

Introduction

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale worked for Grove Patterson, editor of the *Detroit Journal*, shortly after graduating from college. Peale relates the following life-changing incident:

One day he called me in and said, "What is the matter with you, Norman? Why are you afraid? You seem to have no confidence in yourself. You can handle this job, but you must have self-confidence. Besides, no one should go through life scared and filled with self-doubt as you are. Your stories are very good. You can be a great reporter if you do what I tell you."

"Anything you say, sir."

"You've got to develop greater self-confidence."

"How can I do that?" I asked.

Mr. Patterson was one of the greatest Christians I ever knew. He said, "*Center your life in Jesus Christ, our Savior, and read the Bible until it takes hold of you. When you get the Bible inside of you and Jesus Christ becomes real to you, then you will no longer be afraid* [Italics Mine].

You will have normal self-confidence. Of course, you may have moments when self-doubt will come, but now you will be able to overcome it." [Norman Vincent Peale, "How to Have Confidence in Yourself," *Creative Help for Daily Living Part II* 32/1 (27 May 1979): 17-18].

The key to a successful life is to internalize the Word of God--to listen to God with the heart.

Parable of the Soils

The Parable of the Soils is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; and Luke 8:4-15. This parable is a key to other parables of Jesus, since Jesus explains this parable in detail. [R. C. Trench, *Notes On the Parables of Our Lord*, Popular Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948), pp. 16, 29-33]. It deals with inner transformation through

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hearing the Word of God:

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that,

"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" [Isaiah 6:9-10]

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown. Mark 4:1-20, NIV

The setting is a natural amphitheater. Jesus sat in a boat and the people sat on the shore. The water carried the voice of Jesus to the people who lined the gently sloping shoreline. There may have been a farmer sowing grain in the distance when Jesus called out, "Look! A farmer was sowing seed and some of the seed fell on the hard-packed soil by the road."

Thus Jesus began with a familiar event to teach a truth that would affect the destiny of billions of people.

The word "parable" is the transliteration of the compound New Testament Greek word, *para* "alongside" +

bole

, "to cast." Hence, Jesus placed an unknown spiritual truth alongside a known earthly truth in

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order to teach a new truth to those who would listen.

There is one central truth in each parable. If one did not understand the truth at the time, it would exist in story form in the mind of the hearer, so that it might be understood at a later point in the spiritual development of the hearer. If one chose to harden his heart and not receive more spiritual understanding, he would never understand the truth. This could be an act of mercy, since, according to Jesus, we will be judged according to our understanding or light that we have.

The first soil was a hard-packed soil and represented people with hardened hearts, where the Word of God did not penetrate and was consequently stolen by Satan. The people represented here never had saving faith, since, ". . . faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ" (Romans 10:17, NIV).

The second soil consisted of an extremely thin layer of soil over a solid rock. The people represented here received the Word in a "soulless," superficial way and immediately fell when under pressure.

The third soil was good, but was infested with thorns. The people represented here were genuine Christians, but they allowed legitimate concerns and materialistic values to take precedence over the Word of God. Thus, there was not a complete Christlike transformation in their beings.

The fourth soil was good in varying degrees. The persons portrayed here were Christians who opened their hearts to the Word of God in varying degrees and were transformed accordingly.

Jesus is the primary sower, the soil is the human heart and the Word of God is first an abstract Word that becomes incarnate. Stated another way, the Word is form and when superimposed upon a malformed human heart, that human becomes a new Christ-like being.

Jesus teaches us that the place of the Bible is not on a fireplace mantel, coffee table, bookshelf, etc., but in the human heart. *The best translation of the Word of God is a human being.* God

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abstracted his essential nature and placed it in a book--
the Bible

--as a means to reproduce himself in the human heart. Of course, the Holy Spirit superintends from start to finish.

The purpose of the abstract Word of God is to transform the individual into the image of Christ. Once one understands God's purpose relative to the Word of God, he can cooperate in the process.

A Christian Epistemology

In the Parable of the Soils, Jesus teaches the importance of both *what* one hears and *how* one hears. Using these scriptures along with other selected scriptures, we can construct a basic outline for a Christian epistemology.

Ideally, the whole Word of God would be received. Jesus said, ". . . Take care *what* [italics mine] you listen to." (Mark 4:24a, New American Standard Bible). He also said, "Therefore take care *how* [italics mine] you listen. . . ." (Luke 8:18, New American Standard Bible).

