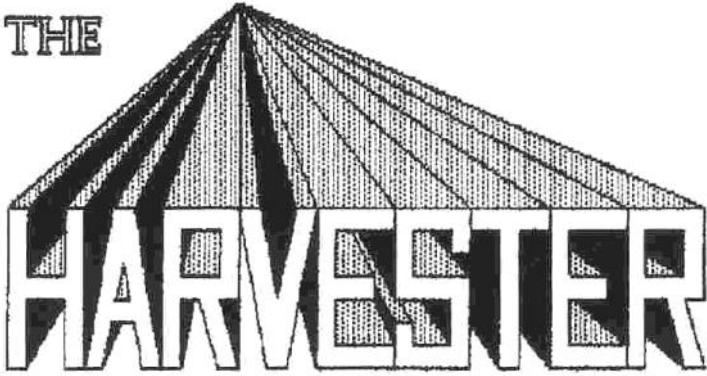


THE



*“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)*

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April 2022

No. 436

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## IDENTIFYING JESUS' COMMANDMENTS (On Being Fruitful)

Let us study a neglectfully simple parable Jesus gave us that is loaded with a strong commandment. But first, ponder these three questions about yourself:

1. Where are you growing?
2. Have you reached your growth potential?
3. Are you digging and dunging for yourself?

Jesus gave a great lesson on repentance in Luke 13:1-5, then followed with a parable on being fruitful in Luke 13:6-9:

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*He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. (Luke 13:6-9)*

We understand that plants in a vineyard sometimes take years to make full production. Apparently the vineyard's owner thought this fig tree was old enough to produce fruit. So for three years he came to find fruit on this particular tree. After the third year he had waited long enough. No figs...no fruit...no production. It was taking up space in good soil, in fact it was "cumbering" the ground. Cumber means to render idle or useless, to abolish, to cease, to make of no effect.

The dresser of the vineyard had mercy on this fig tree. He begged to dig and dung around it and give it one more year to grow. Then, if the fig tree was still unfruitful, it would be cut down and replaced. Notice the finality of this judgement.

### The Implications

The parable could apply only to the Jews that were rejecting Jesus during His earthly ministry, but I think it is also meant to warn us about our own personal, individual judgement. When I first learned this parable it scared me, and it still does. What if the fig tree is me, and I am in the last year of the growth trial? Another implication is that it is possible for a person to "cumber" his own opportunities to produce fruit. One of the accusations of Jesus against the scribes and Pharisees was that when they gained a convert, they made him worse than they were:

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when*

*he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (Mat. 23:15)*

If each generation doesn't strive to get closer and closer to God, then the devil will draw each generation farther and farther away from God.

Now consider the digging and dunging operation, two essential activities in crop production. In general, the digging refers to removing the competition for the desired plant's nutrition and water, as in digging to remove weeds. To a spiritual human, this applies to removing distractions in the form of weights and sins.

*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us... (Heb. 12:1)*

We usually recognize a sin, but a weight may be something that in itself is not sinful, but serves as a distraction to our growth and fruitfulness. Paul gives us a great picture of laying aside the weights when he gave up his great qualifications in the Jewish religion.

*But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ... (Php. 3:7-8)*

What Paul gave up was about equal to a person giving up a law degree and a doctor's license to have more time to study and work in the Lord's church.

We think of dunging (dung being the waste of animals, usually, and the most common source of agricultural nutrients at the time) as the act of adding essential nutrients to produce maximum fruit in the plant. Spiritually speaking, there is no better source of nutrients than the Bible, and there is hardly a

more dense collection of wisdom than in Proverbs. Solomon, the writer of most of Proverbs, was given a specific gift of wisdom from God. Solomon gave us the wisdom in the form of short snippets of information, usually contained in a single verse. The introduction to Proverbs is especially beautiful:

*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Pro. 1:1-7)*

Read the passage over and over to catch the wisdom in every phrase. No doubt there is a great amount of spiritual nutrients here. Peter adds to the idea of our need for spiritual nutrients with encouragement that we should desire them “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2).

