

Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen (Part Seven)

Parable of the Sower

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How good is your memory? Is it more important for men to have a good memory or for women to be able to remember? Does it even matter? Memories are among those easily overlooked gifts for which we should daily thank God. Without memory we are isolated from others, but even worse, we are isolated from ourselves. Without memory life is a disconnected sequence of thinly sliced moments of time. It is memory that stitches together those instances, compiling them into our identity. The word *remember* means to join together, just as the word *dismember* means to separate.

Some of family memory is a tragedy. Happy memories help unify families, creating a repository of good times, spurs smiles, and a strong sense of connection with those memories, which are later shared. Similarly, a country's citizens are sustained by collective memory of how and why their nation's founders struggled. Only by knowing their shared history can people share a destiny. Not surprisingly, Scripture repeatedly directs Israel to remember. Numerous verses in the five books of Moses stress the act of remembering. Look at this general admonition here in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 32:7 Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you.

That is pretty much a command for us to remember. And for those of us who are fathers, to keep those remembrances and remind our children of those things. And this actually, for elders and ministers, is the same thing. We are responsible for helping you remember the days of old and considering those years.

Old Testament Hebrew provides a vital insight into the nature of memory. In Hebrew, if two concepts share the same word, those two concepts are connected. It is significant that Hebrew uses only one word transliterated Zakar for both male and memory.

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male [Zakar] and female He created created them.

Genesis 40:23 Yet the chief butler did not remember [Same word, Zakar, that was 'male' in the previous verse.] Joseph, but forgot him.

Zakar is what is called a denominative in Hebrew grammar, and I will just briefly explain it just to show you a comparison.

For example, to dust is from the noun, dust. To victimize is from the noun victim. So there is a connection between the two, and that is what the case is in this Hebrew words zakar. There was a connection between male and memory. There is meaning behind it. Now why, by using the same word for male and remember, would God link the concept of memory to males?

We can better understand this by asking what the difference between males and females is when it comes to memory. Well, one of the most significant differences between the sexes is that most girls naturally grow into womanhood, while many boys, if neglected, will either remain adolescents or become barbarians. And we are seeing that in our society today. Surely you know more 40 year old males who are still adolescents than females. Transforming boys into men takes effort, and that is not being done in this country. And sadly, we are somewhat neglectful in the church as well.

While most girls intuitively feel a desire to devote themselves to one man, and instinctively know how to cuddle a baby, for a society to endure, boys must be taught how a man should behave. And they are not being taught that today. Girls mature with an inbuilt awareness of time, while boys tend to live only for the moment. And this makes them act destructively toward themselves and toward their community. The cure for this is memory, which links a boy to his father and to the uplifting traditions of manhood. Boys

desperately need role models of manly behavior from the past. Heroic accounts of brave and chivalrous men inspire boys, as we read in the CGG Weekly this week about heroism.

Memory is vital for males to become men, which is why families used the father's name rather than the mother's name for the last name. While sadly, not every boy receives the needed education from his family or community, one resource, the Bible, is available to all. In the earliest chapters of Genesis, God establishes ground rules for male behavior.

Loss of memory is a dreadful affliction. Medical science has not yet found the solution, however, we can do much to create and maintain memories in our families and in the church. And that is what we do each week as we preach. We help you to remember what the Scripture says. We expound upon it and things like that, and we should be doing the same in our families, and you fathers, husbands, are responsible for making sure it happens.

Well, Rabbi Daniel and Susan Lapin provided that valuable insight into the biblical concept of memory asking, "Do you remember?" in their book *Thought Tools*, Volume 2, available at www.RabbiDanielLapin.com. I wanted to make sure he was credited with that.

In great part, because men have often failed in their leadership capabilities, the church throughout history has often suffered from a lack of direction. Why have many men failed the church? The major causes of men's failure to lead are:

(1) A lack of knowledge. A lack of knowledge that the man should lead. It has not been clearly understood that the man's sacred responsibility is to stand at the head of his family. It is a satanic deception that the husband and wife should lead equally. It is in spiritual potential that they are equal.