In this case, the Word of God would be received into the body (through the eye, ear, or touch gates); into the soul (through the conscious, then through the preconscious, then through the unconscious); and into the heart (the spirit--the deepest level of understanding).

Another possibility would be the reception of the Word on a mere intellectual plane. The Word would stop somewhere in the mind and go no deeper. In this case, the individual would not have saving faith. John Wesley warned of the danger of substituting "mental assent" for faith.

Then there are some who immediately "turn off" the Gospel. This can be done either mentally or by actually doing something physical like switching channels on a television set to avoid hearing the Word of God.

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Tragically, there are those who completely avoid contact with the Gospel. They have made a foolish choice to reject Christ and have learned how to minimize exposure to the truth of God's Word.

Four substitutes for the Word of God are mentioned in the Bible:

1. Human Reason
2. Traditions of men
3. Philosophies of men
4. Doctrines of demons

Human reason is based on mere *sense perception*. Reason and sense perception are both good. However, the Word of God must transcend them. One biblical example of believers taking of the Word of God above human reason and sense perception is the case of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 13-14.

Traditions of men is another substitute for the Word of God:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men"
Matthew 15:1-9, NIV

Many traditions that religious people have inherited are not scriptural. Their sources may be rationalistic as cited above, or traditions may stem from ignorance and superstition. However, it

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would not be proper to throw out all tradition. The proper way to deal with tradition is to hold on to the best understanding of God's Word that we may have. Then, we must constantly revise our understanding of the Word of God according to new light that the Holy Spirit gives.

Philosophies of men is another substitute for the Word of God:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Colossians 2:8, NIV

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." [Isaiah 29:14]

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25, NIV

Each of us has a guiding philosophy or theology. It may not be systematized and written in philosophical or theological language, but it is there nonetheless. The important thing is to upgrade one's theology continually with the Word of God.

Doctrines of demons is the most extreme and dangerous substitute for the Word of God. The world is filled with many voices, religions, philosophies and ideologies. Some of them are inspired by demons:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

1 Timothy 4:1-2, NIV

Keep in mind that some may have been brought up in beliefs that were inspired by demons, but who haven't rejected Christ. They can be delivered from wrong beliefs.

Probably the most common predicament of Christians today is the position of having a "curious mixture" of the Word of God and other content.

It is also common to hold part of the Word of God on an *intellectual* level and part on a heart (spirit) level. How does one move the Word of God into the heart?

Internalize the Word of God

Here are twelve practical steps to help internalize the Word of God.

1. Establish a right relationship with God. Confess all known sin to God. Then make things right with people. After one clears his conscience, then he must choose to obey God as a lifestyle. This means walking in the light of his Word as the Holy Spirit illuminates his Word.
2. Pray in the Spirit in order that the heart might be further prepared to receive the Word.
3. Quiet the body and mind. To facilitate this, do all daily chores possible before beginning to read the Bible, so that the mind is undistracted.
4. Since psychomotor functions tend to distract, it would be better to sit or lie down.
5. It is important to rid oneself of all distractions, both internal and external, before, during and after Bible reading and meditation. A good time for Bible reading would be at bedtime, unless one is too tired.
6. Read the Word of God. One should read a small portion carefully. (There is a time to read large portions quickly, but not in this case).
7. Memorize key scriptures.
8. Meditate on selected verses. Christian meditation is not "emptying" the mind to let the devil write on it. Rather, it is filling the mind with the Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to give one understanding of it.
9. Receive the Word into the heart. Some may think that they have done this when the Word is still on the intellectual level. How does one know that he has internalized a particular truth of the Word of God? One has internalized a truth when he automatically ACTS on it!
10. *Think* God's thoughts (Word) consciously as a practice.
11. *Speak* God's thoughts consciously as a practice.
12. *Act* on God's thoughts consciously. Since God's word is true, act like the Bible is true!

As wrong beliefs are purged and the Word of God is internalized, at least two things happen: (1)

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one is conformed more and more into the likeness of Christ and (2) one's self-image is corrected. As a result, self-esteem begins to rise. Then, one's prayer life becomes more effective and his work for the Master becomes more productive.

Assignment: select a passage of scripture that speaks to a particular need. Follow the above twelve steps until you internalize that scripture.

Chapter 6 of my eBook, *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem Using Proven Biblical Principles*.

Download this book free at

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In Essentials: Unity; In non-essentials: Liberty; In all things: Charity

—Peter Meiderlin 1626

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