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The Law of Attraction

"With lovingkindness have I drawn thee." - Jeremiah 31:3

The law of attraction is a universal law. The planets are subject to it and obediently rotate in their orbits. The sun and moon affect our earth through this law and the ocean tides speak of its force and its marvels. The distant ocean calls to the rivulets in distant hills. In answer to that call the lesser streams are attracted to the greater ocean-bound rivers and all flow onward until the mighty currents come to rest in the depths by which they were so effectively drawn.

But the circle of attraction is far wider. The rays of the sun sweep the expanse of the oceans like a broom, lifting its waters to the clouds again. The forested mountains and the grain-waving fields call out to the waters, attracting it back to earth again in the dewdrop and the rain. The land is refreshed. Man is kept supplied with the necessities of life. The streams are kept filled and provide nurture for the deer and cattle on a thousand hills.

In all these things the law of attraction illustrates the nurture of our spiritual lives. Our love of God is in response to his love for us, we are told. "*We love him, because he first loved us*" (I John 4:19). This is the attractive influence of which we sing, "He drew me with the cords of love, and thus he bound me to him." He made us to find the deepest satisfaction only in drinking deeply from the fountain of his grace. His Word teaches us this lesson and the world around us illustrates its application. The ocean draws the scattered streams to itself. Similarly, the wideness of God's love and mercy draw us to himself-the embodiment of all love-excelling. Just as the deer pants for the waters of a cooling stream, and in seeking for that draught learns an inherent law of its own nature, so our heart's search for God is the perfect conformity of our spirit in answer to the attraction of his spirit. The vine which may begin its life in the recesses of a darkened pit will never cease its struggle toward the sunlight. Nor does it ever rest until its tendrils wave in the sunlight which invisibly attracted it. It cannot be "un-affected" by the pull of light for which it has an inherent affinity. So we are drawn by a law of spiritual attraction toward an environment which God has made our true realm of life in fullness. He works through his law, leading us to do his will and his good pleasure. It works to draw us with increasing strength as we progress toward the goal of his attraction. The fervency of prayers for a closer walk with God increases as one's

heart responds to his love. The true testimony of his power working effectively in our hearts is therefore found in this unending longing for the fullest understanding of his grace. What a happy experience it is to know that there is a law working in us and for us by which we become conscious of our progress from one grace to another, from one degree of spiritual understanding to another yet greater vision of God's complete will. What is this but confessing that "the half was never told?" Is it not the reality of our often repeated words, "heaven is nearer and Christ is dearer, than yesterday to me"? We will never reach the heights of attainment represented in God's loving will for us until the law of attraction prevails in our lives. He calls us toward greater things and our language should always be, "Where he leads me I will follow, I'll go with him all the way."

Let the river run its course toward the ocean, thus teaching us the beauty of God's way. The river flows towards its appointed rest. In its *flow* it grows wider and deeper, accepting along the way the contributions of all the little streams which add their all to the flow. The attraction begins far away, when the flow was but a tiny stream. As it flows onward there will be winding curves, noisy rapids, and projecting rocks around which the stream must negotiate in foaming haste and roar. But as the stream nears the ocean its flow will gradually become more quiet and even. The turbulent haste is gone and the undercurrents are stronger. At last it reaches the inflowing tides and merges imperceptibly into the congenial environment of the larger waters which all along its way have been mysteriously affecting it.

Applying this illustration to our lives, how is it with us? The facts of life and the signs of our times tell us that life's course will soon be over. The law of spiritual affinity has drawn us throughout the years towards a goal of which we have some signs of progress. By that law there should be some maturing of our spiritual vision, some evidence that we have been drawn closer to Jesus and learned the deeper facts of eternal life from him. The attractive power of eternal realities must have grown in us. That power should become increasingly evident in the abundance of our testimony, in life and in word. We will have learned to appreciate the need for all the contributing streams along the way which add spiritual knowledge to the volume of our understanding of the whole will of God. Thus comprehending with all saints we will have widened the horizon of all truth and deepened the currents of Christ's intended fellowship among his people in a true unity of spirit. For many of us it has been a long time since we took our first tentative steps in the narrow way. The years have come and gone. Opportunities to grow in grace and knowledge have filled the time. The great ocean of eternity lies just a little further on. And we ask ourselves: "Have we attained the stability of character, the quietness of spirit, and the readiness to merge this present life into that greater life soon to be given to those made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?"

Life's sun sinks westward. As it nears the horizon what will it bring of glory to these closing years? We should want it to be like one of those glorious sunsets when another law of God paints the sky in a glory unlike any that human artists can reproduce. What beauty tints the lingering clouds, spreading a richness of splendor over the arc where earth and heaven seem to blend in an all excelling glory. We behold it all and say how beautiful is the ending of a perfect day! The heart of the day is over and the winds have gone to rest. Day slips quietly through the portals of the western sky, and the night of sleep comes to give rest to the weary toiler. How gracious all God's arrangements are! "*Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge*" (Psa. 19:2).

The consummation of our lives should be just so. There should be a quieting and a deepening of our experience as we approach the shining shore before us. There is our home, and an entering into a completion and perfection for which we have longed. There is our rest. No more painful

limitations will try our body or mind. No more instinctive yearning for that which we have not yet attained will plague. There those hearts which have longed to see the face of God, and the face of him whose image we are to bear will never need to ask again, "Face to face, what shall it be?" Then the stream of life over which the love of God drew us will have merged into the endless life that shall be. Then will appear all that an unfettered and eternal life can mean. We already have numberless verifications of our Lord's good word of promise. He has said to us, as to others, "*Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: Therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.*" We praise him for those cords of love which nothing has severed -- not the forces of evil nor our own failures. In love he has redeemed us and drawn us to himself. That love attracts us as nothing else can.

- J. J. Blackburn

"The world's highest standard is the Golden Rule. The Christian's highest standard is self-sacrifice, doing God's will at any cost." - R5426

"To fear is to believe in evil more than in God." - R5488

Precious Things

O what shining revelation of his treasures God hath given!
Precious things of grace and glory, precious things of earth and heaven.
Holy Spirit, now unlock them with thy mighty golden key,
Royal jewels of the kingdom let us now adoring see!

Christ is precious, oh most precious, gift by God the Father sealed;
Pearl of greatest price and treasure, hidden, yet to us revealed;
His own people's crown of glory, and resplendent diadem;
More than a thousand worlds, and dearer than all life and love to them.

Marvellous and very precious is the corner stone Elect:
Though rejected by the builders, chosen by the Architect.
All supporting, all uniting, and all crowning, tried, and sure;
True foundation, yet true headstone of his temple bright and pure.

Glorious dwelling of the holy, where no grief or gloom of sin
Through the pure and pearly portals evermore shall enter in:
Christ its light and God its temple, Christ its song of endless laud!
Oh, what precious consummation of the precious things of God.

The Secret Place Of Thunder

"Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah." - Psalm 81:7

As with many, the Eighty-First Psalm (Psa. 81) has its immediate reference to the people of Israel. This can readily be seen. But nearly all the psalms stretch forward to the affairs of the New Testament "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

God provides "secret places" for the favor and protection of those who seek to walk in his ways. They are "secret places" because of an understanding which they enjoy, but which is withheld from others. Much that disturbs mankind, producing feelings of restlessness and fear, provides to those to whom God's "thunder" is explained a secret calm.

