



Good Ground Needed

Introduction: Learning to guard ones heart is essential to spiritual soundness and growth.

In the natural world, if we want plants and other organic systems to grow and produce for everyone's benefit, the environment has to be suitable to soundness and growth. We have all experienced, at some level, the effects of pollutants, corrosives, viruses, diseases, and plain bad management. We've choked on diesel exhaust, burned with strong chemicals, gotten sick with colds and flues, have been attacked by one or more of a thousand diseases, and we have even abused ourselves with drugs, alcohol, and over eating. Some things we can control, others we cannot, but we have to do our best to live in the most favorable environment possible.

The inner man of the heart is similar to our eco-system. To produce the good fruits of the Spirit, our inner environment has to be reasonably free of the things that hinder real sustained growth as followers of Christ.

King Solomon's word of exhortation (Proverbs 4:20-23):

Three points of interest:

- 1) Increase in knowledge of God and purpose to obey what you learn (v. 20)
- 2) Keep these words at the center of your heart-the thought center of life- to feed the feed the forces of the heart (v. 21)

3) Exercise extreme care to secure and preserve your inner life, because everything that comes out of us whether word or deed is generated and pours forth from this center (v. 23).

a) Our inner baggage has the potential to taint everything we do. Being “professional” simply will not do; we cannot mask our true sentiments with learned techniques for ever. The inner reservoir will break the dam at some point. Jesus taught: *“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks”* (Lk. 6:45).

b) “Above everything you guard, guard your heart!”

Parable of parables: “The Sower Soweth the Word” (Mk. 4:1-20)

Jesus, in response to His disciple’s question about the meaning of this parable asked, *“If you do not understand this parable, how will you understand the rest?”* The teaching is central, even essential to understand the kingdom of God and how God works in our lives. It provides us with the basic building blocks to understand spiritual work and activity, without which we will most certainly be at a great disadvantage in our pursuit of God and the fulfillment of our quest to please Him in all things. Fortunately, the gospel writers give us both the parable and Jesus’ explanation to help us with this vital truth.

Some of the lessons found in the parable include:

1) Jesus describes how spiritual growth is initiated and achieved in our inner man of the heart.

2) The parable focuses on two important themes: a) the inner life is generated through the seed of God’s word; b) the soil that receives the word is the heart of man.

3) Jesus demonstrates through several general descriptions that the heart of man determines the outcome of the planting according to the state of heart of a particular individual.

4) Jesus unveils the spiritual enemies and life hindrances we might encounter on a daily basis, which press against us and work to determine the fitness of our hearts to bear good fruit.

5) The seed planted in the different types of soil is always *good seed* and will produce when conditions are met; the variable is always the state of the heart of each person that hears the word.

Way side ground is incapable of producing the fruit of the kingdom (v. 15).

This ground is hard and unprepared for planting the seed of God's word. Their hearts are impenetrable. These represent the unwilling and rebellious people of the world who refuse to hear the word of God to their own detriment.

They hold in their heart some fundamental objection that opposes the true work of God in their lives. There is some false argument or reasoning that, in their own minds, refutes or distorts the reality of God and the truth He has revealed. They may be *materialists* who hold basically that there is nothing beyond nature or matter. They deny spiritual realities; they deny the very existence of God. They may also be those who hold to *false gods* or even those who believe *false doctrines* spawned by Satan to deceive or *hypocrites* who act religiously, but whose hearts are far from the Lord. The following passages describe this heart ground in greater detail (Rom. 1:18-32; II Cor. 10:3-6; II Tim. 2:24-26).

Several images that summarize the condition of these hearts include:

1) *"Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you"* (Mt. 7:6).

2) *"And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them"* (Mk. 6:11).

3) *"Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?"* (Pro. 17:16)

Stony ground speaks of those timid hearts that buckle under the pressures that arise because of the word (vv. 16-17)

The problem Jesus identifies here is that the soil lacks depth; the heart only knows God superficially. There is great joy when they hear, but no true commitment to Lord. Jesus says that these tender plants have no root that goes down deep into the soil to anchor them so that they might survive the storms that will certainly be unleashed against them at some point.

Our walk with the Lord will not always be easy sailing. There will be winds and rains that descend against us. Some will encounter discouraging circumstances, they do not understand, suffering they consider unfair, or opposition from friends, family, and general culture. Many, as history testifies, experience terrible persecutions even the loss of life for the sake of the gospel. The apostles warned of these and encouraged believers to “endure hardships” (II Tim. 2:3) and “not think it strange when we fall into fiery trials”, but “be partakers of the sufferings of Christ” (I Pet. 4:12-13), and to “count it all joy” (Jas. 1:2) when such things occur.

Those sown among thorns represent those hearts excessively cluttered with earthly concerns and unhealthy pursuits (vv. 18-19).

They began to bear good fruit, and then they did not. Jesus said, “They became unfruitful”. Growth was visible, but outward and inward influences brought it to a halt and nothing matured in its season.

The cares of this world will keep us running in circles. They call to us relentlessly and try to keep us busy only with the affairs of men. They dominate the heart and drag it down with burdens we were never meant to carry. They are not the normal responsibilities of life. We are referring to the anxious thoughts that keep us on pins and needles, and slowly but surely choke the life out of us. Joy disappears as the dark clouds of fear and worry overcome us. To these Jesus responded, “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt. 6:31-33). The apostle Peter simply said, “Cast all of your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (I Pet. 5:7).

The deceitfulness of riches try to convince us that life is all about the things we purchase and possess to the point that we are determined and identified by them. Our sense of self-worth and how we judge others stems from our purchasing power and

the glitter of it all. “The bigger the better” and “enough is never enough” is our creed. To all of this Jesus exhorted, “*And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Lk. 12:15). Paul wrote to Timothy saying, “*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*” (I Tim. 6:10).

The lust of other things is an uncontrollable desire for the things we do not have or need. It is an insatiable hunger or simply a lack of contentment. We think the *thing* will bring fulfillment until we find it stored away in a box in the basement with a bunch of other *things*. Paul learned this lesson well and wrote about it often: “*godliness with contentment is great gain*” (I Tim. 6:6), “*and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Heb. 13:5), “*for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*” (Phil. 4:11), and finally, “*And having food and raiment let us be therewith content*” (I Tim. 6:8).

Good ground therefore is those tender hearts that are reserved for God alone. They are the ones who are attending to His word and are sensitive to those things the Spirit is communicating. They are responsive to God because they have purposed in their hearts to submit to the will of God out of the treasure of their love for Him. They are those who are eager to hear and obey the voice that calls regardless of the message or the consequences of their faithfulness. Subsequently, they are those who, as Jesus said, build their houses on the rock and are unmoved when the rains fall and the floods come (Mt. 7:24-27). They bring forth ever increasing fruit and it remains all their days.

Conclusion: Guard your hearts for the precious seed.

When we consider all of the enemies that attempt to pollute and corrupt our hearts so that the seed of God’s word cannot take root and grow, it is no wonder that Solomon was insistent that we learn to guard our hearts above all other things. Truly, it is the center from which real life, the life of God in Christ, sends forth its branches, blossoms, and produces good fruit to the glory of God.