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The Seed Is The Word Of God

(Luke 8:11)

By Rev. Wm. C. Robinson, D.D.

This is our Lord's own interpretation of the celebrated parable of the sower. On the face of it, this parable lays upon us the duty of earnest, faithful labor in scattering the seed—preaching the Word. No doubt some will fall upon stony grounds, some among the tares, and some on the paths; nevertheless some will fall in fallow ground and springing up bear good fruit. Therefore, in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone, but if it fall into the ground and die it bringing forth fruit. The best way to hold fast the faith is to hold it forth! There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.

There are many comments in the epistles supporting this elemental Gospel reasoning: The same Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him, For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? It pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. Christians receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save their souls, and so are begotten again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the Word of God, that is, by the Word of the Gospel. The one thing needful is for Mary to sit at Jesus' feet and to hear His Word. Our Lord's final commission to His disciples is that they bear witness to Him, that they teach all things whatsoever He has commanded them. As the Apostle Paul passes off the scene his mantle falls upon men like Timothy with the solemn charge: **Preach the Word. The Word of His grace is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among those that are sanctified.**

In these and like passages our Lord and His authorized Apostles do not hesitate to attribute to the Word, as the instrument of His grace, that which the Holy Spirit does through the Word. Paul insists that his preaching of the Word of the Cross in Corinth was not with the wisdom of men, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The Galatians received the Spirit by the hearing of faith, as the Apostle portrayed to them Christ crucified. Our Gospel came unto the Thessalonians not in Word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance, for they received the apostolic message as the Word of God which also worketh in them that believe. In other words the Word and the Spirit go together, where the Word is faithfully preached and taught there the Spirit is present working faith in the hearts of the hearers. Consequently the more vigorously and widely the Word is preached the more souls are reached for Christ.

Now a series of studies of the work of various

synods and the large churches made by the Department of Country Church and Sunday School Extension is proving this Scriptural teaching by an inductive process. Dr. H. W. McLaughlin is able to show from the Sunday School membership what will be the spiritual birthrate of a synod over a five-year period. This birthrate is in direct proportion to the number of people reached with the teaching and preaching of the Word.

As a student of historical theology I would like to say that this teaching of the Word and of inductive research is the historical doctrine of the Calvinistic or Presbyterian faith. Some of our people have been so anxious to differentiate their thinking from Lutheranism that they have tended to lapse into Zwinglianism under the mistaken impression that Calvin was closer to Zwingli. For those who read the lessons of Providence it is significant that Lutheranism has had a goody history, while Zwinglianism was swallowed up in Calvinism which differs at this point from Zwingli.

The truth is that Calvin is Luther's greatest disciple, and the pity of history is that Luther was unable to understand this fact. Luther said that the Holy Ghost opened to him the meaning of the great Gospel text, Romans 1:16-18, in the Back Tower at Wittenberg, and that "where Christ sat not at the right hand of God, and poured not forth His Spirit, the Christian faith could not exist." Luther held to predestination as earnestly as any Augustinian, but Staupitz had wisely advised him to find himself first in the wounds of Christ and then election would be inexpressibly sweet to him. Similarly, Calvin tells us not to contemplate election in ourselves or even in God, the Father, apart from Christ, but in Christ. Luther linked the electing grace of God in its historical action with the means of grace, the Word and the sacraments; Zwingli separated the determinism of an abstract Deity, working His will by His Spirit, from the Word, and went so far as to list many distinguished pagans in the roll of Christian saints.

Calvin follows Luther rather than Zwingli, teaching that God has established "a mutual connection" and "an inviolable union" between the Word and the Spirit, thus:

"The Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses to believers the illumination of His Spirit." "The Word will never again credit in the hearts of men, till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit." For, "the Lord hath established a kind of mutual connection between the certainty of His Word and His Spirit; so that our minds are filled with a solid reverence for the Word, when by the light of the Spirit we are enabled therein to behold the divine countenance; and on the other hand, without the least fear of mistake, we gladly receive the Spirit when we recognize Him in His image, that is, in the Word." At one and the same time Calvin teaches, "That alone is true faith which the Spirit of God seals in our heart," and "the same Divine Word is the foundation by which faith is sustained and supported, and from which it cannot be moved without an immediate downfall. Take away the Word and there will be no

faith left." "Faith is used metonymically for the Word." "The removal of the Word signifies the departure of the Lord."