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow [ie., "protection"] of the Almighty" (Psa. 91:1). God skillfully reveals his secrets to those he counts worthy of them, while concealing them from the unworthy. When the Law was given to Israel at Sinai amid thunder, they were frightened and asked God to cease his work. They did not understand the blessing the Law would provide them.

Spiritual Israel also finds their eyes occasionally veiled in understanding God's answers to their requests for blessing. He often answers them in the "secret way of thunder" experiences which at first tend to alarm them. It is his voice, but it sometimes takes some time to recognize it. God's methods are secret in another way, other humans are oblivious of the special protection and deliverances provided God's own.

"Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him" (John 12:27-29).

An interesting thought arises from the reference to thunder in the twenty-ninth verse. To the people the voice from heaven seemed like thunder. It sounded ominous. Others, however, discerned in it an angelic voice. Many times God's voice brings an angelic message to his people, but it is meaningless "thunder" to opposers and unbelievers.

Another factor is that lightning is always associated with thunder. Lightning is powerful and dangerous. Thunder is harmless. Loud thunder that so often alarms men is the aftermath of lightning. It is the lightning that damages. During the "storms" or time of trouble to close this age it is the lightning (Psa. 97:4) rather than the thunder that disturbs the "elements" (2 Pet. 3:10) of this present evil world because there is nothing covered, or hidden, which shall not be revealed (Luke 12:2).

Elihu's message to Job is a forceful argument on the ways and the power of God. Elihu shows how these exceed man's comprehension and how his characteristics can be applied beyond the intricacies of "nature" as mentioned. The thirty-seventh chapter can be summarized by the fifth verse: *"God thundereth marvelously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend."*

Thunderous Words

Thunderous words are unintelligible words; they are the voice of thunder to all those *who* have not mixed faith with their hearing (Heb. 4:2). The gospel falling' on the ear of the unbeliever is an ominous sound, a thunder of condemnation. But to those in Christ Jesus there *is* no condemnation -- only a wonderful deliverance. Thus does "thunder" change to the "voice of an angel."

The twenty-sixth chapter of Job reminds his accusers of God's manifest power in all the works of creation and how wonderful they are. The chapter concludes in this way, "*Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him?* [that is, even the great works of creation are but scratches on the surface of Jehovah's power] *but the thunder of his power* [in the ultimate] *who can understand*" (Job 26:14)? It is a secret place of understanding content to all who meditate upon it.

Israel of old came to Mt. Sinai to receive the Law amid a display of fire, blackness, darkness, and tempest with thunderous words that caused the people to plead for these things to end. They feared and asked that they not be spoken to anymore. Israel after the Spirit (Heb. 12:18, 19) recognizes the contrast applicable to themselves:

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more..."

To them is promised a kingdom that shall never be moved.

Fear Amid Storm

How many men and women are fearful of thunderstorms. They often fear for the loss of their property, their possessions, even life itself. And, indeed, literal thunderstorms can indeed remove much from the grasp of man. But great thunderstorms of God's voice will remove from this earth all things that can be shaken (Heb 12:27; cf. Luke 21:26) until only that which cannot be shaken remains. This thought reminds us of the Old Testament words, "*Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions*" (Eccl. 7:29), and again,

"Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions Thus they provoked him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them" (Psa. 106:39, 29).

Paul alludes to this phenomenon saying,

"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers..." (Rom. 1:28,29).

When these evils come before God for recompense his voice of thunder will again distress men as Isaiah foretold: And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of *the* LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly *the* earth. ... And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day (2:19,17).

The crevices of earthly society will prove too vulnerable, incapable of hiding man from the storms of divine retribution coming upon earth.

"Neither *their* silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of *the* LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" (Zeph. 1:18).

This storm is one for which the Almighty has provided a secret place for his people. They see that the "thunder" distressing men is the fulfilling of his strange act (Isa. 28:21,22) and that he is carrying out the consumption (ASV: "destruction") determined upon the whole earth. As strange and unexplained as the Lord's ways may seem to naturally minded men at this time there are those who are at rest in his "secret place" of thunder and who understand the ultimate result of God's power and methods. When the present evil world has been shaken to destruction he will bring in a "new" world of blessings to all.

God Cannot Be Ignored or Denied

Man needs to learn a very hard lesson-because there is much evidence on behalf of God before the eyes of man that has been ignored.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun... (Psa. 19:1-4).

Only a fool can refuse the all surrounding evidence to God. And only because a man turns his face like a flint, not wanting to retain God in his knowledge, must God's ways seem incomprehensible to them. Angelic words to a listening ear are unintelligible thunder to those ears that take no heed to God.

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not" (Rev 10:1-4).

Without studying all the symbols in detail in this article we preface our discussion with our understanding that these words picture the resurrected Jesus as a mighty angel descending from heaven with great power. It seems, then, that the open book in his hand must represent a revelation that he has to make.

With a loud voice he declares his message, described as of "seven thunders" (Rev. 10:4). Seven is consistently a symbol of completeness. It would seem that here the divine program was revealed to John in its completeness. It was a wonderful revelation to John, and was made sufficiently clear for him to immediately set to work writing it down. But he was not allowed to complete this record. A voice from heaven forbade him, saying "*Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.*"

It would seem that the divine time to reveal the message of the seven thunders had not come. Verse seven says that "*...in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*" There is a suggestion that more would transpire among the "secrets" of God before what John had witnessed could become common knowledge for men.

John represented a class -- to the John class God was pleased to reveal his will, his plans and his purposes. From that time the John class have understood what the seven thunders spoke. We believe this has been so. Although the symbols of Revelation are not clear in complete detail, they are largely understood by the John class, the saints of God. These, no more than John, have not been able to write down the vision, that is, they have not generally conveyed them beyond the circle of their fellowship. The seven thunders hide their message until the days of the voice of the seventh angel, and that day was future when John received the message.

Maybe the voice of the seventh angel has begun to sound in our own day -- and very soon God's mystery may become common knowledge. In the intervening years God's people have not had to await such revelation. God's people have enjoyed this revelation finding protection, and assistance to their faith and hope. What the seven thunders uttered to John have been to us a "secret place," where God graciously, gradually, and continuously answered our questions and consoled and comforted us these many years.

When we call upon the Lord in trouble, he often answers in a "secret place of thunder": he reveals his purposes for us and for all mankind. To those who listen for the words of God the "thunder" dies, that is, the tumult and confusion passes from our hearing. Great peace have they who love thy Law, thy Ways, thy Plans -- a "Secret Place" indeed.

- W. A. Smith, Australia

The Word of God or the Theories of Man

[The following article is a discussion about ideas contrary to this author's viewpoint. Readers are advised to read carefully so as not to understand the contrary point as being the opinion of this author. -- Ed. Comm.]

Some time ago we were made aware of a tract titled "Some Aspects of Evil." In reviewing its contents with care we find out how important it is that we use care in our handling of the Word of God. For the purposes of instruction by comparison let us take a look at claims made in this tract.

The tract's author says: "As God is the creator of all things, which must include the Slanderer generally termed the Devil, the responsibility must go back to him, the Creator, not the Devil, a creature." The author is thus teaching that God is responsible for evil, in the sense of sin. In his effort to prove this he cites the prophet Zechariah. The Authorized Version of chapter eleven, verse two, translates the word from which it gives us "Lucifer" (in Isaiah 14:12) with a different word. Here, instead of Lucifer, we are given the word "howl." We read "*Howl, fir tree.*" There is no valid reason why the Isaiah text should not read "How art thou fallen from heaven, Howl, son of the morning."

