

Deleavening The Home

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Spring cleaning. We in the church of God know all about that, do we not? We may call ourselves the masters and mistresses of spring cleaning because we do it all the time, right? For many years we have scoured the house from top to bottom during the waning days of winter and the early days of spring, and have to stop right before the Days of Unleavened Bread when it is all supposed to be done. Each room gets thoroughly cleaned, spruced up, usually the pantry and the kitchen are the very last things, with all the appliances that we have to clean, as we remove all possible leaven from our homes.

We even extend our spring cleaning to our cars and our workspaces under our immediate control, because it is likely that we have eaten a sandwich, a burger, crackers, cookies, bagels, doughnuts, or something else leavened in them. I mean, how many of us eat only matzos or Triscuits at our desk at work? I know I do not.

Some of us have taken spring cleaning to an art form. I know someone, I will not mention any names, who meticulously schedules her spring cleaning room by room, Sunday by Sunday, and other days, too, so that she makes sure she finishes everything on time. Her schedule begins sometime around Christmas break, maybe New Year's, but it is very, very early and marches inexorably and without mercy towards the first Day of Unleavened Bread. Everyone has his or her assignment. They need to get them done on time. And "she who must be obeyed," makes it all happen every year.

Kidding aside, this is a good thing because the work needs to get done and a systematic procedure spreads out the responsibility while keeping to a schedule that will finish the job when it needs to be done. That is only good practice. This is the way construction managers and general contractors and

the like, ensure that building projects get done on time. If you did not have that kind of scheduling and organization and determination to get it all done on time, nothing would get done on time, and there would be problems.

That kind of organization and determination is what has made modern progress happen. That is a good thing and I applaud it. And we are, we have to say, quite happy with the results. It is nice to have things clean and fresh again. Our houses, our cars, our work areas get the once over at least once a year. You do not allow the things that we have to get progressively filthy and run down. Maybe you look over the fence at a neighbor's house and they do not do spring cleaning or anything like it and their things just tend to get worse and worse over time, things start looking worse and worse around their place. That does not happen with us. We do not allow them to run down through neglect.

It is very pleasant to see our rooms freshened up, and in doing so while we do that freshening up and cleaning, we see that we need something, like something that needs to be fixed or something that needs to be replaced. We need a new rug or we need a new bedspread, or we need new paint on the walls. We fix the screen door or re-grout some tile while we are at it because we are all doing these things in order to make the house look good and be clean. We think of ideas for improvements and we fall through on some of them.

Our tradition of spring cleaning, though, with its source in God's command to rid our houses of leaven before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, encourages us not only to clean and order our homes, but to maintain and even improve what we have been given. This principle goes back as far as the Garden of Eden, where God told Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:15 that we should dress and keep what has been given to us. So this fits in nicely, our spring cleaning or our deleavening, with this principle.

It makes sense because the same God who gave the command is a God of work, diligence, the God of purity and order. He is a God of beautification and purification and perfection. He does the same kinds of things Himself for what He is responsible for. And He is responsible for everything. We are supposed to do what He does, follow His example. Please start with me in Hebrews the first chapter. My New King James reads:

Hebrews 1:1-2 God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom He also made the worlds; . . .

We find out that this Son is also the one who was the hands-on Creator. Now notice how the writer of Hebrews describes Him here and His power.

Hebrews 1:3 . . . who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person [And this is the phrase I am looking for in particular.], and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The God that we worship, Jesus Christ in particular, it says here is the one who upholds all things by the word of His power. Are we not glad He does that, that He upholds or sustains everything by His word, that He keeps everything spinning? He created all things and now He makes sure that He maintains it, that everything keeps running the way that it is supposed to. All the laws and the energies that are in this universe that He has set in motion for our benefit, work perfectly every single time, all the time. We do not have to worry that suddenly there will not be any gravity, and we all fly off the earth. That is not how it works.

He upholds everything. Gravity never fails even once, or any of the other laws that are out there working. The earth spins at exactly the right speed that it needs to spin for all the things that it does. The seasons change pretty much right on time. That is not to say we are not going to have a little overlap here and there once they do change, like is happening in some parts of the U.S. right now, getting snow dumped on them even though it is springtime. But He makes all that work.

