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A GOOD HONEST HEART

by Harold Turner

To illustrate a better understanding of the kingdom of God, Jesus spoke what is commonly referred to as the Parable of the Sower. In Luke 8:5-8 Jesus stated the parable, and in verses 11-15 he explained its meaning. He explained that the seed is the word of God, and the various types of soil into which the seed fell were various conditions of men's hearts. Let's notice the reading of his explanation of the parable. "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. 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. But that on the good ground are they, which

in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

This parable stresses several important lessons that are so vital to life and to our relationship to God. It stresses the importance of preaching the word. It is impossible to receive a crop when no seed is planted. The seed that produces the new birth is the word of God, and unless this seed is planted there is no way to produce the new birth. The parable also stresses the need to prepare the heart to receive the word. The wayside soil was so beaten down that the seed could not penetrate it, and Satan was quick to remove it lest it be believed. Too, it stresses that just becoming a Christian is not enough. The heart represented by the rocky soil, and the thorny ground, both received the word and continued for a while, but neither brought forth any fruit. The first fell away, the other was choked and thus was unfruitful. The parable warns us of deceptive and destructive perils that we

must face and overcome to live a victorious life for Christ. And it stresses that the only heart from which a fruitful and productive life can come is the honest and good heart. The only way we can be successful in living the Christian life, the only way we can be fruitful, and the only way we can be victorious is to have the right condition of heart.

The spiritual heart is the key to a successful Christian life. Unless the heart is right, there is no service that one can render that will be acceptable. It isn't just external service, or our time or money that God wants from us, but he wants us from the heart. The whole Christian life depends on the condition of the heart. Just as the physical heart picks up oxygen and food supplies and transports them throughout the body to supply life to every member of the body, so the spiritual heart receives the life giving power from God, which is distributed through his word, and transports this power into

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WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

By Naomi Price

This is a subject which I have felt for a long time needed to be written about and studied. Ever since the teachings of Dr. Spock, about thirty years ago, which taught us not to spank our children, we have seen a loss of many of our children from obedience to God, nation and parents.

I am a preacher's wife of 45 years, a mother of three fine sons, two are preaching full time, the third one preaches part time. All three have a masters degree from a Christian College or University. None of them gave us trouble as far as disobedience, or wanting to go places and do things they should not. All three of them were brought up on the word of God as a regular spiritual diet. These things, plus numerous experiences as a preacher's wife make me feel eligible to write on this much needed subject.

Since my husband, Clarence A. Price died January 19, 1980, I have been working in a public place of business where

many children and parents come every day. I am appalled at the things I see and hear from children who are uncontrolled, and who in fact are running the lives of their parents. These children express fits of anger when they don't get what they want, and the weary parents give in to their screams and cries. These parents seem not to realize or know what God has said about their responsibility. In Prov. 22:15 the Bible states, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." Do you believe that God knows best? I am sure of it.

Beloved, if we will forget the teaching of Dr. Spock, who later said that he was wrong in his teachings, and get back to raising our children as God would have us, they will honor and respect, not only us, but God and the laws of our country. This will help us to have a God fearing nation.

A few years ago my husband and I

were visiting some parents who were not Christians. They had four children who were grown and gone from the home. These parents believed in spanking and teaching their children obedience, honor and respect. They said to us, "If we were raising our children today, we would be accused of child abuse because we believed in spanking our children good when they needed it. As a result we have four fine grown children we are proud of, and who obey us and respect both us and others." Christian friends, shall we let those who are not Christians do a better job raising their children than we are doing?

Someone has said, "Oh, if I spank my children I may warp their little personality." Friends, this is exactly the opposite of what it will do. In Prov. 13:24 the Bible says, "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother." Does this sound like the

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Jesus said, "I AM."

By Robert Ball

A professor in a Christian College was flying from a foreign country. On the plane there was a man standing in the aisle talking to a number of people. The man belonged to a religion which did not believe that Jesus was the Christ or the Son of God. While the man was talking to the people someone asked him, What about Jesus? The man answered, "Oh Jesus was a good man, in fact he was a very good man, but never the less he was just a man."

