

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

August 2010

HOW IS YOUR SOIL?



In [the parable of the sower] Jesus speaks of three different kinds of responses we see in the church to the gospel seed. Some receive the Christian message in the shallow soil of their hearts, but beneath it there is only impenetrable rock. The plant dies as a result. Apparently in view are those whose minds actually repel the message despite their apparent acceptance of it. These recipients have no intention of paying the cost in self-commitment that is required if the message is in fact to be believed. Belief, after all, entails both the acceptance of the message and commitment to the one at the center of that message. There are, apparently, many like this in America today.

There is a second kind of person in the parable who has brushed up against the gospel, and these people, too, are everywhere in American society today. They appear to be more

serious than the first kind, whose momentary allegiance to Christ results in nothing. They are the ones who have heard the Word, who do not reject it, and in whom it apparently takes root. It does not strike rock. Nevertheless, “their fruit does not mature” (Luke 8:14). Why is this? The seed falls on ground that has not been cleared well. The weeds are not immediately evident, but soon they make their presence known. When they do, they kill off the small plant that is struggling for life. What are these weeds? They are “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” (8:14).

In the West we have not the slightest inkling that, in reveling in affluence as we do, we are playing with fire. This affluence so easily becomes an alternative Way, Truth, and Life, a counterfeit gospel in which to have is to be saved and to have not is to be damned. Unfortunately, *la dolce vida* is not itself satisfying, not in an enduring way. It tends to make us shallow, self-absorbed people who give ourselves to chasing what is superficial by way of styles, fads,

and what is pleasurable provided there are no demands for commitments. The styles quickly become obsolete, the fads are forgotten, and the pleasures fade like the morning mist so that this kind of life constantly has to be reinventing itself. Those who fashion their lives around these things die of emptiness. The pains that linger in the soul like a bad headache stay a long, long time.

It is hard to know exactly how those who have received the Word stand in relation to Christ, but they show nothing of spiritual merit in their lives despite their hearing of the Word, their born-again professing, and maybe their church going. They may show up in the born-again category in Barna’s polls, but they are not in the right category in life.

There is a third category. It is made up of those who not only hear the word, but also “hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). Hearing the Word is not hard; holding

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it fast is a different matter. Here are the people who cut their lives to its truths, who hear in its words the voice of eternity, indeed the voice of their incarnate and resurrected Savior speaking.

In fact, there is nothing quite so cheering, so invigorating, as to be with people like this. They are people whose eyes are wide open to the shadows and pains of life, but they also live on another plane. They no longer stare in self-pity at their own pains, and no longer run from one preacher to another seeking some therapeutic release from anxiety, fear, confusion, and bewilderment. They are the people who are tough-minded, morally sinewy, and infectious joy. They are the ones who have done what is necessary. The Word entered not only the surface of their lives but also the soil beneath it. The tangled roots of the weeds have been pulled out of this soil so that the seed grows into a strong plant.

There are examples of each of these categories of response all through America today. We expect this because Jesus led us to expect it. Has it been like this in every age? Jesus' parable certainly suggests that it has.

What appears to be different today, though, is that the first two categories - the stone in the heart and the weeds that choke the seed - are so abundant and so disproportionately represented. They are the exemplars of the "Christianity Lite" that so many evangelical churches are propagating. What catches our attention - and our breath - are the vast numbers of Christian misfires. Almost half of America is claiming to be born again, but fewer than one in ten has even the foggiest notion of what it means to be a disciple of Christ in biblical terms.

These misfires, these remnants of faded, tattered, undemanding faith, are found everywhere. One does not have to dig too deeply before discovering in the lives of many people a time when they had made a "decision" or had been part of an evangelical church. They stand out in colleges and universities and, not

least, on college and university faculties. There one finds many disaffected evangelicals, people whose religious lives were started in a gospel crusade, or in hearing the testimony of another believer, or in a Christian organization on campus, but somewhere along the line things fell apart. Some of these retain a memory of the day Christ was "accepted," but it is overgrown by many other interests like getting tenure, or getting to the next level, or not being embarrassed culturally, or earning acceptance in the academic guild... they are disinterested in, and disconnected from, the gospel. In some cases a remnant of sympathy toward Christian faith remains, but more typically, whatever else was there has long since gone and has been replaced by what is hard, resistant, and even hostile. Here, indeed, are the antagonisms of the disappointed and disaffected.

Does the church not bear considerable responsibility for this situation? ...

In Christianity, cut-rate products bring a cut-rate future.

[Taken from *The Courage to Be Protestant* by David F. Wells, 2008, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI]



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