

## The Parable Of The Leaven, Expanded

Love of the Brethren Corrupted

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 27-Feb-16; Sermon #1310

The theologian Francis Schaeffer, in his essay “The Mark of the Christian,” writes of a condition that, over my years in the church and in the ministry, I have come to agree with. Here is his quote:

I have observed one thing among true Christians in their differences in many countries: What divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians—what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30, or 40 years (or for 50 or 60 years in a son’s or daughter’s memory)—is not the issue of doctrine or belief which caused the differences in the first place. Invariably, it is a lack of love—and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. These stick in the mind like glue. And after time passes and the differences between the Christians or the groups appear less than they did, there are still those bitter, bitter things we said in the midst of what we thought was a good and sufficient objective discussion. It is these things—the unloving attitudes and words—that cause the stench that the world can smell in the church of Jesus Christ among those who are really true Christians.

I do not want to minimize doctrinal differences as the things that divide us because they do play a part in some of the splits (notice I said ‘some’ of the splits, not ‘all’ the splits). So I take it for granted that often doctrinal differences are at play.

But far too often, I have found that people do it the other way around: They look for a doctrinal excuse to cover their real reason for leaving a congregation. Instead of applying patience, forbearance, mercy, and forgiveness (and also applying the scriptural instructions on how to recover a relationship, how to reconcile), they leave in a huff, relationship problems unresolved, citing some doctrinal point or another, and they are out the door.

Now, why? Why do they do this? I am sure there are many reasons why people do this.

1. Fear: They fear to reconcile with the other person.
2. Frustration. They are frustrated and they just want it to end.

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

3. Impatience. They are impatient, they do not want to deal with it anymore, and they just want out.
4. Pride. This is a *big* one. They do not want to admit that actually they were in the wrong.
5. Stubbornness—they are going to stand their ground till the earth comes crashing down around them—and many other things.

That is just a few that I took off the top of my head. But when you peel back all of these various attitudes, what it shows ultimately is the lack of love—that one or both (oftentimes it is both) parties in this problem, that is affecting members of the church, do not love each other. They are not showing the love of God toward each other.

They are repudiating the second great commandment that Jesus gave us in Matthew 22: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So the person who leaves the church in this way fails to give reconciliation a chance. This puts him in a very, very dangerous position before God. Let us see that in Matthew 5. We are going to read verses 21 through 26.

This is, of course, in the Sermon on the Mount. I want you to notice that this is one of the first things that Jesus begins to explain after He has talked about the Beatitudes. After He has confirmed the law’s place, it actually says “Hey, in the Christian church, we have to be more righteous than the Pharisees who kept it in the letter—we have to keep it in the Spirit.” And so He starts in at this point.

**Matthew 5:21-24** You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder,’ and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire [of Gehenna fire—of the grave, of the pit, and it goes probably beyond that too]. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you [there is a problem between him and you that is unresolved], leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift [to God].

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

“Because that problem between you and your brother is making a problem between you and God. So go reconcile,” He says.

**Matthew 5:25-26** Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him [while you are going along through life with him], lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you are thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

What is Jesus saying here? If you have an enemy—an adversary in the church here—God is not going to intervene in mercy on your behalf until you have either reconciled with that brother or you have paid the full cost. Pretty serious warnings here. What He is saying here is that harmony among the brethren, the members of the church, is *vital* to its health. We have to be one with one another. We are supposed to be one body.

**Psalms 133:1** Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity [and then he goes and talks about how refreshing that is, and how good it is, and how pleased with it that God is].

But we can only be in harmony if we have become reconciled one to another, through the love of God and in the unity of the Spirit, to be a smoothly functioning body of Christ. He charges us here be reconciled to a brother that either you have offended or he has offended you, and to quickly agree with an adversary (make up, submit, whatever you have to do) to make sure that the problem goes away. Otherwise God will not accept our offerings or intervene in mercy for trouble that we bring on ourselves. Pretty stern words. Let us go to I John 4 where we find some more stern words.

**I John 4:20-21** If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar [he is a liar to himself; he is a liar before God]; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

You cannot separate the love of God from the love of our fellow man, and especially those fellow men that are in the church of God. John says here that just does not work—it is an impossibility—because we show the love of God right in the here and now

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

in the way we interact with one another. So the proof is in the pudding of our love for one another that we have the love of God in us, that the love of God is truly poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5, one of those memory verses). But let us look here in I John 2.

