

THORNY GROUND PART 2

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 2 August 2020

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Introduction

Today we are going to continue in our discussion of 'thorny ground'. It is particularly important for us to give attention to this ground, because it refers to a person who *should have a heart of good ground*.

The nature of a person with a heart of thorny ground

'Thorny ground' people even identify themselves as being part of the fellowship of the body of Christ.

They have been born to *see* the kingdom and have *entered* the kingdom.

Paul made this point quite emphatically in his letter to the Hebrews.

He wrote, 'Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God.' Heb 6:1.

When we discussed 'wayside ground', we noted that the foundations of repentance and faith signify the fundamental issue regarding *understanding*.

This person has overcome the wayside ground issue and has been *born to see* the kingdom.

'Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of the laying on of hands [remember that 'the laying on of hands' has to do with a *relational* connection toward a specific work of the will of God being done], of the resurrection of the dead [this person is touching *exanastasis* life because they are conformed to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings], and of eternal judgement.' Heb 6:1-2.

This person has *overcome* the 'stumbling' associated with *stony ground*: they are embracing the reality of their baptism; they are eating and drinking in faith for participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

So, they are *born of water and of the Spirit* to enter the kingdom.

Paul laid out these foundations, saying, 'This is a person who *should be demonstrating firstfruits*'.

'For it is impossible for those who were once *enlightened* [someone who has been born to *see*], and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become *partakers of the Holy Spirit*, and have *tasted the good word of God* [the word by which we are born] and the *powers of the age to come* [a person who is obtaining, or beginning to receive, *exanastasis* life, the glory of which becomes our eternal inheritance], if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.' Heb 6: 4-6.

What has this to do with thorny ground?

The very next verse explains this particular point.

This person has *overcome wayside ground*; is *overcoming* the stumbling associated with the *stony ground*.

But then Paul said, within that context, that if a person who has entered in *falls away*, they are in a great deal of trouble.

Bearing fruit not for our sake – blessing from God

'For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it.' Heb 6:7. This is a beautiful description, isn't it?

What is 'the earth'? That is the *ground of our heart*.

What is 'the rain that often comes upon it'? That is the rain of the word, the *water of the word* that is coming to the ground of our heart, to cause what is birthed in us to grow up.

We are a people who have a lot of 'rain' falling on the ground of our heart, aren't we?

We love the word. We are here as people who are connected to the body of Christ; we are those who are committed to being rooted and grounded in love.

And Paul said, 'For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs *useful for those by whom it is cultivated*.' Heb 6:7.

Here is where we start to experience the issue regarding thorny ground: what comes up out of the ground, that which is birthed in us by the word, is *not for our sake*. Do you see the point?

The expression of firstfruits is actually useful for *the one who has cultivated it!*

‘For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, *receives blessing from God.*’ Heb 6:7.

They receive blessing from God!

The ‘blessing from God’ is you obtaining your *sonship*, and being joined to the *fellowship of Yahweh* in Christ.

Giving attention to dealing with thorns

‘*But if it bears thorns and briars*, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.’ Heb 6:8.

So, we see that we cannot have good ground, or firstfruits expression, cohabiting with thorns. And, unless we are *dealing with the thorns* in us, then that which has been cultivated, which is of the divine nature, will fall away.

It is interesting that Paul made this point in the light of wayside and stony ground. He said that *the word itself*, as it is being poured out into our hearts, causes *both of these types of plants* to come up.

Unless we *give attention* to being delivered from the thorns that we find in our heart and in our families, then *the word itself* will actually cause those things to grow.

This is the point of deception, isn’t it? This is why we become deceived: we are there, listening to the word, but we are living in a way that is *other than* the culture of fellowship - true fellowship in Christ.

Because we are *hearing* the word, we are believing that the way that we are living is true.

Last week, we learned that this is the second of the types of thorns that Jesus described. This is the *deceitfulness* of riches.

Cultivating the divine nature in our families

Today I want to focus on the fact that the blessing of God is *the divine nature*, which we are to multiply *individually* and as *families*.

