible allows for a much older earth, because the days of Genesis 1 should not be interpreted literally.” Brother Scott believes that Adam could not have accomplished every task he was given to do on the sixth day.
- B. For many years, Hill Roberts, founder of the Lord, I Believe Seminars, has advocated that the “Big Bang Theory” is the “Bible believer’s friend and the atheists’ nemesis.” He also claims that the physical world is the primary revelation of God instead of the Bible account. Furthermore, Brother Roberts claims that, after the initial “Big Bang,” natural action over vast eons of time made the physical earth. His article, *A Harmonization of God’s Genesis Revelation With His Natural Revelation*, details this concept paralleling the doctrine of uniformitarianism. He repeatedly speaks of the changes needed to the Earth’s initial state as “a blob of clay-gas” hot from the Big Bang which must be “cooled” and “stabilized” by natural means over vast periods of time so that it could be prepared for God’s next action.

- C. Other brethren have conceded that they believe these views or do not believe that these views present a problem of exegesis within the divine text, and therefore extend fellowship to such teachers.
- D. There are a number of problems with this view:
 1. The days of creation cannot be ages in view of the language used. When “evening and morning” are used in connection with “day,” it becomes apparent that the days under consideration were normal solar days. In a few Psalms (33:6, 9; 148:4-5), the inspired writers stated that when God spoke, the work of creating was done, and after that it merely stood fast.
 2. The days of creation cannot be ages in view of Adam. Adam was created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:26-27). Adam and Eve lived through day six and day seven (if the six days are ages, then day seven would also be an age). In Genesis 5:5, we read, “And the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.”
 3. The days of creation cannot be ages in view of sin and death. Genesis 2:17 teaches that death and suffering are the result of sin, and that sin entered the world with Adam and Eve. But the theory of evolution asserts that the process of life-and-death struggle had been going on for millions of years before man appeared on the earth, and that man’s most immediate ancestors were part of that struggle.
 4. The days of creation cannot be ages in view of the teaching of Jesus. The Lord made a number of statements which alluded to the creation of man and woman at the beginning of the world (Mark 10:6). If the world were billions of years old, Jesus would be confused.
 5. The days of creation cannot be ages in view of the sabbath day rest. Based on the seventh day, the Jews were commanded to set apart the “seventh day” for a Sabbath (Exodus 20:10). How could the observance of the seventh day of the week have been based on the seventh day relative to creation, unless the seventh day following creation was a literal twenty-four hour day?

IV. The Annihilation Of The Wicked

- A. Homer Hailey had a posthumous book titled “God’s Judgments And Punishments” published in 2003. In this book, he took the position that whether eternal punishment is extinction, annihilation, or a continuous consciousness in a lake of fire forever was a matter of indifference.
- B. Hailey taught that those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire, “exist no more” (p. 142), “are totally consumed” (p. 144), “nothing left ... which could possibly be tormented” (p. 144), “existence came to an end in the lake of fire” (p. 178), “second death would bring the individuals to extinction as it did death and Hades” (p. 179). He reduces the wicked to “the darkness of nothingness ... the darkness of nonexistence” (p. 184). He states, “The expressions ‘unquenchable fire’ and ‘eternal fire’ are evidently used symbolically or metaphorically ...” (p. 143).
- C. The Bible uses a few explicit expressions to describe the never-ending agony of the doomed in Hell:
 1. “Weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42; 22:13).

2. "Where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-48).
 3. "Sorer punishment" than death "without mercy" (Hebrews 10:28-29).
- D. Hell is no place you want to go. Because of the recent nature of this error, the full impact of Hailey's influence regarding this issue remains to be seen.

Conclusion. It is leaven and where has it taken us? Can we continue to change the nature of scriptural fellowship and justify error within the church? What are we told to do with the leaven? Clean out the old leaven of corrupt doctrine so that you may be a new lump (1 Corinthians 5:8; cp. Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:11).