**I John 2:7** Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. . .

This has been around for a long time, folks. It may seem like a new commandment, but it is not. It is an old commandment.

**I John 2:7-11** . . .The old commandment is the word which you heard from the [very] beginning. [It has always been part of God's teaching—what is it?] Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Of course, that whole section there that I just read is prefaced in verse 6 by “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” And He said He loves us—He loves us to the end.

If we do not love truly our brethren whom we see every week (sometimes more than every week), we are shouting out that we have been overtaken by the darkness of Satan and this evil world. That is what it says: “he who hates his brother is in darkness” until now. And then, in verse 11, it says, as John puts it here, we are stumbling about aimlessly in the dark and will come to no good end (“does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes”). That is pretty scary.

This is a major problem in the church at any time, and I think it is probably going to be especially bad in the time of the end (which time we believe we are living in). We do not love each other as Jesus commanded us to do. You may want to look that up in John 15:12 and 17, where He says it twice “Love one another as I have loved you.”

That is an incredibly high standard! We cannot even begin to think that we are going to

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

reach that in this life. But we must be trying, we must be pursuing that perfect love that He has for us. But we find that many times we fail to reconcile ourselves one to another. We may think we do, but we do not do it according to the biblical precepts.

Many times what we found in the church is that we have allowed worldly attitudes, ideas, and methods to distort what it means to love one another, to love our neighbor. And once we do this, once we bring in these outside influences—that worldly wisdom that is out there—it hampers our ability to have right and godly relationships with each other.

This is a very serious problem within the church of God. It is, in a large part, the reason why there are so many churches, so many groups. Because people just cannot get along with one another—their own brethren—in the church. It is sad and I am sure God is not happy with the situation.

Now, with that introduction, we are going to today look at one of Jesus' parables that actually prophesies this very problem in the church. This is the Parable of the Leaven in Matthew 13:33 and we see that Jesus warns us that Satan will attack the church on this very point—on our relationships with one another. Sadly, within the last words of that parable, Jesus tells us that the devil's sneaky assault will succeed. It will be very successful.

But first, before we go into all that, I have a few things that I need to get out of the way here. Many of you were around in 1997 when I gave a series of sermons on the parables of Matthew 13. I am not going to revisit that whole series but I do want to get this one parable, kind of in a revised way, over to you again today. So much of the information that was in that earlier sermon will be repeated here, but hopefully my point will be a little bit more meaningful.

I am not going to take the time today to go over the principles of interpreting parables that I did during that series that took a major chunk of at least one of those sermons. If you want to know those or you want to go over those, please refer back to that original series back in 1997. I believe the Parable of the Mustard Seed was the first one that I did.

But before we go into the parable, we should briefly explore Jesus' use of the term 'kingdom of heaven' as He uses it in Matthew 13, because it is necessary for us to understand His meaning here in order to interpret these parables properly.

He begins to use this in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: "The kingdom of

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

heaven is like. . .” He also says it in the next one, the Parable of the Mustard Seed: “The kingdom of heaven is like. . .” Same in the Parable of the Leaven in verse 33: “The kingdom of heaven is like. . .”

He says it again in the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, and the Parable of the Dragnet.

So all but the Parable of the Tares in this chapter (and the final one, the householder) have, as a beginning to it, “The kingdom of heaven is like. . .” It is clear that most of these parables are what would they call ‘Kingdom Parables.’

Now what does He mean by ‘kingdom’? At times, kingdom is a misleading translation of this Greek word ‘basileia.’ It can have the sense of a king’s realm—the actual land and territory that he is ruling over. It could also have the sense of his reign—the length of his reign, the whole amount of his reign (the reign of Queen Elizabeth II has been over 60 years). It can also mean his sovereign power or his sovereignty. So it is not necessarily about his kingdom, but his authority and what he has power over.

To me, the words ‘dominion’ and ‘domain’ set the proper tone in this particular set of parables, specifically the fact that the domain of God right now is expanding, that it is not just a specific thing but it is actually growing—it is growing with the growth of the church. A lot of the parables that we see in Matthew 13 are about growth.