Ephesians 5:23-25, 32 [You are very familiar with this. You almost have it memorized. Paul says] For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself

for her, . . . This is a great mystery [It is a great mystery to the world, but not to people with God's Holy Spirit.], but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

That is about is politically incorrect as you can get in this society today. Do not let political correctness in this world stop you from speaking the truth. Do not kowtow to it. Even if you kowtow to one item of it, you are going down a rabbit hole. Everything that we teach in the church, everything that the Bible teaches, is politically incorrect in this society. And we can see them changing the wording, changing the meaning of words, and destroying the language. Proper knowledge in gentle, righteous leadership is vital to the spiritual health of the church. Today, mainstream Christianity has been feminized and sadly, it has influenced God's church as well.

(2) A lack of conviction. When a man does not comprehend the tremendous importance of his responsibility to lead, without conviction, everything is merely a preference.

James 2:20-22 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

A lack of conviction is a lack of faith. Faithful conviction is vital to the spiritual health of the church. It is absolutely needed.

(3) A lack of self discipline. (There are more, but I am only going to give you three at this time.) Although a man may have knowledge and conviction, he may not have the character to apply it to life's experiences. If he lacks self control, he may allow women and children to dominate or pressure him. Or he may fail to offer needed virtuous leadership. The apostle Peter writes of fruitful growth in the faith in II Peter 1 and he lists more qualities that men must have and women as well.

II Peter 1:5-9 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith [or conviction] virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self control perseverance, to

perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things [and these should be characteristics that every man strives for, and every woman] is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.

This list of spiritual fruit is vital to the spiritual health of the church, and we men are responsible for helping our families and helping the church remember it. Men's failure to lead is not the fault of women and children, although their weaknesses may contribute somewhat to the problem or at least make it more difficult. The blame lies with the man, and there are many social problems which occur when the father is not a proper head of his house.

As a result, the same problems that have often hit the church of God down through the centuries, now have accumulated into an onslaught of difficulties at the end of this age. Personality clashes, discontentment, divisions, false doctrines, false teachers, faithlessness, disloyalty, the list goes on. This society influences each and every one of us, and we must fight and resist against it.

As I mentioned earlier, political correctness is one of the more obvious things, particularly since about the early 1990s. We have observed, and some of you have experienced, people of dubious conversion claiming to be members of the true church, people who tend to pick and choose from a smorgasbord of ministers, whose messages agree with their own humanly reasoned beliefs. They look for leaders who titillate their senses and do not offend their sensitive emotions.

Men who should be spiritually mature often fail in the responsibility to lead gently, teach the truth, and protect the church from false doctrine. Such men reject the government of God and set themselves up as the standard of righteousness, attempting to supplant Jesus Christ and God the Father who give clear instructions through the apostle Paul not to do this.

II Timothy 4:1-4 I charge you therefore, before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

With this in mind, with this background, so to speak, in mind, we will turn to the book of Revelation and the seven churches, where I left off. In the chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation, we discover that all seven letters to the seven churches have three distinct approaches. First, historical and chronological references indicating that the seven churches follow consecutively down through history while also overlapping one another. And this is the weakest of the applications of the three.

The second, character references indicating negative and positive attributes, characteristics, and works. Seven times, Jesus said, "I know your works." He mentions that in Revelation 2:2, 9, and 13. Also Revelation 3:1, 8, and 15.

The third distinct approach is prophetic references to Christ's second coming, indicating that the seven churches, or the seven church characteristics and attitudes, exist just before Jesus Christ's return. Five out of the seven references to the church in Revelation 2 and 3 indicate they are in existence when Christ returns. And since this is the case, we can rightly deduce that all seven church attitudes exist just before the return of Christ.