Consider whether this suggestion has merit and the lessons we may learn from this sort of teaching.

Strong's Concordance gives the Hebrew word translated "howl" in the Zechariah text as *yalal*, "to howl or yell." While the word *heylel*, translated "Lucifer" in the Isaiah text, is defined as "the morning star" from *halal* in the sense of brightness. *Halal* he defines as "a primitive root; to be clear (originally of sound, but also of color); to shine; hence to make a show, to boast; and thus to be (clamorously) foolish; to rave." This word is used only once in the Old Testament; but how much of the character of Satan it portrays in its one appearance.

Regarding this word William Smith in *The Dictionary of the Bible* says:

"Lucifer, (Hebrew *helel*, Septuagint *Eosphorus*), a word in AN found only in Isaiah (14:12):

How art thou fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How art thou cut down to the ground,
Which didst weaken the nations!

"It clearly signifies a 'bright star,' and probably what we call the morning star. In this passage it is a symbolical representation of the king of Babylon, in his splendor and in his fall. Its application, from St. Jerome downwards, to Satan in his fall from heaven arises probably from the fact that the Babylonian Empire is in Scripture represented as the type of tyrannical and self-idolizing power, and especially connected with the empire of the Evil One in the Apocalypse."

A footnote calls attention to objections that have been made to this application and adds the following comment:

"It is certain that the monarchs of the great empires antagonistic to the church are regarded in Scripture as analogic representations of Satan; and what is more natural and more probable than that, in addressing the former, the holy Spirit should employ some language applicable in its

fullest sense only to the former? The eye of the prophetic spirit pierces through the mortal type, and fastens upon the immortal [?] antitype. -- See, as specimens of this usage" - Isa. 37:21-29; Ezek. 28:2-10; Eze. 31:2-18.

The tract also claims that John (John 8:44), does not teach "that the Slanderer was at one time in harmony with the truth and then threw it over, but the contrary. He was never in harmony with the truth. From his creation he opposed it. He sinned from the beginning (1 John 3:8)." It is strange that in the same paragraph this author quotes the *Diaglott* interlinear, "*lie has not stood in the truth because there is no truth in him,*" and gives an interpretation which neither it nor the Authorized Version could be used to support. If Jesus had wished to express the thought this tract writer holds, he could have said, "Satan never was in the truth because there was no truth in him." Instead, he describes a departure from the truth by using the word "stood," translated from a word which Thayer defines as "to persist, continue, persevere." The author of this tract cites John (8:44) as an example of this usage. But Thayer, commenting upon this verse in particular says, "His nature abhors, is utterly estranged from the truth." Evidently this great Greek scholar understood the Greek to mean exactly what the author of the tract says it does not mean.

The able explanation of the creation of Satan given by C.T. Russell may be remembered by many readers. We cite two brief excerpts on the issue:

"As surely as Satan himself was a part of the general creation of God, so surely we may know that he was created perfect and upright, in the image of God: because all of God's work is perfect (Eph. 3:9; Deut. 32:4). He has but the one standard of righteousness, justice, perfection, and he himself is the standard" (The New Creation).

"Our Lord explained respecting his own knowledge of Satan in his pre-human condition that there and then he had been a witness to Satan's fall from glory, privilege, and position to his present attitude of chief adversary to God. "*I beheld Satan, as lightning [as a bright one] fall from heaven.*" What does it matter to us that we did not see Satan fall from his glorious condition? Our Master did and he has borne testimony, not only respecting Satan's personality, but also respecting his fall from brightness and honor" (Zion's Watch Tower, August 1900).

A variety of commentators and lexicographers agree with this proposition that Satan was created perfect, and fell from grace subsequently.

Barnes, whose comments give evidence of an intimate personal acquaintance with God, writes as follows on this phrase and the preceding one:

"*I make peace,*' I hush the contending passions of men; I dispose to peace, and prevent wars when I choose-a passage which proves that the most violent passions are under his control. No passions are more uncontrollable than those which lead us to wars; and nowhere is there a more striking display of the Omnipotence of God than in his power to repress the pride, ambition, and spirit of revenge of conquerors and kings: "*Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people*" (Psa. 65:7).

"*And create evil.*' The parallelism here shows that this is not to be understood in the sense of all evil, but of that which is the opposite of peace and prosperity. That is, God directs judgments, trials, and calamities; he has power to suffer the mad passions of men to rage, and to afflict nations with war, he presides over adverse as well as prosperous events. The passage, does not prove that God is the author of moral evil, or sin. Such a sentiment is abhorrent to the general strain of the Bible, and to all just views of the character of a holy God."

The comment by Adam Clarke throws some light on the passage from a historical viewpoint: " 'I make peace and create evil' -- evil is here evidently put for war and its attendant miseries. I will procure peace for the Israelites, and destroy Babylon by war. 'I form light, and create darkness.' Now, as darkness is the privation of light -- the evil of war is the privation of peace."

Young in his *Concise Critical Comments on the Bible* also has in mind the historical setting and thinks of the evil as war and its attendant miseries. The following is his comment on the previous phrases: "'Forming light,' which Cyrus adored as a fire worshiper. 'Preparing darkness,' which he feared as the work of an evil spirit." He makes no comment on the word "evil," evidently supposing that all readers will interpret it correctly when the context is in mind.

The definition of Prof. Strong's concordance of the word translated "evil" is "Bad or (as noun) evil (natural or moral)." He says that this noun is from a verb which literally means to spoil by breaking to pieces. The primary significance of the word, evidently because of its etymology, is given by Gesenius as "Kill, evil," in the sense of "adversity, calamity." "Evil in a moral sense" is given only as a secondary meaning of the word.

For some reason this tract claims an alternate reading for Genesis (Gen. 1:2). It is claimed that the verse should read: "the earth became," omitting the words "form" and "void." Strong defines this verb from which the word "became" is translated as meaning "to exist, that is, to be or become, come to pass." Gesenius supports this. Since the translation given in the King James Version is the one that fits with the context, it is the one to be preferred. Darby, Margolis, Lesser, Douay, Fenton, Moffatt, Young, Newberry, Revised Version, and the American Revision all use the past tense, giving no thought of a perfect earth having been made uninhabitable, as the writer of the tract does, but the reverse. Young even makes it read,

"The earth *hath existed waste and void.*" His note on this verb reads:

"*Existed.* This rendering is, perhaps, preferable to that of the Common Version 'was.' The Hebrew verb is not simply the logical nexus, *is, was, etc.,* but the real verb of existence. The thought is that, at the beginning here referred to, the earth was and had existed in the state described as waste and void."

The purpose of revelation is to make God known, whom to know is eternal life (John 17:3). It might be logical, though not scriptural, to suppose that if God were the absolute and sole author of every form of evil, then he must injustice extricate every creature from it. How different in that case would Jesus' statement have read: "This is life eternal, that God having created evil, including the sin for which he has condemned you, must therefore give you life."

