

## Sin Begets Sin

### Leavening and Sin

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Those of you who have looked at the calendar recently know the first day of Unleavened Bread is exactly one month from today on April 6th, and so it is fitting to begin turning our attention to what this annual holy day represents as we begin examining our homes and our lives for leavening. So please turn with me to I Corinthians 5, starting in verse 6.

**I Corinthians 5:6-8** Your glorying is not good. 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 are truly unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. 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.

One of the reasons that leavening is used as a type of sin in the Bible is that just like the spores of leavening, sin does not stay contained. Sin spreads and one sin begets another sin. This afternoon we will be looking at several examples of how sin spreads so that we can better prepare for the Passover and for the Days of Unleavened Bread.

I have here an editorial that was written a number of years ago, and even though some of the details may be outdated, the principle contained within it is still very applicable to us. The editorial is entitled "The Enron Scandal and the Left's Social Engineering Agenda." It was written by a man named Warren Smith. The article begins:

There has been a lot of ink spilled over the past few weeks about the Enron scandal. The media have blamed the scandal on inadequate regulation, dishonest executives, and the hubris of senior management and the floppiness of accounting firm Arthur Andersen. It's likely that all these factors contributed to the

disaster. But there has been one other major contributing factor, that is the role that a small minority of corporate social engineers, often found in the human resources and public relations department of our largest companies have played in creating a culture in corporate America that encourages its leaders to make up the rules as they go along.

We see their work when we when we read headlines like the new rules in Business or visionary leaders are redefining everything. On one level, such headlines are fluffy and banal, but on another level they are insidious and destructive. For they imply and give voice to a world view that is at odds with the traditional and biblical morality. Nowhere is this attitude more in evidence than in the battle over same-sex domestic partnerships and large corporations. A near majority of Fortune 500 companies now offer same-sex domestic partner benefits to employees. And not incidentally, all of the big five accounting firms, including Arthur Andersen, now offer same-sex benefits, and again, when this was written, this sort of thing was still new and somewhat shocking.

Continuing the quote,

Why is this significant? Because every one of the Fortune 500 companies and every one of the big five accounting firms do business in places where homosexual behavior, that is, sodomy, is illegal. In other words, these companies have corporate policies that condone, if not outright encourage, illegal behavior. This unfortunate reality has two tremendously corrosive and destructive effects.

First, it fosters hubris on the part of the senior executives. They say we are enlightened, we are progressive. It may be against the law, but it shouldn't be. We're inventing the future, rewriting the rules, so we must stay on the vanguard of social change. Is it any wonder that executives of such organizations would have few qualms about breaking other laws. Secondly, such an organizational culture co-ops employees who do have moral qualms about such policies. Employees who invest their time, talents, and gifts with these

corporations end up, whether they like it or not, directly aiding and abetting the evil that they do.

Many know this and protest at the risk of their careers or leave, and the corporation wins another battle in the war of moral attrition. Or they do not protest, they compartmentalize their beliefs, and the next time it comes time to make a moral stand, perhaps over something even that is more immoral or illegal, they have already gone through the mental gymnastics. It becomes easier and easier to look the other way. And [still quoting] am I saying that the pro homosexual campaign that is active in many large corporations led to the Enron scandal? Not directly, but I am saying that any business or political organization that forces its members or employees or citizens to compromise their moral and ethical standards is bound to become an organization where compromise becomes the norm.

Warren Smith draws an intriguing comparison here between the laws regarding financial accounting and the laws regarding homosexual behavior. Even though these laws are vastly different in their application, he demonstrates that the senior management of these companies have the same basic approach to law. The way they approached laws regarding homosexuality was identical to the way they approached the regulations concerning accounting. In both cases they were in favor of pushing the envelope and of creatively interpreting the law. Their entire business ethic is built on rewriting the rules and doing your own thing. They are intent on rewriting the things with which they disagree.

This article highlights one of the reasons that leavening is a symbol for sin in the Bible. The article chronicles sin first appearing in the marketing department as it cranks out these mottos that endorse rebellion. Then the human resources department picks up on this leavening spirit, and soon it is rewriting corporate policy in order to accept or even condone sexual behavior that is against the laws of God and at least at the time was also against the laws of the country. But after this sin and rebellion had festered in the marketing and human resources departments, then it also became apparent in the accounting people along the way, this leavening spread throughout the ranks of employees, and as the article points out, the

employees who do not leave in protest end up either willingly aiding and abetting the criminal behavior or else they try to compartmentalize their beliefs, which is of course an exercise in futility.

Just how far did this leavening go? It was later reported that one of the major pornographic magazines produced an issue featuring the women of Enron in which some of the women in the company were also doing their own thing and setting the new status quo. It would seem that the corruption of the corporation was complete. We can see God's lament over similar behavior in Jeremiah chapter 9, starting in verse 1.