The Parable of the Sower and Seed is about individual members and their growth.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares talks about the whole growth of the church, but the enemy has put tares in with it and they are causing problems.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed also has to do with growth. But this is growth, as I explained in those sermons, that is growing out of bounds to where it actually transforms this little herb (a mustard) into a great tree and the tree then becomes home to all kinds of birds which, in the parables here, is very clearly Satan and his demons.

Then of course, in the Parable of the Leaven, we know that it is an expansion of the church that is also mentioned there. And so forth.

We need to understand that Jesus is saying that when He leaves (when He is resurrected and ascends to heaven), He will begin His church, and it begins with the apostles and those few members that were with them, and then immediately it begins to grow and to expand. There were 3000 people on the first Pentecost that asked for

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

baptism, and then it grew another 5000, and then it was just taking over the whole earth. These apostles were turning the world outside down, it was said of them. So there was great expansion of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven—those over whom God was ruling at that time.

Now I do not want to say that the kingdom is not coming with Jesus' return. Obviously, it is. That is how we tend to think of it—as a future reality, that Christ will return and He will establish His government on the earth. That is true, very true.

However, this is a very important scripture to me in terms of Jesus' understanding of the kingdom of heaven in this particular area of scripture (Matthew 13). Colossians 1:13 informs us that Christians have already been translated (or conveyed, transferred) "into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Once we are accepted by Jesus Christ, once we accept His blood as covering us, and we believe and turn to Him and we give ourselves to Him, then we have become spiritually part of that Kingdom.

Paul says our citizenship is in heaven. It is already there. Our names have been put on the rolls of the Kingdom of God, as it were. He says we are ambassadors for Christ. We are the ones that go out from Him as representatives. So when we yield to God and are accepted as His sons and daughters, we come under the dominion of the Kingdom of God. We voluntarily become a citizen or a subject of the Kingdom of God.

As I said, Christians are spiritually part of the kingdom of heaven now. We could even go so far as to say that we (meaning the church of God), as individuals and as a whole (as an organism, as the body of Christ), are its present domain. That is what comprises the kingdom of heaven at this time because this is where Christ rules as the King.

So, yes, Christ will establish His government in what we might call a physical form over the whole earth at His return, and then it will really start getting big and cover the whole earth. But, to true Christians, the kingdom of heaven is already ruling over them. So, in its sense, in Matthew 13, what Jesus is trying to get across here is that when He says "The kingdom of heaven is like. . ." He is saying essentially "The church throughout this age is like. . ." It is kind of synonymous with the church.

At this point, when we are looking at it, whatever it is that Jesus rules over is what the kingdom of heaven is. Its application, for us, is now in the church.

Matthew 13 where we have the Parable of the Leaven. It is also found in Luke 13:20-21 but we are going to stay here.

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Matthew 13:33** Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.”

Very simple. What is it there—five lines of text? There is seemingly not much there. But it is so full of teaching and it is incredible that Jesus can pack so much into a few words.

The other day, just to make sure, I went over about forty different commentaries just to see their ideas on this particular parable. Most commentators interpret this parable just like they do the Parable of the Mustard Seed. And what they say is they are twin parables just using different illustrations. Basically, the interpretation is that the Kingdom starts small and eventually fills the whole earth and that is it. That is basically what they say.

But once we begin to examine the symbols (I am talking about leaven, woman; some of the things she does like, took and hid; and the three measures of meal), this interpretation not only becomes doubtful, it becomes impossible, to my mind. It just cannot be that the Kingdom grows and eventually covers the whole earth. That is way too simplistic and ignoring the wording that Jesus Christ gave us; and He is the one who said in three different places “You shall live by every word of God.”

Let us start looking over these symbols here. The first one we come across after ‘kingdom of heaven’ (which has been already explained as meaning the church in this age) is ‘leaven.’ It is a comparison here. He is not saying the church is leaven or the Kingdom of God is leaven. He is just saying that it is *like* leaven. He is making a comparison laying two things side by side so we can get a comparison.

Here is the kingdom of heaven—the church—but this is like this other thing (the situation that we see explained in the rest of the parable) and we are supposed to see the similarities here—the reality of the kingdom of heaven and this imaginary story that He is giving us instruction through.

Now when He said “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven” the Jews must have gone “Ugh...what are you saying? How can that be? We have the pure kingdom of heaven, or the Kingdom of God, and this Jesus—this radical, this rabble-rouser—is saying that it is like leaven? Leaven is bad! Leaven is not a good thing. How can that be?”

