

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 26, Number 23

June 6, 2010



What Grows In You?

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Colossians 3:16–17)

You can never beat the perspective of Scripture regarding life and the issues we face daily. Our contemporary culture lives on the ragged edge of obsession about body weight, effectively what grows **on** us. But Scripture directs us to the more significant issue of what dwells and grows **in** us.

"... as the rabbis later pointed out, he who dwells in a house is the master of the house, not just a passing guest . . ." ¹⁵⁵

"Thus we are to submit to the demands of the Christian message and let it become so deeply implanted within us as to control all our thinking." ¹⁵⁶¹

Rabbinical teachings often miss the greater spiritual truths of the New Testament, but in this point, they make a powerful point. Ideas that dwell, regularly make themselves at home, in our minds control us and dominate our actions. Paul doesn't teach us to spend at least thirty minutes a day simply reading the Bible. No, he does not require us to read the Bible all day long, but he does require an abiding conscious regard for Scripture, for the "word of Christ," to reside in our minds.

Increasingly over the years I have come to realize the vast distinction between merely reading the Bible and studying it. I fear that far too many Christians faithfully read their Bibles, often on a schedule that allows them to read the whole Bible once or twice in a year. However, if you were to examine how much time these same people spend **studying** their Bibles, you'd likely be sadly disappointed. Reading? Faithfully. Study? Hardly at all.

For a person to read the Bible but not study its teachings is a near equivalent to planting high quality seeds in sterilized, worn out soil, and then leaving it to grow or die on its own. Don't expect a lot of fruit to grow on the plant, assuming the unlikely prospect that it even survives at all. Its leaves will appear yellow and anemic. Its growth will be stunted and weak.

Paul somewhat subtly requires two steps in his opening words. We must begin to make space for the word of Christ to dwell in us before our minds and lives ever realize any of the richness that such intimate companionship with Scripture will foster. But, even after Scripture has finally enriched us, we must continue to foster it so that it lands in already enriched hearts, enhancing its growth, health, and fruitfulness. The two-step process lays the foundation for increased fruitfulness and a healthier, more robust Christian faith. In the soil analogy, as we begin to study and apply Scripture to our lives, we transform red, worn out dirt into enriched fertile soil. The first planting begins to benefit, but later plantings, if that enrichment continues and grows, will prove far more fruitful and healthy than the first planting.

How many times do pastors observe new members in their churches with healthy, hungry minds for Scripture, only to see those same people over time become rigidly complacent and contented? Where they once invested true study time with Scripture, they now hardly open their Bible to read it. Study it; what is that? They act as if they decided they know everything they need to know about Scripture for the rest of their life. By this neglect of Scripture, these people shut down fruit-bearing in their life. They often become experts at telling people what is wrong about everything they observe, and they demonstrate amazing skill at rationalizing their own failures and sins, often finding creative ways to blame others rather than accept personal responsibility for their own actions.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another.... Take note of the link between one's

¹⁵⁵ ¹⁵⁵ 155. Dunn, p. 236.

¹⁵⁶ ¹⁵⁶ 156. Vaughan, p. 216.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, Col 3:16 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

ability to teach and admonish others and the manner in which the word of Christ dwells in him/her. We cannot possibly admonish others when the word of Christ barely survives a fruitless, anemic existence in our own lives. I believe this point explains the necessity that Paul sets forth in his list of ministerial and deacon qualifications, "And let these also first be proved...." (1 Timothy 3:10) You don't ordain a man, hoping that he will eventually measure up to the office. You only ordain him after he has proved these qualities with consistency over time. While most churches never retract a man's ordination, I have found it rather amazing over the years to observe how a man in either office slowly dissolves out of influence and relevance when he fails to live up to the Biblical qualifications of his office. We may not "unordain" a man, but, when a man chooses not to live up to the office he fills, God removes him from a position of influence.