The water cycle keeps on working. Water comes down on the mountains and rolls down toward the sea and then goes out to the sea and it evaporates up into the clouds and pretty soon you are finding it falling down on the mountains again. So the land gets hydrated, plants get watered, we have water to drink, and it is purified by that natural process. We are the ones that

polluted. God put the system there to work so that it would not be polluted. But that is another story altogether.

Even the plants and the animals that are here on the earth, even the rocks, the soil, everything that has been put on this earth has been designed to make sure that it can support life on this planet. And our great God did that, and our great God is upholding that to make sure it continues—day after day after day.

Of course, maybe even more importantly in terms of the overall plan, is that our God does this with us, too. He sustains *us*. And since we are His new creations being made after His own likeness and in His own image, He makes sure that we are maintained and improved. He applies the same principles of maintenance and improvement to each one of us. He makes sure that we do not stagnate. He makes sure that we do not suffer through neglect. Sometimes we do that, and that is not His fault, because it is our problem that we have not kept up with what He is trying to do with us. But He is on His throne and He is working to bring us into His image.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. . . .

He not only starts our faith—we have our calling from God and we are brought together with Jesus Christ and we start a relationship—but He maintains that relationship all the way through to the end to the point of perfection, as He sees it in us, of maturity, of spiritual maturity. Once He feels like we are done, then fine, that is great, and will be raised into the Kingdom of God when He returns.

He is the one who is Head of the church, and our High Priest has taken on with the Father the responsibility of making sure all of that happens. There are several times in the gospels where He says in prayer to the Father and in talking to the disciples, that He has not lost anybody except the one who was the son of perdition to fulfill the prophecy. And that is the same way with us. No one is able to snatch us out of His hand, and so He is going to complete the work that He started. Let us look at Hebrews 13th chapter. This is the final benediction, we could say, of the book where the author here says,

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

So God Father and Jesus Christ are a team that work together to make us complete or perfect or spiritually mature and They are the best workers in the universe. They never stop. Jesus said, "My Father is working and I am working." That is what They do. They are creators, They are designers, They are workers, and most of all, They are completers. They finish Their jobs and They make sure that when the job is finished, it is improved over what the raw material was at the beginning.

They form us into Their image. We go from clay to spirit, from human and carnal, to divine. They are the ones that are the examples of how to get a job done and do it right.

Well, since it is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, I want to focus on the theme of God's command to rid our homes of leaven. But clearly this is a physical activity, a physical work that we do, and this physical activity points to a spiritual truth. Something more important than just the physical act of getting leaven out of the house. It points to something that is much more necessary.

God instructs us to get leavening or yeast, a type of sin, out of our houses, out of our homes. Spiritually, this indicates that He wants us to work specifically on removing sin from where we live, from the areas we are responsible for. From ourselves, certainly. We always focus on that, removing leaven from ourselves, removing sin from ourselves. But I would like to expand this in my sermon today and talk about removing leaven from our families as best we can.

Not just ourselves, but our *houses*. Houses are physical things. Houses are also *familial* things. The house of David was a dynasty. The house of God not only was a temple in times past, but it is also the church. There is two levels here, the physical and spiritual. We need to understand that we have a responsibility that goes on beyond merely ourselves and reaches to those that we have the closest relationships with. I will explain this as we go.

Please turn back to the book of Exodus, chapter 12. We will read the original command to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread given to Moses here as the Passover also was being instituted.

Exodus 12:15-20 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation [which we are doing right now], and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you. So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread [that was last night, the end of the 14th, not the beginning], until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.

It was through this passage, mentioned several times removing from our houses and finally gets down to removing it from or eating unleavened bread in our habitations, in our homes where we live. The command here in verse 15 to remove leaven from our houses comes immediately after the positive command to *eat* unleavened bread and they go hand-in-hand: The unleavened should be eaten, actively used, during the Days of Unleavened Bread as a training device that God gives us every year to remember this very thing about sin.