The blessing is a reality for every individual – ‘blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those who mourn’. Mat 5:3-4. The Beatitudes refer here to individuals.

But remember that *the blessing of Abraham* belongs to all of the *families* of the earth.

This means that the issue of thorny ground, which is the *competing reality* to blessing, has a reality for us individually, but *also* for our *households* and our *families*.

We need to understand what this ‘thorny principle’ looks like in relation to *all* the dimensions of blessing.

Going on to perfection

Our *deliverance* from thorny ground – Paul’s major point – is fundamental to our going on to perfection.

‘Having left behind all the discussion of the elementary principles, having laid all these foundations, *let us go on to perfection.*’ Heb 6:1.

The key to going on to perfection is to be *joined to the process* through which these ‘thorny weed’ alternatives are being *removed* from our lives.

This is an important point, isn’t it? I am sure that as you are listening to this, you are saying, ‘That’s what I want! I want to be delivered from this way; and I want to walk and be fruitful in the things that the Lord has defined for my life.’

How thorns grow

Before we consider *how we are delivered* from them, it is important that we understand *how the thorns get there* in the first place!

Of course, this is connected to ‘the other law’ – we have already spoken about ‘desire’ being within our heart – but remember that the temptation that comes is from *Satan*.

These are *other words* that are being proclaimed, which we, through desire, *give our ear to* and *pursue*.

This results in something else growing up within us that *chokes the life* of our sonship.

Devotional laziness allows thorns to grow in our households

These ‘thorns’ can become the cultural reality in our houses when we are either *lazy* or *lack discernment* in relation to the *cultural influences* that we allow into our lives and into our houses.

There are many Scriptures that highlight this reality, but I have chosen a few to illustrate the point. I am sure that you will be able to find more to develop this understanding further.

We read in the book of Proverbs, 'The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns.' Pro 15:19.

That is a deep statement because, when we make a hedge, it is as though we *plant* it. It is *cultivated*.

Solomon spoke in this proverb of 'the way'. When we speak about 'the way', we are referring to a *pathway that we walk in*.

This is the amazing point about the parable of the sower and the seed: it actually speaks about *the way that we walk* – the *wayside*; not stumbling *in the way*.

This proverb is speaking about *a way that is 'prickly'*.

'The way of a lazy man is like a hedge of thorns, but the way of the upright is a highway.' Pro 15:19.

Joining Christ's offering pathway delivers us from thorns

The Scriptures, particularly the prophetic Scriptures, describe this highway, as 'a highway of holiness'.

And we are *pilgrims* on this highway of holiness, as it is the highway *that Christ pioneered for us* through His offering journey.

And so, the way of the *upright* is on *that path*; and that path is the means by which we are *delivered from the thorns* that are cultivated through laziness.

Being diligent in relation to obedience to the word

We noted last week that 'laziness' is not just slothfulness or unwillingness to engage in life at all. It does not mean that we are 'inactive'.

Rather, laziness is seen in a person who is not *diligent* in relation to their *obedience* to the *word* and *culture* of the Lord.

We could be highly engaged in the pursuit of a lifestyle and of a profile, both civic and religious, and be highly engaged in the community, and be *completely lazy in relation to the word* of the Lord.

The opposite of 'laziness' is 'diligence', and the Scriptures bear this out.

Moses exhorted the people not to be lazy in relation to the word of the Lord but, rather, to be *diligent*; and he was specifically referring to

households. 'And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.' Deu 6:6.

That is beautiful in relation to the parable of the sower and the seed!

We have already noted that the apostle Paul spoke about the rain that is being poured out on the earth, or ground, of our heart. Heb 6:7.

Now, here, Moses declared, 'These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.'

The word – the focal point of our living

He continued, 'You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.' Deu 6:7-8.

So, we have declared *the focal point* of our *perspective*, and what our *orientation* and *attention* is given to.

'You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.' Deu 6:9.

Diligence is not establishing some kind of devotional 'law'.

