

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Working the Soil

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He received a variety of reactions to His teaching. In the midst of this, He taught the "parable of the sower," which explains the vast differences in how souls respond to the truth our Lord's given.

A key point Jesus made when explaining the parable is that "*the seed is the word of God*" (**Luke 8:11**). Regardless of what the soil was like, the seed in the parable was consistent. A failure to bear good, lasting fruit was not a reflection of anything defective in the seed.

In like manner, failure to respond rightly to the Word of God doesn't diminish the power and perfection of the truth. What it *does* indicate is a need to "work the soil" (our hearts) so that God's Word yields the fruit He wants.

An example of this is seen with the first type of ground referenced in our Lord's parable. **Luke 8:5** mentions seed that "*fell along the road, and it was trampled under foot, and the birds of the sky devoured it.*" Jesus explained, "*Those along the road are those who hear, then the devil comes, and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved*" (**verse 12**).

In other words, those who receive seed "*along the road*" have *hardened* hearts that refuse to accept the truth. While this can happen in a general sense (i.e., rejecting God's Word entirely), it can also apply to any specific teaching He's given. For instance, a Christian may have no trouble accepting the truth about baptism, but harden his or her heart against the truth God's given concerning divorce and remarriage. Receiving God's Word with meekness (**James 1:21**) demands a heart that will accept the *whole counsel* of God.

The second place Jesus references seed falling in His parable is "*on the rocky ground,*

where it had little soil, and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of soil" (**Mark 4:5**). His explanation (**verses 16-17**) shows that the rocky ground represents hearts that have a *shallow* faith. Those who receive the seed in this ground lack a deep conviction and commitment to God and thus will stumble in the face of trials and temptations.

When Jesus faced trials, He didn't use them as an excuse for doing wrong, but instead committed Himself *wholeheartedly* to the Father's will (**1 Pet. 2:22-23**). We must have this level of devotion instead of having a superficial commitment that only submits to God when things are easy.

A third type of heart represented in the parable is the *distracted* heart. Jesus illustrated this heart with the words, "*Other fell amid the thorns, and the thorns grew with it, and choked it*" (**Luke 8:7**). He explained, "*That which fell among the thorns, these are those who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity*" (**verse 14**).

The explanation Jesus gave for the "*thorns*" indicates that He primarily had in mind things that are wholesome in themselves, but can easily consume our lives and hinder us from having the spiritual focus that we should. If the Christian fails to grow, study, pray, teach, help others, or assemble like we should because his or her time is filled with temporal pursuits, that Christian is letting the "*thorns*" take over.

The one who prioritizes God's will above such pursuits, while letting the Word get deeply rooted in his or heart and giving honest consideration to all of God's teaching, will allow God's Word to produce the good, lasting fruit God expects of us.

May we "work the soil" of our hearts to ensure we have this heart God is looking for.

Helping the Poor

In **Galatians 2:9**, Paul recounted how Peter, James, and John gave to he and Barnabas the “*the right hand of fellowship*.” The three primarily taught Jews, while Paul and Barnabas primarily preached to Gentiles. Paul went on to mention one thing Peter, James, and John exhorted him and Barnabas to do. **Galatians 2:10**: *They only asked us to remember the poor – which very thing I was also zealous to do.*

Examples of early Christians show God’s desire for *all* of us to be zealous for helping the poor (**Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; 11:29-30**).

Fulfilling this responsibility can seem challenging when we consider the qualifier of **2 Thessalonians 3:10**: *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.* Those who are poor because of an unwillingness to work should be encouraged to *repent*.

While laziness should not be “enabled,” Scripture shows that laziness is far from the *only* cause of poverty.

The Bible speaks against those who oppress the poor (cf. **James 2:6**), inferring that poverty can be caused (or worsened) by oppression. People can be poor because they’ve had things stolen (cf. **Heb. 10:34**). Some have been made poor because of famine or other natural disasters (**Acts 11:28**). In other words, the poor includes much more than just those who are unwilling to work.

The poor and needy should receive our compassion. Notice **1 John 3:17**: *But whoever has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, then closes his heart of compassion against him, how does God’s love abide in him?* Those who are “*rich in this present world*” (**1 Tim. 6:17**) are exhorted to be rich *in good works* and to be “*ready to distribute, willing to share*” (**verse 18**).

As zealous as we should be to help the poor, we should be careful to do so in accordance with God’s pattern.

God established a weekly “*collection for the saints*” (**1 Cor. 16:1**). He commanded, “*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him*” (**verse 2**). This is God’s pattern for raising funds for *all* authorized works of the church.

In the immediate context, though, the apostle Paul indicated that this collection would be used to carry aid to needy saints in Jerusalem (**verse 3**). This passage shows that local churches have biblical authority to provide for needy saints (not only those of their own number, but of other local churches as well).

Benevolence as a collective work of the church is specifically for *saints* though. Church benevolence in the New Testament was not an “evangelism tool” to attract the lost, but rather a work intended to help needy Christians. Moreover, church benevolence does not supersede family’s obligation to provide for its own (cf. **1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 16**).

While benevolence as a collective work of the church is for needy saints, *individual* Christians have responsibility to help *both* brethren *and* non-Christians as we have the ability and opportunity.

Galatians 6:10 says, “*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*” This passage teaches about responsibilities of *individuals*, rather than the collective work of the church (cf. **verses 1-9**).

Notice, though, how this verse stresses our need to do the best we can to help others. While we must cautiously avoid unscriptural work in the area of benevolence, we must be zealous to pursue that which *is* scriptural.

Like the apostle Paul, may each of us be zealous to “*remember the poor.*”

-Michael Hickox (both articles)

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