Further, this close connection between the Word and the Spirit explains the success of the Evangelical Arminian movement in spite of the theological defects which Dr. John L. Girardeau properly pointed out in lectures delivered in the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia (**Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism**). In other words, in spite of these intellectual slips, the Wesleys took with tremendous seriousness the command of the Lord to preach the Word. And a Methodist who bows his will to Christ and zealously seeks to obey his command to sow the seed is coming nearer recognizing the sovereignty of God than is a thinker who may have a more accurate intellectual grasp of the system of Bible truth, but is either too lazy or too much preoccupied with other things to preach the Word. The Wesleys preached the Gospel and taught the Word in their classes, and God accompanied their preaching and teaching with the power of the Spirit. About the only minister among us who showed a like zeal was Brother Bryan of Birmingham who preached over thirty times each week and died lamenting there were still so many people unreached for Christ.

According to Calvinistic doctrine the Holy Spirit is present accompanying the administration of the bread and the cup, so that these elements properly administered became the seal of the fact that the Spirit is feeding the hearts and souls of believers with the life of Christ. But we also teach that the Word is more important even than the sacraments. Therefore, we cannot logically hold a lower doctrine of the presence of the Spirit accompanying the Word than we do of the Spirit accompanying the sacrament. When the Word is faithfully preached from its true theme and center, God reconciling the world unto Himself in Christ, there the Spirit is present, as He was with the like preaching of Paul in Corinth, Galatia and Thessalonica. And the Holy Spirit is present in a power to enable sinners to do what they otherwise could not do, that is, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and repent of their sins.

Our Lord told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," and insisted that no man could come

unto Him except the Father draw him. The Apostle reminds us that we were dead in trespasses and sins and that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit for they are foolishness to him. Luther has put the same thought into his Child's Catechism, "I believe that I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him of my own reason or power, but the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel." Of himself the sinner cannot, but where the Gospel is preached there the Holy Spirit is present to enable him to do what of himself he can not do. In the story of the paralytic let down through the roof, we read that as He was teaching, the power of the Lord was with Him to heal. Our Lord Jesus did not hesitate to command the man with a withered hand to do the very thing he of himself could not do: Stretch forth thy hand. And He has commissioned us to command sinners to do what in themselves they cannot do: Repent and believe the Gospel.

Only we ought to issue that command as ambassadors of Christ. When we only preach our own word, or the words of some popular speaker, they are without power. But when we preach as faithful ambassadors of Christ, proclaiming Him from His own Word, that Word is with power to save. Accordingly when we do preach that Word faithfully we ought to expect and seek to reap the harvest. No doubt the full harvest is the end of the world. But we ought to preach believing that the Spirit is present using the instrument of His own forging, the Word, for the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the comfort and upbuilding of the saints. Holding our own God-given heritage of truth let us be more diligent in scattering the seed and in pressing home the invitation to confess Christ. As the Word is preached the Spirit is present working faith in the hearts of the hearers. Let us depend on His presence and power and call men to confess the faith He implants. Under the blessing of the Spirit such is the power of the Word that it gives being to what it gives expression, it calls things that are not, and being called they begin to be. God has promised that His Word shall not return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleases and prosper in the thing whereunto He sends it. For no word from God shall be void of power.

Baptism

By John Scott Johnson, Ph.D.*

BURIED BY (OR IN) BAPTISM

The fifth support (or "prop") of the immersion idea of baptism is the expression "buried by (or in) baptism." There are only two places in the Bible where this expression occurs—Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12. Neither place records buried by (or in) baptism in water, and one definitely states "buried . . . by baptism into death."

It is not difficult to prove by the Bible many things far removed from Bible truths if words or phrases are separated from their connection. For example, would you have Bible authority for suicide in a hurry? "Judas . . . hanged himself" (Matt. 27:3-5). "Do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37). "That thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27).

To show the connection, the setting, of "buried by (or in) baptism" in the Bible, a few verses from each chapter are quoted:

Rom. 6:1-6:

1. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid.

2. How shall we that are dead in sin, live any longer therein?

3. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into His death?

4. Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.