I am not reading this passage today, to provoke us into setting some sort of devotional 'standard' to which we will give ourselves in order to 'comply with this command'. That is not what Moses was saying; nor what this passage means.

Rather, Moses was listing all the *activities of our life*.

He said, 'When you sit in your house': all the activities that we engage in when we sit in our house.

'When you walk by the way': we are 'walking by the way' when we are on our way to *school* or on our way to *work*, or when we are involved in *recreational* activities – the 'outside' activities.

'When you lie down': when we are resting; and 'when you rise up'.

He was referring to *all the activities of your house*, and was saying that, *foundational* to these, should be the *word of God*.

The *word* should be *the cultural definition*, and *the reality*, and *the way*, in which we *walk*.

The word is our treasure

These verses describe a person or household for whom *the word is their treasure*. They will be

devotional, not because it is law, but because they *love the word, as a family*.

As they *love* the word and *give heed* to it, it is the *lamp* to their feet and *light* to their path. Psa 119:105.

The word, by the Spirit, gives them *understanding* regarding how to live and *how to proceed on the pathway of life* that Christ has pioneered.

The word defines our conversation and our responses

When difficulties arise when we are ‘walking by the way’, off to school or off to work, what is our response as a household?

Is it to fight for our rights, as one who becomes a little ‘prickly’ about the prickly circumstances that our children find themselves in?

Or do we *heed the word*, and *obtain faith*, and teach our children to believe in *their participation* in the offering and sufferings of Christ?

Do you see that this is the word that defines the *nature of our conversation* in our household?

Moses declared, ‘You shall *teach them* diligently and you shall *talk of them*.’

There are difficulties to negotiate as we go through life. How do we view them and talk about them?

Is it in the light? Is it by walking *in the light of the word*?

If this is so, *this is what it means to be diligent*, not lazy.

On one hand, we can be very ‘active’, going to our child’s school and giving the teachers and principal a bit of a ‘bucketing’, yet be *completely lazy* in relation to the commands of Christ.

Or we can take stock, and spend time *praying* and *talking* together in the light of the word.

The word becoming the culture of our household

Now, what about our cultural practices?

There are things that we get *carried along by*, simply because we see *other people* within the church doing them.

Instead of asking, ‘Is this cultural practice that we are going to engage in consistent with what we have been illuminated in, by the word?’

Or do we look at it and say, ‘If they are doing it, that’s good enough for us too.’

Do you see that one of these responses is very lazy, isn’t it? It is simply using *another person* as the *measure and standard* by which we define our own culture.

The other response is an *application to the word* that we have heard. *We walk in the light of the word*.

Do you see the difference between laziness and diligence?

Diligence is not a ‘law of devotional attention’; it is a reality of *the word becoming the culture* of our house.

This type of diligence is not the culture of a lazy person.

Laziness leads to lack of understanding

Let’s read another proverb now – one which will be quite familiar to people. ‘I went by the field of the *lazy man*, and by the vineyard of the man *devoid of understanding*’. Pro 24:30.

You will remember that we have discussed ‘understanding’ previously. ‘Understanding’ is the reality that *stems from repentance and faith*, so that the word, which is the *wisdom from above*, is *becoming the culture of our life*; and this is evident in our *conversation* and our *conduct*.

So, this proverb indicates that a lazy person has *not* made that word the basis of the culture of their life. As a result, they are *devoid of understanding*.

‘I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well.’ Pro 24:30-32.

We are giving some good consideration to thorny ground, aren’t we?

‘I looked on it and I *received instruction*.’ Pro 24:32.

We are all receiving instruction today about laziness.

Inattention to the word makes us vulnerable to the enemy

‘A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like

a prowler, and your need like an armed man'.
Pro 24:33-34.

Jesus spoke about being *asleep*, and being vulnerable to robbers who come and *sow tares* among the wheat. Mat 13:25.

'Sleepiness' is *inattention to the culture* of our house, which makes it *vulnerable to other things* being planted in there.

