

“Purge Out the Old Leaven”

Since its inception, *Affirmation & Critique* has been devoted to presenting the truth concerning God’s eternal economy and to offering critiques of theological views that deviate from the central biblical revelation regarding the divine economy. In a severely worded and highly critical response to our first issue, a person who identified himself as a pastor and seminary professor accused us of keeping our theological position well covered. From the beginning until now, however, we have publicly declared that our burden is to write clearly, emphatically, and repeatedly concerning the economy of God, which we have defined numerous times and which we will gladly define again (see below). It should become evident even to a casual reader that this issue of *A & C* affirms the truth about the Father’s house in John 14 and about the holy city in Revelation 21 and 22 and critiques the traditional, religious (and false) notion of heaven as the eternal abode of God’s redeemed. We critique both the idea that the Father’s house in John 14 is a “heavenly mansion” and the concept that the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22 is either a physical city or a mere synonym of heaven. Such a critique requires an earnest, although initial, attempt to “purge out the old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:7), especially what we call “the leaven of heaven.”

God’s eternal economy is His plan and arrangement, according to the desire of His heart, to dispense Himself into His Divine Trinity into His chosen, redeemed, and regenerated tripartite people to be their life, their life supply, and their everything in order to make them His corporate expression. In the present age this expression is the church, the house of the Father and the Body of Christ; in eternity this expression will be a marvelous, organic entity—the New Jerusalem. This is God’s economy, and for it we were created, redeemed, and regenerated. Apart from this economy, the universe has no meaning and the Christian life has no purpose or goal. Since the matter of the divine economy is so crucial, it is our desire to communicate the truth of God’s economy to God’s people, especially to those who are poor in spirit and pure in heart (Matt. 5:3, 8) in seeking the Lord and doing the Father’s will.

Our understanding of the divine economy, and especially of the Father’s house and the New Jerusalem, is not according

to traditional interpretations but according to the pure Word of God. Proverbs tells us that every word of God is pure, or tried, and that we should not add to His words, lest He reprove us and we be found a liar (30:5-6). Adding to the word of God is most serious and is strictly forbidden in Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, and Revelation 22:18. In this matter we are pleased to heed the admonition of the critic mentioned above: “If you would be God’s prophet, you must not be an innovator, but a faithful proclaimer of what is revealed in the Word of God—period.” As those who would be faithful proclaimers of God’s eternal economy, we wish to affirm what is in the Word and critique what is added to the Word, especially by traditional theological teachings that differ from the central thought of God as made known in the Word of God.

In a practical way, what does it mean to add to the word of God? The word of the Lord Jesus provides a clear explanation. In Matthew 16:6 He told His disciples, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” When the disciples were unable to understand the Lord’s word, He asked them, “How is it that you do not understand that it was not about bread that I spoke to you? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (v. 11). This further word must have made the disciples clear, for the next verse says, “Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” The Lord Jesus Himself likens the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees to leaven, to something added to dough to produce fermentation. In 15:6 He said to the Pharisees, “You have deprived the word of God of its authority because of your tradition.” Therefore, quoting Isaiah, He could say, “In vain do they worship Me, teaching as teachings the commandments of men” (v. 9). If we put all these verses together, we see that the leaven of the Pharisees is the traditional teachings and commandments of men. When these are added to the word of God, God’s word is nullified, deprived of its authority. Then instead of the authoritative divine word, there is a leavened mixture of divine revelation with human tradition and opinion. As those who endeavor to hold to the pure word of God, we must purge out all leaven, rejecting the pagan notions, natural concepts, and traditional teachings

that have been added to and mixed with the word of God. If we fail to purge out this leaven, we will not have a clear understanding of God's economy and of the New Jerusalem as the ultimate goal of God in His economy.