The five that mention Him coming are the following: Ephesus in Revelation 2:5-6. "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent." The second one is Pergamos in Revelation 2:16, "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth." Thyatira in Revelation 2:25. "But hold fast what you have till I come." Sardis in Revelation 3:3-4.

"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief and you will not know what hour I come upon you." And finally Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10-11. "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have that no one may take your crown."

So we see there that these messages are for our time now, just before the return of Christ.

Here is a quick summary of the negative characteristics of the called of the church of God down through its history and at the end time:

Ephesus lacked diligence and love for the doctrine of Christ thereby losing its first love. It ceased to actively carry God's truth to the world and in the process, went to sleep spiritually.

Smyrna has nothing negative said about it by Christ. However, they were warned about infiltrators.

Pergamos compromised the doctrine of Christ. This was a church of evil surroundings and it was infected with heresy.

Thyatira was guilty of harboring of false prophetess. They committed spiritual adultery with Roman Catholic Church. They undervalue the holiness of the doctrine of Christ, and many just sympathized with the church with little or no commitment to the teachings of Christ. Very few were willing to give up their lives for it. And when the going got rough, they dropped away from what truth they had received, often neglecting the Sabbath.

Sardis is called the dead church because it forgot much of the doctrine of Christ and became spiritually dead as a result of a lack of real faithfulness and spirituality. It is accused of imperfect works, and they had misdirected efforts that were fruitless. Their priorities were skewed.

Philadelphia has nothing negative said about it by Christ.

However, He says, "Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." So obviously there are people trying to take what you have. This indicates that there are people targeting them and trying to make them slip up by deception.

Laodicea is called the lukewarm warm church because it is faithless, self-satisfied, and tolerant of sin. The self-righteous group constantly strives over doctrine because of their never-ending pursuit to liberalize and water down doctrine. And I could add to that they are affected or they are influenced by political correctness.

The world looks on such events occurring in any church as evidence of corruption or wrongdoing, or something wrong and reprehensible in the church. Worldly clubs, societies, or churches in the world do not generally seem to have such troubles or controversies over doctrine. They do over their own doctrines, over their own traditions of men, but not the doctrines of Christ, because they do not have them, for the most part. Satan does not bother them. They are already on his side, but Satan seeks to destroy God's one and only true church. But we know the gates of hell will never prevail against it.

Now, historically, members of God's church have made plenty of mistakes (we all have and we know it in our own lives), from which we may learn much, and we have the blessing of access to these admonitions to the church, which were prepared for us almost 2,000 years ago. So I must ask, what are we going to do about these things in our own lives? Because we cannot try to fix them in the church if we are not fixing them in our own lives. Because the problems that we are having in our own lives affect everyone in the church.

Sadly, negligence of the Sabbath has been very common for the children of Israel. And this weakness has also been apparent with some in the church. One generally ignored principle concerning the Sabbath is finding your own pleasure. It seems vague, but it is not that vague because we know what we please us and what does not.

Isaiah 58:13-14 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken."

You know, many seek entertainment during this holy time, while at one and the same time they neglect Bible study and prayer. Some spend hours every Sabbath in restaurants feeding the lust of the eyes and flesh. Eating out at restaurants on the Sabbath is not necessarily wrong, occasionally, or at the Feast of Tabernacles. However, it can easily become a form of entertainment and pleasure seeking. It could be pleasure driven. Others play sports or work out. And some go as far as to do secular work on its such as washing the car, cutting the grass, or many other things that we should not be doing on the Sabbath.

Protestantism has been a negative influence on members of the church of God. It de-emphasizes or even rejects keeping the Ten Commandments. And in many congregations, the Ten Commandments have become suggestions rather than commandments and they are falsely thought of as optional guidelines. When appearing before the Great God, we should wear the best we can afford. A casual attitude toward the Sabbath shows that God's way of life is a preference rather than a conviction.