The passage we have just quoted from the book of Proverbs applies to us *individually* – to the *ground of our heart*, and to the *stone wall* that is supposed to be *defining the lines* of our *inheritance* and of the *sanctification* of each individual. Pro 24:30-34.

It also applies to a *family*.

So, the same principle applies to individuals, families and households – *all three*. Remember that a household is three generations.

Diligent stewardship of the church

It also applies to a whole church.

That is a pretty amazing thought, isn't it? This accountability for diligence applies to those who have been set over the house.

Jesus spoke a great deal about that. He said, 'They were not ready when I came, and I came like a robber and a thief.' Mar 13: 35-36.

We will focus today, not on the whole church, but on *the ground of our heart*, and also the ground of our families and households, in relation to this point.

Protecting the ground of the family's inheritance

The walls protecting this man's field have been *broken down*. Pro 24:31.

Remember that 'the field' refers to the *blessing* of their *inheritance*. This blessing belongs to *him* and to *his family*, but walls have been broken down.

There was *nothing preventing* the entry of *other philosophies* or *other cultures* into the ground of his family.

The outcome was that *his field was overgrown* with *thorns* and covered with *nettles*.

This is an important point.

This person *did have* the ground of their inheritance! They *did have* the ground of their inheritance; but, because they were *not watching*

over it – they were not *guarding their heart* or *keeping their heart* or *keeping the ground of their family culture* – these thorns and nettles *gained traction*, or *root*, in that ground – because *the wall was broken down*.

When the wall is broken down, things have *easy access* into the field.

The outcome for this man was that it was overgrown with thorns and covered with nettles.

Watching over the sanctification of our family

Some Christian families are not *diligent to watch over* the affairs of their house.

What do I mean by this?

I mean that they *do not take time to talk together* – for example, about what has been learnt at school.

I am definitely not saying that school is bad! Children, you all need to go to school!

What I am saying is that what is being taught in school is not *godliness* – it does not matter which school we are referring to.

The point is that those who are *accountable* for the care of the house, Dad and Mum, need to know what is going on.

If they are not *aware*, and are not *engaging with their children* about what is going on at school or with friends, the boundary of their house is vulnerable.

Something else is feeding into the child's perception of reality; into their perception of what is true and what is not true.

This is where *deception* comes in, isn't it?

These parents do not sufficiently consider, nor question, what their children are learning in school; nor do they show discernment regarding the activities that they engage in.

It is not simply that our children go to school and are bombarded with the spirit of the world.

It is that some of the activities that we engage in, even in the church, promote cultural activities, that are not particularly helpful to a child's understanding of themselves or others.

There is some degree of laxity in relation to *sanctification* and *honour*.

Kept in sanctification and honour

'Sanctification' is a person *keeping themselves; it is the lines, or wall, of their identity.*

'Honour' is the awareness of the sanctification of another.

Sometimes, we engage in activities where those lines become unclear.

Seeking to escape difficulty, we can be drawn away by the desire for other things

Some parents do not show discernment regarding the activities that their children engage in, nor the media they consume.

I would say that most of us are fairly careful about what our children are watching or engaging with, even in social media.

But it is important that we consider, also, the volume of information, and the time that we spend engaging in these activities, which we view as a 'relief' from the difficulty of the way.

Now, the Scriptures refer to this as being '*at ease*'. Psa 73:12. Amo 6:1. Jer 48:11.

Instead of accepting that our way has a *work* to it, we are looking for an *escape* from that work.

As soon as we look for an escape from the works that the Lord has prepared for us, either individually or as families, that is when 'the *desires* for other things' become an issue for us.

That is when we are *tempted and drawn away* by our desires. Jas 1:14.

So, we have to *give attention* to these things. We *all* need to, because we are all interfacing with these realities every day.

Guarding our families in the truth

Instead of resisting the spirit of the world, many families have *opened* the doors and windows of their houses, or have allowed the walls of the land that is their inheritance to fall down, through their inordinate use of social media; through their excessive consumption of television and movies and online material; and by comparing themselves with one another as the basis for their cultural practice.

I am not saying that social media is bad or television is bad or anything is bad, because that is just not true.

