

# 1 Corinthians 5:6

*A Ministry in the Word*

---

## Scripture Reading

*Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then ye must needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — with such an one know not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

---

## What Is the Glorying?

The glorying referred to in verse 6 reaches back to chapter 1, verse 29, where it is written that *no flesh should glory in his presence*. That was given as the reason for a number of things set forth before — the factions and the claims of the schools: *I am of Apollos, and I of Cephas*. Gift, too, had been misused as a means of puffing up the flesh. So that is the glorying the apostle addresses: *Your glorying is not good*.

The last verse of chapter 1 also bears on this: *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*. That would be good — that would be good indeed. But what is in our text is the opposite — glorying in that which puffs up, glorying in the toleration of what ought to be removed.

Is it not common to boast that in one's little corner of Christendom there is such liberality as to tolerate the very persons Paul writes in chapter 5 ought to be put away? That is boasting — and it is a very evil sort of boasting. It also explains why in chapter 2, verse 2, he says, *I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified*. How many times has that verse been quoted, across the years, as a way of holding ministry to a low level! That is not its meaning at all. The apostle shaped his ministry to the Corinthians to wither the flesh at every turn. He wanted to know nothing among them but Christ and Him crucified because that was the end of the man in the flesh. That is the real thrust of the verse — not a restriction on the scope of ministry.

## **Leaven in Matthew 13 and 1 Corinthians 5**

In Matthew 13, a woman puts leaven into three measures of meal. The three measures of meal in Scripture speak of Christ manifested as the food of God's people. And that woman leavens this — every doctrine with respect to Christ, come here to be the food of God's people, has been leavened. Every aspect of it. That is the general state in Christendom. What Matthew 13 gives us is the corruption in Christendom.

The systematic usage of leaven in Scripture is that it is something evil, to be kept out of every offering brought to Jehovah. The exception is the two wave loaves, which had leaven — but they were baked, stopping the action of the leaven, and they represent a new testimony brought in for God.

Many independent congregations are taught that the leavening process in Matthew 13 is what is meant in 1 Corinthians 5 as well. But taking verses 6 and 7

together, it is plain that this is not so. The presence of leaven — known and unjudged in the assembly — imposes upon that assembly a new character. They are not a new lump anymore. They have to purge it out, the text says, in order to be a new lump. If they do not, what kind of a lump are they? Not a new lump. Not unleavened in Christ in practice.

## **Standing and Practice**

The phrase *unleavened in Christ* is a statement of standing — and the practice must conform to the standing. To have known and unjudged leaven in the assembly does not correspond to the standing in Christ as unleavened. The creeping process of leaven is true in its own place — it will work that way too — but that is not the point here.

When 2 Corinthians says they had approved themselves pure in the matter — if they had not done so, what would they have been? Is it reading too much into God's Word to say they would not have been pure? Unjudged known leaven in an assembly puts that assembly in a different status. It is not a new lump anymore. It is impure.

The illustration is from baking. There is a lump of dough on the counter. Is it leavened or unleavened? If on one corner you can plainly see there is leaven there, you do not wait six weeks to see if it has spread. You know at once: that is a leavened lump. Because if it were unleavened, there would be no leaven anywhere in it. Yes, leaven spreads — but that is not the point. The point is that known leaven makes the lump leavened.

## **Leaven in Scripture — Always Evil**

As far as can be known, there is not a single verse in all of Scripture in which leaven is presented in a favourable light. In every case, in every place, it is the

working of something evil. In symbol, in significance, in meaning — there is always something not good, something corrupt, something working its way through.

That is worth mentioning because there are plenty of voices in Christendom who will take passages that use the word leaven and speak about the spread of the gospel — a horrible thought. The spread of the gospel is a good thing — that is true. But you cannot get a picture of it from leaven. It reminds one of the wedge of gold: gold is a good thing, but the principle of a wedge is to work its way in gradually — and that is not what divine righteousness is about.

In things among men, moral evolution is always in a downward direction. Things never gradually evolve into a better state. The result of something permeating its way through slowly over time is that the end is worse, not better.

## **Fellowship with Leaven**

The advantage some see in denying that known leaven leavens the assembly is that it removes what has been called secondary defilement. On that view, there might be another assembly where there are apparently godly persons, and yet there is the toleration of a known positive evil — called leaven in Scripture. But on such a theory, those persons can still be received, because they themselves are not personally practicing the evil, and therefore the assembly is supposedly not leavened. This makes for a broader and easier path.

But the doctrine of being leavened by fellowship with leaven is clearly found in Scripture. The illustration of a school with a smallpox outbreak is instructive: no other school would accept students from it. In matters of health, people are considerably more careful than in matters of righteousness and the keeping of God's house clean. The relevance of disease is immediately seen; the relevance of righteousness can be dismissed easily. 'But there are such nice Christians there!' The concern here is not niceness, but holiness — the order of God's house, and

what is due the Lord Jesus.

## **Doctrinal Leaven: Galatians 5:9**

Galatians 5:9 uses the same language: *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.* The very same words. One cannot so immerse oneself in 1 Corinthians as to forget the importance Scripture places on judging evil in Galatians, or vice versa.

If there should be ever so much purity in the lives of the saints, but doctrinal evil is minimized and tolerated — there is leaven, unjudged. Or if doctrines are carefully maintained, but purity of behaviour is let go and moral evil tolerated — in the same way, leaven is there. The same language is in both places. Moral and doctrinal evil are equally addressed.

Leaven may arise in assemblies without being immediately known. The Lord can bring such things to light in His own time. But I do not think it correct to say that because leaven is unmanifested, the assembly is therefore automatically leavened and has lost its new-lump character. It is when the thing comes out — and there is a refusal to judge it — that the assembly is shown to be in that state. When an assembly knows something is evil and refuses to judge it, that assembly has taken on a new character and shown itself to be such.