Regarding our need to purge out the old, religious leaven, it is significant that the first part of Matthew 16 deals with leaven and that the second part presents the revelation of Christ and the church (vv. 16, 18). This indicates that leavened teachings—the doctrine of today's Pharisees and Sadducees—hinder us from receiving the revelation of Christ and the church. Witness Lee says,

If we are still under the influence of religious leaven, we shall never be clear about Christ or the church....If there is still leaven within you, you will be under a veil, and your eyes will not be able to see Christ and the church. To see Christ and the church...you need to eliminate every kind of leaven. (*Matthew* 563)

If we remain under the influence of religious leaven, we will not have a proper and thorough understanding of Christ, the church, the cross, the kingdom, the Father's house, and the New Jerusalem. Religious leaven and the divine economy cannot coexist. Either the presence of leaven will keep us from knowing the divine economy, or the revelation of the divine economy will expose the religious leaven. The Lord's parable in Matthew 13:33 indicates that virtually every aspect of the divine truth in the Scriptures has been leavened. "The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened." In the Bible leaven signifies evil things and evil doctrines (1 Cor. 5:6-8; Matt. 16:6, 11-12). The woman with the leaven refers, we believe, to the apostate church, otherwise signified by the woman Jezebel in Revelation 2:20. Three measures is the quantity needed to make a full meal (Gen. 18:6). The hiding of the leaven in three measures of meal signifies that in a hidden way the truths in the Bible and the teachings concerning Christ have been fully leavened.

Sadly, this is true also of the divine revelation concerning the Father's house and the New Jerusalem. The leaven of heaven has been mixed with the fine flour of God's economy unfolded in the Gospel of John to produce the perverse doctrine that the Father's house in John 14 refers to a heavenly mansion, a magnificent eternal dwelling that the Son of God is supposedly designing and preparing for every one of His believers. Likewise, the leaven of materialistic notions and traditional, religious ideas has been added to the revelatory sign of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21—22, resulting in the notion of the New Jerusalem as a literal golden city with huge pearl gates. This means, as Witness Lee observes, that the ultimate consummation of the divine revelation in the holy Scriptures "has been leavened and has been changed in every

way in its intrinsic essence and element....This is the greatest leaven which the woman took and put into the biblical fine flour (Matt. 13:33)" (*Training* 148). Asserting that by the Lord's mercy we must labor to purge out this leaven:

The truth concerning the house in John 14 and the city in Revelation 21 has been leavened and this leaven in past centuries has governed the Christian teachings; therefore, so many have been robbed, misled, distracted, frustrated, and held back....We must purge out this leaven. (*Training* 149)

This is our burden. On the one hand, we must minister the divine economy in sincerity and truth; on the other hand, we must purge out the old leaven. Only when God's economy is faithfully ministered and the leaven is thoroughly purged will God's people know why they were created and redeemed, and only then will they understand God's goal in His dealings with them. The time must come when God's people are no longer robbed, misled, distracted, frustrated, and held back but instead are given an opportunity to reconsider traditional teachings in light of the pure word of God and to be recovered to God's original intention and to the central line of God's revelation concerning Christ, the church, the Father's house, and the New Jerusalem.

This issue, therefore, serves a twofold purpose: to minister the truth concerning the ultimate goal of God's economy and to purge out the old leaven, the leaven that has caused God's people to be cheated and deceived in their spiritual understanding and frustrated and retarded in their spiritual development. We have no intention of being iconoclastic or sensationalistic. Instead, we seek to accurately explicate the details of the spiritual signs—the Father's house and the New Jerusalem—that speak of the ultimate consummation of God's economy. This explication often occurs from within the metaphors themselves; that is, the details of the metaphors sometimes are seemingly referenced as being literal. It would be a mistake to read our arguments in this manner. Whether from within or outside of these metaphors, our only aim is to uphold the truth for the interests of God and to present the truth for the benefit of God's people. May all the regenerated children of God find their place in the Father's house and join with seeking believers everywhere in becoming the New Jerusalem for the consummation of God's economy and the fulfillment of His heart's desire.

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by the Editors

Works Cited

- Lee, Witness. *Elders' Training, Book 2: The Vision of the Lord's Recovery*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1985.
- . *Life-study of Matthew*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1986.