When the Christian professor heard this he just couldn't resist any longer. He stood up and said, "Sir?" The man in the aisle answered, "Yes;" The professor said, "You say that Jesus was just a good man?" The man answered, "Yes, that's right." Then the professor asked, "Well, would you say Jesus was a liar?" The man answered, "No, he was a good man, he was not a liar." The professor asked the man if he thought Jesus was crazy, and the man said, "No he wasn't crazy, he was a good knowledgeable man." The professor then said, "Well, sir, the way I see it is that Jesus was one of three things. Either he was a liar, because he claimed to be the Son of God, or else he was crazy, because one would have to be crazy to claim to be the Son of God if it were not true, or, he was just what he claimed to be, the only begotten Son of God. Now, my good man, you have already said that he was not a liar, and that he was not crazy, So it seems my choice is clear, I am going to believe Jesus."

What about you? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Let's look at some of the things that Jesus claimed to be. In Matt. 3:16-17, after John had baptized Jesus, the Bible states, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In John 5:18 we read, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." Jesus claimed to be the Son

of God. John 1:14 tells us that he left heaven and was made flesh and dwelt among us. He lived among men and set the perfect example by living without sin. His only connection with sin was in his sacrifice for mankind. In 2 Cor. 5:21 Paul said, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." When Jesus died on the cross it was for the sins of the whole world. He took all of our sins upon himself and died for us.

In John 6:35 Jesus said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." In John 8:12 He said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." In John 10:7 Jesus said, "I am the door." In John 10:11, 14 he said, "I am the good shepherd." In John 11:25 he said, "I am the resurrection and the life." In John 14:6 he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And in John 15:1-8 Jesus said that he was the true vine, and his Father was the husbandman. Jesus is everything that man needs to come to and live in the right relationship with the Father. He is the Son of God and only in his name can we be saved (Acts 4:12). Without him we have no hope of eternal life (Eph. 2:12). In Him God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).

Jesus invites all who will to come to him through faith in what he claims to be. To come we must first turn away from our sins in true repentance, and in obedience to his will we are baptized into his spiritual body, the church. In Rom. 6:3 Paul said, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" And in 2 Cor. 5:17 he said, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Have you expressed your faith in Jesus by repentance and being baptized into Him? He is your Savior, but only if you want him to be. You must come to Him. He has already come and died for you, and he now asks that you come follow him.

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parents are to be in command, or their children? Many parents today are letting their children rule them. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul wrote, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." (Eph. 6:1.) The Holy Spirit states that is right for children to obey their parents, if right, it can't be wrong. If we teach our children to obey, the church will be alleviated of many of its problems, our schools will once again be places of learning and respect, and our homes will be happier places to live. This will also help the divorce problem, because disobedient children can and do cause divorces. It will also cause our nation to be better, and as a result many little ones will not grow up and lose their souls in eternity. I believe its far past time to serve some "peach tree tea", (not the kind you drink) or get a good paddle and use it. Lets get our children under control as God has directed in his word. Its later than we think.

What is child abuse? It is a failure to discipline and correct our children as needed, for this is exactly what God instructs us to do. It is going too far in anger, being brutal and bruising and damaging their bodies. Because we love our children, let us do as God instructs. Remember, He has never asked us to do something we cannot do.

"When a man talks because he enjoys hearing himself, he will soon find that others are willing to let him have all the pleasure."

"A good citizen will love his neighbor, but a first class Christian will love his enemy."

"A lot of trouble in this world is caused by combining a narrow mind with a wide mouth."

ELEMENT OF CHANGE

By Erwin Cowen

"And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation. I restore him four-fold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:8-10.)