Because throughout the Old Testament (which those people knew pretty well) leaven is the symbol of the corruption of sin. They knew that. That is why they had to take

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

leavening out of their homes every year during the Days of Unleavened Bread. They knew about the sacrifices (we will find out a little bit more about them later), but they were not supposed to be made with leaven either. They knew that. They knew what leaven does: Leaven puffs up. So how can the heavenly have anything to do with leavening, with the corruption of sin?

I am sure it immediately struck a discordant note in their minds. And that was the point. Jesus wanted to shock them, just as He had wanted to shock them in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, by giving them something that, in that one, was impossible. How can a mustard seed grow up to be a tree? Well, in this case it is 'How can the kingdom of heaven become compared to leaven—something pure being compared to something that is corrupt?' And it is true.

Everywhere in Scripture, Old Testament and New Testament alike, leaven is a negative symbol. Even in those verses certain offerings contained leaven. There are a couple of offerings that contained leaven. There is one part of the peace offering that had leaven. And of course, there is the wave loaves of the firstfruits that are given on the day of Pentecost that also contained leaven. But in both of those cases, leavening is talking about human sin.

Human sin is involved in the peace offering. It is the offerer—the priest—and God sharing a common meal. And guess what, the offerer has sin! The priest is sinful. If we are talking about Jesus Christ, of course He is unleavened. But we are talking about a regular priest. We are talking about a human that has leaven—sin—in him. But even in those cases, leaven symbolizes sin.

It is only here in the entire Bible that any of the commentators say that leaven is a positive symbol—because they just cannot go beyond this astonishment that Jesus Christ would somehow compare the kingdom of heaven to leaven. Well, He is, because He is not talking about the perfect reality that resides in heaven now. He is talking about the situation as it is on earth with human people. He is ruling over them but they are not perfect, not by a long shot. So leaven in the church is not really that odd because we are still people—sinful people.

So if it is something positive and the rest of the Bible uses leaven as negative, then our interpretation must be wrong. That is what I came up with when I originally saw this. This cannot be a positive symbol because God is consistent. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It says, in Malachi 3:6, "I change not. Therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed."

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The symbols are going to be consistent here. If we are going to prove Scripture by scripture—if we are going to interpret Scripture by other parts of Scripture—then the symbol has to be the same, has to be consistent. If it is going to be negative in all the other places in the Bible, it has to be negative here. So leaven is a negative symbol and it stands just for the thing that everywhere else says what it stands for, which is sin.

Let us go to Matthew 16. Jesus Christ is so good to us, He gives us the interpretation of these symbols, right in the context, just three chapters over.

**Matthew 16:5-6** And when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” [and then they go on “What is He talking about? What does He mean?”]

**Matthew 16:11-12** “How is it you do not understand” [Jesus says] “that I did not speak to you concerning bread—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread [you sometimes think the disciples were rather thick at times], but of the doctrine [the teaching] of the Pharisees and Sadducees [which was not good; they were leading people astray through false teaching, false doctrines].

So leaven, as Jesus uses it here, is teaching that you do not want to listen to, that you want to beware of. Let us go to Luke 12 and we will see He uses it just slightly differently. But, at base, it is the same thing.

**Luke 12:1** In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

He is using a different word here, ‘hypocrisy’ rather than “teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees” but it is the same thing because they taught one thing and they did another. They were giving, what would you call, a two-toned witness as it were—and do one thing that was showing one way and the other one was going another way. But in both cases—the false teaching and the hypocrisy—it is sin. It is the corruption of sin that is being talked about here.

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Let us go to I Corinthians 5. We go over these scriptures just about every year during the Days of Unleavened Bread. He talks, in verse 1, about the sexual immorality that was going there.

**I Corinthians 5:2-6** And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, concerning him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus [because we are talking about a terrible sin here]. Your glorying is not good [he says]. . . .

Because they were trying to cover over all of this with love, love, love and it was not working because this man's sin was dividing the congregation and they were getting big, puffy heads full of pride about how good they were, and how kind they were, and how tolerant they were, and it was not a good thing.

**I Corinthians 5:6-7** . . . Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump [which is a principle that fits in with Matthew 13:33]? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

We have been forgiven of our sins and we are clean. We should be unleavened. But sin still comes in and infects us, does it not? In order to be clean once again, we have to not only ask for forgiveness but we have to repent—we have to purge out that old leaven, get rid of it, so it does not hurt us anymore.