We must yield to being molded into the image of God, growing in character, in grace, and in knowledge. Choosing to do the right thing, to set the right example requires effort. We must demonstrate our commitment to God by our faithfulness and living His way of life 24/7. It is to those who overcome, with the help of God's Spirit, that God allows into His Kingdom. God's Spirit abiding in us sanctifies us, sets us apart from the world for holy use. And we have to think of ourselves as set apart for holy use so that we use the Sabbath in a holy manner. Sanctification signifies that were impregnated with the Holy Spirit and stamps us with a seal that says we have God's Holy Spirit.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you [Paul speaking of course], brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions [That means remember and do the traditions] which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

God calls many, but he selects only a few as firstfruits. He makes His truth available generally, but by comparison only a few pass the test for inclusion with the firstfruits. So tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people throughout the almost 2,000 years of the true church's history, have been introduced to God's truth and gone back to the religions of the world.

It is helpful at this time to summarize the positive characteristics of the seven church attitudes. The common link in the praise that Jesus Christ gives the churches and the difference between the called who fall away and the chosen, is that the called who fall away are faithless, proud, and opinionated, and the elect of God are truly faithful, humble, and teachable.

Ephesus is persistent in service to God and their patience is mentioned twice. They are strong and disciplined, including self-controlled.

Smyrna is poor in material possessions in contrast to the Laodiceans, but rich in faith. Because of their faithfulness, they are strong enough to be sorely tested in their appreciation for the doctrine of Christ. Many remained faithful, even though persecuted to death.

Pergamus is steadfast in their identity with Christ. They were not afraid to be called Christian. They actively evangelized much of Europe, witnessing about the coming Kingdom of God. Many remained faithful, even through persecution, to death.

Thyatira, the church of good works at their end. They had the fine character traits of love, service, faith, and patience.

Sardis is credited with keeping God's name. Only a few faithful saints stayed pure by overcoming and adhering to the true doctrine of Christ.

Philadelphia is called the faithful church. It is known as those who have their fellow men as brothers—brotherly love. The Philadelphians show love toward others by obedience to the law of God and by the carrying out of God's will—that of warning the world of impending destruction that hangs over it and of the coming Kingdom of God. The church did not deny Christ's name, including His nature, character, personality, and power, and kept, that is both believed and practiced His Word.

Laodicea has nothing good said about it by Christ, although it is a Sabbath keeping church. Christ says confidently that they will still be able to repent and overcome sin. Christ's advice for this church focuses on being zealous for God's way of life and repenting of hidden sin.

Of all the doctrines of Christ, the most visible, and the one God uses as the test commandment, is that of the Sabbath to narrow down where His church exists. It is only the first test of many tests in search of the true church of God.

But to understand why God's visible church has been so consistently plagued by conspiracies, false teachers, false doctrines, divisions, and disloyalty, it helps to recognize that Jesus described the calling of different characteristics of people. We find these people described in the Parable of the Sower.

But first, let me give you some background to Christ's parables. Although Jesus was much more than a storyteller, He was at least that, and as a result, the people of His day flocked to Him and listen to Him joyfully. Christ's words were always picturesque. He spoke of sheep among wolves, of camels creeping through the eye of a needle, of people trying to remove specks from other people's eyes while planks were in their own. He referred to a house divided against itself destined to fall down, of throwing children's bread to dogs, He warned against the yeast of the Pharisees.

Strictly speaking, however, these imaginative pictures are not stories. The stories Jesus told all fall into a specific category of story known as parables. A parable is a story from real life or a real life situation from which a moral or spiritual truth is drawn. So examples are abundant. The prodigal son, the Good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the tax collector, the wedding banquet, the sheep and the goats, and others, including the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13.

Parables differ from fables. The world is calling the Bible a book of fables, but parables differ from fables in that a fable is not a real situation. An example of a fable is any of Aesop's stories in which animals talk. In those stories the animals are simply people in disguise. Parables also differ from allegories, since in an allegory each, or nearly each detail has a meaning. The best known and probably most successful allegory ever written is C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.

