



## **Sowing the Seed Recklessly - Parts 1 to 3** by Gerald Cowan

All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.

### **SOWING THE SEED RECKLESSLY – Part 1**

#### **Second Thoughts about the Parable of the Sower, the Seed, and the Soil**

The parable of the sower, seed, and soil recorded in **Matthew 13:1-23**, **Mark 4:1-20** and **Luke 8:5-14** is one of the most familiar parables of Jesus, one that some think is the easiest to understand and apply. But we might not understand it any more than the first disciples did if we did not have Jesus' own explanation of it. It is relatively simple and easy to grasp when we have his explanation before us. Actually, there are several ways to present and apply the parable by shifting the focus in it. For example, there is something to be said for careful choice and preparation of the ground where you plan to sow your seed, and then taking care to sow it where it is most likely to grow and reproduce. **That would make it a parable about farming – the parable of the SOWER.** There is also something to be said for careful choice of the seed, trying to match it to the soil type, conditions, seasons etc, and then sowing the seed which is most likely to reproduce and grow in the chosen soil. **That would be a parable about selection – the parable of the SEED.** Is there not something to be said about the soil, its capacity for receiving and reproducing the seed, its responsibility for improving itself while preserving, protecting, and promoting growth in the seed – making itself and its potential attractive to the sower? **That would be another parable about selection – the parable of the SOIL.** After reminding ourselves about the meaning of the parable as Jesus explained it we will suggest a different but plausible and practical application.

#### **THE PARABLE AS JESUS EXPLAINED IT.**

There are four elements of the parable, three stipulated and one implied. **The first element is the seed which is to be sown.** The seed planted determines the fruit which it produces. To parody somewhat the Lord's words in **Matthew 7:16-20**, if you plant only corn seed you do not expect it to produce a variety of different vegetables. If you plant a variety of vegetable seeds you do not expect they will all produce the same vegetable. We are astute enough to know that *you will reap what you sow* (**Galatians 6:7-8**), both literally and metaphorically. We should also understand that good healthy fruit is not produced from diseased or genetically altered seed. The nature and quality of the seed determines the nature and quality of what is produced by it.

Jesus said the seed in the parable is the word of God (**Luke 8:11**). We must be sure the seed itself is pure, not corrupted. Not every "Bible" one reads, preaches, or teaches from is an accurate reflection of the original Hebrew or Greek writings. It may have errors in translation. The errors may not be intentional and some, spelling errors

for example, may be relatively harmless. But some are actually deliberately skewed to present doctrines and dogmas of pseudo-Christian, non-Christian, cultic, or denominational views. Paraphrases (such as **The Living Bible**, **The Good News Bible**, and **The Message**) are little more than denominational sermons hiding under a cloak of piety. They are mixed seed: some truth of God, some human religiosity, some modern and post-modern human philosophy. One of the chief gods of post-modern religion is Diversity. The "faith" is spread more in songs and sermons than by scripture-reading. Cringe-worthy songs and cringe-worthy sermons from cringe-worthy singers and speakers have caused the splitting and splintering of nominal Christians around the world into a bewildering number of denominations, churches, and sectarian groups.

What often passes for Christianity today is a hybrid mixture, more human than divine – the kind denounced in Paul's letter to the **Colossians**. Many have their favorite "version" of the Bible while others assume any and all "Bibles" are from God and salvation truth can be gleaned from any of them. Not so! There is not one extant translation which can be certified to be error free and not needing to be updated, revised, or re-translated. **Be careful in your choice of seed. The seed you plant determines the result you will get** from the planting, whether it will be true Christians or counterfeit tares and weeds (**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**)

**The second element of the parable is the sower who sows the seed.** First of all, it is the Lord himself (**Matthew 13:37**). Jesus is explaining about his ministry and the response of people to it. Only an enemy of God would sow corrupt and corrupting seed along with the truth of God. Jesus sowed nothing but good seed: honest, true and accurate, life-giving words of the Spirit of God (**John 6:63b, 68**). As the one who selects and sows the seed, the sower is responsible for the product which comes from it. Neither God nor Christ nor the Spirit is the author of religious confusion (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). One might suppose that Jesus, by virtue of his authority and power, could have prevented others from preaching "fake good news" – he could have struck them blind or mute or incapable; he could have punished them or destroyed them. But he did not do so. Nor can any other sower do so now. Jesus is the primary sower of the gospel seed, but the sower is also any teacher, preacher, proclaimer of the word of God, or anyone doing some one-on-one sharing of the word. In the parable Jesus is explaining to the disciples and the multitudes what to do in sharing the gospel message.