**I Corinthians 5:8** Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven [notice how he talks about it here; he defines it here for us] of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So we have three different interpretations, or usages, of leaven.

First, Jesus uses it as false teaching, false doctrine; then He uses it as hypocrisy; and then Paul uses it as malice and wickedness. It just comes down to that what they are

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

talking about is sin, like an infectious disease, corrupting people (us, the church). Leaven is pretty simple to understand.

So we are saying that the kingdom of heaven—the Kingdom of God (or, as we have understood it here, the church in its present in history)—contains leaven, contains sin. That is very clear. All we have to do is look in the mirror and you know that if you are a member of God’s church, you still have sin and you need to purge it. That is what Paul says.

Let us go on to the next symbol in verse 33 and that is the main actor here.

**Matthew 13:33** The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took. .

‘Woman’ is the next symbol and here is another surprise because, up to this point in the parables of Matthew 13, you have had a man doing the work (“a man sows”). And obviously, “the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.” You think, as it goes on, it is about a man out there sowing mustard seed. But here we get a change.

We have another character (a woman, not a man) and this change is significant. Now you might think “Well, women are usually the ones that make bread, right?” Well, that is true. But in a series of parables like this where there is a man doing all these things and suddenly there is a woman doing something, we need to take note because change is significant.

If you go through the Bible, you see women are used as symbols of various things. You find that a woman symbolizes the church. A woman symbolizes the false church. Woman symbolizes Babylon, the Old Covenant (Hagar), the New Covenant (Sarah), Israel (Aholah), Judah (Aholibah), even Sodom (one of their sisters). Of course, there are many others where women are used to symbolize things.

Now the common denominator in all of these things (church, Babylon, false church, Old Covenant, New Covenant, Israel, Judah, Sodom) is there is a system of beliefs and practices that mold, shape, fashion, or influence a community of people. All of these things are communities of people, but they are differentiated by what they teach or what they exemplify.

The church exemplifies or teaches the truth of God, but the false church exemplifies and teaches something that is not right. It has a part of the truth, but it is a mixture of the

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

knowledge of good and evil, and it actually persecutes and suppresses the church of God.

The same thing can be said for Babylon. We know Babylon is a big system. Actually it stands for the system that is in this world that is against God and it is influencing people all around the world. And we can go on through these others and see the same thing.

But that is the common denominator among all these symbols of women, that the woman represents a system of beliefs and practices that it teaches or uses to influence others. If you are a part of Babylon, then you have been molded or influenced by the Babylonian system. If you are a part of the church, on the other hand, you have been molded and influenced by the truth of God and therefore should be doing what the truth tells you to do.

So that is the underlying message or interpretation of what the woman represents—a system of beliefs and practices that are used to mold, shape, or influence a community of people whether that community is the whole world, a particular nation, or a body of people like the church.

This symbol actually goes all the way back to Eve. Do you remember the principle, the law of first mention? Well, the first mention of a woman is in the person of Eve. And what did she do? She was the one that influenced Adam to sin (“Here, take this apple,” or whatever it was, and he ate). So that symbol goes right on through the Bible, that the woman, as a symbol in parables and prophecies, tends to be about something—some entity—that uses its influence on others.

To know what that system is (whether it is good or bad or what it is supposed to be doing), we have to look at the context though. You cannot just say “Oh, this is a system” and go on. We need to know “Is this system—this woman—good or bad?” We have to check out the context and see what the characteristics are.

So what did this woman do? Well, the first thing it says she did was ‘took.’ She took. Originally, this word is the Greek ‘lambano’ (sounds like a dance). It connotes ‘grasping’ and ‘seizing.’ The root of this is ‘grasping’ and ‘seizing.’ It is used about simple ‘obtaining,’ that you take an apple off the pile there and you would eat it. You obtained that apple. You took it off the pile.

But it also has the connotation where it means ‘stealing’ or gaining possession of a thing that was not given (meaning, instead of it being a gift, you appropriated it for yourself; it was not given to you, you took it). It could also be used in Greek to mean ‘to take

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

captive' or 'to kidnap' or 'take as a hostage' or that sort of thing.

Now what I think Jesus is indicating, is that the woman did not receive this leaven as a gift. It was not something that was given to her, we might say, from above. It was not part of what God would have given as a good thing. This was something she took, she appropriated for herself—something she took of her own volition.

