

Days Of Truth

Leavening and False Doctrine

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Throughout the Bible, there are a number of symbols and types associated with leavening, with unleavened bread, and with this week called the Days of Unleavened Bread. At its most basic level, leavening symbolizes sin because of its propensity to spread as well as to puff up with pride.

The Days of Unleavened Bread are a memorial of ancient Israel's flight from Egypt under God's leadership and intervention culminating in their baptism in the Red Sea. For us these days symbolize our flight from sin, from Satan, and this world. And this too is possible only because of what God has done and continues to do. The process we go through every year of removing all of the leavening from our habitations pictures our continual effort to remove sin from our lives.

The leavening represents sin in a general sense, but the Bible also uses it in a more specific way as a symbol for false doctrine and for false teaching. In its broadest application, we could say it stands for anything that is not true. This afternoon we will be looking at the symbol of leavening as it applies to false spiritual teaching. Please turn with me to Matthew chapter 16 to get started.

Matthew 16:6 Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

The margin says the teaching of the Pharisees. I am dropping down to verse 12.

Matthew 16:12 Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine [in the margins as the teaching] of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

This section is not dealing directly with the Days of Unleavened Bread, but Jesus Christ says here that leavening is a type of false doctrine or false

spiritual teaching. The Pharisees were the primary religious teachers at this time. As we have recently heard, the Pharisees started out in the time of Ezra with the very best of intentions, but along the way their approach and their teachings became twisted. The culture at the time of Christ was very heavily influenced by the heresies of the Pharisees, and the leaven kept the people in a spiritual bondage that was just as real as the physical bondage that the Israelites experienced in Egypt and later in Assyria and Babylon. Let us consider this in light of the New Testament commands to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread.

I Corinthians 5:7-8 Therefore, put out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you are unleavened. For even Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Verse 8 shows that unleavened bread represents sincerity and truth. This is the other side of Christ's statement that leaven represents false doctrine and by extension, any sort of falsehood that causes spiritual deception or slavery. The word truth in verse 8 is exactly what it appears to be. It is used elsewhere to describe Christ as being full of grace and truth. Truth is also used to describe the Holy Spirit. It is called the Spirit of truth, which will guide each of us into all truth.

Truth is used to define the Word of God. It is used when Christ says the truth shall make us free in John 8:32, and keep that principle in mind because it plays a very important part in the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread. We usually think of the word sincerity in terms of good intentions, but the word in verse 8 means much more than that as well. It means that it is pure and undefiled and uncontaminated. It means that there is no mixture involved and that this is the genuine article.

Before our calling and conversion, we walked according to the course of this world. We were under the religious deception perpetrated by the ruler of this cosmos. We were spiritual slaves in bondage to a self-serving system that was inherently anti-God. We lived according to all manner of false doctrines and false ideas about God and about the purpose of this physical existence. Our master kept us busy, kept us distracted, and kept us deceived. We were

not wearing shackles or chains in a physical sense. Instead, it was our minds that was in bondage.

Our spiritual eyes were blinded from seeing the existence and the outworking of God. False teachers led us, whether they were Christian or secular, and we ingested false concepts, ideas, and beliefs. The thinking that we ingested became a part of us and affected the way we lived our life. We were not free because we did not know the truth.

The Days of Unleavened Bread were significant for ancient Israel because they were a reminder of what God did to free them from physical slavery. For us these days represent putting sin out of our lives, and they remind us of God's action in liberating us from Satan and from this world, from our own human nature.

But it is not just sin and Satan in a general sense from which we have been set free. More specifically, these days are also an annual reminder of the truth that God has given to us and the spiritual freedom that we have as a result of correct spiritual teaching taught by true ministers of God. It is the truth that God has given us that begins to set us free.

Satan's attempts to deceive through false teaching have never stopped. He began deceiving mankind in the Garden of Eden, and then he began again with Nimrod shortly after God began again with Noah. When the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, Satan again was working full time to keep them in bondage to a false belief system.

As Richard told us on the first day, God had to go to great lengths to help them unlearn all that they had absorbed in Egypt. Is it that much different in our time? Jesus warned in Matthew 24:24 that as we approach the end, the level of Satanic deception will be especially intense. He said,

Matthew 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

He warns that if it is possible for us to be deceived, we will be deceived by false doctrines. The verse does not say that there is one group of people that God will supernaturally protect from deception and that they do not have to

worry about being led astray. Instead, what it means is that *the elect are those who do not allow themselves to be deceived*. To think that it is impossible to be deceived once God has called us is not very far from believing in the doctrine of eternal security. The Bible does not support a once enlightened, always enlightened doctrine or a once free, always free doctrine. On the contrary, all of the New Testament writers warn about false teachers and false doctrine.

Those warnings only make sense if they are directed at those who have already been called out. Why would Peter and Paul and the rest of the writers waste their time warning people, people who did not have the truth about being led astray? They did not waste their time. The audience of the apostles' writing was those whom God had already called from this world and freed from the false beliefs. The New Testament is directed at those whom God has already set free from bondage, which He accomplished in part by revealing truth, and the New Testament is full of exhortations directly and indirectly to remain free from that bondage. God has set us free, but we have a very large responsibility in remaining free.

