

186 Wheat and weeds – learning from my/our mistakes

I'm not sure who thought it up(!), but teaching people through parables was a genius idea: as long as the hearers are open to the Holy Spirit, then God can teach us the particular thing(s) that we need to learn at any given time.

But if, like me(!), you work out a given interpretation of a given Scripture, or a passage, or indeed the whole Bible, and try to stick to it, come hell or high water, you'll miss what God wants to do, in us and through us. I have certainly done that, over the years.

The other big mistake I made, which nearly cost me my marriage, was to think that unarguable spiritual gifts validate someone's teaching. As I witnessed many times, 'Harry'^[0] had gifts of healing and prophecy, but little by little, his teaching changed, and I didn't notice. I did learn some good biblical lessons through Harry, but weed seeds were also sown in there.^[Mt 13:24-30]

On a wider canvas, we can see that each generation has had to reinterpret (parts of) the Bible as God has taught us new things and moved us on in areas that needed reform. Think of the huge damage that has been done to the gospel cause, through an over-literal interpretation of Genesis, or by attempts to keep women out of church leadership, or trying to maintain slavery.

To combat some of the wrong-turns that the church has made, God has seeded movements for change, such as the Reformation, a ***massive reinterpretation*** of Scripture that restored the idea of 'justification my faith alone', and had the Scriptures translated into people's own languages.

Then there were the Revivalist movements, through which ***huge numbers*** came to a saving faith in Jesus, starting with Wesley and Edwards in the 18th century, right up to the early 20th century with people such as Billy Graham.

But the devil continued to sow his seeds, so amongst that glorious wheat, grew up some nasty weeds. I hate talking about negative things, as I feel so positive now about what God is doing, but I have detected a few pernicious weeds, as I've been writing – starting with my *bête noire*. I hope I'm not treading on too many toes here, but these are just my views, and I've been wrong before...

– An over-emphasis on penal substitution (just one of many biblical images for salvation), has been made worse by an over-literal interpretation of hell as permanent, constant torture.

– The gospel has been reduced to an individualistic, 'how I get saved and get to heaven', with Jesus becoming the mechanism by which I get saved, and, worse, salvation becoming the gateway to personal and private 'blessing'.

– Attempts to justify Old Testament claims that 'God told them to...', where what they did would, in other circumstances, have been classed as rank barbarism or even genocide.

How many people do you know who have 'rejected God', but actually, it's the 'God' we've depicted that they've rejected?!

"But it's what we've always been taught!" True, but maybe it's time we reread our Bibles!