The problem arises when we are unable to distinguish between what is being communicated to us, and the word of *truth*.

Something else begins to define for us our reality of what is true. We need to understand this.

Families allow these influences to affect the nature of the conversation and conduct of their houses, and what they recognise as being their community.

There are two points here: one is 'culture' – that is, conversation and conduct; and the other is 'community'.

When these influences affect the way in which we talk, different words are feeding into the nature of the conversation in the house. I am referring, literally, to what we talk about, but also to the conduct of our house.

Remember that *diligent* people have a particular conversational foundation, don't they?

And *lazy* people allow their conversation to take on a different hue as well.

These influences will increasingly be at odds with offering. That is where the conversation and conduct will jar.

True fellowship, the community of Christ, is found only on the ground of the word

It is also to do with what our community is.

To make *offering*, we have to be joined to the community of Christ, where we are laying down our lives to reveal another.

On the other hand, we may seek out a community of people who have similar 'desires', even in the fellowship of the church, believing that our connection and affection for them in the pursuit of a lifestyle is 'fellowship'.

That is a deception, because *true fellowship* is *demonstrated by love*, which means laying down our lives in offering on the ground that is defined by the word from the presbytery.

Do you see that 'fellowship' is not only our 'connection' with one another?

Our fellowship is found only on the ground that is defined by the word that is proclaimed from the presbytery.

This is the way in which the apostle John opened his letter. He wrote, 'That which we have seen,

heard, looked upon and handled we declare to you – this word – so that you might have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and the Son.’ 1Jn 1:1-3.

Do you see that *that word defines where our community is*?

At times, we can become a little *unclear* in this area.

Giving our time to the word devotionally as a family

Almost invariably, our apathy toward the culture of Christ – that is, our malaise, or laziness, regarding attention to these things – is accompanied by irregular, and even non-existent, family devotions.

So, whilst, on the one hand, we do not think of our devotional time as being according to a law, on the other hand, if we are ‘jarring’ at this word and starting to ‘bristle’, we simply need to be *diligent*.

May I encourage you to actually *give your time* to the word, devotionally, as a family?

Unless we *talk about the word*, unless we take time to *consider* what is being said and what the word ‘looks like’ in our household, it doesn’t matter how ‘committed’ we are.

If the word is not actually *broken open and fed to one another*, then it is not the thing that we are feeding on, is it? That is a pretty obvious point!

We will be feeding on *something else*.

And when we identify as being part of the church, but are feeding on something else, we are deceived.

A devotional life is foundational to a person who expresses *firstfruits* - the culture begins on that foundation.

Diligence in relation to our children

I want to make another point about diligence, particularly in relation to our children.

Diligence does not mean removing our children from the world because of fear. We may look at what is going on in the world and say, ‘I need to do everything that I can to protect them from that.’ That is not what Jesus said we are to do in relation to our interfacing with the world.

If we are avoiding interfacing with the world because of *fear*, it means we are not living by faith, because *faith works by love* - and love casts out all fear.

Do you see that operating by fear is not according to the culture of Christ?

Diligence is not removing our children from the world because of fear; rather, it is ensuring that they are in the name of Christ because our houses are in His name.

This is the reality of gathering as ‘two or three in Jesus’ name’ in response to the word and the initiative of Christ’s messengers. Mat 18:20.

Meeting in the name of the Lord

Importantly, to be meeting ‘in His name’ is not two or three Christian households merely gathering together.

This is a focal point and a misconception among many of us. Meeting as two or three in the name of Christ is not two or three Christian households getting together.

It is two or three Christian households who are *responding together* and are *established on the ground of the presbytery*, because they come in the name of the Lord.

The word that the presbytery proclaims in the name of the Lord is the ground on which we meet, two or three in His name. And, when that is true, Jesus says, ‘I am there with you also.’

John said that the presbytery proclaims the word so that *we may have fellowship with them* - and who is their fellowship with? It is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. That is where His name is.

