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FRUITFULNESS: THE CULTIVATION OF THE HEART

by Dan Trygg

After the breaking up of the soil, the task is not over. Fruitfulness still will not follow upon a sincere repentance alone. **A complete repentance is a radical change of mind or world view. This implies *not only* a rejection of the values and habits of the old world view, *but also* an agreement with the importance of the positive aspects of the new life.** This initiates a process of change in thought and behavior patterns. In God's call to Jeremiah, He appointed him "to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). **Following the negative side of repentance must come the positive aspect, a new vision, a new direction for one's life.** The positive side embraces the necessary choices required to bring that new life about. Real repentance includes the willingness to pursue the entire procedure involved in producing fruitfulness. **Positive choices must be made. New approaches to life must be pursued.** The fruitful life will not be a passive life. Abiding in the Vine is obviously not a passive proposition, or Jesus would not have found it necessary to command us to do so. **Abiding is not just a faith position, it is a faith process.**

In Hosea 10:12, we find this emphasis on the positive choices put into perspective: "Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you." **Along with the breaking up of the soil, we must sow seed. We must seek the Lord,** an activity that requires active choices which must continually be made, until the fruitfulness desired comes to pass. Again, in 6:1a,3a, "Come, let us return to the Lord... So let us know, let press on to know the Lord." Or, again in 12:6, "Therefore, return to your God, observe kindness and justice, and wait for your God continually." Note that the concept of repentance, or "returning to the Lord", is followed by the exhortation to persevering, positive volitional action. Even waiting for the Lord is an activity which requires positive, persevering choice.

Sometimes, we want to make the growth process too simplistic. We have been taught to think that if we just get our bodies to church for some worship and exposure to the Word of God, everything will work out. Just keep sowing that Word into our hearts, and we will grow fine. **The picture is quickly complicated, however, as we become aware of other growth-factors.** For example, in Mk. 4:1-20, Jesus' parable of the sower, we observe that the seed of the Word of truth has no productivity at all when it falls upon a hardly packed surface, which it cannot penetrate. It is quickly snatched away by Satan (vs. 15). Again, in the example of rocky soil (vss. 16,17), we see a heart which will not allow truth to penetrate too deeply. Consequently, the impression of truth is quickly cut off by adverse or threatening conditions. Truth is given no place for its roots to go down into the soil of the heart deep enough to be securely established. Thus its life cannot be supported, and the productivity of the Word passes away. In the third example, that of the seed among the thorns (vs. 18,19), water and nutrients are sufficient to support life. However, when the plant springs up, the demands from the surrounding thorns detract from the life potential of the soil. While the life produced by the Word of truth continues, it never comes to fruition because of these other distractions that rob the soil. **Only under the optimum growth conditions will the fullest potential for fruit-bearing be revealed** (vs. 20).

Breaking up the fallow ground, or turning over the soil of our hearts, happens as we initially open up areas of our lives to the Lord that have not been tender and open toward Him. Much more is required, however, in order to see the life of God fully manifested in a mature, healthy, fruit-bearing crop of His planting. **Cultivation of the heart is not only a negative turning away from the old, but also requires positive activity** which extends beyond the preparation of the soil of the heart. **Cultivation is an ongoing process that recognizes the**

changing condition of the heart. The soil of one's inner being does not ever merely stand in readiness for growth. **There are continuous forces at work to harden the heart, to deceive it, distract it, rob it of energy and motivation.** The making of new choices brings about the actual sowing of seed, the weeding, watering, etc., necessary for the righteous fruit to come to maturity. Different varieties of fruit, corresponding to individual differences in people, can only successfully be produced by methods that vary according to the peculiarities of that fruit. **There are a variety of cultivation methods which will be necessary in producing a fully-orbed life of godliness.**

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful (or sinful) way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way". (Psa. 139:23,24)

FOR MEDITATION: Hosea 10:12.

"Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you."

The Slavery of Ingrained Habits

"Our ordinary method of dealing with ingrained sin is to launch a frontal attack. We rely on our willpower and determination. Whatever may be the issue for us -- anger, fear, bitterness, gluttony, pride, lust, substance abuse -- we determine never to do it again; we pray against it, fight against it, set our will against it. But the struggle is all in vain, and we find ourselves once again morally bankrupt or, worse yet, so proud of our external righteousness that 'whitened sepulchers' is a mild description of our condition.

"In Colossians Paul lists some of the outward forms that people use to control sin: 'touch not, taste not, handle not'. He then adds that these things 'have indeed a show of wisdom in *will worship*' (Col. 2:20-23). 'Will worship' -- what a telling phrase, and how descriptive of so much of our lives. The moment we feel we can succeed and attain victory over sin by the strength of our will alone is the moment we are worshipping the will. Isn't it ironic that Paul looks on our most strenuous efforts in the spiritual walk and calls them idolatry, 'will worship'?

"Willpower will never succeed in dealing with the deeply ingrained habits of sin. Emmet Fox writes, 'As soon as you resist mentally any undesirable or unwanted circumstance, you thereby endow it with more power -- power which it will use against you, and you will have depleted your own resources to that exact extent.'

"'Will worship' may produce an outward show of success for a time, but in the cracks and crevices of our lives our deep inner condition will eventually be revealed. You see, by dint of will people can make a good showing for a time, but sooner or later there will come that unguarded moment when the 'careless word' will slip out to reveal the true condition of the heart. If we are full of compassion, it will be revealed; if we are full of bitterness, that also will be revealed.

"It is not that we plan to be this way. We have no intention of exploding with anger or parading a sticky arrogance, but when we are with people, what we *are* comes out. Though we may try with all our might to hide these things, we are betrayed by our eyes, our tongue, our chin, our hands, our whole body language. Willpower has no defense against the unguarded moment. The will has the same deficiency as the law -- it can only deal with externals. It is incapable of bringing about the necessary transformation of the inner spirit."