Now, just so that we do not get confused or misunderstand what it is saying here in verse 15, it says, "On the first day, you shall remove leaven from your houses." In English that sounds like you should be doing it on the first Day of Unleavened Bread, that you shall remove it on the first Day of

Unleavened Bread. That is not what it says in Hebrew. In Hebrew, it says, leaven or yeast should be stopped or ceased on the holy day. Now that still is not all that clear that leaven should be stopped on the holy day. Behind the word "removed" is the Hebrew word *tasbitu*. You hear the "sh" and the B and the T in there. You understand that those three letters are the same as Shabat. What it means is that this *tasbitu* and Shabbat are related terms. They have very similar meanings. *Tasbitu* means "to stop" or "to cease," "to end," "to rest," "to finish," "to disappear" even. You have to "disappear" all your leaven.

Here it means "to cause to stop" or "to cause or make an end." So practically, what is being said here is that leaven should already be out of the house before the first second of the first holy day begins and remain out of the house until the last second of the last Day of Unleavened Bread. The full seven days, from the first beginning second to the last ending second, are to be unleavened, *completely unleavened*. The New American Bible, Revised Edition, has an excellent translation that captures the sense of this particular sentence that we are talking about here, the second one in verse 15. "On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses." The New American Bible, Revised Edition, has it this way: "From the very first day you will have your houses clear of all leaven." So that is what it means. I just wanted to make sure I explained that point just in case somebody might misunderstand.

Let us go one more chapter over to Exodus 13. We are going to read verses 6-7. But there is a slight change here in the command about removing leaven from the house.

Exodus 13:6-7 "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters."

So we cannot have it with us, nor can it be in *all* our quarters. A little bit different way of putting it, not just from our houses or are habitations, but it cannot be seen in all our *quarters*. The Hebrew word behind quarters is one denoting a border or a boundary or even a whole territory. The word "your"

right before it, it says "nor shall leaven be seen among you in all *your* quarters." That is singular, second person singular. So it is talking about the individual here, in each person's *individual* territory or the borders of an individual's place of habitation.

We can conclude then that we are responsible; it is our job to remove leaven from all the places where we have control, where we can consider those things ours, that we have responsibility over those places. Like I mentioned before, that would obviously be our homes, our yards, our cars, our places of business. And of course, we are employees, a lot of us, of other people who own the business, so in that case, we are responsible only for our workstation, our desk or whatever we have control over at our business. Now, if we own the business, that means that we have to make sure that no leavening is in the *whole* business, because that is what we have responsibility for. That is what we control. That would be what we would consider our territory or within our borders—so our quarters.

God is showing us here that we have to make sure that we do what He says, specifically in this command, but more broadly in everything, in all of those places that we consider ours, or that we have any responsibility over or we have control over: land, place of business, our cars, any other kind of possessions that we may have. Those are the things that we have to do this work to clean them of leaven. Maybe a Hebrew idiom would be helpful here to explain. The Hebrew idiom is, "God wants you to take leaven out of all that is under your hand, whatever you control."

So the main point here is that God's command can be looked at in two ways. It either restricts us to working on those things that are only ours. Or you could look at it another way and say that it *focuses us* on removing the leaven from our particular property and spaces we have responsibility over. You look at it kind of negatively *and* positively. God restricts us to our own or He focuses us on our own. He does not want you going into somebody else's territory and doing this. He wants you to focus on yours and so there is orders, limits there that He wants us to stay within.

Let us add another piece to the puzzle and go to I Corinthians 5. We usually get here at least one time every Feast of Unleavened Bread. We will be reading verses 6-8. Paul here draws a very clear line between leaven and sin.

I Corinthians 5:6 Your glorying is not good.

They had had, of course, the sin that Paul was addressing here of the man marrying his father's wife, and instead of doing what they should have done, they had actually condoned it and that was not good. So he says, your glorying is not good.