**The third element is the soils into which the seed is sown.** No matter how good the seed and no matter how careful the sower, the soil determines the eventual result. Four types of soil are mentioned here and they are ultimately responsible for what the seed produces. Each type of soil represents the attitudes and actions of one who hears the word of God and is offered the seed of the kingdom.

- ◆ **Hard packed soil** is uninterested and unreceptive. The seed does not penetrate or germinate. Enemies may take it away or destroy it. Nothing is produced by it or from it.
- ◆ **Stony shallow soil** may be quick to respond, but there can be no longevity or durability. What grows up quickly will probably die without producing desirable fruit.
- ◆ **Thorny soil** has too many other things trying to grow in it. It cannot nourish everything. The good seed may not grow to reproductive maturity.
- ◆ **Good soil** means the seed is not hindered and is properly nourished. The seed, the sower, and the soil work together to produce properly. This is no doubt the desire and intention of the Giver of the seed, God himself who provides seed for the sower (**2 Corinthians 9:10-11**).

**A fourth element in the parable is the hazards, handicaps, and hindrances to proper fruit production.** This is implied rather than expressly identified, but clearly intended to be considered if one is to apply the parable correctly. The seed may have been corrupted – altered in some way as in hybrid, genetically engineered variations. It may have other seeds mixed in – thorns, thistles, weeds, and parasites. There are enemies of the seed and enemies of the soil: Satan and those who serve him. Pushers and purveyors of competing seed (practitioners of other religions – including denominations of professing Christianity – genetically engineered or hybrid religion, all of which are of Satan, not of Christ and not of God). The soil's condition is not forced upon it but rather chosen by it, whether directly or by default. The recipient of the word of God may be hard-hearted, indifferent, open to evil companions and influences, lazy, pleasure-seeking, and self-indulgent. The sower is not responsible for and cannot compensate for the conditions and responses of the soil but can be careful to give no encouragement and show no tolerance for errors made by the soil. As a sower you cannot judge the soil, cannot be completely selective according to your own judgment. Some may be receptive and productive that you thought would not be. Some you thought were "good soil" may turn out to be unreceptive and unproductive.

So maybe a point we have missed in the parable is that there is a time for the sower to scatter his seed recklessly, indiscriminately, and continually. Give the soil the opportunity to receive the truth or reject it on its own, don't make the prejudicial decision for it. In physical farming the waste of the seed is an important factor – it is precious and not inexhaustible. So, care is mandatory. But the seed of the word of God is an inexhaustible resource. It is not wasted even when not received by the target soil. Someone else may hear it and receive it, having heard it while you were directing it elsewhere. Put out the seed, in any and every form practical or possible for you. You may not see or ever know what it produces, but you know what it is able to produce – and you want to be an instrument of the Lord in the production.

<><> — *Gerald Cowan, Personal Periodicals Number 680, October 26, 2021*

## **SCATTER THE SEED RECKLESSLY – Part 2 (THE PARABLE OF A DISCOURAGED SOWER OF SEED).**

A certain famous preacher worked hard to prepare provocative and productive sermons. He delivered them carefully, persistently, and prayerfully to a certain group of people. But they were not always well received and seemed ineffective, producing nothing worthwhile. He wrote a painful personal letter which amounted to his final sermon to some people to whom he had given so much. He said he thought perhaps his work among them had been wasted. But for a long time afterward and even until now countless persons in countless generations have read his sermons, including this particular letter, marveled at his understanding, and reveled in his teaching. Many have grown remarkably closer to God in Christ because of this preacher.

The preacher's name was Paul, Christ's apostle to the Gentiles. The letter was written to the Galatians. We thank God we have this letter preserved for us. We read it, teach it, and try to preserve it for the generations yet to come.