I want you to please look with me in II Corinthians 11 because this is the context in which this appears.

**II Corinthians 11:3** I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

**II Corinthians 11:13-14** For [there] are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And [it is] no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

We see then a theme in this chapter that Paul is concerned that they are going to be deceived by these false ministers and the false teachings that they are putting out there for them to hear. That is the context. Then he goes in to a different section (my New King James here calls it 'Reluctant Boasting') but he is on the same subject. Notice what he says in verse 20.

**II Corinthians 11:20-21** For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame I say that we were too weak for that [anyway, he is actually being sarcastic here]!

But notice that he uses this word 'took' (it is actually in present tense, 'takes,' here in verse 20). This is the same word 'lambano' and he is using it in the sense of 'stealing,' of taking what is not theirs. "So if one takes from you," he says, and this is in the same context as the deceits of Satan and his ministers.

What I am saying is that, here 'takes' means 'to exploit by deception,' 'to take advantage of by trickery.' I believe that that is the same sense it is used in Matthew 13:33—that the

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

woman takes advantage by trickery. She takes this leaven. She takes this thing that was not supposed to be taken.

Why do I think that? Why is it something that is negative? Why is not it just that she obtains it? Because of the next two words. It says, “and hid in.” Now it is a different word obviously than what we just read, but ‘hid’ is a very interesting Greek word (‘enkrupto’). It is only used here, in this form, in the Bible.

If you listen to that word ‘enkrupto,’ does it remind you of any English word? Encrypt. If we encrypt a message, we do exactly this: We hide our message by mixing the letters into a code. So the underlying meaning of ‘enkrupto’ or ‘hide’ in here has to do with mixing something secretly.

So ‘enkrupto’ means ‘to hide in’ as it is actually, literally translated here in verse 33—to hide in something. This woman hid the leaven in the measures of meal. So she hid it in. ‘To hide in’ is the basic meaning.

It can also mean ‘to mix’ (which is what a lot of modern Bibles translate this word as, in this particular verse, because they believe it is a positive parable). It can mean even ‘to knead’ or ‘to fold’ or ‘conceal.’ But, without any descriptors around it or the context not getting in the way here, its major connotation is ‘being sneaky,’ secret, covert, surreptitious.

When you take the two words together—took (lambano) and hid (enkrupto)—and you put them together in the same sentence, it becomes pretty obvious that this woman is doing something bad. She is not on the up and up.

First, she steals or takes something that was not given to her as a gift, and then she hides it, or she conceals it in this other thing. Not only is she sinning in the first place by taking something (breaking the Eighth Commandment), she is also now compounding her sin by hiding it, by concealing it. So the woman is up to no good. She is a bad lady. She is not a good lady, she is a bad lady.

What she is doing—if we could just take away all of the dross here and just try to give you an understanding of what Jesus is trying to say—is that she is mixing (or we would use the theological term ‘syncretizing’) false teaching into this meal. She is mixing something that is corrupt—the leaven—into the meal. She is a negative symbol.

Where is this leaven—the hidden leaven, the leaven that was stolen, the leaven that was taken—directed? Well, it is directed at the three measures of meal which is also a

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

very interesting symbol. Now three measures equals about twenty-one or twenty-two liters. That is a lot. Before today, I had had a figure down here for how big it was and I went back and re-calculated it and found out I was wrong.

Twenty-one or twenty-two liters is actually about five-and-a-half gallons of flour. It is a lot of flour. I mean, you could imagine gallons. That is something most of us can understand from, like a milk jug. That is a lot of meal. And she is putting this leaven into this great amount of meal.

As a matter of fact, commentators say that this amount of flour would make anywhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty loaves of bread. So it is large. Remember we are talking about the growth of the Kingdom of God. It is supposed to increase, it is supposed to expand. So there is a lot of meal there to work with.

But if we want to understand what three measures of meal really means, we have to go back to the book of Genesis, in chapter 18. This is another one of those instances where the law of first mention comes into play.

Now the law of first mention says that any time a phrase or a word is used the first time, it colors its usage, its understanding, its interpretation in the rest of the Bible (like I mentioned with Eve). Eve is the one who tempted Adam and he sinned.

Here we have, in Genesis 18, the first use of three measures of meal. Okay, let us start in verse 1 so we can see what is going on here.