I Corinthians 5:6-8 Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 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. [So, yes, we have been unleavened through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.] Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

We have to continue what Jesus Christ started in our unleavening and remain unleavened. We do not want to allow the old leaven to come back, which he here calls the leaven of malice and wickedness. But we want to replace that with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So Paul here, as I said, draws a line between leaven and sin. Specifically, he uses the terms malice and wickedness. As I mentioned before, these two words cover two different areas of sin.

The malice is a sin of the mind. It is what is our intent, how we feel about things. And then the wickedness covers the evil words and deeds that come out of the wickedness, or the malice, I should say, that is inside. So one is our attitudes, and the other one is our deeds and our words. It covers everything that is sinful. It is not just malice, it is not just what we might call wickedness. But it is the whole realm of sin. And that is the leavening that we need to be getting rid of.

Now, in the Old Testament, none of the sacrifices were allowed to be made with leaven. Only a couple of the offerings were made with leaven, and the reason for that, we believe, is because those particular offerings represent us as we are sinful human beings. And all the things that we do, as much as we

try, still contain leaven. They still contain that element of sin because we are fallible, we are very fallible. So, like the wave loaves that were offered up on the Feast of Pentecost, which we believe represent the church, old and new, those were made with leaven because they represent us and they are offered before God for acceptance. And then, of course, He gives His grace. So otherwise no leaven was supposed to be found in any of the offerings that were made.

Of course, later on in Jesus' ministry, He helped to define what leaven is. He spoke to His disciples about the leaven of Herod, and he called it hypocrisy. You will find that in Mark the eighth chapter, verse 15. He also talked about the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, which He also termed as a kind of hypocrisy, and that is their corrupt doctrine. You find this in Matthew 16:11-12. Their corrupt doctrine was hypocritical. They said, Do this, do that, and they put heavy burdens on people. But they did not do it themselves. They were preach, preach, preach but no do, do, do. Do you know what I mean? So that is why Jesus castigated them so much because they expected everybody else to do what they said but they did not follow through themselves.

Together, in all of these ways that the Bible helps us see what leaven is, and as we have taught for many years, these various things indicate that the symbol of leaven boils down to it being a corrupting agent, like the process of fermentation of yeast, because what happens when yeast gets heated up in a lump of dough? It is a nice, warm, and moist place. It begins to grow and multiply, and in doing so, it dies after a while and releases all this gas into the dough and it expands.

So we get an idea of what sin does through that corrupting process of fermentation. Like leaven, sin spreads quickly in whatever body it is in, it corrupts the whole person. Or if it is put into a group situation it corrupts the whole group eventually. And Paul says here in I Corinthians 5 that it puffs up. It produces pride. When you think of pride, you think of Satan the Devil and all his evil and wickedness that came as a result of that. That is the sort of thing that God wants us to get rid of. He does not want the sin to come into our midst, whether it is within ourselves or within the group, and cause all these terrible consequences either to ourselves or to the group.

So when God commands us to remove leaven from our houses, from our quarters, that is, from our homes and from our possessions, everything that we have control over, He is using this symbol of leaven or yeast to teach and remind us that we must be repenting and overcoming sin all our lives. It is not just focused on this week. This week is just a training week that we go through every year. It is a continuing education, we do this every year in our continuing education during the holy days where we have to relearn this lesson again and again and again throughout our lives. That we have to get rid of sin, that we have to deleaven ourselves, that we must repent all year long—all our lives. It is a work, a job that never ends. We just are practicing this week in type with the taking out of leaven or keeping leaven out of our homes for these seven days.

As Paul says here, our past sins are removed. They are forgiven. Christ did that by His death and giving His blood on the cross. But once that is done and He continues to watch over us and help us through our lives and, of course, forgive us, we have to routinely engage in what Paul calls "mortifying the flesh." You will find that in Colossians 3, where we are told that we need to mortify the flesh. That is an old word. It is in the King James. The New King James and a lot of the modern translations simply translated out as "put to death," that we are putting to death our members, those parts of our bodies, as it were, that are inclined to sin. That we are putting those things down, that we are not letting them live in ourselves. We are putting our carnality to death.

