

Sermon on The Parable of the Sower

Lessons: Genesis 47:13-27

Matthew 13:1-13, 18-22

True Christian Religion 375

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"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matthew 13: 23)

When we first come to understand truth from the Word, it is as if we have, as described in the parable, received seeds of truth. Yet simply understanding such seeds of truth does not do much for us. Simply understanding truth does not make us spiritual. The purpose of receiving seeds of truth is that we will follow and live according to them. Truth is like a trip map with a set of directions. Like a trip map, truth shows us where we are, or our starting place; and it shows us the destination, or where we want to end up. And to get to the destination, we need to follow the directions. And what is the destination that truths point to, and where does following the directions lead? Truths from the Lord's Word ultimately point to heaven and give us directions for getting to heaven.

Yet although this is an end to which truths look, we do not always follow the directions. This is described in the parable of the sower. We know that some of the seed fell by the wayside and was devoured; some fell upon rocky places and although it sprang up, the sprouts were soon withered by the sun; some fell among thorns and was choked; and some seeds fell into good ground and brought forth fruit. In this parable the sower is the Lord and the seeds are truths from the Lord out of His Word. Those things which prevent the seed from producing fruit, represent all the things in each of us that oppose the leading of truths. In general, these are self-centered loves and love for the affairs and attractions of this world. These self-centered and worldly-centered loves try to devour, wither, and choke the seeds of truth which the Lord is giving to us. To use our map analogy, it is as if the Lord provides us with the map and directions -- and we keep insisting on taking detours. Haven't we all found ourselves doing this?

Now, what is important to keep in mind in this parable is not concentrating on different types of people, that is, that there are some people who receive seed as if by the wayside, some as if among thorns, some as if in stony places, and some as if in good ground. There are people who do indeed fit into each of the categories. And those of us who like to gossip can tell you just who they are! But

what is really important is to see that all of these categories dwell in each of us. If we reflect upon our own reactions to the seeds of truth, we can see in ourselves times when we allow the seeds of truth to be devoured, choked, or withered. We do not need to look at others to see examples of these errors. We need only to reflect upon ourselves. Perhaps we can all remember times when we have acted like ravenous birds devouring freshly sown seed, or like hard rocky ground, or like thorny weeds.

Seeing that everything said in the Word, applies to ourselves and is speaking about us, has been called the one person principle. So the parable of the sower is saying something about us and speaking directly to us when it describes the seed that the birds devoured, or that the sun scorched, or that was choked by thorns, as well as that which was sown on good soil. And this principle properly applied can both help us understand the meaning and application of things said in the Word, as well as temper us with a sense of humility.

But consider the seeds which fell into the good ground and were able to bring forth fruit. It is said in Matthew that "he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the Word, and understands it, who also bears fruit and produces ..." What is that good ground? In general, the good ground is what is of the Lord in us. The seeds of truth from the Lord, in order to become fruitful, must be received into what is from the Lord within us. This is clear from this passage from the Word:

"...the Lord is so conjoined with man, spirit, and angel, that everything which has relation to the Divine is not from them, but from the Lord. For it is known that all the good and all the truth which any one has, is not from himself, but from the Lord.... In a word, the Lord cannot have a dwelling place in man and angel, and abide with them, except in what is His; not in what is their own, for this is evil, and (even) if it were good, still it is finite..." (Divine Providence 53)

So where does this good ground, which is the Lord's with us, come from? From earliest infancy, the Lord has been storing up in each of us affections of good and truth. In the Word these are called remains and they are described in this way:

"But what are remains? They are not only the goods and truths which a person has learned from the Word of the Lord from early childhood onwards and

so had imprinted in his memory, but also all resulting states, such as states of innocence from early childhood; states of love towards parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, and friends; states of charity towards the neighbor, and also of compassion on the poor and needy; in a word, all states of good and truth. These states, together with the goods and truths that have been imprinted in the memory, are called remains, which the Lord preserves in a person and stores away in his internal man, quite without his knowledge. There they are separated completely from the things that are the person's own, that is, evils and falsities. The Lord so preserves all of those states with the individual that not even the least of them perishes." (AC 561)

"No one could live ... unless he had something living in him, that is, something of innocence, charity, and mercy ... this a person receives from the Lord when an infant and a child, as is evident from the state of infants and also from that of childhood. The things that are stored up are called in the Word 'remains' and are the Lord's alone in a person." (AC 1050)

Prior to being regenerated, remains are the only good ground which a person has. The first seeds of truth which a person understands are seen out of the remains which a person has from the Lord. Thus the first things seen to be true are seen from what is the Lord's dwelling place in a person. Truths received into that good ground become fruitful to the degree that a person cultivates them, that is, takes care of them and sees that they grow within himself. Yet, because the Lord leaves us in freedom to reject His truth, we can refuse to follow it, that is, we can insist on taking one detour after another.

The first good ground that we have are the remains we have from the Lord. But we can, in a sense, add to or acquire more good ground. This is done when we shun evils and falsities as sins against God. When we choose to do this, we reject the self-centered and worldly evils and the falsities which oppose the reception and growth of seeds of truth. It is like clearing the ground of rocks and weeds and chasing away the ravenous birds that eat the seeds. It is not enough for us to simply procure seeds for ourselves, for such seed is of no use without good ground that we tend and take care of so that the seed may grow and become fruitful.

In order to produce fruits which are works of charity, or good works, we need to prepare and take care of the good ground for the planting and growth seeds of truth. This is done by following the instructions, that is, doing what the Lord's truth teaches. In doing good works, effort is involved, like the

effort involved in planting and taking care of a garden. And because the Lord leaves us in freedom to follow his instructions, we may choose not to follow them.

For example:

First, we may neglect procure truth for ourselves from the Word and from preaching and teaching from the Word, thus we may neglect to acquire any good seed for ourselves. Second, we may fail to take care of the good ground in which the seeds are to grow. And finally, we may neglect to harvest the fruit or let it rot in the garden. This is like neglecting to do good works of use to the neighbor. Doing good is not merely doing good to ourselves alone, but it is especially doing good to others.

This the Word makes clear when it teaches:

"Man is not born for himself, but for the sake of others; that is, he is not born to live for himself alone, but for others; otherwise there would be no such thing as social community in which any good could exist. (True Christian Religion 406)

Every person is to some degree the neighbor to whom charity is to be exercised. To see how every truth in the Word applies to ourselves, is most necessary. But to then neglect to exercise charity to the neighbor, results in a perversion of the Lord's intent in giving us seeds in the first place, for in this neglect there is a form of self-centeredness in which we regard only ourselves. It is like taking the seeds that the Lord has given us, planting them and taking care of the garden, growing a beautiful and bountiful crop, and then refusing to share any of it with anyone! We stand in the midst of our garden, admiring it, and saying to ourselves, "This is mine, all mine, and just for me."

It is important that we come first to know ourselves and to see clearly what is in us, for unless we can know what is within our own fruits or acts, we can hardly expect to be in a position to truly be useful to others. However, if we turn the one person principle into the one person-centered principle, are we not in danger of corrupting and perverting the truths that the Lord has given us? It is said in the Word that "by their fruits you shall know them." If we were to allow ourselves to become so one person centered that we neglect to share our fruits, that is, our faith and good works with others -- then what will they know of us?

Amen