In the Parables of Jesus not every detail has a deep meaning. In fact, to try to force meaning into each of the details produces strange and sometimes even obviously false doctrines. When we talk of analogies from the Bible, we have to be very careful not to take the analogies too far, because when you take an analogy too far, it becomes ridiculous. In the parables of Jesus not every detail has meaning, at least deep meaning. I think every *word* has meaning. But every word does not have the deepest of meanings, so parables are real life stories from which one or more basic truths can be drawn. As Matthew 13:10-17 make clear Jesus implemented the use of parables at this specific stage in His ministry for the deliberate purpose of withholding further truth about Himself and the Kingdom of God from the general crowds. These were meant for only the people whose mind he opened.

Matthew 13:10-17 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables because, seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor

do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear would you hear and did not hear it."

So masses of people had rejected Him and therefore could not understand the deeper things that He now needed to reveal about the Kingdom. The disciples, on the other hand, had begun to believe Him, and were looking to Him for teaching, and therefore He taught His lessons in parables and then explained the stories after to them. In fact, as Matthew makes clear from chapter 13 on, that the explanation of the parables is always given to the disciples alone and never to the crowds.

Matthew 13 contains seven parables, all of which have one theme—the Kingdom of God. They are called the Parables of the Kingdom, and it is no accident that these are the first parables encountered, since from the beginning, Matthew has been writing about the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Matthew's gospel presents Jesus as the King of Israel, just as Mark presents Him as the Son of Man, and Luke as the Servant. But whether we give Matthew that specific emphasis or not, there is no doubt that Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom is the major theme of this gospel.

The first verse in Matthew introduces Jesus as the son of David, Israel's great king. Jesus' forerunner John the Baptist is said to have come preaching the kingdom of heaven. Taken together, Jesus' parables show the nature, origin, hindrances to, and victory of Christ's work of spreading His gospel through His messengers between the days of His coming and His coming again.

Now we come to the Parable of the Sower, which is found in Matthew 13:3-9 and it is explained in verses 19-23. It is also found in Mark 4 and in Luke 8. But we are going to look at Matthew 13 and use that as a basis. Jesus reveals why those who hear the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God are

not always receptive in the same way. People who are called have their minds opened. The Holy Spirit enables them to take it heart. Yet many see its surface value, but do not internalize it.

The parable illustrates the church's relationship to the different groups of people with which it comes in contact. Jesus uses three components: the sower, the seed, and the soil to indicate the differences. So His story shows the fate of the sown seed, the different types of soils on which it fell, and the resulting effects. Though Jesus names it the Parable of the Sower, the subject matter emphasizes the challenge of the diverse soils. Nevertheless, the sower does not play a minor role in the parable, since without him, no sowing could occur without which there would be no possibility of fruit. The sower primarily represents Jesus Christ Himself.

Matthew 13:37 And He answered and said to them, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man [Jesus Christ].

However, by spiritual bond, God's church, which carries out His will, also represents the sower by extension. And so God's ministers may be considered sowers of the gospel as well.

The Parable of Sower is essential because it introduces and anticipates the whole series of parables in Matthew 13. Back to the beginning of chapter 13 we are going to read verses 1-4 to begin with. Of course, this parallels Mark 4 and Luke 8.

Matthew 13:1-4 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore. Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them."

Jesus described natural conditions regarding seed and soils here. A farmer places seed in the ground so it will sprout and bear fruit. Now some seeds fall on unplowed, unturned, hard ground. This type of soil does not allow the seed to sink in, and the birds easily find and devour the seed.

Matthew 13:5-6 "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away."