Then Paul uses another metaphor, one of taking clothing off and putting clothing on. You find this in Ephesians 4. I am going to read this one. We have to put off the old man who is corrupt, and we must put on the image of Jesus Christ, who is the New Man. He is talking about walking no longer as the Gentiles do, and he describes how they are very licentious.

Ephesians 4:20-24 But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.

These are our marching orders once we enter the church and they continue until we die. That we continue to work on spotting the old man in us and repenting of what the old man has done and continues to do. That we then put on other habits—good habits, good character, the character of Jesus Christ—to replace those things. We are to do this until we are complete, perfect. That God is satisfied with our growth. And all that means for us practically is that we just keep on doing it and keep on doing it and keep on doing it until we die.

So these are the basic marching orders of every Christian: that once we are cleansed by Jesus Christ, we get rid of the old leaven, and we eat the new, or eat unleavened bread.

We all understand that. This has been very basic. We have all rightly understood that the focus of our overcoming and growing has been on the individual because truly we have control only over ourselves. Even our spouses and our children are out of our control, as it were, in terms of making them do something. You cannot make another person change. "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." It is one of those things that you can do whatever you want to do or whatever you hope to do to show the person the right way, but you cannot convince them to do it unless they want to do it themselves. So we cannot really change them. We cannot get the sin out of other people, so when I say we are supposed to be getting sin out of our families, I do not mean that we do this forcefully, that we try to make those other people that we have some control over stop sinning because we cannot. They have to make the decision to do that themselves.

I just want to make that clear that I am not talking about the old style. A lot of people in Worldwide had fathers or whatever that were very controlling over their households, and they would be very cruel in how they treated them. That is not what I am talking about here. I am talking about a situation where we do certain positive things to affect change, to influence change, to help change go. So yes, we have to root out our own sins. Our goal, as I mentioned, is to be completely unleavened as Jesus Christ is. It is what we should be doing. We should be working on ourselves most of all, because that is where the change can happen. Otherwise, if we try to change

somebody else it usually does not work that well, especially if we do it rather hardheadedly and hardnosedly. We usually end up having problems with our relationships rather than making things work well.

Think of it. If we all just bore down and began to change ourselves as God wanted us to be, would we not experience spectacular growth? I am not talking about numbers, but I am talking about in our spirituality, in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and what good witnesses we would be for God if we all just did what the command says to do. Rooting out the old man and putting on the New. We would be terrific examples and make quite a good witness to our families, to each other, and to the world.

But as I mentioned, my comments today are suggesting a slightly wider focus for that because it does mention we remove it from our houses, we remove it from our territory. And there are more people in our territory, or in our houses in many cases, in most cases, than just us, just our individual selves. I hope my comments will add some impetus to our overcoming of sin because we are putting other people in mind as part of why we are overcoming and growing. That is how we can in one way remove sin from our homes.

Now this wider focus that I am talking about as I have already kind of hinted at, is what can be called ridding the material self of leaven. Mr. Armstrong used a term for many years called the "empirical self," and I think that he misunderstood the term. The empirical self is something in psychology that is different, as he defined it. What he defined is called by psychology the "material self." It is the same thing if you understood what he meant by the empirical self, but it is actually the material self.

Essentially, the material self is oneself and what we consider to be ours. That is, we consider a spouse to be ours. We consider our children to be ourselves. We consider our homes, any lands, any possessions, to be part of ourselves—our material self. So when we are removing sin, we need to think of it, at least to stay up with what I am trying to say in terms of removing sin from our material selves, not just ourselves alone. Those are the things that we have responsibility for and which we have a measure of control over. So this means removing sin more broadly. Or, maybe I should say more technically and more correctly, this means *influencing* the removal of sin more broadly.

We need to add one little point to this so that we understand that my notion here is not entirely off base. What I would like to draw your attention to is the fact that this command to remove leaven from the houses or from one's quarters, was given to the people of Israel. Now think of Israel at the time, let us say 1450 BC, or whenever it was, what was their culture like? What was the Israelite culture like when God gave this command? This particular type of culture lasted well into the New Testament era for at least the Jews, probably the people of Israel as well, but they were off migrating by that time.