**Genesis 18:1-8** Then the Lord appeared to him [Abraham] by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." They said, "Do as you have said." So Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes" [So she is going to make a hundred cakes for these guys. Just a morsel of bread!]. And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)  
the tree as they ate.

We understand that one of these men was Jesus Christ and the other two were angels. This is the lead-up for a couple of things.

1. Here God, the Lord, told Abraham that he would have a son when He came by in the appointed time next year.
2. The second thing in this chapter is Abraham's intercession for Sodom; that God said "I cannot keep this from Abraham, so I am going to tell him what I am going to do to Sodom. Its cry has come up. It needs to be destroyed" and so all that goes on.

So you have this fellowship meal that Abraham and Sarah make for the Lord which contains three measures of meal, and it is during the meal there is this huge announcement of the promised son coming. It is a big thing, it is huge, in the plan of God that Isaac would be born. He is not only the progenitor, then, of all of Israel that is going to be born from Abraham, but also he is a type of Jesus Christ, the real Promised Son. So big things in the plan of God here. Of course, then, if we go on, we have the problem with Sodom as well.

Not only that, we should not forget the fact who Abraham is. What is he called in the New Testament? The father of the faithful. He represents the church of God or the righteous person. He is the one who began it all as it were. So just keep those in mind. This is the first time that the phrase "three measures of fine meal" is mentioned. It is also mentioned two other times (not mentioned in that phrasing specifically).

In Judges 6:18-19, Gideon, when he is accosted by the angel in the winepress, says: "Can I make you an offering?" He makes an offering and included in that offering is an ephah of fine flour, which is three measures of meal. Now just think about what Gideon did. He was being chosen to lead that army of 300 men, and be a savior of Israel and a judge later on. Another big thing.

The next time it is used is in I Samuel 1:24 where Hannah dedicates Samuel (gives him to the Lord so he could live with the priest there)—another huge moment in Israelite history because Samuel became the prophet, and he is the one that anointed David as king, and he was a judge. So big things happen when three measures of meal are in these offerings.

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Numbers 15:8-9** And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to the Lord, then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering [or meal offering] of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil.

Here we have it being told us that the grain offering is three-tenths of an ephah (or basically one-third of an ephah).

Now you need to know a little bit about Israelite measures here because this is not the same thing as three measures of meal. The omer is the smallest unit of capacity and it takes three omers to make one seah, which is the unit of measure transliterated in Matthew 13:33. We are talking about seahs here (which is one-third of an ephah, because it takes three seahs to make one ephah). So you have three omers make one seah and then three seahs make one ephah. This is not exact at all because ten omers make one ephah. So it is a little bit inexact.

But what you see here is that the normal meal offering was one-third of an ephah, which is one-third of one seah—one measure of meal. If something is three measures of meal, then what is being said here is that this offering is great, it is for a huge purpose—just like Abraham’s offering there to the three men was three measures of meal. It was way above and beyond what was normally required. It was three times as large.

So what Jesus is talking about here in the parable is that this thing, this entity, that is represented by the fine flour—the three measures of meal—is to do a great work or do a great thing for the kingdom of heaven. It is what may be called a meal offering on steroids.

We have come to understand, if we go back to Leviticus 2, that the meal offering symbolizes the offeror’s service and devotion to fellow man. That is the basic understanding. The burnt offering is like the first and great commandment which talks about, of course, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your being.’ The second great commandment is seen in the meal offering which is ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ It speaks to our devotion and our love toward one another.

**Leviticus 2:11** “No grain offering which you bring to the Lord shall be made with leaven for you shall burn no leaven nor any honey in any offering to the Lord made by fire.”

Now we are beginning to see things come together. What is Satan doing here through the woman? Because if we go back to Matthew 13 and we look at all the parables, we see it starts out with the Parable of the Sower and that the birds of the air (which is interpreted as Satan and his demons) come and try to snatch it away.

In the Parable of the Tares, Satan the enemy, the adversary, comes and puts tares amidst the field of wheat.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, we find that something has happened so that the mustard seed has grown into a tree and the birds of the air (again Satan and his demons) have come to dwell in it.

And here we find that this woman is putting leaven in the meal offering—this super meal offering. Because the church basically, we could say, is supposed to be a super meal offering of Jesus Christ to this world. It is His body that He has given for the life of the world, for the life of everyone in it, if they are called to believe in it.