**Jeremiah 9:1-3** Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh, that I had in the wilderness a lodging place for travelers; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. "And like a bow they have bent their tongues for lies. They are not valiant for the truth on the earth. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know Me," says the Lord.

In verse 2, God says Israel consists of adulterers, those who are unfaithful to a covenant. He says Israel is a gang of treacherous men. In verse 3, God continues to list Israel's sins by adding deceit and contempt for the truth, and the verses after this speak of the deceit even more. That sounds like a good description of Enron. They were unfaithful in their covenant to the shareholders. They were treacherous, and they had few qualms about deceiving.

Notice the beginning of the last phrase in verse 3. They proceed from evil to evil. Their sin will not be contained. They are not content with just one infraction. They have to go from one to the next to the next. The leavening had spread so far, verse 3 says that as a result they did not know God.

These are the same people that God mentions in Amos as being the only family in all the earth that God has known. But the leavening in the nation was so thick that it was preventing them from knowing Him in return. Jeremiah poses an interesting question with regard to sin just a couple of chapters over, Jeremiah 13.

**Jeremiah 13:23** Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

Their lives were so full of sin and of leavening that God says that they were accustomed to it. The Amplified Bible says they were taught or even trained to do evil. The implication is that this training was a willing self-education.

In this chapter, Jeremiah foretells the captivity of Judah because of her many sins, and the context points to idolatry and unfaithfulness to the covenant as the main transgressions. The sin was allowed to spread unchecked like leavening until it had pervaded every aspect of their lives. Jeremiah says the sins of the people have become so great that it is like it is a part of their genes, even though each man has to choose his own way.

God says to Jeremiah that the predisposition towards sin became so great that the choice was essentially already made. The dough had been thoroughly kneaded and the leavening was uniformly mixed throughout it. Their sin was as predictable as a leopard having spots.

We know that a man's sins are not genetically determined. One does not inherit a temper, for instance. It is something that is learned. It is a sin that is allowed to develop. We cannot blame the genetic code for our moral failings, but at the same time, our environments and our experiences can influence our decisions to the point that if we do not actively regulate ourselves and evaluate our every word and deed, we will end up acting out a script that has been written for us as if it had become a part of our genetic code.

Sin begets sin. The leavening of one generation becomes the leavening of the next unless it is aggressively removed. It is a statistical fact that those who are abused have the tendency to become abusers. Racist parents tend to produce racist children. Parents who rebel against authority, such as God, tend to have children who do likewise. A self-centered generation will tend to produce another self-centered generation, and the sin continues to spread.

And there are a number of applications and lessons that we can draw from these examples. First, because sin begins in the hearts, our overall approach to law and to sin is more important than a specific sin.

It is not to say that the individual sins are unimportant, but as Christ says in Matthew 15:19, it is the heart that produces evil thoughts, murder, adultery, theft, false witnessing, slander, and irreverent speech. The heart of the Enron Corporation was in favor of breaking the law. It was in favor of getting around and overlooking those regulations that it did not have any use for. It thought that it was above the law. And from this heart then proceeded several specific instances of immorality.

And so it is with us. Our heart is what is in need of replacement, but until we are changed into an incorruptible form, there is always the danger of our leavened heart breaking out of its confinement and defiling areas of our lives.

A second lesson is that just as one sin leads to another within us, a sin in one person can lead to a sin in another person. I want to emphasize the word *can* because this is our own choice. We *can* learn about sin from watching the examples of others. We *can* gain the knowledge of sin through our choices of entertainment, our companions, and our role models. Unless it is actively regulated, this knowledge of sin can easily take root within our hearts, and then break out in murder, adultery, theft, and so on.

It is in our best eternal interest to keep this knowledge of sin from entering our lives in the first place. It is far easier to keep it out than to contain it once it has gained entrance and become a part of our character.

And third, our sins affect others and produce a ripple effect. Our sins may even set the stage for others to sin. The sins of the executives of Enron and Arthur Andersen affected everyone who worked for those companies. The moral choices we each make will have an effect of varying intensity on our spouse, on our children, on our parents, our siblings, our congregation, the church in general, and even people we have never met.

Each decision with which we are presented has the potential to affect an unknown number of people, and if that decision involves sin, natural law

dictates that the sin will spread and involve others in it. Just as each one of us has been affected by the decisions of Adam and Eve, our own decisions often have ramifications beyond our imaginations.

So as we begin turning our thoughts to the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, remember this principle that *sin begets sin*. Remember that sin resists containment and that once sin has taken hold, it will seek every opportunity to break out. And remember that one of the ways in which we can show love toward our neighbor is by not sinning, not just against them, but by not sinning in general.

Just as a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, the total effect of any sin can never be accurately predicted. We can choose whether we add leavening to a recipe, but once it is added, we have no control over the effects of the leavening. And sin, like leavening, begets more sin.