Other than the same Paul's letter to the **Romans** perhaps no other writing in the New Testament has had a greater impact and influence upon Christianity than **Galatians**. Our understanding of the relationship of the law of Moses and the Jewish religion to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian religion is shaped by **Galatians**. Our understanding of the plan of salvation by faith, grace, and obedience to the gospel is summed up brilliantly and decisively in Galatians. The kind of life to be lived and the relationships to be sustained with each other and with God are incisively and insightfully outlined in Galatians.

### **GOD'S WORD WILL NOT FAIL OF ITS PURPOSE AND RETURN TO HIM VOID.**

**Isaiah 55:10-11** applies in principle to all the word of God, however and whenever given. God assures that His word will not return to Him without accomplishing what He sent it to do. God intends that people know Him by and through His word. He intends that it get into the minds and lives of people. One purpose, among other things, is to supply seed for the sower – to give one the information he needs to teach others and bring them to God. Commenting on it, Paul prayed,

May He who supplies seed for the sower ... supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness.  
(**2 Corinthians 9:10**)

Some like to stretch this saying of Isaiah and of God and suggest that, though it may not bear fruit immediately, it can stay in the mind for a long time, germinating and producing spiritual results later. Of course, that is true – we have seen it happen. It is true whether it is in producing a Christian or simply the understanding and application of some Christian principle that one later calls to mind and acts upon. That is what keeps some of us teaching and preaching to people who seem to do nothing with it – we trust that it may produce a good effect at some later time.

The seed will not bear fruit unless it is planted in the minds of people. A book on the shelf does nothing on its own. It must be read and applied before it can do anything for the person who has it. It must be read to others, explained to them, and applied by them before it can do anything productive and effective for them. Case in point: owning a copy or several copies of the Bible imparts neither knowledge nor grace to the owner. There will be few if any tangible benefits from the Bible unless it is actually read and applied to one's own life. It is neither adding to nor detracting from God's

word to say that only if it is properly planted can it fulfill His purpose. If it is not planted in the minds of people, it will be as if it did not exist, as if it were not given at all.

The effectiveness (increase) of the word does not depend upon God alone. God gave the word. Some plant it. Some water it. If proper application of the word is made God gives the increase (**1 Corinthians 3:6-9**). The planters and the waterers are fellow workers with God. If there is a productive increase, God and His co-workers rejoice. If not, there is no rejoicing except in the fact that the seed was actually sown and nurtured. God has done his part, the sower has done his part, any and all other co-workers have done their part and cannot be faulted – each is rewarded for his work, whether or not it bears immediate discernible results. If there is no increase because of the failure of the hearers, the soil, it is not the fault of God, the seed, the planters, or the waterers. But if the seed is never planted there is no way it can produce anything.

### **PAUL WAS NOT A RESULTS-ORIENTED PREACHER.**

**He understood what his mission was, what the Lord expected and required him to do (Acts 26:16-19; 1 Corinthians 1:17 and 9:16).** Jesus told him,

“I will make you a minister and a witness of the things you have seen and the things that I will yet reveal to you.” (**Acts 26:18**)

Of his commission Paul said,

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.  
(**1 Corinthians 1:17**)

Yes, and woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. (**1 Corinthians 9:16**)

Paul was sent to plant the seed that Christ gave him. If he did that faithfully he was a good minister of Christ, a faithful steward of Christ – whether or not anybody obeyed the gospel when he preached it to them.

**Paul has a great lesson on preaching in Romans 10:13-21, pertaining particularly to the audience.** *The one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (v. 13).* This does not mean one calls out, “Lord, Lord.” or says, “Oh Jesus,” or “Oh God.” One calls upon the Lord by doing what the Lord says do (**Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21-23**). One cannot call on the Lord if he does not believe in him (**v. 14a**). Faith is essential (**Hebrews 11:6**). One is not actually calling upon the Lord if he does not believe that He is, and that He rewards those who seek him diligently and call upon him (**Hebrews 11:1**). Even if one does the right thing, if he does not believe or if he has doubts, he is not asking or acting in faith, and he will receive nothing (**James 1:6**). But how will any others become believers if they do not hear the words of the Lord, do not hear the truth about the Lord? (**v. 14b**). And how will they ever hear unless someone teaches them the truth? (**v. 14c**). And who is going to go and teach them unless he is sent, unless he feels it is God’s will for him to do it, unless he believes God is sending him to do it? (**v. 15**). It is worth emphasizing here that one cannot plant the seed of God in others if it has not first been planted in him. Some say they feel no call; they do not feel that they are personally sent by God. They believe teaching and preaching are for those who are called to do those things, who are prepared for it and able to do it. Some believe Paul’s reference is only to the