If the knowledge of God is necessary to "life eternal," what care the student must exercise in rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). To have learned somewhat of God should cause reverence for him and his Word to fill our heart, warning against a careless regard for interpretation. Should it not teach us to scrutinize even the smallest points carefully, lest we unintentionally belittle his glory (John 14:16,17,25).

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercises loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jer. 9:23,24).

- P. E. Thomson

The Question Box

What is an example of "handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Corinthians 4:2)?

Deceit means unclearly -- with guile -- without a clear conscience, men pleasers -- not God pleasers, coveting men's attention by any means. See 2 Timothy 4:3-4 regarding the "itching ears and fables." Also 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5. To feed the lusts of the flesh instead of building up in the most holy faith -- vain babblings.

- Loyal Petran

"Handling the word of God deceitfully" is using God's word for personal benefit at the expense of others.

A prime example was Satan quoting from Psalm 91 in Luke 4:10-12. Old testament examples include Korah's challenge to Moses (Num. 16:3) and Balaam's greed (Num. 22:1-25:18; 31:16; 2 Peter 2:15). New Testament examples include the Pharisees and lawyers charging John with demonism and Jesus with gluttony (Luke 7:33-34), Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-24), and the self-seeking Diotrophes (3 John 9). For later examples, Athanasius could not impugn Arius' character and so trumped up a charge of heresy over the nature of God (they poisoned Arius to death in AD 336); William Tyndale was burned in AD 1535 for translating the Bible into English; Michael Servetus, an Arian, was burned in AD 1553 by Calvinists; Peter Waldo, Martin Luther, Charles T. Russell, and many others of irreproachable character have been vilified as apostates, reprobates, and frauds. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service to God" (John 16:2).

- J. B. Parkinson

Vine's Expository Dictionary shows "deceitfully" as a translation of the Greek *doloo*, signifying to ensnare, to lure, hence to corrupt or adulterate, "especially by mingling truths of the Word of God with false doctrines or notions, and so handling it deceitfully." This instinctively reminds us of Satan who "works with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness" to becloud the minds of men, "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ... should shine unto them (2 Thess. 2:9,10; 2 Cor. 4:4); and of his co-workers, who also lie in wait to deceive even those in the church by their cunning and improper handling of the doctrinal teachings of the Word. - Eph. 4:14; 2 Peter 2:12,13

Perhaps the most glaring example of handling the Word deceitfully would be in Jesus' second temptation by the Adversary (Matt. 4:5-7). Satan urged him (probably in vision rather than in actuality) to cast himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, citing the protective promise of Psalm 91. Jesus' response demonstrated the proper application of Scripture and the deceitfulness of the tempter (Psa. 91:7). taken place (2 Tim. 2:16-18); the declarations of others that the day of Christ was shortly at hand, even before the great falling away from the faith that had hardly yet begun (2 Thess. 2:17); and the blasphemous teaching of Augustine and others that the rule of the Roman Catholic Church was actually the biblical "Kingdom of Christ" and later that the thousand years of her peak power represented the Millennial reign.

- Charles F. Redeker

Paul's words are found in preparing the Corinthians for the blunt and forthright arguments he plans to use in later chapters of his epistle. Having established his ministry as being parallel to that of Moses in chapter 3, he expresses his determination to be bold and fearless in carrying it out.

The word he chooses for "deceitful" is from the Greek "doloō," which means to use as a lure, or to catch with bait. While elsewhere he may speak of "being all things to all people" and of "being crafty" and "catching them with guile," here he wants to be sure they understand that there are specific responsibilities which cannot be softened by kind and gentle words.

Any time we seek to soften the impact of truth because our listener, particularly if he or she is a fellow Christian, finds it unpalatable, we furnish an example of "handling the word of God deceitfully." For a similar lesson see Isaiah 30:10.

- Carl Hagensick

Genesis 3:1-5 Satan purposely suggested that God had given an all inclusive command of not eating of every tree of the Garden (which Eve clarified as concerning "only one tree). He used also a half-truth in contradicting god's word with a "ye shall not surely die: for God doth know . . ."

Revelation 2:14 Balaam was forbidden by God to put a curse on Israel

(Num. 22), but to receive personal gain, Balaam taught Balak how to lead Israel into disobeying God's commandments and thereby bring God's curse directly upon themselves.

Jeremiah 23:1-32 False prophets that speak their own words but claim that "the Lord has said . . .," God has promised his wrath to be upon them for leading his people astray.

3 John 9-11 Diotrephes, a member of the church, who loves to be first among them, unjustly accuses John with wicked words, does not receive brethren, and threatens to put out of the church any who do receive them.

- Tom A. Herz

Many Corinthians justified certain sins which they were inclined to practice by citing certain Old Testament passages or by wresting the words written in the Apostle's letter. That was a misuse of God's word in that it was not meant to teach but to serve the desires of the flesh. Recent exposure of some ecclesiastical practices reflects the same problem today.

Others may disguise their beliefs in certain doctrines that would make them unpopular; the more popular teachings of the day will bring in a larger audience or gain more financial support.

Each of us may hide unpopular beliefs for fear of running contrary to the liberality of the day. It is not popular to speak against homosexuality or women preaching in the church. That would label us radical and isolate us from many in the world. We can even look for scriptural support for our moral conduct that mimics the world's. Paul says when we do this we are using the scriptures deceitfully, rather than for "reproof, that the man of God might be perfected."

- Len Griehs

A mere example is intimation that repentance is a casual, distasteful experience, once done and quick to be forgotten rather than a real, continual infusion of character upon which to build. Note Acts 17: 30; 20:21; 2 Cor. 7:10; Heb. 6:1.

Another example is the consistent lifestyle, reflected in thought, word, and deed, of unbelief in God's ability to free us from the weaknesses that ensnare us: those to which we resign ourselves because we cannot become free by our own power. The Scriptures truly teach that we can become free by full faith in Jesus (who died for us) and in his power (note Rom. 6:12-14, 22, 23; chaps. 6-7).

A third example is the asserting and support of ideas, things, organizations, or people in excess of their real value when balanced by comparison to the true principles and precepts established in the word of God (note Num. 33:51-53; Deut. 33:29; 2 Cor. 10:5).

- Brian Kuehmichel

In this text the Apostle Paul is referring to the false teachers in Corinth. These were corrupting or adulterating the word of God for their own advantage (2 Cor. 2:17). In contrast, the Apostle is appealing to the conscience of every one of them and also to his integrity in the sight of God. His practice was always that of setting forth the truth plainly, without veiling it or resorting to deception. Similarly, in 1 Thess. 2:2-6, Paul's exhortation was not from error nor from impurity nor in deceit. He was entrusted with the glad tidings and did not seek honor from men, neither did he attempt to please men. His motive was pure; he was gentle among them, like a loving mother caring for her little children (1 Thess. 2:6-12). We practice deception when we do not proclaim God's word as we understand it. Our motive should be to assist, encourage, and strengthen the brethren. If our motive is to seek honor from men, then we are adulterating and negotiating the word of God: we are handling God's word deceitfully.

- John Karavas

There were many false apostles in the early church. St. Paul, in defending himself, contrasts their actions with his. This text does not apply to Christians with honest differences. In the Greek "deceitfully" means using trickery, cunning. Since the word is used only once in the New Testament (Strong's 1388), we must consider the root word it comes from (Gk. *dolos*, Strong's 1388). It is translated: subtlety (Matt. 26:4), deceit (Mark 7:22), craft (Mark 14:1), guile (John 1:47-48; 2 Cor. 12:16 [NIV "I caught you by trickery"]; 1 Thess. 2:3; 1 Peter 2:1,22; 1 Peter 3:10; Rev. 14:5).