## **Grace Allowed Space**

The apostle did not place the Corinthians as if they were already a leavened company — he warned them that they must purge it out *to be* a new lump, *according as ye are* unleavened. What he charged them with was that they had not mourned. Had they mourned, the apostolic instruction would have come in just as it has here, and God makes provision.

Even with Babylon, God gave her space to repent. So the assembly at Corinth was given space to act upon reception of the apostolic instruction — which they

did. And the conclusion was: *You have shown yourselves pure in the matter*. That is how the grace of God could look at it, because they responded to His injunctions through the apostle.

But all the explanations put forth to get rid of the true bearing of this passage are a very serious thing. A teaching that allows evil partakes of the evil it allows. No holy doctrine permits evil. The only thing for evil is judgment. Scripture shows fire applied to stop its action — and that is what came in here through the apostle.

### **Christ Our Passover — The Feast of Unleavened Bread**

Verse 8 reaches back to Leviticus 23 and the seven feasts of Jehovah. There are one-day feasts and some followed by seven-day feasts. The one-day feasts bear on some great act of God; the seven-day feasts speak of the result of what God has done.

The Passover was on the fourteenth day of the month. On the fifteenth day began a seven-day feast called the Feast of Unleavened Bread — speaking of the unleavened walk that flows from the great thing God did at the Passover. *Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast*. This is not referring to the Lord's Supper. It refers to the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, beginning the very next day. From the moment the good of Christ our Passover being sacrificed is applied to us, the seven-day feast of our walk for God's glory begins. The seven days speak of the whole of our time here.

How fitting it is that in verse 8 we read *let us keep the feast* rather than *thou shalt keep the feast*, as Moses might have written. This leaves it to the state of heart of the doer — as an encouragement, not a bare command. *Let us* — it is something to be done together. The assembly has a conscience — a collective thing, addressable, a source of action. It is a deep thing, not merely on the surface.

## **A New Lump — First Love**

The word *new* in verse 7 — *a new lump* — speaks of something fresh, something uncontaminated. It calls to mind the words to Ephesus in Revelation: *Thou hast left thy first love*. That is the moral root of declension. A new lump ought to have first love. And so all the saints composing the assembly should be walking in the good of that seven-day feast, marked by a character contrary to what the Corinthians' state had been showing.

The feasts of Jehovah — the Mo'edim, the appointed times — are very beautiful types. And here the apostle, by the Spirit, applies one of those Old Testament types directly in the context of the necessity of being separate from leaven unto the Lord. This is apostolic authority applying the type. That is very clear, and it is a most beautiful application.

## **Separation from Evil as God's Principle of Unity**

When the principle of separation from evil is pressed, objections come at every turn. Someone will quote Revelation: *Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins*. The response: 'Oh, that just means you might imbibe those sins.' Is that why God says *come out of her* — merely that you might imbibe the sins? That is an attempt to play it down as far as possible.

In correspondence in which this matter was pressed, one leader of Open Brethren could only say, concerning 2 John, that one becomes a *partial partaker* of such a man's sins. A partial partaker — those were his words. One is dragged, kicking and screaming, against this teaching of Scripture. Another example: when Hebrews 6 was pressed — *It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance* — one man said: 'Impossible means almost impossible.' End of discussion. When people do that with God's Word, there is nowhere to go. Scripture does not say a partial partaker, or almost impossible. It is always the attempt to soften, to get around, to diminish.

Mr. Darby wrote his paper *Separation from Evil as God's Principle of Unity* in 1846 in response to the formation of the British Evangelical Alliance — not in connection with Bethesda, as is sometimes alleged. Both W. H. Dorman and William Kelly asserted this plainly. The phrase 'Gospel Unity' — associated with the Evangelical Alliance — shows what is on the mind: a unity whose principle is something less than the truth of the one body. It is foreign to Scripture. It is not Philadelphian in character.

### **Philadelphia: The Holy and the True**

The way the Lord Jesus presents Himself to the seven assemblies in Revelation reflects on what He has to say to them. To Laodicea He speaks of Himself as the beginning of the creation of God — the new creation — because they were acting as if the old creation, the flesh, characterized them. To Philadelphia He presents Himself as the holy and the true — because in whatever feeble manner it might have been, the Philadelphian assembly was answering to Himself in that character.

And He says to Philadelphia: *Thou hast a little power*. That little power cannot become less than the amount needed to keep the assembly pure. It might be ever so feeble — but the Lord will give that much to His gathered saints if they want to honour Him as the holy and the true.

To receive from places that are leavened would have to be based on those persons having approved themselves pure regarding that leavened fellowship — and the only way to do so is to act on 2 Timothy 2 and depart from iniquity. For an assembly that tolerates leaven is an iniquitous place from which one must be separate. Our associations are required to be in accordance with our standing in Christ.

### **The Chapter Must Judge Us**

At Corinth, when this chapter was first read, it would have judged them. That is the right idea — that this chapter must judge us. It is a totally different thing to lift ourselves up as judges of it. Many of the objections to carrying out 1 Corinthians 5 carry at their bottom the thought that we are competent judges of this chapter — that instead of it judging us, we should judge it, and dispose of it according to our own thoughts.

Acts 2:40 also comes to mind: *Save yourselves from this untoward generation.* Those who heard Peter on the day of Pentecost had a connection with the generation that crucified the Lord Jesus. To receive salvation they had to separate themselves from what they had been connected with before.

And to the Corinthians, the same sort of cry applies: if the leavener is simply left there — if nothing is done — then the Spirit of God raises the same cry: *Save yourselves.* And how does the assembly do that? By what the apostle writes in our chapter: *Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump.*

---

— Study ends —