Jesus seems to be indicating, by the prophecy in this parable, that the church's service and devotion to fellow man will be corrupted by this woman's (the false system's) mixing of false, destructive, and corrupting doctrines into its teachings and practices. What Jesus is saying is that once He founds the church, false teaching and false practices are going to infiltrate the church. And what it is going to do—the biggest problem that it is going to cause—is that it is going to break down the harmony of the church members.

Satan's goal, then, in deceiving the church like this, is to undermine the proper way that we should act and react and serve each other. That if he gets at us, we could say, on the one hand, he works to set members against each other and, on the other hand, he corrupts the doctrines and the practices that would help us to reconcile with one another.

And if the people are at odds with each other (if the hand and the foot do not love each other, if the spleen and the large intestine cannot get along in the body of Christ as it were), the church's work will be ineffective. They cannot do God's work because they are squabbling internally. With leaven in it, the church cannot fulfill its purpose of being light and salt and a blessing to the world. They are making a bad witness. As Francis Schaeffer said, people out there can smell hypocrisy a mile away.

And you know what? Matthew 13:33 says the woman, that awful woman, succeeds (He says "till it was all leavened through and through"). That whole three measures of meal

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

that makes, or should make, this huge amount of bread is completely leavened with just a little pinch of sour dough (a little bit of leaven).

**Galatians 5:9** A little leaven leavens the whole lump.

The church has been very successful in guarding the significant doctrines which mark it as God's church (the Sabbath, the nature of God, the identity of Israel, the holy days, God's plan, several other things besides that we could name). But where has it shown its great weakness? Right here, in the area of personal relationships, in not showing true love one for another.

What are the church's greatest problems today, beyond a lack of understanding of the doctrines? Well, they are in things like distrust, offense, marriage problems, disunity, selfishness, gossip, rumor, talebearing, judging and condemning one another, comparing ourselves among ourselves (as Paul says), and giving place to wrath, among others. All of these are involved in the meal offering. The meal offering covers all of these in that we are not showing love and devotion toward each other. This is the area that we need to focus our efforts in overcoming. We have got to start learning to get along as brethren.

God gives a remedy for this in Matthew 13, but it is one that we have been doing. I hope we have been doing well. The remedy is in the Parable of the Householder, which is the final parable in Matthew 13:51-52. I will not go over it. It is very simple.

The householder is the ministry. He has been given charge, in this particular parable, to take out of his treasure both old and new. Meaning, what he is supposed to do here is, he is supposed to use what he has learned and experienced, what he has been taught by others, for the good of his house (the church). He is supposed to teach these things to the people.

Then Christ tells him to bring out old and new. Jesus is saying that a minister should teach by carefully balancing the teaching of the old and new testaments, or, to put another way, balancing traditional understanding of God's Word with new insights and applications (not new truths as it was told to us back in the early '90s). I am talking always THE truth of God, but having a new insight or new perception of it so that we can give it to you in a way that is more understandable and will apply in this day and age.

So the ministry is charged, then, in this particular parable, with being a bulwark against Satan's and the woman's deceptions by teaching what Paul calls "the whole counsel of

The Parable of the Leaven, Expanded by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)  
God” (Acts 20:27). And in I Timothy 6, Paul admonishes Timothy. He says:

**I Timothy 6:20-21** O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding [the woman:] the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it, some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

That is what the ministry is charged to do here. They are to be the first line of defense against this woman. But there is a second line of defense and that is you. Let us finish here in Philippians 2. The second line of defense is your godly response to these teachings. Paul writes here:

**Philippians 2:1-5** Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy [these are all things that we should have one for another], fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

You are the second bulwark against this woman and Satan’s deceptions. The ministry’s teaching will do no good if those who hear it do not respond by humbling themselves before the Word of God and looking out for the interests of others, showing love toward them (especially their interest in eternal life in the Kingdom of God). What a shame it would be, or how terrible it would be, if something we have done would cause another to stumble and not be in the Kingdom—because we did not show the proper love for them! As it says here, Jesus lived His life like this. This was His mind, that He would do anything and everything that it took to love the brethren, to love others. And it is our great goal to live in His image.

So do not let that woman, with her leaven, win the day. Paul exhorts, in I Corinthians 5:

**I Corinthians 5:7** Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.