God gave this command in Exodus 12 and 13 to Israelites, and they did not have a cultural perspective like we do. They were very different from us. We in 21st century America are highly individualistic. So when we read this command in Exodus 12 and 13 to remove leaven from our houses, we think of us—ourselves—just our particular person. And that is how we have applied it—very specifically to each individual. Because we are an individualistic culture. We apply everything to ourselves. We want to be seen just for ourselves, not as members of a group or any kind of larger group of, let us say, even a church or a community or even a family. We tend to want to be known for me, I, as individuals.

But God knew that He was giving this command to a people who did not think like that necessarily. The people of Israel lived in a culture, their own culture, that prized loyalty to family, clan, tribe, or even to the whole nation. They thought less as individuals and more as part of a community. It started with the family, went out to the clan or to the town or whatever they happen to be there, the local community, and then fleshed out from there to wider relationships. So they were far more community oriented than we are. We could even call them communal in the sense that a person's social identity and personality are largely molded by community relationships, not as one person alone.

They did not think of themselves as one person alone. They could not survive as one person alone in most cases. They had to have the rest of their community with them, whether it was parents or spouse or children or the wider tribe or clan to make sure that they could keep on living. So they would have thought of God's command to remove leaven in far wider a focus

than we do. It would not be just themselves, but it would go on to the whole community.

I should mention here, maybe this will help to explain it a little bit more. Israel during this time was still patriarchal. There was a patriarch and he was the one that led all of them. Moses kind of fell into that role, but each individual tribe had a patriarch, and each individual clan had a patriarch. And then each individual family had a patriarch. You see this with Moses trying to get people from each tribe and he will call the fathers of the tribes and that is what he would do. He would call on the ranking member of the tribe—sometimes it is called a prince, sometimes it is called a father, sometimes it gives the particular name. But those people were the ones who were basically governing the whole tribe. Maybe they were the eldest or the eldest in the line, and the patriarchy had been handed down to them.

So these people, the Israelites, saw themselves as members of these patriarchies. And in a patriarchy, the patriarch has pretty much all the power and if anybody wants to do anything, he has to get the patriarch's permission. So a patriarch hearing this command from God would see it as his responsibility to influence or to order the whole tribe to do what the command says to do. He would put himself, as the leader of his tribe, to make sure that all of these commands would be obeyed. And then the people, unlike us, most of them would be willing to knuckle under the patriarch's authority.

I am not saying that is what we should do here. That is not it. All I am saying here is that we need to look at this just a little bit more broadly than just ourselves and you will see what I mean in a few minutes.

But we need to think that this command that God gave that we are to remove leaven from our houses was given to a people who would not think of it as just themselves who must obey this command, but everyone around them as well. To put it simply, if I can put it simply, when God says to remove leaven from one's house or quarters, the ancient Israelite would not stop his thoughts at my house, my quarters, but all of those that could be included under his material self, which would include not only him but his immediate

family, if not more than that. He would think it as his whole community's responsibility to obey the command. And he would encourage that and all the individual people that were in that community.

If he was really taking the command seriously, it would be not just for himself, but for everyone so that the whole community would benefit. In the antitype then, meaning us and what we are to do with this command, we would see this then that God is telling us that our goal should be to remove sin, not just from ourselves, but more broadly. In other words, we have a responsibility from God to do our utmost to lead and guide our families in removing sin and encouraging it in our broader relationships. So it is not just something we do for ourselves. It is something we do for everyone else in our community, and I am speaking mostly family community and church community.

Now I want to repeat again what I said before. That this must be tempered with the fact that we can change only ourselves. We can repent only of our own sins, so we cannot do that for somebody else. We cannot make somebody change. We cannot make them repent. But even so, each one of us has a sphere of influence. Each one of us has influence over somebody else or with somebody else. Husbands have influence with their wives, and vice versa, wives with their husbands. There is a measure of, I was going to say control, but influence is a better word, that one spouse has with another. Put some pressure on in a gentle way.