Honesty and generosity are basic elements of the kind of character which is necessary to please God; and it is interesting to note that they are both found in an unexpected place. There is nothing in the record that indicates that Zacchaeus was in the habit of practicing either of them before Jesus visited him. But be that as it may, these traits of character were potentially in this tax collector of Jericho, and needed only to be brought to the surface and made active in his daily life. This reminds us of similar circumstances in the life of the man who became the great apostle Peter, as well as others that Jesus came in contact with during his earthly ministry. The Lord, in fact, found and caused many seemingly unpromising people to change. These were sometimes people who were very low in the eyes of many. One such person was the woman of Samaria in John 4. Jesus changed the lives of these. Simon Peter and Zacchaeus

were making little or no progress toward a life which would please God, but when Jesus was finished with them, they were hardly recognizable.

When Jesus changed a man he never left the impression that he was importing something artificial or alien to him, but instead he made the person to see something in himself which he did not know was there. Jesus brought these things out into the open.

The gospel may be regarded as an extension of His personal ministry. The Lord expects man to take the gospel, live by it, teach it, and to deal with others just as he would if he were here in person. Solomon said that the whole duty of man is to "Fear God and keep his commandments". Jesus instructed the apostles to "Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 28:19.) In applying the gospel message to others we must get them to see themselves, and their needs which only the Lord can supply. When this is accomplished, we must encourage the lost to want to become what he is able of becoming. Then the road to peace and salvation for such a person is a matter of obeying from the heart, the Lord's instructions.

There are multitudes of people who wish they were better than they are. For example, some have a bad temper and

desire to control it better, some are timid and wish for courage, etc. Perhaps these wonder where such qualities or blessings can be obtained. No one can put such qualities into another person from the outside. These qualities are very essential in order for us to be what God wants us to be, but these qualities are already within us, imprisoned and undeveloped. They are like seed that has never been watered, and has never taken growth. The gospel teaches us how to develop and free these good qualities of life.

When Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, Peter was temperamental and impulsive, but in time he would become as stable as a rock. Jesus said to Peter, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." (John 1:42.)

People must be themselves, perhaps not as they are now, but themselves as they are capable of becoming through the study and practice of God's word, and through faith and trust in Jesus, and through their love toward others. Jesus will, through the gospel, bring out the best in our lives. He will make us into "new creatures." He changes the heart, and from the heart proceed all the issues of life. Do you want your life improved? Jesus is the only fulfilling answer to this need.

LEARNING

By Donnie F. Mangrum

Learning can be beneficial or it can be dangerous. The Bible has much to say about many subjects, and of course, it has much to say about learning. In Acts 26 Paul is making his defense before King Agrippa when the governor, Festus, told him in verse 24, "Paul thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Paul answered, "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." This learned man had some difficulty speaking about Christ to this audience. Festus had fear that the words of Paul would offend his honored guest, King Agrippa. Often times we stop short of teaching Christ for fear of offending someone. But in verse 28, as we read on, we find that Festus was wrong, and that rather than being offended, Agrippa was impressed by Paul's manner and message. Agrippa said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

In our society today it appears people are more interested in impressing the audience than in planting the truth. Maybe we need to take a lesson from Paul. You notice Paul did not lose his temper with Festus, he rather said kind words about him - "most noble Festus". Eventually his politeness kept him the floor and allowed him to complete his message. If we, when teaching, can use the skill of respect and politeness the results can be much more successful. All walks of life will honor one who can control himself. In Prov. 25:21 we can learn this principle - "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." Yes, kindness can keep us talking when we continue in an orderly manner.

The lack of learning about God can turn God from us. It will lead our lives

into sin, and we will begin to deteriorate from generation to generation. A failure to instill a knowledge of God in the hearts and minds of our children will cause them to be less likely to accept his teachings later. In Hosea 4:6 we see such an example, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me; seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." A lack of learning is dangerous to our ever staying close to God. Yet, this learning must be from God, and not something contrary to the teachings of His word.

Our learning and knowledge of God needs to be everlasting. It should be an increasing trait of our life. We are taught to study in 2 Tim. 2:15, and we are taught to pray for wisdom, the ability to use our learning in James 1:5. In Heb. 5:12-14

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every phase of life. God's word is a source of spiritual food for the soul, which must be received before life can exist. The condition of the heart affects every activity in life. In Prov. 4:23 God warns us to "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Both good and evil reflect forth from the heart. Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Matt. 12:35.) The condition of the heart affects the way we think, the way we understand, every emotional reaction we have, it affects every plan we make, and every relationship in life. To please God we must begin with the heart.