So, to be diligent is not to avoid the world because of fear. It is to ensure that we are in the name, and that our children are established in the name as well.

Meeting as one in one Spirit together with Him

Jesus said, ‘Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You [He was obviously praying to the Father]. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom you have given Me, that *they may be one as We are one*.’ Joh 17:11.

Do you see that the initiative for diligence is to ‘keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’?

If we do not give attention to the 'prickles,' we cannot be in one Spirit in the bond of peace. There is no peace when we are prickly with one another. This is an amazing statement.

Scripture exhorts us to give attention to the word, and to the Lord Himself. His initiative toward us is to *keep us in His name* so that we may be one.

So, these prickles are being taken away so that we can be *in one Spirit* together.

'I do not pray [This is Jesus, our great High Priest, forever making intercession.] that You should take them out of the world.'

Now, you may think, 'So then, if we don't want any thorns, and we don't want to be vulnerable to the world, the best place to be would be out of it, wouldn't it?' But that is not what Jesus said.

'I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should *keep them* from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.'

And we are not of the world, because we are *born of Him*; the Spirit of the Son is dwelling in our hearts.

'Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.'
Joh 17:15-17.

Citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem

To be diligent in the name of the Lord is to be a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem. Rev 3:12.

So, as a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, in the name of the Lord, our 'diligence' is to engage in, and explain, and participate in, this city.

If you are being illuminated by the word, you will be illuminated to see your citizenship in that city, which is beautiful thought.

Because we are forsaking all other community connections, we do not love the world. And we are hated by the world, but we love our citizenship in heaven.

Each person, individually as well as households, is exhorted to 'walk about Zion, go all around her'. Psa 48:12.

So, we actually have to *give ourselves* to getting to know all those other people who are part of the city of Jerusalem.

We become very comfortable in our own kind of community because of our shared interest, don't we?

But that is a *deception*. That is not what *fellowship* is.

Fellowship in His city; our cultural reality

Fellowship is the entire context of a 'city' in which God has placed us.

We have to take an initiative of faith to get to know our city. It is the place where we live. It is the place where the temple is; *where we are making offering*.

It is the cultural reality of our life.

So, 'Walk about Zion, go all around her. Count her towers.'

We can imagine a family, with their little children, saying, 'How many towers can you see in this city?' Go and find where your place is in this city. Count her towers.

'Mark well her bulwarks, consider her palaces.'

I love this point, 'consider her palaces', because Jesus said, 'Don't be afraid, because I go to prepare a house for you, a mansion, a room for you in a palace.' So, 'consider her palaces' means, 'consider your sanctification as a son of God as part of this city'.

This is the diligence we are to have, isn't it? For what reason? It is so that we may tell it to the generation who are following.

This is what we are to *talk about in our houses*.

Do you know what your participation is? How are you hearing the word? Are you seeing the 'bulwarks and the towers' that are our protection as a city?

Christ our Pioneer, our Guide forever

'For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.' Psa 48:12-14.

Now, isn't that what a *pioneer* is? He was referring to Christ, who has perfected the pathway of our sonship.

And He is our guide, even in relation to our death. This is the death that we are *dying in fellowship with Him*. But it is also our literal death, so that when we fall asleep, finally, we will awake in Him. This is beautiful, isn't it?

Thorns in families

I now want to speak about what happens when 'thorns' become *established* within families.

We all know that we have thorny responses but, further to that, because of fear, we may begin to compromise on our family culture because we don't want to lose our children to another way.

Some parents fail to maintain the sanctification, in Christian culture, of their houses.

They are afraid that their recalcitrant children will leave home if they contradict them, or if they try to establish clear lines regarding behaviours and attitudes that are acceptable within the household.

Sadly, for some of us, 'the horse has already bolted'. The wall has been broken down, and 'thorns and nettles' are growing up - and they are actually the *attitudes* of our children.

Now, when that happens, it is no use merely 'building the walls' and demanding compliance.

It actually requires *repentance* and *a confession* by the parents that they have been culturally lax.

It is not anyone else's fault! It is actually the accountability and responsibility of *those to whom that ground has been given*.