So the seed fell there, it sank in, but only to a very shallow depth. It sprang up quickly, but it also faded quickly in the sun's heat because it had no root. When the sun grows hot, representing the light of God's truth, exposing them, or trials and persecution testing them, the sprouts wither away and the result is an inadequate root system. Fertile and rich soil provides nutrients for the seeds to produce a crop that varies in its yield. It is common for crops to produce 100, 60, or 30 grains for each one sown. For example, some strains of wheat will produce a crop 1,200 or 1,500 times the original amount of seed sown. That is a miracle in itself, is not it?

Matthew 13:7 "Some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choke them."

Biblical references to thorns are always negative, even threatening. For example, in Judges 8:7 When the leaders of Succoth refused to give Gideon's army bread to eat. "So Gideon said, "For this cause, when the Lord has delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into my hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!"

The use of thorn imagery throughout Scripture emphasizes biblical messages of punishment, worthlessness, and nonproductivity.

Matthew 13:8-9 "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

So not all of Christ's parables are explained. In fact, most are not. But the Parable of the Sower is clearly explained. The emphasis is on the various kinds of hearts and how they reject or receive Christ's message. The seed sown is the Word of God, the Bible. The word fell on four types of classifications of people.

Matthew 13:18-23 "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who receives 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."

So that is the explanation given here. Now let us look at the four types or classifications of people individually and how they are explained.

Jesus starts with seed by the wayside in verse 19. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who receives seed by the wayside."

So the first and largest number were those by the wayside. They were the millions who heard but the truth of God's Word never sank in. There was no response from this largest number, though they did hear, at least in part. The Worldwide Church of God at one time ran an advertisement in the Reader's Digest for India, and they got over 1,000,000 replies, or responses. It overwhelmed them, and they never did it again because it was just too much. So that would be the type of thing that would fit into the wayside.

Now, this first type of soil represents the hard heart of which there are many today as well as in Christ's time. It is described as soil along the path, and this ground has been trampled down by the many feet that have passed through that way over many years. Because the soil is hard, the seed that falls there merely lies on the path and does not sink in. And the birds, which Christ compares to the devil or the devil's workers, soon snatch it away.

What is it that makes the human heart hard? There can only be one answer, and you know the answer. It is sin. Sin hardens the heart and the heart that is hardened sins even more broadly and deliberately, and this type of person is described in the first chapter of Romans.

Romans 1:20-21 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [divine nature], so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Romans 1:31-32 . . . undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgement of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

So those who condone sin also deserve death. This passage can be summarized this way. The person begins by suppressing the truth about God that may be known from nature, plunges into the spiritual ignorance and degradation that inevitably follows, and at last comes not only to practice the sins of evil persons, but to approve them as well. Here we see both halves of the circle. Sin leads to a rejection of God and God's truth, and the rejection of truth leads to even greater sin. What is it that leads such a person to reject the truth of God in the first place? According to Paul, it is a determined opposition to the nature of God Himself, which Paul describes as human godlessness and wickedness.

Romans 1:18-19 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth and unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

So they are without excuse. Virtually all God's attributes whether sovereignty, holiness, omniscience, immutability, or even divine love are offensive to the natural man *because* he recognizes them. So rather than repent of sin and turn for mercy to a God who is altogether sovereign, holy,

knowing, and unchangeable, men and women suppress the knowledge they have and refuse their search for the spiritual knowledge that could and should heal and lead them to salvation. So we see "even" the scientists of the world lying just to get their grants and to further their agenda. People are in a declining moral state because they love sin, and sin hardens people's hearts and therefore they will not receive the truth of God when it is preached to them.

The opposition of the unconverted heart to God's sovereignty is especially evident in the Kingdom parables because kingdom means rule and rule is the same as sovereignty. And when Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God, He came preaching God's right to rule over the minds and hearts of all people, and they did not like it. They hated it, and they hated Him for it.