Parents have influence and a lot more control over their children. Siblings have influence with each other. A lot of times if a parent cannot get a child to do something, an older sister or brother can come up with a way to make that happen. Grandparents have influence with their children and probably even more than anything, with their grandchildren.

God wants us to use this influence that we have, this sphere of influence, to exhort and encourage those closest to us to amend their ways and to live righteously before God. That we should be putting on a gentle pressure on those who are part of our material selves to become more godlike.

Now what do I mean by all this? Let us go to Colossians 3. We should be just a few pages away from it. We are going to go down all the way into

chapter 4. This is what I mean by a sphere of influence and helping the relationships that occur within the material self. We know these from Ephesians. Here is our Colossians versions of the same lives.

Colossians 3:18-25 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. [So notice there wives have a relationship with their husbands and their part is to submit here.] Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers [or even better, parents], do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants [or employees, let us say], obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

Colossians 4:1-6 Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. [So speaking to the employers there.] Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

This section from verse 18 in chapter 3 and on through chapter 4, verse 6 follows on the heels of Paul's exhortation earlier in the chapter, as we said, to mortify the flesh, to put off the old man and to put on the New Man. You find that there in verse 9.

Colossians 3:9-10 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

So we have this idea that we are to get rid of leaven, or mortify the flesh, put off the old man and we are then supposed to be working toward putting on the New Man. And it is this idea of putting on the New Man that goes into the very next section, which my New King James has here titled "Character of the New Man." So Paul gives us a pretty good idea of what the things are that the New Man would look like. These are the attributes of Jesus Christ, the character of God, that are we are supposed to be putting on and how we are supposed to be living. Then it gets to this point in chapter 3, verse 18, where it begins to talk not about the individual, but the individual in community, or the individual in relationships. Because our removing sin from ourselves affects other people. And so what we have here, even though they are rather general admonitions from Paul, they express this idea of how we are supposed to encourage and help the proper growth within these relationships.

So notice: each one of these things from chapter 3, verse 18 on, each one of the people that he addresses here is in a relationship, as I mentioned. Wives with their husbands, and then husbands with their wives, children in relationship with their parents and how they are supposed to act, and then it gets to the parents in verse 21, how they are to act toward their children. Finally he speaks about servants or employees, and how they are supposed to work and get along with their employers, or masters, as it says here.

At the start of chapter 4, we go on to the master, or the employer, and how he should treat his employees as remembering that he also has a Master in heaven, Jesus Christ. And then we get to verse 2 in chapter 4, and he tells us that we should be praying for one another, for each one in the church. Actually in that particular one, you do not pray to air, you do not pray to the ceiling. That is an integral part of your relationship with God. Your relationship telling Him the things that you need and would like, and how you would desire other people in the church to have the things that they

need, whether it is healing or extra funds or what have you, a new job. Paul is telling us how we should conduct this relationship with our Father through prayer.

He goes on in verse 3, talking about praying for the work of the church. Specifically, he is talking about helping Paul, who was in prison at the time, so that he could preach the word as it should be preached. And so here is the relationship of the individual member to the ministry or to those who are actually on the front lines of doing the work. Then in verse 5 he tells us how we are supposed to walk, how we are supposed to live, conduct ourselves towards those people who are in the world, to the unconverted. That is another relationship. We live in this world, and we have to get along with people and here are instructions how we are supposed to get rid of the leaven in our relationship with them.

Finally, in verse 6 of chapter 4, he talks about how we should relate to one another in our speech, whoever that other person is. Whether it is in the church, whether it is in our family, whether it is out in the world, we have a responsibility to extend our influence, our growth in God's way toward those who we talk to. We talk with grace, our speech seasoned with salt, and as it says, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. So you have answers for people who might have questions, which gets to the idea of studying and learning and growing so that you may say the right things to people.