The very fact that the heart plays such an important role in our relationship to God would also indicate some dangers to consider. The heart must be properly guided by God's word, otherwise it is easily deceived and misguided. In Jer. 17:9 we are told, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Being easily deceived, the heart will cause one to be dishonest with himself. In Gal. 6:3 Paul said, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." Isn't Paul describing the deceitfulness and dishonesty of the heart in evaluating one's self? In Prov. 28:26 God warns, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." The heart may blind a person from seeing himself as he really is. In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus spoke a parable unto certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. Notice in this reading the Pharisee. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this publican. I fast twice in a week, I give tithes of all that I possess." What was this man's problem? Wasn't it his heart? The heart is deceitful and dishonest, and must be guided by God's word if it is ever to please Him. Unless properly guided the heart will help us find self-justifying excuses for not doing anything we don't want to do, and for doing anything we want to do. But a good and honest heart considers what does and what does not please God.

There are several reasons why only a good and honest heart can please God. For one thing, before one can please God he must have the right attitude toward obedience. In Rom. 6:17-18 Paul shows that obedience must come from the heart to please God. Certainly obedience to commands with the wrong attitude will never please God. When the attitude is right, obedience is not a problem. When

one has a good honest heart he doesn't have to be pushed and pulled and have every art of persuasion used to get him to obey God. And, all the pushing and pulling, all the persuasion in the world will not cause the rocky soil, and the thorny ground to produce fruit. Why? Because the condition of the heart is not right. The right condition of the heart is studying, searching, and desiring to find ways of pleasing God and serving others.

A second reason why only a good and honest heart can please God is because of its attitude toward others. As long as we are like the Pharisee mentioned in Luke 18:14-15, we can never please God. Keep in mind that he was a very religious person, and he was morally good, and did things required of God, but because of his attitude he could never please God. "God I thank thee, that I am not as other men . . ." Isn't it sad that he had to live in a world where all others were beneath him? God teaches us the attitude we must develop in Phil. 2:3-4: "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." An attitude that looks down at all others is a serious and dangerous attitude.

And third, the reason why only a good honest heart can please God is because of its attitude toward sin. The right attitude of the heart works hard to keep pure and holy. It will abstain from all appearances of evil, knowing the deceptiveness and dangers of sin. Rather than live as close to the borderline of sin as possible, the good heart lives as far from sin as possible. It will fortify itself with such protective devices as the word of God, prayer and close fellowship with faithful Christians. These are vital to living a successful Christian life, and to overcoming the devil who constantly seeks to destroy us.

What kind of heart do you have? One thing certain, unless it is good and honest it cannot please God. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. (Prov. 4:23.)

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we are taught that at some point in our life our knowledge should be greater than the day before. In other words, we are to grow to the point of teaching others the word of God. After we have spent time in study and a prayerful attitude toward God's word, we will be more efficient in sharing it and living it. Living for God is best accomplished when we do this. This is no different than other aspects of life, we only become efficient and well rounded in an area after we have given it much effort.

Jeremiah decided one time to drop the teaching of God's word, but he had spent too much time in preparing himself to do this. In Jer. 20:9 he said, "Then I said, I will not make mention of God, nor speak any more in his name, but his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." This burning desire is what each of us should attempt to place in our life. But, this can be accomplished only by learning and growing closer to God. A continual exercise will make us stronger and we will have much more endurance.

If your learning and teaching the truth of God causes someone to call you "mad" just remember our friend Paul, and continue with politeness. Paul endured much because of his great endeavor to teach Jesus Christ. And because of his great efforts he accomplished great things in fulfilling the Lord's work on earth. May God help us to have the same determination.

"One of life's great blessings is that we don't have to believe everything to which we are forced to listen."

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