But that is precisely what the people involved did not want. Adam did not want it. He had great freedom, but he was offended by what he saw as God's unreasonable and arbitrary restriction of his eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If God exercised His sovereignty at that point, well, it was there that Adam would rebel. So he did, and he deserved the death penalty. And this spirit of rebellion against God's sovereignty worked itself out in history until eventually Jesus Christ came to earth. And the response of His people was, "We will not have this Man rule over us!" Exactly what mankind has said in his heart since the beginning.

So it is also today, and this is probably the greatest reason for the rejection of God's grace in Jesus Christ at this and any other time in history. What they needed to do is humble themselves and submit their lives to Jesus Christ. This is one of the things that I have been showing all the way down through the history of the church since Christ, is the attacks that the church has faced and what they have done to come out with sterling character.

Next there is the seed on stony ground in verses 20-21. "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles."

So the second group were those on the rocks who, when they heard, were interested and received the message with joy. Many of these were baptized, however they had no root and temporarily believed, but because they lacked depth of purpose or capacity to grow spiritually, they soon dropped out.

The stony ground represents those who hear the gospel and feel titillated by its truth. Though their senses are excited, they have no depth of understanding, no rich soil in which they may take root and grow. While suffering anxiety from sin they respond to the attractive offer of God's mercy. The truth offers them peace of mind, pardon from sin, and salvation with eternal life. Believing they are forgiven, their anxiety seems to disappear, and temporary peace and happiness fill their lives. But they have no foundation upon which to support permanent joy. Their happiness soon subsides, as does their desire to live righteously. They just cannot continue with it.

They cannot persevere. They begin to fade from God's truth because they have no real appreciation for Christ's sacrifice or the conviction to resist temptation or to endure trials and persecution. Because they exhibit no true repentance, it becomes evident that they are not true Christians. Excited human emotion carries them for a time, but it cannot sustain them through the long process of conversion.

Many people fit this description of a shallow heart. We see them in all the greater churches of God congregations. Their shallow hearts are attracted to the excitement of a place where friendly people gather together as they would in a club. They hear God's Word preached and seem to fit in. They even claim to be a member of the church. But then some difficulty arises—the loss of a job, misunderstandings with other Christians, sickness, or even a bad romance—and just as suddenly as they once seemed to embrace the faith, they fall away because they were never really converted. Just being in church mouthing the things you hear other people say does not make you a Christian.

Yours may be an extremely shallow heart. Your heart may be like rocky soil, and so we certainly want to do everything we can to come out of that attitude. So those type of people, you need to really pray with heartfelt prayer to God and ask Him to open their minds.

Next there is the seed among thorns, in verse 22. "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and he becomes unfruitful."

Those among thorns stand for having a strangled heart. When they heard the message, they were baptized, but the cares and riches of the world choked them. They still wanted to be like the world. They were liberals, in many cases. They brought forth no fruit to perfection. The thorny ground symbolizes those who become consumed by the anxieties of this physical life and the deceitful enticements of wealth.

Now when I speak of wealth here or riches, I think it is safe to say that every one of us in the United States and in the nations of Israel, the descendants of Israel around the world, are rich compared to the rest of history. So the way people lived and the way we live today and what we have in the way of material blessings, material wants, makes us rich compared to the rest in history. So think of it that way.

The constant pressures of everyday life, providing sustenance, maintaining employment, seeking education, and performing social duties can be distracting, causing Christians to ignore God and spiritual growth. The desire for wealth magnifies this distraction. It is enticing but yields the expected rewards. It promises to make us happy but when gained, leaves a spiritually empty.

I Timothy 6:7-10 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of

money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The temptation and pursuit of wealth produces bad fruit: dishonesty, stealing, oppression of the poor, and taking advantage of others. This type of person has a heart that is strangled by things. Jesus describes those things as thorns, and we know this was true and Jesus' day because of Christ's many warnings against riches.