apostles and inspired men of the New Testament. We are not “called” as Paul was. But notice the words of Jesus, in **Matthew 28:19-20**.

“Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you.”

Does that not necessarily imply that those taught should also become teachers, that those who have received the truth should also share with others what they have received?

To an apparently uninspired man named Timothy Paul said,

The things you have heard from me commit to other faithful men who shall then be able to teach others also. (**2 Timothy 2:2**)

The proof of belief on the part of those who hear the gospel is that they do what God says in the gospel, they obey Jesus as Lord. (**Romans 16**). Faith is produced in those who hear the word of God (**17**). When faith is produced, they will call upon the name of the Lord for salvation. The teacher is not in control of the end result. He has done his part by delivering the words of the Lord to them. That is all God sends him to do.

Here are a few questions to ask all would-be and should-be preachers, actually to ask all Christians who should be sharers of the word of God. To whom should you be willing to preach? To whom should you actually preach? Whom would and should you be willing to teach? Whom, if any, should be ignored or excluded, or assumed unworthy to hear God’s word? What should your attitude be in the case of consistently unresponsive hearers? Can you change the word in order to attract a certain audience? Should you avoid certain matters in order not to offend the hearers? Are you ever justified in moving on to a new piece of ground to plant your seed, or should you keep sowing in the same place to the same people? We will address some of these matters later when we say more about selecting the soil in which to plant.

If one is results-oriented, he may become discouraged and move on or even quit when he thinks there are not enough responses to justify his continuing efforts. But if he is service-minded and ministry-oriented he will continue preaching and teaching as he has opportunity. He will trust the soil/hearers to be receptive and trust the Lord to give the appropriate increase.

—-- *Gerald Cowan, Personal Periodicals Number 681, October 27, 2021*

### **SCATTER THE SEED RECKLESSLY – Part 3 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE SOWER, SEED, SOIL**

So far, we have had more to say about more about the sower and the soils than about the seed. The harvest gratifies the hearts of the sowers. But a caveat must be attached to this. The soul-winner must not be content until his sowing produces the fruit that God wants and does not simply satisfy a particular desire of the sower himself. We will pursue that thought in this segment of our essay.

We often stress the point that “*God gives the increase*” (**1 Corinthians 3:6**) – that the fruit of harvest depend upon God – but we do not stress enough that the sower/planter and waterer/ cultivator must do their work; God does not do their part for them. There will be little if any fruit or harvest if everything is simply left up to God. God has provided the seed. It is up to the sower to identify the true seed and select it from among all the doctrinal seeds the world of religion has produced and propagates as alternatives to the valid words of God. We have often made the point that you can reap only what you sow. You will not harvest wheat if you planted barley; figs do not grow from pomegranate seeds, etc. If one plants the doctrinal seed of any denomination or sect, he can only reap an increase and harvest of that particular sect or denomination. The church of the Lord does not increase and grow by increasing membership of any or all denominations.

**Question: How much attention should one give to selection of the soil in which to plant the seed?** Some get the idea from Jesus’ parable that one should avoid wasting the seed by planting in hard bare, stony, or thorn-infested ground, rather to look for good soil and plant there. This, they reason, will assure a good response and produce much fruit for the kingdom of God — also to enhance the sower’s own record as an effective and successful soul-winner (bragging rights are important for enhancing one’s reputation. Why waste one’s time and energy where the potential for success is minimal when one could improve his “score” by judicious choice of to whom he should teach, preach, and share the gospel. That would make this **a parable of the harvest**, with emphasis on numbers and results. This approach led, in times past, to competition to secure the most “responses” to one’s preaching and teaching (a selfish desire to glorify oneself and not enough consideration for the glory of Christ or even for the real good of the “prospect” one is attempting to “convert.” Jesus did not say “seek out the best soil and do your planting there if you want to be a successful soul-winner.” Yes, of course he did say if one consistently rejects and will not receive the word shake the dust off your feet and move on to others who may be more receptive (**Matthew 10:14**).

