

## “Step 6 - Cleanse the Leaven”

### Romans 13:12-14

Life is not constant, it has its ups and downs. There are hard days and easy days. Good seasons and bad seasons. No matter how well we plan or how careful we are to do the right thing, difficult circumstances arrive that shake us and leave us looking for refuge. And even when there aren't difficult circumstances our bodies seem to have a mind of their own leaving us depressed, angry, fearful, lustful, etc. for no apparent reason. No wonder the Bible speaks so often about the Lord being our refuge in times of trouble. He promises to protect and comfort us when these storms hit, but at the same time the world always offers its own forms of comfort and presses us when we're weak to find refuge there rather than in God. As soon as the pain arrives, so do tempting thoughts. This is why I have to plan carefully in order to live in freedom, especially in the culture in which we find ourselves today. We don't have to look for wrong choices, they pursue us at every turn. We're constantly being enticed. But it's possible to put up barriers that make tempting options harder to reach. This is what Paul means when he tells us to "...make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Ro 13:14). He's saying don't place wrong sources of comfort near at hand. When we're weak their voice will grow strong and draw us away from the Lord.

#### Cleanse the leaven

As part of their preparation for Passover Israel was told to search their homes and remove every speck of leaven (yeast). The action was symbolic of evil with its power to spread corruption. To me the picture is one of removing from the areas where I live things that might tempt me.

- Exodus 12:15; 13:6, 7
- 1 Corinthians 6:6-8 – Paul compares the influence of a defiant sinner in the church to leaven, warning that such attitudes contain a power that can spread to others.
- By analogy, there are certain objects, substances, places, foods and even people who tend to entice me when I'm weak or suffering.
- What tempts me when I'm tired, lonely, bored, angry, hungry, sad...?
  - Alcohol, pornography, drugs, guns, soul-tie items, unhealthy food, money, false religious objects...?
- Listen to Paul: "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:12-14).
- Watch Timothy: 1 Timothy 5:22-24

Taking steps to "cleanse the leaven" out of my life may be socially awkward because it signals to others you have a problem. In some cases it will require me to confess to others. You may have to explain to your spouse, friends, fellow employees, etc.

#### Confession

- "What grows in the dark dies in the light"
- Telling a spouse, a pastor, a doctor
- People often confess and ask you to hold them "accountable," but this is an unfair burden. We can't police you, you must discipline your own life.
- We can sit with you and pray with you as you confess to the Lord (Jas 5:16).
- Telling a spouse: He/she needs to be told in discrete, not lurid details. This is a confession not a therapy session. He/she needs to be told:
  - So the opportunities are stopped (deceptive behavior and lies exposed)
  - So he/she can pray
  - So he/she can finally understand the strange things they've been sensing or the strange ways you've been behaving (comforts them to know they aren't crazy).

#### The gift of pain

When various forms of pain come into my life doing nothing is not an option. Some source of relief must be found. And please note that mental pain is just as bad as physical pain. You can no more ignore depression than you can an open wound in your flesh. But pain brings with it a gift: it can drive us to God. If I refuse the comfort temptation offers then where else can I turn?

#### The place of refuge

God doesn't ask me to ignore my pain and just "bite the bullet." He doesn't warn me about the dangers of temptation and not provide me with an even better alternative. He knows I have to find comfort somewhere. We learn to stop using the wrong medication and start using God's medication.

- Ephesians 5:18 – "be filled with the Spirit..."
- Romans 13:12-14 – "the armor of light"
- Psalm 73:25-28 "the nearness of God is my good; I have made God my refuge"



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It always seems to come back to this doesn't it? Finding a real living relationship with God, not religion. Quenching our thirst with His Spirit (Jn 7:37, 38).

## Questions

- 1) If it's not too personal, tell us a way you have "cleansed the leaven" out of your life.
- 2) How do you cope with bad news? Where do you turn?