Matthew 19:23-24 And then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly I say to you, that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Luke 18:22-23 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him [that is, the rich man], "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

So if that was true in Jesus' day among people whom we would regard, for the most part, as quite poor, how much truer must it be in ours? We are choked with riches! We have cars and houses, boats and bank accounts, and all the modern gadgets of our materialistic culture. There is this point too. Riches do not choke a person all at once. It is a gradual process. Like the weeds in Christ's parable, riches grow up gradually. Very slowly. They strangle the budding of spiritual life within. Beware of that if you either have great possessions or are on your way to acquiring them, or desiring them. Above all, beware if you are saying, "I need to provide for myself now. I'll think about spiritual things when I am older." That does not work and here is why. Jesus warned against that very thing.

Luke 12:16-21 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to

store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" [Is this not what people say when they reach 65, 66, or whatever is retirement age? That is what they want to do. They want to do this, at least in our society.] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

By historical standards, most of us are rich today, so all of us must beware.

Next, there is the seed on good ground, in verse 23. Finally, we get to something more positive. "But he who receives 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."

The fourth and last type of soil is the one to which the entire parable has been building up. Those others were contrasts. This group is the smallest of all, and were those on good ground, which kept the word and came out of the world, growing spiritually in character and biblical knowledge. They brought forth fruit with patience in varying degrees, they are consistently faithful. So they persevere, and they continue to persevere no matter what happens.

Now the good ground corresponds to those whose open hearts and minds are softened by God's calling and receive it genuinely. They are a rich and fine soil, a mind that submits itself to the full influence of God's truth. It is this mind of good ground that is unified with the body of Christ, the church.

Ephesians 4:1-6 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness [that is humility] and gentleness, with longsuffering [patience], bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The called of God not only accept His Word, the message of Jesus Christ, as rich soil accepts a seed for growth, they also bear much fruit. John 15:5, 8 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. . . . By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." It is the humble, open heart that receives the Word of God like good soil receives seed and bears much fruit.

Let us begin to wrap this up. There are many minor points we should remember. Let me give you a few very quickly.

Only a portion in the parable, that is one-fourth or less, of the preaching of the gospel bears fruit in Christ's or any other age. We should remember that even Jesus did not get everyone to believe Him, though many did. And if this is so, we must not think we have failed when people reject our efforts to promote God's truth. On the other hand, we should be encouraged in our witness by knowing that some will believe and we will have a hand in helping them to see God. Also, the only sure evidence of a genuine reception of the Word of God in a person's life is spiritual fruit. Although we are not saved by our good works, the total absence of them, that is good fruit, indicates that we have never been truly converted.

Furthermore, the presence of fruit is the important thing, not necessarily the amount of it, at least in most cases, depending on various factors. We do as much as we can with what we are given to work with, and God will give us more to be able to do more.

But these things are all unimportant without the main one, namely that it is only the humble, loving, open heart that willingly receives the Word of God with gladness and conviction. Not the hard heart, not the shallow heart, and not the strangled heart. Only the open heart that continually submits to the will of God is the heart that produces fruit.

We can produce nothing unless the divine Gardener breaks up the hard ground, uproots the rocks, and removes the thorns. That is our hope, not you, but the Gardener is our hope. Notice what God said through the prophet Ezekiel who wrote to the unconverted of his day.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

So God's Word often falls on ears of people who have hearts of stone, callused by sin, on whom it makes no room for impression. Like seed on the hard-packed road, it is consumed before it ever has a chance to develop. And such hardened people soon lose interest in Christ's good news and continue in the ways of the world. All who are merely intrigued by God's Word are not chosen by Him. All those who are called are not beyond being enticed by the world. Those God chooses understand the gospel because it comes only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Without this spiritual power the hearer is susceptible to having God's knowledge stolen by Satan, the accuser, the tempter.

When God calls us, he is offering us a new heart with a new Spirit to enable us to produce spiritual fruit by walking in His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments. We must take Him up on His offer with conviction and humility. All of us must regard Jesus Christ's wisdom as a warning. Many are called, but few are chosen. Everyone have a persevering remainder of the Sabbath.