

Galatians 5:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Analysis

A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Proverbial warning about error's pervasive influence. "A little leaven" (mikra zymē, μικρὰ ζύμη)—small amount of yeast. Mikros (μικρός) emphasizes the seemingly insignificant quantity. "Leaveneth" (zymoi, ζυμοῖ)—present tense verb: is leavening, continuously fermenting. "The whole lump" (holon to phyrama, ὅλον τὸ φύραμα)—the entire batch of dough. Phyrama (φύραμα) is the mixed dough, the kneaded mass ready for baking.

Leaven in Scripture often symbolizes sin, corruption, evil influence (Exodus 12:15, Matthew 16:6, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). A tiny amount of yeast permeates and transforms whole loaves. Paul's point: a little false teaching corrupts entire faith. The Judaizers' error—adding just circumcision to faith—seemed minor but fundamentally perverted the gospel. Small compromises have massive consequences. Allowing "just a little" law-righteousness destroys grace entirely. There's no such thing as minor theological error when it touches the gospel's heart. The Galatians thought they were making small addition to faith; Paul shows they're abandoning faith altogether. Vigilance against error, even apparently minor error, is essential. Don't tolerate leaven.

Historical Context

Jesus used leaven imagery to warn against Pharisaic and Sadducean teaching (Matthew 16:6-12). Paul uses it to warn against tolerating sexual immorality in the church (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) and here against doctrinal error. Leaven's permeating

quality makes it perfect metaphor: false teaching doesn't stay contained but spreads, infecting the whole community. The Galatian churches hadn't fully embraced circumcision yet, but Paul warns: if you allow this teaching foothold, it will take over completely. Better to reject it entirely now than let it ferment and spread.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What 'little leaven'—seemingly minor doctrinal compromises or moral allowances—are you tolerating that could corrupt your entire faith?
2. How do small deviations from gospel truth end up fundamentally perverting Christianity?
3. What vigilance is required to prevent false teaching from spreading through churches and individual lives?

Interlinear Text

μικρὰ	ζύμη	ὅλον	τὸ	φύραμα	ζυμοῖ
A little	leaven	the whole	G3588	lump	leaveneth
G3398	G2219	G3650		G5445	G2220

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 15:33 (Parallel theme): Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

Mark 8:15 (Parallel theme): And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.

Luke 13:21 (Parallel theme): It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Luke 12:1 (Parallel theme): In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 Timothy 2:17 (Parallel theme): And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;

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