- Andrew Jarmola

"It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture if thou mark-not only what is spoken and written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstance, considering what goeth before and what followeth after."

Miles Coverdale -- A.D. 1535.

"It is a sign of greatness of mind when one is able under trying circumstances to think less of himself and more of others." R2787

The Parable of the Sower, Part 1

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow." - Matthew 13:3

Of all the parables of our Lord this one is doubtless the best known and remembered (cf. Matt. 13:3-8; Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-8). Yet, like all other portions of our Father's Word it grows richer and more precious through study and reflection. Our Lord, himself, indicated that this was the foremost among his parables in importance. And he indicates, as well, that it's understanding is a key to a comprehension of the other parables. *"Do you all miss the meaning of this parable?" He added; 'How then will you understand the rest of my parables'"* (Mark 4:13, Weymouth, Author's emphasis)?

Parables of the Kingdom

This parable is the first of seven parables recorded in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. These seven parables are similar to the seven messages to the churches of our Lord which are recorded by John the Revelator. Together, the parables are known as the Parables of the Kingdom and they seem to portray successive eras during the Gospel Age, from the beginning of this era unto its close. In them we have a vivid delineation of the trials and resistance which the kingdom of heaven was to encounter from the Adversary from the period of its introduction to men until the end of the Gospel Age.

In this two part article we propose to consider the Parable of the Sower by itself, apart from the others with which it is associated. We will attempt to develop those particular lessons which are unique to this one pictorial instruction of our Lord.

We begin by refreshing our minds concerning the account (cf. Matt. 13:1-9). In the first three verses we read that our Lord had left the house (probably at Capernaum -- the city from which he conducted much of his open ministry, cf. Matt. 4:13) and was sitting on the shore of the lake (Gennesaret). This was the same area in which many recorded incidents in *his* ministry took place. The multitude was assembled at the edge of this beautiful lake. The place was a convenient one; for, while the lake is nearly surrounded by mountains, the mountains do not reach the water's edge, leaving an expanse of beach.

There were so many people who had crowded around our Lord he found it convenient for the teaching he was about to do to enter a boat and have it pushed offshore. There, all of the people could see and hear him. He sat while he taught them the wonderful lessons of the parables. The first one, the parable of the sower, rests like so many others on the commonest of daily activities. It may have been that as our Lord overlooked the people he had seen a farmer scattering his seed in the furrows. He may even have pointed the farmer out to the listeners in illustration of the words which were soon to fall so graciously from his lips.

"Behold, the sower goes out to sow. As he sows, some of the seed falls by the wayside, and the birds come and peck it up. Some falls on rocky ground, where it has but scanty soil. It quickly shows itself above ground, because it has no depth of earth; but when the sun is risen, it is scorched by the heat, and through having no roots it withers up. Some falls among the thorns; but the thorns spring up and stifle it. But a portion falls upon good ground, and gives a return, some a hundred for one, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, every one who has ears" (Moffatt)!

Later, our Lord explained the parable to his disciples. He showed that the seed which was sown is the Word of God, that is to say, the Word of God respecting the kingdom (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). This Word, when understood (Matt. 13:23), received (Mark 4:20), and kept (Luke 8:15), would produce sons of the kingdom (Matt. 13:38). Further, he explained that the four soil conditions illustrated four different kinds of hearers.

We will consider each of these points in detail. First, however, let us look at the moral which Jesus draws from the parable. What lesson did he intend for us to draw from this homely illustration? We have seen that it is possible for one to understand all of the details of a story and be able to explain it to others without ever learning it's lesson themselves.

What is the lesson? Our Lord states the lesson in these words: "*Take heed what ye hear*" (Mark 4:24). We notice a slight difference in Luke's version where he records the words as "*Take heed how ye hear*" (Mark 8:18). Doubtless our Lord's words contained both of these thoughts and each evangelist recorded that part of the message which particularly struck him.

Absurd Over-Interpretations

"Take heed what ye hear." *"Take heed how ye hear."* This is the moral or lesson Christ drew from the parable. The parable was beautiful by its brevity and profound by it's force. It is informative to note, however, that this natural lesson -- a lesson drawn by divine wisdom -- also shows the weakness and insufficiency of even the most perfect of parables. In it we see the absurd results we will reach if we attempt to press the interpretation in every detail too far.

Note why we say this. Our Lord declares that we are to be careful what we hear and how we hear it. But how can the ground exercise any care as to what seed it will receive? The ground must take what the sower casts upon it. If the good seed is choked by thorns or fails because of lack of soil the ground is not to blame for that. The ground's conditions are not dependent upon itself, but upon the farmer. It is he who should have burned off the thorns, or gathered out the stones, or added the necessary soil; it is he, not the ground, who is to blame if the wrong seed is sown or if the ground yields no fruit.

This is a very important lesson. We must not push his analogies and comparisons too far. Natural situations and processes are inadequate to completely express spiritual truths. We must bring the understanding and discrimination of our hearts to even the most perfect of words ever uttered.

In approaching this parable we find that we must supplement the illustration -- ah, but not the message. Different hearers of the Word are not only like various kinds of soil, they are also like different farmers. By the farmer's skill he compels the ground to bring forth fruit -- despite the curse which has fallen upon it. So we, by cultivating our hearts, may constrain our otherwise barren hearts to bring forth fruit unto God. We can determine what seed we will receive into our hearts and we are to see to it that we only receive the good seed -- the seed that will produce the sons of the kingdom, and not the tare which the enemy will only too happily scatter upon our hearts if we permit him.

We can determine the conditions of the soil into which the seed falls. We, as farmers, are able to see that there will be good soil, rich enough, deep enough, adequate for the growing of the good seed. "*Take heed what ye hear*" -- that is to say, "Be careful that what you hear is the very word of God." "*Take heed how you hear*" -- that is to say, "Be careful that you do not hear the word of God in vain." The first lesson is to be sure that you receive God's truth. The second lesson is that once you have received it be sure that you obey it.

What You Hear

It is hardly necessary to remind anyone that we are being taught all day, everyday. The air is full of veritable seeds. They are forever falling upon the ground. Every word we hear or thought kindled in us by what we see our neighbor do (whether that neighbor be in Christ or not) has a moral complexion and effect. So do the myriad thoughts which pass through our minds in the pursuit of daily life, the radio and television broadcasts we witness, and the books we read. And with all of these seeds floating through our lives we need to be careful-very careful indeed -- about which ones we allow to come to rest in our lives.

We must be careful because once the seeds of figurative weeds have fallen into our lives we will have to deal with them. The seeds which are evil must not be allowed to land. Take for example the seeds of the zizanium. It is a bastard corn and its seeds are much like those of wheat. Evil, like these seeds, often resembles good-until one examines it very carefully. Once evil has taken root in our mind we must deal with it. Like the farmer who has allowed weed seeds to fall upon his ground, we must pluck the outcroppings of evil from our lives -- wasting labor and strength upon them, enduring the pain and wrenching of their removal, and leaving behind a bare spot which will not easily become productive again. This watchful care over the daily influences in our lives -- the good and the evil which visit us -- is part of our Savior's warning. But there can be little doubt that the primary allusion is to our choice of direct and definite spiritual instruction.

