

"Beware the Yeast"

I can remember as a kid growing up here in Waco the smell of the Mrs. Baird's Bakery just a few blocks from where we meet here at Columbus Avenue. Coming over the viaducts on 17th or 18th you could smell the bread being baked—the wonderful smell of yeast bread. Yeast, I would later learn, was what caused the bread to rise and expand. It had a profound effect on the dough.

In the Bible, we see yeast mentioned in a couple of different contexts, some literal and some figuratively. The Jews were not to use yeast in the bread that they ate during the Passover feast. The lack of yeast in their "unleavened" bread would remind them of the haste in which they left Egypt when they fled from slavery to eventually settle in a land with which God would bless them. In Exodus 12, they are commanded to remove anything from their house that had yeast in it and their house was to remain yeast-free for seven days. Because Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the celebration of Passover, we, in observance of our Lord's death, don't use yeast in our communion bread.

Jesus said in Matthew 13 that the kingdom of heaven was like the yeast that a woman used to leaven about 60 pounds of flour. The yeast, though a small amount, worked through all of the dough she was making. In the same way, Jesus inferred, a small number of believers can impact the world for good. The "yeast" is pervasive, affecting all it touches.

However, that pervasiveness, that ability of a small amount of yeast to affect a large amount of dough, can also be an illustration concerning our susceptibility to false teaching. Jesus confused his apostles in Matthew 16 by saying to them in verse 6: "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." In Mark 8:15, Jesus includes Herod's "yeast" as something to avoid at all costs.

The apostles first thought he was talking about literal bread. Eventually Jesus convinced them that he was talking to them about the teaching of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herod. Their words could cause Jesus' followers to believe a lie. They needed to be on their guard against such teaching.

The same is true of us today. There are many who will try to convince us to believe something other than the truth outlined in God's word.

Their teaching can be pervasive. Its effect on the church can be devastating. It is in I Corinthians 5 that Paul says "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough—sin in the church can and will eventually affect everyone. Paul's advice? Get rid of the old yeast of "malice and wickedness" and replace it with the bread of "sincerity and truth." We need to remain vigilant. It is the only way to be well pleasing to God.