

Pinching Apples

I had some doubts on whether to send out this week's essay as it seemed a bit lengthy on describing the shortcomings of the design flaws of the Millennium Tower in San Francisco. But the emphasis was on the critical importance on establishing a solid foundation and that will tie in with what has been brewing this week. That, along with some of the scriptures, Bereans this week, and that Still Small Voice, a few parables came into focus.

It seems that patching the busted drum at least until Tabernacles is fitting, until we order some new drums. The focus on our foundation with God should never be clearer and more intense as it is now as we are approaching the fall Holy Days.

Psalm 82:5- "They do not know, neither do they understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken out of course."

Our spiritual responsibility for growth never decreases or lessens simply because we have "been in the church" for a certain length of time or we perform "specific functions within the group." This is not the Scouts and we do not receive merit badges. Our crown of life will not be given while we are still here on Earth.

James 1:12- “Blessed *is the* man who endures trials because, after he has been proved, he shall receive a crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Revelation 2:10- “Do not fear any of the things that you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast *some* of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.”

We have conditions set before us that require our work. Our salvation is not just something that comes in a cereal box or you can purchase through Amazon. God gave His only Son Who died a horrible death on the cross for all mankind for all of our sins, past present and future. When we put our hand to the plow and jump in this race it will require our active participation.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27- “Don’t you know that those who run a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? That is the way you *are to* run in order that you may obtain *the prize*. For everyone who is striving *for mastery* controls himself in all things. Of course, they *do this* so that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we *are striving for* an incorruptible *crown*. I therefore so run, not as one who

is uncertain; so *also* I fight, not as beating *the* air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, after preaching to others, I myself might be rejected.”

Everyone DOES NOT get a trophy or in this case, a crown. Our work necessitates us to produce fruit. We all know we not going to go out and plant vineyards and orchards, but we had better be growing spiritually. Maybe now you are catching the drift where the title is headed.

I had to chuckle at this week’s title as it is definitely showing some age-related orientation. I actually had to go back several pages on the dictionary listings that did not have to do with gardening or skin folding to locate a correct reference. I found one on the fourth page of the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary: [transitive] “To pinch” something (from somebody/something) (British/English, informal) to steal something, especially something small and not very valuable.

-Kids have been pinching our apples again.

I can recall old movies like the Bowery Boys or the Little Rascals stealing apples from apple carts and the term “pinched” was used frequently for stealing in the old gangster shows of that era.

Matthew 7:15-16- “But beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, for within *they* are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits. They do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, do they?”

Our bearing fruit is a requirement set forth in God’s Word. It is scripturally required. We know there are so many Protestant churches that claim faith is all you need. James, the brother of Jesus has a few words to say on this matter.

James 2:18, 20, 26- “18. But someone is going to say, “You have faith, and I have works.” *My answer is:* You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works.”

“20. But are you willing to understand, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”

“26. For as the body without *the* spirit is dead, in the same way also, faith without works is dead.”

These are the same folks who believe that once you are “born again” you are heaven bound and salvation is yours. I hate to disappoint anyone, even those who are called and think they are chosen. God has an eraser for His Book of Life.

When we read the parables Jesus uses in the Gospels, we can sometimes overlook their meanings or assume they all mean and reference the “same” thing. For example, the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13, the wheat (seed) represent the children of the kingdom but the tares represent the children of the wicked one.

Matthew 13:38- “And the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*.”

But if we look a little closer at the parable in Matthew 13:47-50:

Matthew 13:47-50- “Again, the kingdom of heaven is compared to a dragnet cast into the sea, gathering in *every* kind of fish; Which after it was filled was drawn up on shore; and they sat down and collected the *good* into vessels, and the *unfit* they threw away. This is the way it will be in the *end of the age*: the angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the righteous, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

We can see there is a difference of the separation. Note that the parable states “every kind of fish” and they collected the “good” and threw away the “unfit.” It does not specify that the unfit are of the wicked one.

In the coming judgment at the end of the age, God will require more of us than just our going through the motions or “playing church.” Jesus Christ makes it relatively clear in John 15.

John 15:2-6- “He takes away every branch in Me that does not bear fruit; but He cleanses each one that bears fruit, in order that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean through the word that I have spoken to you. Dwell in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, but only if it remains in the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you are dwelling in Me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. The one who is dwelling in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; because apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not dwell in Me, he is cast out as a branch, and is dried up; and men gather them and cast them into a fire, and they are burned.”

We know the judgment will begin in the house of God first.

1 Peter 4:17- “For the time *has come for* judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it first *begins* with us, what *will be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” God is our Righteous Judge.

Our black robes will be waiting for future roles. We must have the character worthy to wear them.