... *teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* Paul expands the role of teaching and admonishing from the pulpit to the pew. Every person in the congregation is responsible to labor toward this objective. I have often used this passage and its companion in Ephesians 5:19-20 to encourage--to insist on--congregations actively selecting the hymns that we sing in our church services. Song leaders should set the mood of the singing worship to urge people in the congregation to select the hymns that we sing. First, it offers the opportunity for active participation in the worship service. More importantly, it gives each member the opportunity to "teach and admonish" others by the words of the hymn selected. I will never forget walking into our church one Sunday morning and observing a young mother and her children sitting in their seats while most of the people who had arrived were in the church's lunch room visiting. This young mother looked incredibly sad. She was looking intently at a particular hymn. When I spoke to her, I noticed the hymn that she was reading. When she didn't call out the hymn during the song service that morning, I made sure that we sang it as our closing hymn. The hymn, "Does Jesus Care?" voiced this young mother's intense struggles with a dreadfully difficult situation at that moment. She truly needed the church to know her state of mind and to pray for her. Song leaders, have a hymn or two in mind if no one makes a selection, but work to encourage the members of the congregation to actively select the hymns you sing in every worship service. This opportunity is often the only way folks can speak to the congregation about something that is truly a burden to their heart.

...*singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.* Why do Primitive Baptists not use external musical instruments to accompany their songs? Simple; the New Testament instrumental accompaniment to singing in worship should be the internal "heart-strings" of every member who sings. External musical instruments are a relatively new thing outside the Roman church's history. One of the earliest and most respected theologians of the Methodist Church wrote the following words in his commentary on Amos 6:5.

I believe that David was not authorized by the Lord to introduce that multitude of musical instruments into the Divine worship of which we read, and I am satisfied that his conduct in this respect is most solemnly reprehended by this prophet; and I farther believe that the use of such instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is without the sanction and against the will of God; that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion, and that they are sinful. If there was a wo to them who invented instruments of music, as did David under the law, is there no wo, no curse to them who invent them, and introduce them into the worship of God in the Christian Church? I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity. The late venerable and most eminent divine, the Revelation John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into the chapels of the Methodists said, in his terse and powerful manner, "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither Heard nor Seen." I say the same, though I think the expense of purchase had better be spared.²

Do not miss Clarke's quote from John Wesley, "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither Heard nor Seen." Thus Primitive Baptists' strict avoidance of instrumental music, external instruments, is far more historical and Biblical than the endless array of bands and musical instruments that commonly

² Clarke, Adam, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible*, (Amos 6:5), copied from SwordSearcher Bible Software.

appear in contemporary churches today. While far too many Christians either try to ignore or to rewrite history to suite their present personal fancy, we respectfully hold to the New Testament as our rightful and valid authority for our method and manner of worship. In attending occasional worship services in non-Primitive Baptist churches over the years I have often recalled the title to a once-popular song, "Dueling Banjos," as I observed the organist and the pianist trying to outdo each other in their performances. The sound of human voices seemed little more than a faint whisper beneath the dominant noise of the dueling piano and organ. I wonder. When/Why did the Methodist Church decide to abandon the strong convictions of her founder and one of her most respected theologians regarding this question?

I began speaking in church during my fourteenth year. This early beginning in some ways forced me to grow up before my time. In other ways I had to live with my own immaturity until life experiences and deeper Bible study (See my point above) nudged me into a more mature state of mind. As a young teenager in this situation, I recall my first visit to a little Primitive Baptist church in north Mississippi. Sitting right on a front bench to the side of the pulpit I observed an old man, singing at the top of his voice. The poor old man had no sense of music. As the cliché goes, he couldn't carry a tune in a basket, but that didn't stop him from giving full volume to his effort. My immediate--and sadly immature--first reaction was near disgust. Doesn't this poor old man know he's singing out of tune? Why won't he just sit there and listen to those who can sing? Shortly after that worship service ended, I had occasion to join the pastor in visiting with this man in his home. I quickly began to feel the stinging rebuke of conscience for my hasty and immature judgment. This godly man was making incredible melody in his heart, even if his voice missed every note. I came to look forward to hearing this precious man's out-of-tune voice because I learned to listen to the melody of the heart more than the mechanical melody of the voice. How powerfully this brother taught me in all wisdom that day, and he didn't even know it. That, my friends, is what Biblical worship, especially Biblical worship in singing, is all about.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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