Jesus taught many people. Some of his students had even been teachers themselves. They, for the most part, had invalidated the commandments of God with their traditions. At this point in his ministry many of the people followed him because he fed them, not because they listened to his words and were spiritually nourished. While he revealed truths to their ears they saw only the miracles. The loaves and the fishes were more agreeable to them than the parables and the warnings. Here Jesus begins his instruction by admonishing them that the primary qualification for any religious teacher -- assuming that the preliminary qualifications as honesty, sincerity, and integrity of character had already been met should be: "What does he teach? Is it the truth of God?"

(Sincerity. Honesty. Integrity. If these preliminary qualifications cannot be met then any individual, no matter how apt to teach he may appear to be, should not be permitted to occupy the position of a religious teacher at all. Assuming that teachers have this good witness, our question concerning the teachings which they present should be: "Is it the truth of God?")

This does not mean that we should not be concerned about the manner in which the truth is presented. By no means. The truth is never to be spoken except in love. If it is spoken in any other way it ceases to be the truth. The words may be the same but the character of the message is not. The Apostle Paul pressed this point when contrasting himself with the would -- be apostles of that day.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me (1 Cor. 4:15-16).

If a brother is wise, he will press all the powers of wisdom, argument, sympathy, and love which he possesses into the service of the Gospel. He will consecrate all of his abilities and his energy to the service of his Master. But while working kind tactfulness, he will not allow his wish to avoid

offending others to lead him to compromise truth in favor of error. No! The defense and exposition of the truth of God must be his supreme aim.

We who listen or read -- we are to care more for the good seed than for the manner in which it is sown. To acquire complete knowledge of the truth--this should be our chief aim and desire. Am I growing into a further acquaintance with the Divine word? Do I understand it better, read it more intelligently, find old difficulties disappear, find new beauties claiming my appreciation? Does the Word shed a fuller and more illuminating light on the difficulties of my daily path? Does the Word spread the light of hope across the shadow of my sorrows? Am I learning to drink in more of its spirit and to give out more of its spirit? This is the main concern for all who take heed to what they hear.

How Ye Hear

In addition to what we hear we should take heed to how we hear. If we hear the truth we must obey it. Indeed, as we consider this parable, it is not difficult to see that this is its emphatic point. The likelihood that two kinds of seeds might be sown, one good and one evil, is not considered -- it is not even mentioned. That lesson we find dealt with in subsequent parables. In the parable of the Sower, the only seed sown is the good seed. The Master concentrates our attention on the frame of heart and mind which we should exhibit. He shows us the need to embrace his Word. Jesus proceeds to describe four kinds of hearers. Three of these are unprofitable. One hearer is a good or profitable hearer. Let us consider them in the order in which they appear in the parable.

Sown By the Wayside

As the sower goes over the field scattering the seed, some of it falls on the pathway, or close by the side of the path which runs through the field. Here, the earth has not been broken by the plow. The seed lies upon the surface of the ground until it is either crushed under the feet of passers by or is scavenged by the birds which follow in the sower's footsteps.

The spiritual significance of this familiar rural scene is explained by our Lord. *"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart."* (Matt. 13:19) *"... lest they should believe and be saved"* (Luke 8:12).

Observe, however, that the soil of the path and under the path may be as deep and rich as the best of the field; its natural ability to bring forth fruit may be very great, but it has been hardened by the passing of many travelers. The seed is unable to penetrate this packed soil. It can only lie there, the prey of birds. And if it should escape the attention of the animals it will do no more than rot in the way.

The first unprofitable hearer, then, is not a man of a cold heart, nor a man who has been overrun by evil. He is simply negligent, uninterested, indifferent. This person does not understand that the Word has some bearing upon himself. Such a person does not recognize its importance to him. They offer not objections to hearing the Word, but it does not penetrate their heart. The Word produces no personal interest, nor does it even have the opportunity to send out mental and emotional tendrils--like the fine filament like roots of a young plant -- so that it might gather a little place of earth and enough nourishment from which to grow. The gospel message finds no place in the heart or the mind of such an one. It gets no grip in their lives. The gospel does not even produce the same interest that such a person might show when you tell them of business tips or advise them of the outcome of some sporting event.

How has this kind of person come to be? What has hardened his heart and mind? They made their heart a highway-have allowed all thoughts, evil and good, to travel through their mind. They left themselves open to the base things of the world as well as to all the good things. The soil of their heart :good though it may be -- has been hardened, become insensitive, and it can accept no more seeds. Only the keen, grinding, plow of affliction can break the turf into clods, beginning again preparation of the soil for cultivation.

Such may have felt the Word of God fall upon their heart. They may have understood a little of life; of the reality of death and of the truth of God. They may have understood some things. Such may even have thought to investigate the matter themselves, to look into the Word of God and study it. But about the time that they reach a decision for God something interferes. And the impression which the good seed made upon their heart disappears.

- P. L. Read

The wise steward will always seek to cultivate along the lines of his natural abilities and not expect the Lord to work a miracle for his advancement and so waste valuable time seeking to develop that which he does not by nature possess.

The Parable of the Sower, Part 2

"Behold, a sower went forth to sow." - Matthew 13:3

Sown Upon The Rocky Places

"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth" (Matt. 13:5). In the place in which the sower goes forth bearing precious seed there are places in which the hard rock lies close beneath the surface. The seed which falls upon such ground falls into shallow soil. This thin layer of soil heats up quickly because of the rock beneath which holds and radiates its heat. Seeds which fall here spring up early from this warmth and because the thin layer of soil contains little moisture the sun quickly scorches the new sprouts. The plants wither as quickly as they sprouted.

And what does our Lord say of such?

"And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth" (Matt. 13:20-21, ASV).

This second hearer, then, is a man of shallow, superficial character, who does nothing thoroughly, brings nothing to perfection.

How true a touch the Master imparts. Having stamped this man as superficial, he describes a man who is of a hard and impenetrable heart. Under the light surface of easily stirred dust there lies a bed of rock. And is it not among those who lead a life of light enjoyment, who tread among the trivial cares and ambitions and pleasures that we learn how heartless men can be. It is not among the poor or the busy that men are trained to stifle emotion and to harden themselves. No, it is among the elegance of pleasure and fashion that men and women are hardened into indifference and cultivate that selfishness which is death to all love and to all nobility of character.

Have you not seen that when such men of sensitive, but shallow, character have the Word of God impressed upon them that they are moved by the emotion of the moment? Quickly, they receive the word with joy. They, like the good hearer later spoken of, not only understand and assent to it, but they also receive it to themselves. Such allow the Word to work in them and to shape their course in life. For a short time their lives are changed. They are eager to give their susceptible and easily moved heart over to this new and stimulating excitement. Nothing in their experience has ever been quite like this. They break the rules of good taste and good sense in order to show their esteem for the Word. They rush about straining to bring others to the esteem which they now feel for the truth of God. Such live a life enraptured. And they would have all to share it with them.

Ah, but like all other raptures, it is quickly past and its force is soon spent. Times change. And these hearers change with the times. Since they have no root they cannot endure any influences which are brought to bear against them. When temptation comes they are unable to resist. The excitement is over. The consecrated life now looks as dreary to them as all previous forms of life had looked. "... *tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth.*" Such do not keep the word. Their nerveless hands cannot hold it fast. As quickly as it is received they release it again.