So maybe a point we have missed in the parable is that there is a time for the sower to scatter his seed recklessly, Preach the word everywhere, to everybody indiscriminately, persistently, and continually. Give the soil/ hearer the opportunity to receive the truth or reject it on its own; don’t make the prejudicial decision for it. In physical farming the waste of the seed is an important factor – it is precious and not inexhaustible, so care is mandatory. But the seed of the word of God is an inexhaustible resource. It is not wasted even when not received by the target soil. Someone else may hear it and receive it, having heard it while you were directing it elsewhere. Put out the seed, in any and every form practical or possible for you. You may not see or ever know what it produces, but you know what it is able to produce – and you want to be an instrument of the Lord in the production. a sower the Lord can approve and appreciate. Remember you are not doing this for yourself but for the Lord and for those you are trying to bring to him. The Lord is not necessarily numbers-oriented, as so many of his people are. Remember the lesson Paul taught us: Christ

does not send us into the world with quota to meet but rather with a gospel to preach, a message to share. The parable of the talents has often been inappropriately forced into consideration (begin reading at **Matthew 25:14-30**). The requirement of using what was given and available was not that each recipient should double the Master's investment in him – the two approved servants were approved because they made an effort to use properly and increase if they could the Master's money. The rejected and condemned servant was not faulted for failure to double the investment made in him but rather because he did nothing with it, nothing at all – did not even try to use the ability which earned him the opportunity to serve his Master (see **25:15** to each according to his own ability). Again, to paraphrase Paul, the work of the sower is not impressed by the number of baptisms (or other "responses" but to preach the gospel, to plant the seed that is able to save the souls of receptive and responsive hearers (**James 1:21**).

**Here are other things a preacher/ teacher must remember:**

- No one can do what is the assigned responsibility of any other person.
- You cannot teach for another.
- You cannot respond for another.
- God cannot give the increase unless the seed is planted (the sower's part) and acted upon (the hearer's part).
- Paraphrase of **1 Corinthians 1:21**. *It pleases God when the preaching of His word receives a proper response, and He saves those who thus become obedient believers.*
- It is fair to say also that it pleases God when His word is preached faithfully even when it does not produce the desired response – He is pleased with the preacher, but He cannot be pleased with the unresponsive hearers.

**Conclusion:** Choose the right seed, the word of God. Remember that Jesus the Sower sowed the seed on all kinds of soil, good and bad. You too must scatter the seed recklessly, wherever you are allowed to do it. If others hear it and act upon it, calling upon the Lord in obedience to it, He will be pleased. And even if they do not respond favorably, you will be a faithful minister to the Lord – you will please the Lord.

—-- Gerald Cowan, *Personal Periodicals Number 682, October 30, 2021*



## SEEDS THAT WORK UNSEEN

Unseen but working out  
The plan of God –  
Potential life is there  
Beneath the sod.  
Its pattern to complete  
It does not know,  
But its design is set  
And soon will show,  
When water, soil and warmth  
Combine with light  
To make a plant that proves  
God's wondrous might.  
And all who look will see  
Beauty and grace  
In something with no soul  
But has its place.

Unseen but working as  
The Lord designed,  
A seed of human life  
God had in mind  
Before there was a world.  
It has a soul,  
A spirit like God's own.  
God makes it whole.  
It finally becomes  
A living man,  
Not just a bit of flesh  
No better than  
A plant or lifeless thing  
That cannot know  
Or see. Man can praise God  
And to Him go.

Unseen. the seed of truth  
Implanted in  
The heart and mind of one  
Who lets it in,  
Thinks carefully on it  
And lets it grow,  
Attended by his prayer  
'Til he can know  
That change is happening  
In him, and he  
Is transformed from within  
And saved to be  
A new-made man in Christ,  
From sin made free,  
With life that now can last  
Eternally.

– Gerald Cowan