This covers pretty much the whole gamut of our sphere of influence. Our job as members of the church, as part of Christ's body, as sons and daughters of God, is to act properly in each one of these relationships. If we act properly, if we do what Paul exhorts us to do here, then we are actually encouraging these other people in our sphere of influence, to see our example and maybe change themselves. If we, in our relationships with each other, do not uphold these principles, you know what happens? Arguments, other sorts of conflicts and fights, people seeing you as a hypocrite. It is a total bad example when you do not follow these things. And when you do not follow these things and other people see this bad example, they tend to let down themselves.

So our job is, in all of our relationships, whoever they happen to be, that we always uphold the unleavened way of God in hopes that God will use our influence to cause change in the other person. This works especially well in the family because we are around those people, those other relationships that we have, more often than with other ones. So if the father or the husband in the family is righteous, it is going to help the mother, the wife in the family. If the mother and the father are acting toward each other in a proper way and conducting themselves properly toward the children, the children have a far greater chance of picking up those same good habits and following through. It is not a guarantee, but we have to use what influence we have to encourage proper good behavior, getting rid of the sins, having these good habits that will take them into their adulthood and perhaps, according to God's will, start the process over with their own families. And it radiates out from there through all these material self relationships.

As I said, in each one of these relationships that we see here in Colossians 3 and 4, we have a measure of influence. We even have a measure of influence with God. He listens to our prayers. He takes what we have to say to Him seriously. It is not going to encourage Him to be any better because He is already perfect. But at least we have some influence with Him. Look at some of the the examples of people in the Bible. The one that comes to mind most is Moses and his pleading before God not to destroy Israel. What kind of influence was that? Whether he could have God calm down and continue His work with the children of Israel. I mean, that is just incredible, that a man would be able to have that sort of influence, if you will, even with God.

Because we have influence and therefore a measure of control in our relationships, we need to advocate and inspire good in others as much as we possibly can to create positive change in their lives. We are to be the light of the world, are we not? That kind of encapsulates basically what I am trying to say—that we have to be a light *everywhere*, all the time. We cannot let down in our families because our children are going to see that and they are going to see it as hypocrisy, which is the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Herodians. You do not want to be a Pharisee in your own home. You want to be like Christ who was always an excellent example to whomever He came in contact with, and He used His influence to help them.

Let us go to Titus the second chapter as we wind down here. Here, Paul gives another list of instructions, another list of admonitions. But this is one is specifically to church members in their interactions with each other in the body of Christ. This is how we are to act amongst ourselves here in the church. So he has given these commands or instructions to Titus, who is the pastor of this church in Crete, and he was telling them how to teach the people so that they would be this way.

Titus 2:1-10 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men should be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience [That is how the older men should appear to the other people in the church, as an example, as a help.]; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they may admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient [or, submissive] to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. [This is older women and younger women, and the older women, he says here, are to have a hand in helping the younger women in some of these areas.] Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works [meaning Titus, as a younger man, has to be the example for them]; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

This all comes down, as he says here in verse 10, that we could be an adornment to the teaching of God, meaning we are good examples. People adorn themselves with nice clothing or with jewelry or whatever it is, and it makes a nice show of what the doctrine teaches in this case, in this particular metaphor, what our principles are, what our character should be like. So the people of the church, he is saying here, should be good examples of the teaching that the church teaches.

If we fulfill these roles, and we do have roles within the church, it creates an atmosphere within the church that encourages goodness and growth, and it is that goodness and growth that drives out the sin. If you are living properly before God and you are getting rid of the sin and you are doing what is good, then there is no room for new sin. So with each person doing his or her part within the church, this is how we rid our house, as it were, our families, or the house of God, of sin. We all have a part to play, especially in being good examples and encouraging one another toward goodness.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts [that is, getting rid of leaven], we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

This is where we stand. We have been granted grace and forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. That is what we saw there in the Passover service. And now it is our job, it is our role, if you will, and our goal to deny ungodliness and lust—sin, deny sin—and live Christ-like lives while we still live in this world looking forward to the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

If we do this, if we make this our aim and we work diligently at it, we will be not just ourselves saved, but we will be that purified and specially prepared people, a community, a group, a family who are eager to do the works of God.

Have a wonderful Feast of Unleavened Bread, everyone.