Received Among Thorns

Beside the trodden and rocky places there are broad patches in the field which are thick with the seeds of thorns and weeds. These grow alongside the good seed. But they grow faster and more prolifically than the good seed, and soon the good seed has been choked -- before it can bring forth fruit.

Who are these of whom the Master speaks? Whom among all of the hearers of the Word is a seed sown among thorns?

"And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection" (Luke 8:14).

Note that the ground is good enough to grow either wheat or thorns. But it is not rich enough to grow both -- or at least not to bring both to full flower and fruitage. On this soil the seed has a better chance than on the two previous examples. It gets into the soil. There it takes root, finds nourishment, water, and has time to grow. It springs up and even forms the ear. The plant is not trodden down, nor snatched away, nor scorched. Long after the farmer has made his rounds among the planted land, noticing the withered stalks of the seed sown on the rocky place, he has hopes that these on the thorny ground are doing fairly well, *although* there are too many weeds among them. But when they have nearly come to fruit, and just when their prospects appear best, they too are choked out by quicker growths. And so the wheat is not allowed to mature to the full corn in the ear.

And it is so with some of those who hear the Word. Like the good hearer, they understand, receive, and hold fast the seed. They do not allow the seed to be gathered away by the birds as soon as it has fallen, nor do they renounce it as soon as it demands a firm resistance to temptation, or a patient endurance of a trial. These keep the Word through all such testings. Nevertheless, just as it is on the point of bearing fruit they allow the Word to be choked. As much as they love God and his truth, they love other things besides. These other loves grow more quickly. They grow higher than the wheat, stealing the sunlight of man's attention. They suck up the juices which should nourish the true fruit. And so the life and the power of the gospel message are gradually neutralized and drawn out of them. Although the fruit may be formed in them, they do not bring it to perfection -- completeness, maturity.

What Thorns Choke the Word?

Some of them are the cares of this world (vs. 14). The anxieties which occur, alike, to all can distract our attention *from* God. What shall we drink? What shall we eat? With what shall we be clothed? As God draws us toward himself it is these cares which entice us away.

Other thorns also arise. Riches are elegantly deceitful. Their temptations are subtle, beguiling us away from the simplicity that is in Christ. And though riches (like the cares of this world) are not evil of themselves, yet all of human history has testified to the power of wealth and power to lure hearts away from the love and service of God. As a rule, rich men have been content with the world as it is, and naturally so. They have what they want, they have no reason to see it improved. Wealth has many ways of deceiving, and no man is more worthy of honor than the rich man who keeps himself unspotted from the world and its ways.

The pleasures of life and the desire for things not possessed are more common varieties of weeds and thorns. But they are hardly less fatal than the rarer forms. They ruin thousands for every one heart that is, drawn aside by riches. Anyone who has lived with observant eyes has seen -- time and again -- the believer who gave himself to God while young and who has been lured away from the simplicity of it by the lure of pleasure and the excessive pursuit of other objects. He does not turn away suddenly. 'Nor does he completely fall away. First this object attracts his attention. Then that object. There may not be one of these objects which, if the issue were distinctly raised, he would not sacrifice for Christ's sake. But among so many quick springing

thorns, the good seed has but a poor chance, and seldom brings its fruit to perfection. How many a fair, bright, promise has been thus nipped in the bud! Let us take heed that these deadly thorns and weeds do not make us unfruitful hearers of the word of truth and grace.

Receiving Truth Into Good Ground

At last we arrive at the happiest part of our study: the good hearer. As we note various points in our Lord's description we hope that all will find encouragement and strength for the development in ourselves of the characteristics which he displays. We know that if they are found in us they will enable the believer to yield a rich, mature, fruit to God from the good seed of the Word which he has sown in us.

As we have noted differences among the evangelists in their description of the moral of the parable, we note also that each focuses upon different aspects of the good hearer. Matthew says that "... *he that receiveth seed into good ground is he that heareth the Word and understandeth it.*" Mark says that he hears the word and "receives" it. Lastly, Luke refers to the Word as being "kept" in a "good and honest heart" so that it may bring forth fruit with patience.

Understanding

This is the first characteristic of the good hearer. Scholars attach a great deal of significance to the Greek word here translated "understand." The word is as though it described a process; as if a man took many statements and laid them out on a table before him. Placing them side by side he can see how they relate to one another, how they are true alone and also how they work in concert with other truths. Having examined and analyzed these matters he is not only able to affirm they are true, but also that they shall be true for him, that he believes these things, will act upon them, and see that his life is governed by them. This understanding includes the agreement of the intellect, the determination of the will, and the sympathy of the heart. What an amazing breadth we find in such a simple word. But, it might be asked, could any other "understanding" empower the Word of God, working *in* the lives of men, to grow to mature fruitage?

The first attribute of the good hearer is a very comprehensive one. Before anyone can claim to be such a hearer they must personally have studied and considered the truth as it is in Jesus and have weighed any objections to it of which they have been aware. Such objections must have all been found wanting. One must recognize how well this truth of God is adapted to them personally, how it fits their individual needs. They must have grasped these truths with conviction that they are of God and that they are for them. Not only must reason and intellect consent to these truths; we must also be determined to act upon them. We must find ourselves completely in sympathy with these truths and committed to live them out in our own lives.

This being accomplished we will have met the first qualification for the good hearer. As long as we continue to doubt a thing, or while we question or dislike it, it will have no major influence in

our life. When we listen in faith, in love, and with a determination to be changed by what we hear then we are in a condition to make the most of the divine Word of truth.

Receiveth

The Apostle Mark carries Matthew's thought a step further. To "receive," as used by Mark, is "to take it into one's self." The implication here is that the good hearer is so charmed and won over by the peculiar fitness of the gracious gospel message to his own dire need, so touched and penetrated by it, that he embraces it with joy, and receives it into his life. Such a believer becomes a part of the message and the message becomes a part of him. He prepares a figurative sanctuary for it, a place in the recesses of his mind, to which he can always resort. In the depths of his heart, like the Shekinah light in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, the gospel sheds a hallowing, sanctifying, and enlightening influence upon all of the courts and avenues of his life.

The model hearer, then, is one who not only understands the Word and gives it the agreement of his intelligence, will, and affection but who also admits the Word into himself -- to become a part of him -- the guiding and shaping spirit of his life.

A Good And Honest Heart Always the physician, Luke goes further than Matthew and Mark by describing the "heart" of the good hearer. By this description of a "good and honest heart" he is describing a person who is sincere and honest. Obviously, a person with an untrue heart could hardly make a good hearer of truth. We cannot be good hearers unless our hearts are good -- candid, open, sincere; hearts like little children's; hearts like Nathanael's, of whom our Lord could say "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*" If we would know the secrets of the truth we must become unselfish and unprejudiced. We must prefer to be on the side of truth rather than to find the truth on our side.

Having received the Word into an honest heart, the good hearer will keep it, or hold it fast. He will not let it go. No matter what alluring trinkets he may find to replace it. He will not suffer the good seed to be withered by wayside influences, nor choked by the many cares or even the seemingly innocent pleasures of life, nor will he allow it to be obstructed by the rock-hard spirit of impenitence.

