

Are You Sowing the Seed of the Kingdom?

By Robert Johnson

It's the time when many gardeners are either planning or are already at work to plant their spring gardens. Decisions on what seeds to buy, even seedlings already started in anticipation of soon being planted, have people imagining the outcome they will harvest later. Information from *Dave's Garden* on the Internet reveals, for where I live, each winter on average, our risk of frost is through March 29. Almost certainly, however, we will receive frost through March 12. We are almost guaranteed not to get frost from April 14 through October 17. Our frost-free growing season is around 220 days (<https://davesgarden.com/guides/freeze-frost-dates/>).

One has to prepare before actually planting anything, but one must also make sure the soil itself has been prepared and is optimized to assure the best possible growing conditions, so the desired harvest can be reaped. It is obvious one just doesn't go and throw down seed on the ground at any time and expect there to be a bumper crop later. The Book of Proverbs illustrates this point. "The slacker does not plow during planting season; at harvest time he looks, and there is nothing" (Proverbs 20:4). For a good harvest later, planning and work must be done in advance.

This time of year, I am reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 13 regarding the Parable of the Soils. Just throwing seed on hard soil or on rocky ground or in a weed-infested field will not provide a desirable outcome. Yet, Jesus was not simply speaking of good agricultural practices. He was talking about our responsibility to prepare our hearts for His Word and about the kind of heart it takes to receive it, to nurture and grow it, and to bear fruit for eternity.

However, this is how many people approach the Christian life! After obedience to the Gospel, their hearts are not open to hear and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Some do not practice genuine repentance and allow obstacles to keep the Word from establishing itself and growing faith (Matthew 3:8). Others keep a love of the world and of the cares of life growing, which chokes out the Word and keeps us entangled in sin (Matthew 13:22). Obeying the Gospel isn't the end of our responsibility to God, but it is the beginning. It takes God's grace and our dedication to produce Christian living and an eternal hope. "Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save you. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:21-22).

Most would feel pity over a person who thought that not planting, not cultivating, not weeding, doing mostly nothing to prepare for a harvest, still he could look at his backyard one day and expect to see a great crop of his favorite vegetable ready to harvest. Such is also the disappointment one will experience who isn't taking care of the Word in his or her heart and life now regarding what the outcome will be in Judgment. Now is the time to be engaged in serving Christ and growing in Him. Now is the time to overcome the lusts of the flesh and to grow the fruit of the Spirit instead. Harvest is coming, and we must do our part to be prepared and receive the outcome of eternal life. Is your heart receptive to God's Word? Are you growing in Christ? "Sow righteousness for yourselves and reap faithful love; break up your unplowed ground. It is time to seek the Lord until He comes and sends righteousness on you like the rain" (Hosea 10:12).

Care for One Another

By Gary C. Hampton

Paul compared the church to a body (Romans 12:4-5). The members of a physical body are sympathetic to one another. The whole body hurts when a toe is stubbed or a finger is smashed (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26).

Christians' care for one another is seen in thoughtful actions taken toward others within the family of God. Weak brethren should not condemn the strong, nor should the strong look down upon the weak and count them unworthy of their fellowship. Both should recognize that God will judge all according to His law, so all must submit to His authority. Each will answer to God and should not condemn others in matters of opinion. Senseless arguments over unanswered questions risk causing a brother to stumble (Romans 14:10-13; 1 Corinthians 8:12; Isaiah 45:23).

Paul's prayer stressed the need to strive for unity and the good of the brethren, following the example of the Savior (Romans 15:5-7). Unity is achieved both through inward feelings and outward expressions of praise and devotion toward God.

Paul pleaded with Christians at Philippi to complete his joy by being united in thought, love, work and purpose. Even elders are not to be self-willed (Philippians 2:2-4). Christians agree on biblical principles. That agreement can form the basis of a working relationship, which produces like-mindedness. Selfish ambition or promotion of a party spirit for personal gain should be avoided to prevent division (1:16).

Christ's followers should be humble or lowly minded (1 Peter 5:6). Disciples should learn to appreciate, even look for, the good qualities of others and always treat the other man as one who is worthy of service. Consideration for others' needs in the Christian life must come before self (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:10).

Care for fellow believers will result in simple acts of thoughtfulness (Romans 12:10). Each of us needs to be on the lookout for opportunities to show that we are thinking of one another.