
Christ's Object Lessons

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Chapter 7—Like Unto Leaven

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This chapter is based on [Matthew 13:33](#); [Luke 13:20, 21](#).

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Many educated and influential men had come to hear the Prophet of Galilee. Some of these looked with curious interest upon the multitude that had gathered about Christ as He taught by the sea. In this great throng all classes of society were represented. There were the poor, the illiterate, the ragged beggar, the robber with the seal of guilt upon his face, the maimed, the dissipated, the merchant and the man of leisure, high and low, rich and poor, all crowding upon one another for a place to stand and hear the words of Christ. As these cultured men gazed upon the strange assembly, they asked themselves, Is the kingdom of God composed of such material as this? Again the Saviour replied by a parable:

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“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

Among the Jews leaven was sometimes used as an emblem of sin. At the time of the Passover the people were directed to remove all the leaven from their houses as they were to put away sin from their hearts. Christ warned His disciples, “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” [Luke 12:1](#). And the apostle Paul speaks of the “leaven of malice and wickedness.” [1 Corinthians 5:8](#). But in the Saviour’s parable, leaven is used to represent the kingdom of heaven. It illustrates the quickening, assimilating power of the grace of God.

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None are so vile, none have fallen so low, as to be beyond the working of this power. In all who will submit themselves to the Holy Spirit a new principle of life is to be implanted; the lost image of God is to be restored in humanity.

But man cannot transform himself by the exercise of his will. He possesses no power by which this change can be effected. The leaven—something wholly from without—must be put into the meal before the desired change can be wrought in it. So the grace of

God must be received by the sinner before he can be fitted for the kingdom of glory. All the culture and education which the world can give will fail of making a degraded child of sin a child of heaven. The renewing energy must come from God. The change can be made only by the Holy Spirit. All who would be saved, high or low, rich or poor, must submit to the working of this power.

As the leaven, when mingled with the meal, works from within outward, so it is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. No mere external change is sufficient to bring us into harmony with God. There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians, but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart.

A profession of faith and the possession of truth in the soul are two different things. The mere knowledge of truth is not enough. We may possess this, but the tenor of our thoughts may not be changed. The heart must be converted and sanctified.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God.

[98] The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.

The great truth of the conversion of the heart by the Holy Spirit is presented in Christ's words to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above, he can not see the kingdom of God.... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." [John 3:3-8](#), margin.

The apostle Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, says, "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when

we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” [Ephesians 2:4-8](#).

The leaven hidden in the flour works invisibly to bring the whole mass under its leavening process; so the leaven of truth works secretly, silently, steadily, to transform the soul. The natural inclinations are softened and subdued. New thoughts, new feelings, new motives, are implanted. A new standard of character is set up—the life of Christ. The mind is changed; the faculties are roused to action in new lines. Man is not endowed with new faculties, but the faculties he has are sanctified. The conscience is awakened. We are endowed with traits of character that enable us to do service for God. [99]

Often the question arises, Why, then, are there so many, claiming to believe God’s word, in whom there is not seen a reformation in words, in spirit, and in character? Why are there so many who cannot bear opposition to their purposes and plans, who manifest an unholy temper, and whose words are harsh, overbearing, and passionate? There is seen in their lives the same love of self, the same selfish indulgence, the same temper and hasty speech, that is seen in the life of the worldling. There is the same sensitive pride, the same yielding to natural inclination, the same perversity of character, as if the truth were wholly unknown to them. The reason is that they are not converted. They have not hidden the leaven of truth in the heart. It has not had opportunity to do its work. Their natural and cultivated tendencies to evil have not been submitted to its transforming power. Their lives reveal the absence of the grace of Christ, an unbelief in His power to transform the character. [100]

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” [Romans 10:17](#). The Scriptures are the great agency in the transformation of character. Christ prayed, “Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.” [John 17:17](#). If studied and obeyed, the word of God works in the heart, subduing every unholy attribute. The Holy Spirit comes to convict of sin, and the faith that springs

up in the heart works by love to Christ, conforming us in body, soul, and spirit to His own image. Then God can use us to do His will. The power given us works from within outwardly, leading us to communicate to others the truth that has been communicated to us.

[101] The truths of the word of God meet man's great practical necessity—the conversion of the soul through faith. These grand principles are not to be thought too pure and holy to be brought into the daily life. They are truths which reach to heaven and compass eternity, yet their vital influence is to be woven into human experience. They are to permeate all the great things and all the little things of life.

Received into the heart, the leaven of truth will regulate the desires, purify the thoughts, and sweeten the disposition. It quickens the faculties of the mind and the energies of the soul. It enlarges the capacity for feeling, for loving.

The world regards as a mystery the man who is imbued with this principle. The selfish, money-loving man lives only to secure for himself the riches, honors, and pleasures of this world. He loses the eternal world from his reckoning. But with the follower of Christ these things will not be all-absorbing. For Christ's sake he will labor and deny self, that he may aid in the great work of saving souls who are without Christ and without hope in the world. Such a man the world cannot understand; for he is keeping in view eternal realities. The love of Christ with its redeeming power has come into the heart. This love masters every other motive, and raises its possessor above the corrupting influence of the world.

[102] The word of God is to have a sanctifying effect on our association with every member of the human family. The leaven of truth will not produce the spirit of rivalry, the love of ambition, the desire to be first. True, heaven-born love is not selfish and changeable. It is not dependent on human praise. The heart of him who receives the grace of God overflows with love for God and for those for whom Christ died. Self is not struggling for recognition. He does not love others because they love and please him, because they appreciate his merits, but because they are Christ's purchased possession. If his motives, words, or actions are misunderstood or misrepresented, he takes no offense, but pursues the even tenor of his way. He is kind

and thoughtful, humble in his opinion of himself, yet full of hope, always trusting in the mercy and love of God.

The apostle exhorts us, "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." [1 Peter 1:15, 16](#). The grace of Christ is to control the temper and the voice. Its working will be seen in politeness and tender regard shown by brother for brother, in kind, encouraging words. An angel presence is in the home. The life breathes a sweet perfume, which ascends to God as holy incense. Love is manifested in kindness, gentleness, forbearance, and long-suffering.

The countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the heart shines out in the faces of those who love Him and keep His commandments. Truth is written there. The sweet peace of heaven is revealed. There is expressed a habitual gentleness, a more than human love.

The leaven of truth works a change in the whole man, making the coarse refined, the rough gentle, the selfish generous. By it the impure are cleansed, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Through its life-giving power it brings all there is of mind and soul and strength into harmony with the divine life. Man with his human nature becomes a partaker of divinity. Christ is honored in excellence and perfection of character. As these changes are effected, angels break forth in rapturous song, and God and Christ rejoice over souls fashioned after the divine similitude.