The Scriptures make the case even stronger that it is our responsibility to seek the nutrients, apply them, and grow:

*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have*

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*need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb. 5:12-14)*

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)*

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)*

Let's consider another angle on this parable, that Jesus is describing the two destinies we are each growing toward. One is the destiny of life and fruitfulness, the other the destiny of barrenness and ultimate destruction. James gives us the stages of malignant growth from an evil lust to death:

*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (Jas. 1:14-15)*

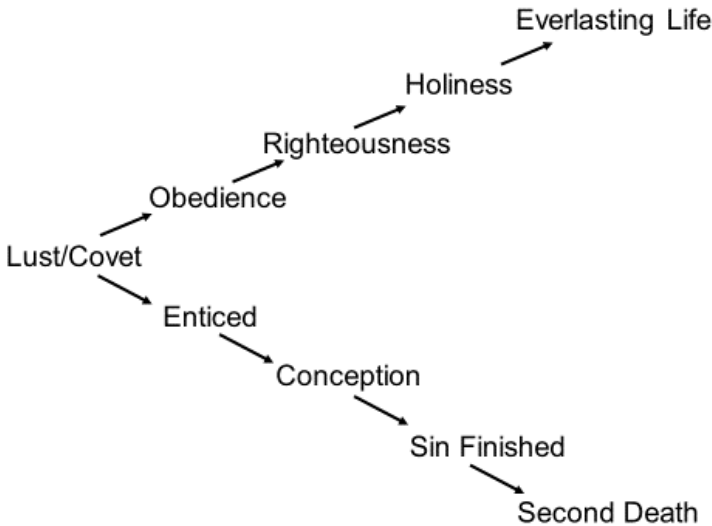
On the other hand, Paul gives us the stages of glorious growth from good lust to everlasting life:

*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Rom. 6:16)*

*...even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. (Rom. 6:19b)*

*But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. (Rom 6:22)*

This diagram shows the two paths of growth. Notice they both begin with lust/covet, but also remember that the words lust and covet are neutral words – their meaning (good or bad) being determined by the context of their use.



The upward path is of glorious growth to everlasting life, while the downward path is the malignant path leading to the second death. Now here is the scary part...we each are on one of these paths. There is no jumping back and forth...no exceptions...no escapes...no fooling...

*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1 John 2:15b)*

*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment... (Heb. 9:27)*

Let's tie all this together by answering our original questions. There are many answers; I'm just giving you mine.

Where are you growing? In the area where your knowledge is expanding? So is your knowledge expanding in the Bible, or hobbies, or jobs, or music, or what? It's your choice.

Have you reached your growth potential? Definitely not...so you cannot stop growing. There is no end to the knowledge in the Bible, and no bottom to the depth of the wisdom God put into the Bible for us.

Are you digging and dunging for yourself? You must! No one else can do it as well, because no one else knows your needs like you do--except for God--and if you will just try, He will supply!

If this study of the barren fig tree doesn't scare you, then Great! That means you have already dug out the competition for your time in the scriptures and have dunged yourself with the wisdom in the scriptures. And if this study does scare you, then Great again! The first step in being fruitful is in knowing you need to be. My lust/covet for you is that you are living in holiness, the last stage before everlasting life.

BILL PRINCE, JR.  
Oxford, AL

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## DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

*(4) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:*

*(5) And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*

*(6) And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:*

*(7) And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*

*(8) And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.*

*(9) And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.*

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

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<b>DATES</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>SPEAKER</b>
April 7 - 10	Oak Grove Eubank, KY	J. D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

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*Masks and social distancing are recommended at these meetings. Please check the website calendar for the latest updates.*

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## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Which of the twelve sons of Jacob had a name that means “praise”?
2. What is the seventh commandment?
3. How many tribes inherited land on the east of Jordan?
4. In Luke’s account of the Beatitudes who does Jesus say the Kingdom of God belongs to?
5. What proportion of his goods did Zacchaeus give away to the poor?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH...

### NOTEWORTHY SIGNS

The Christian life is a marathon  
that begins with a walk.

Faith is bread for daily use,  
not cake for special occasions.

Teaching kids to count is good,  
but teaching them what counts is best.

If the going gets easy,  
you may be going downhill.