The good hearer will have found it hard to find the truth -- and having gotten it he will not let it go. At times this will be very difficult. The good hearer may be forced to give up great earthly gains: jobs, position, location, esteem. And at other times the purchase of divine truth may be the greatest of delights; a treasure which seems purchasable for only the smallest of costs by comparison to the value which the hearer places upon the wonderful prize he receives in return.

The hearer might be able to avert the most dangerous of earthly situations by resorting to just the mildest of lies, or by the leaving of a wrong impression, or the evasion of truth, or being untrue to his convictions. But the good hearer will resist all such temptations. He *will* hold on to the truth of God at all cost. He, like Job, will retain his integrity at all cost.

The good hearer is not left to his own devices. From the laws to be deduced from the Word of God he will find assurance. These unchangeable verities will govern the common and uncommon aspects of his life, and the hearer will know that they cannot be altered -- much less repealed -- no matter how hard the temptations and desires of this life assail him -- for it is just then that he needs them most. This is the good hearer. This is the man who is a doer of the Word, when doing is most difficult. This man is not a hearer only. He does not forget who he is or who he should be.

The good hearer, gazing constantly into the perfect law of liberty, walks by it and is blessed in his deed.

Fruit With Cheerful Constancy

To have progressed this far, even to the bearing of fruit, is not enough. The good hearer is one who brings forth fruit with much patience. Of all his characteristics this is the most valuable and the most difficult to attain. It is harder to wait than it is to work. Unless we have some harvest, and that soon, who will have the heart to sow. The farmer has long patience -- and needs it too -- in order to wait for the early and the latter rains. The winter frost must mellow the seed lying in the bosom of the earth. The spring rains must swell the seed, and the suns of summer must mature it.

So also with us. In order to become a good hearer (that is, a good doer of the Word) one must become patient, long suffering. Like the figurative seed, we must endure many a killing frost, many a darkening shadow, many a burning sun before the good seed, falling upon our heart, will reward us with its thirty, or sixty, or even its hundred fold harvest. But if we wait patiently, or with "cheerful constancy" as the word translated "patience" more exactly means, the harvest will be sweet and precious. It is only the weeds which spring up quickly. And God is not unjust that he would forget our labor of love-if we faint not. *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"* (Gal. 6:9).

We shall reap all that we have sown. Yea, more than we have sown. He that gives the seed to the husbandman and bread to the hungry will multiply the seed which has been sown and give us also to eat of the fruit of our labor. One day, a day somewhat nearer than when we first believed, all the seeds which have been planted in us will have grown to maturity -- if we have received them in a good and honest heart, which we have kept cultivated. Then we shall awake in his likeness (Rom. 6:5). Let us be patient and steadfast. Let us establish our hearts before him. Thus may it be with us all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

- P. L. Read

Heart Purity

Thou must be true thyself
If thou the truth wouldest teach,
Thy soul must overflow, if thou
Another soul wouldst reach;
It needs the overflow of heart
To give the lips full speech.

Think truly, and thy thoughts
Shall the world's famine feed;
Speak truly, and each word of thine
Shall be a faithful seed;
Live truly, and thy life shall be
A great and noble creed.

The Power of Prayer

Who knows what marvels happen when we pray!
What forces stir; what victories may be won!
What things transpire when we can humbly say;
In Jesus' precious name "Thy will be done!"
We cannot comprehend with mortal eyes
That source divine! We cannot find our way
To answer prayer: yet oft with sweet surprise
The darkest hour is changed to brightest day!

We cannot come with virtue when we pray.
No merit ours on which to lean and trust!
We have naught else except a need to say:
"We are but faulty creatures of the dust!"
God has been good and goodness is the theme
Of those who claim him as their greatest friend
Whom they love with a love which is supreme,
Because of one who loved them to the end!

Prayer brings within its train a deep repose,
An inward calm abiding in its strength.
It seeks the truth because it gladly knows
That wisdom's ways are opened up at length!
Prayer must be pure to burn with holy fire!
The incense right if sacred be its flame!
The heart sincere: ennobled with desire
To honor God in Jesus' precious Name.

And oh the joy and solace which it brings
As gates of love spring open to our view!
Transcendent the Almighty King of kings:
The Source of all that's holy, good and true!
His angels watch to bless each heart and mind
With promises imparting hope and peace.
His chast'ning Hand for those who wish to find
That mercy for the righteous does not cease.

-F. Lardent

Making a Foolish Choice

"If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever." - 1 Kings 12:1- 7

This was the wise advice given by the old men of Israel to King Jereboam. But the king did not listen to their counsel. Instead, he acted harshly according to the advice of the young men. It is important to remember, however, in evaluating his actions that Rehoboam's mother was a heathen woman and addicted to the worship of idols.

King Solomon had been trying to please her and his other wives by building various temples to false gods. So, then, it cannot be wondered that under these circumstances Rehoboam did not turn out very well. The power of heredity is great indeed!

Rehoboam may have acted out of self interest. It may have seemed that if he granted these requests by the old men that he would have to keep granting such pleas, ad infinitum. In his mind the best policy seemed to be one of intimidating the people and dealing harshly with them. So he said, "My father chastened you with whips, I will chastise you with scorpions."

This was a very unwise decision. The elements of unrest and dissatisfaction were evident in the kingdom. Had Rehoboam been wise he would have recognized the conditions around him and would have used greater tact and diplomacy in dealing with the spirit of rebellion. The fact is that a test of his kingship had arisen and he failed to recognize that he was, indeed, being tested. Being proud and arrogant, he thought he could do as he pleased.

It is a mistake to take such a course -- at any time. But today it would be a greater mistake. There is a testing just like that of Jereboam going on today among God's people and the people of the world. The spirit of discontentment is rampant. If the rulers of this world were wise, they would act to ease the burdens of the people instead of increasing them. But these rulers act according to their worldly wisdom. They disregard the wisdom that comes from above. Consequently the spirit of discontent grows and looms more ominously on the horizon.

This spirit is also present among brethren in Christ. Some are making demands of their brethren which even God does not require. Others are erecting false tests of faith upon their own authority. They have set a straight line and claim that all who are on one side of that line are "in the truth," and all those on the other are "out" of it. Those who disagree will be whipped with scorpion tongues. This is a deplorable state. It manifests a *lack* of Christ-like spirit, and without that spirit no person will ever win the divine kingdom.

Rehoboam was unable to tell when he was being tested. Are we able to discern the tests of the present? Our tests? Our faith and love will be fully proven. *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* The will of God is that we show our faith and confidence in him and prove our love for him and for his brethren. *"If ye do these things, ye shall never fail."*

- Walter Sargeant

A Word of Appreciation To Our Correspondents

We take this opportunity to express our thanks to all who write in and whom we have been unable to answer in person. It often happens that we are unable to answer every letter, or to delve into the depth of response which the writer might have anticipated. We ask your understanding if we don't respond just as you might have liked. Rest assured that all of your letters are read and appreciated with the same warmth that set your pen upon the paper. Such messages are a great comfort in the day to day run of events. We learn much from those who take the time to express their feelings, and encourage you to keep us posted about what is on your mind.

We make it a policy to express our appreciation to those who support our work. But, as a matter of practicality we normally respond by mail to donations above the cost of the HERALD subscription.

We also thank those with whom we have not corresponded for your support.

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