A very real danger remains of going back into captivity little by little, one false idea at a time. When God says, "Come out of her, my people," referring to Babylon, He is talking to individuals that He has already brought out once, and that is why they are called His people. Consider the world in which we live. At every turn, Satan is broadcasting a false way. One cannot turn on the radio or television or get on the Internet without being confronted by a falsehood. There is not only this world's Christianity that we have to shun, but we also have to be wary of the secular humanism, the agnosticism, the atheism that the mainstream entertainment and information networks propagate.

The falsehoods and the deceptions and the lies are everywhere. Sometimes they are easy to recognize, and other times they are packaged with so much truth that they are almost invisible.

Please turn with me to Exodus 12. Here we will find some of God's instructions regarding the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Exodus 12:15 Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. Even the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses, for whosoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul or that person shall be cut off from Israel.

Dropping down to verse 18.

Exodus 12:18-20 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, you shall eat unleavened bread until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses, for whosoever eats that which is leavened, even that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger or born in the land. You shall eat nothing leavened, and in all of your habitations shall you eat unleavened bread.

God gives instructions that during this week not only are we to avoid leavened bread, we also are instructed to eat unleavened bread every day. In fact, I counted 11 verses in the first five books where it specifically tells us to eat unleavened bread every day for seven days. And by contrast, I only counted seven verses that specifically commands us to avoid leavening. It is clear from this that eating unleavened bread is just as much a part of these days as the avoidance of leavening, and perhaps even more so. If the respective number of commands is significant, the eating of unleavened bread is even somewhat more important than the deleavening and the avoidance of leavening. God calls this week the Days of Unleavened Bread rather than say the days of avoiding leavening.

The focus is weighted, if only slightly toward the unleavened bread rather than the deleavening. And the lesson here is that merely avoiding sin or avoiding false spiritual teaching is not enough. We have to do more than just reject the teachings and the teachers of this world's Christianity. We also have to take steps to do something positive and partaking of the truth. If our focus is only on avoiding what is false, we could just close our eyes and

cover our ears, and would be little better than the Pharisees. I do not mean the Pharisees did not eat unleavened bread, but their primary approach was on avoiding sin rather than actively doing what is good.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians 10:21 that we cannot partake of both God's table and Satan's table. The table is where we eat, so this reinforces what we have already seen. Our spiritual diet cannot be a mixture of true and false doctrines. This ties right into the symbols of leavening and unleavened bread for this week. We are commanded to both remove the false spiritual teaching from our lives and replace it with the true, the genuine, and the pure unleavened bread. The Days of Unleavened Bread give us an annual object lesson, even though on the physical plane we only have to keep our lives unleavened for one week.

We know that the purpose is to remind us that our lives should always be free from sin. When we look at this from the perspective of leavening representing false doctrine, there is a very concrete application for us, even though God initially freed us by opening our minds. A great deal of vigilance is required to keep our minds unleavened and to guard our hearts. We deleaven our homes once a year and the next year they need to be deleavened once again. Likewise, we have the perpetual responsibility to reject false teachings and false teachers. Just as a little leaven leavens the entire lump of dough, a little falsehood or a little twist within a spiritual teaching is going to affect the outcome of that teaching, as well as pervert all of the associated doctrines.

And just as an aside, it is interesting that the penalty of eating leavened bread was to be cut off from the rest of the congregation. It seems to represent a type of quarantining of the people. The positive commands to eat unleavened bread is the other side of this equation. Just as we are instructed to eat unleavened bread every day during this week, a larger meaning is that we should be ingesting truth every day for the entirety of our converted lives.

In its ultimate fulfillment, this means taking in Christ. He is the definition of truth, and His life was completely unleavened. Another application of this is to take in the pure and unadulterated Word of God, which is also defined as truth. But this means more than just reading the Bible every day. We could memorize the entirety of the Bible just as we can cram our mouths full of

food and that does not mean that all of it is going to be properly digested or assimilated. The eating here does not mean just putting it into our mouths, but it implies a process of it becoming a part of us.

Jesus Christ not only spoke true words, but all of His actions and His intentions were also true and sincere. The truth is only valuable if we make use of it. We have to take it in through daily Bible study. We have to digest it through meditating on it. We have to put it into practice for the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth to really be a part of us. But what we take in and put into our lives must be unleavened.

The saying "you are what you eat" applies just as much to spiritual food as it does to physical. It is quite possible to avoid false teachings and yet be on a spiritual starvation diet which will leave us spiritually malnourished and weak. Likewise, it is possible to be on a spiritual junk food diet, which may be exciting and leave us feeling full and content and satiated, but which also leaves us undernourished and full of impurities with which the body has to contend. By contrast, the diet God gave to Israel was very simple. It was manna every day. It was the perfect food, and yet Israel despised it.

The Days of Unleavened Bread symbolize our spiritual freedom and everything that God has done to make that possible, but these days also remind us that we have a responsibility to remain free from spiritual bondage. That responsibility has a dual application that requires our attention every day: to continually purge the false spiritual teachings from our minds and to perpetually fill our lives with truth, because it is truth that will make us free and will keep us free.