Matthew 7:17-23- “In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree *that is not producing good fruit is cut down and is cast into the fire. Therefore, you shall assuredly know them by their fruits.* Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but the one who *is* doing the will of My Father, Who *is* in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy through Your name? And *did we not* cast out demons through Your name? And *did we not* perform many works of power through Your name?’ And then I will confess to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness.’”

Even those of us who have been called can still be thrown into the fire if we do not bear sufficient fruit. We, as branches cannot produce anything apart from Jesus,

Who is the Vine (**John 15:5**). Our spiritual growth and the fruit we yield is totally dependent upon our relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

If we fail or neglect our relationship, we can become complacent, things will become routine. We will overlook “a little leaven” and begin to ignore worldly things as harmless. Remember Christ’s warning to the Laodiceans...

Revelation 3:15-16- “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would *that* you be *either* cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and *are* neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.”

Our salvation came at an incredible price and we cannot neglect so great a salvation.

Hebrews 2:1-3- “For this reason, it is imperative that we give much greater attention to the things *which* we have heard, lest at any time we should slip away. For if the word spoken by angels was *enforced* without fail, and every transgression and disobedience received just recompense, How shall we escape, *if* we have neglected so great a salvation; which was first received when it was spoken by the Lord, *and* was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*;”

God will judge us far more closely than those He has not called at this time. We may not want to think on these things but we need to keep them in our thoughts as we work towards overcoming our human nature and sinful flesh. We will not be able to “slip one past God.” Party crashing? I do not think so.

Matthew 22:11-14- “And when the king came in to see the guests, *he* noticed a man there who was not dressed in *proper* attire for *the* wedding feast; And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you enter here without a garment *fit* for *the* wedding feast?’ But he had no answer. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind his hands and feet, *and* take him away, and cast *him* into the outer darkness.’ There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few *are* chosen.”

The fruit we produce must come from ourselves. We cannot “pinch” an apple from another person’s cart or pick fruit from someone else’s tree. We had better be giving God *our* very best. Giving a marginal offering did not work out well for Cain in the Old Testament and we have the entire Bible of examples of what *not* to do to learn from (**Genesis 4:5**). Growing in the likeness of Jesus our Savior will yield the Fruits of the Spirit God so desires of us.

John 3:17-21- “For God sent not His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment: that the light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who practices evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, so that his works may not be exposed; But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be manifested, that they have been accomplished by the power of God.”

When we practice truth, we live God’s way of life. We have a strong relationship with Him, a solid foundation in prayer, we acknowledge His presence in our daily lives and the blessings He bestows upon us. Bearing fruit is serious business.

Matthew 25:14-34: “For *the kingdom of heaven is* like a man leaving the country, who called his own servants and delivered to them his property. Now to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one; he *gave* to each one according to his own ability, and immediately left the country. Then the one who had received five talents went and traded with them, and made an additional five

talents. In the same way also, the one who had *received* two *talents* also gained two others. But the one who had received the single *talent* went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Now after a long time, the lord of those servants came to take account with them. Then the one who had received five talents came to *him and* brought an additional five talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered five talents to me; see, I have gained five other talents besides them.' And his lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' And the one who had received two talents also came to him *and* said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; see, I have gained two other talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' Then the one who had received the single talent also came to *him and* said, 'Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. And *because* I was afraid, I went and hid your talent in the earth. *Now* look, you have your own.' His lord answered *and* said to him, '*You* wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather what I did not scatter. Because *you knew* this, you were duty-bound to take my talent to the money exchangers, *so that* when I came, I could have received my own with interest. Therefore, take the talent from him, and give *it* to the one who

has ten talents. For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and *he* shall have abundance; on the other hand, *as for* the one who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken from him. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.’ There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now when the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon *the* throne of His glory; And He shall gather before Him all the nations; and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He shall set the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at *His* left. Then shall the King say to those at His right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from *the* foundation of *the* world.’”

From these parables, we can see that we are God’s servants. He has given us “talents” to use as well. These servants were required to produce so are we. We can see what happened to the “bad example” who failed. We stand to inherit a Kingdom. He will not permit anyone to be an heir unless we are cultivating the character, He so desires in us.

Are we using what God has given us? Are we making efforts to seek Him even more? Or are we burying what He has given us? God makes it clear, there will be penalties if we fail to do our part to meet His terms.

God has given us the most precious gift, the gift of salvation through the life and sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. So costly a price was paid for us to have the hope of eternal life and the forgiveness of sins, would it seem unreasonable to anyone that God would require us to produce something of merit in return? Not that we could ever earn such a gift nor even be worthy but that we would love Him and His Son with such devotion we would forsake a world of sin and follow His Commandments and way of life. God already knows. Amen.