So, sometimes, in relation to ensuring that we don't compromise, we have to begin by acknowledging that *we* have allowed this to happen.

A culture of compromise - laziness

Now, the *compromises* that we make in our houses to try to secure our children who are prickly and who may have contrary understandings and commitments to the Lord, are based in fear and are a form of *laziness*.

Jesus connected taking action through fear with laziness, in relation to the servant who hid his talent. The fellow who received one talent buried it in the ground because he was afraid of his master. And the Lord came and said, 'Yes, you are right to be afraid; but you are wicked and lazy.'

Compromise, as a result of fear, which we use to say that we are showing the love of God, is actually laziness.

We do have to be clear about what our culture is, and we do need to 'hold the line' on our culture.

Cultural compromise, motivated by a fallen understanding of love and embracing all aberrations, is *not* the love of God, because the love of God is a jealous love.

It abides only that which is of *the culture of offering*.

A culture of compromise motivated by a fallen understanding of love and the pursuit of short-term peace does not produce good fruit. In fact, it produces only thorny, painful and fruitless relationships in the house.

Relational disharmony and continual conflict in the house are *sufferings* that result from the *mixed culture*. These sufferings are the *judgement* of God on the house because of *disobedience*.

We are responsible for what comes into our houses and, as parents, we are responsible for addressing the alternative cultures that gain entrance into our house.

We must not do this in fear, but by *grace*, as those who have joined ourselves to the culture of the cross.

Repentance and faith, and receiving an introduction into grace

As the word concerning the culture of our houses illuminates us, *repentance* is needed. This is a foundation of *repentance*, and then *faith* is exercised to *speak*.

The first 'speaking' is not actually to do with the issues that we are seeing. The first speaking is in *prayer*, isn't it?

And it is not speaking in relation to our fears and anxieties. It is actually saying, 'I do not even know what to say, Lord.'

This is prayer by the Spirit, and *the Spirit joins us to the prayer of Christ*; and that means to be bound to the throne of grace.

Then, when you are interfacing with the messy situation in your family, you are doing it by grace, accepting that the mess is part of your *fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ*.

It is actually doing a work in your heart to *deliver you* from your own prickles.

And, in that fellowship, there is actually the capacity, and resurrection life, to minister to those who will receive it. There is no other way.

It is only in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings that there is reconciliation and recovery. To attempt to do it outside of that is actually fruitless. There might be short-term peace but, in the end, it will cause greater fatigue.

Repentance and faith, and receiving an introduction into grace by faith, is the means by which we train our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Obedience to His word; grace for our family

He is with us, and His grace is towards our children as heirs together of the grace of life.

We are only heirs together of the grace of life if we are *joined together in the fellowship of His offering*.

This is because He is full of grace and truth, and that is being made available to us as *exanastasis* life, where He is. We have to be on that journey with Him, don't we? This is 'the highway of holiness'.

However, if we will not obey God's word and will not walk in His ways in relation to the culture of our houses, which are supposed to be contexts of blessing, then what we are afraid of, in relation to our children or our families, will most certainly come upon us.

We cannot interface with life through fear and, actually, that is sin, isn't it?

The only way is through *obedience to His word*; and there will be grace for us and our family.

'My house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant'

I will finish this section with an encouraging Scripture from the testimony of King David. I personally found it encouraging, because we are interfacing with the prickles of our own life all the time, and we are realising how much it provokes our own thorny responses.

At the end of his life, King David said, 'Although my house is not so with God.' 2Sa 23:5.

He recognised that some 'thorns' had grown up in his household. And there was hardly any more a thorny person than Absalom, was there? He was the sort of the person whom the world would have loved - attractive, wealthy, charismatic, etc.

Perhaps David realised, 'Well, I had a fair amount of thorniness in my life, and a lot of it was because of my laziness in relation to the culture of my

household. It was my deviant responses to life that allowed this to happen.'

'Although my house is not so with God, yet ...'

David was saying that although his house was not so with God, he was not dwelling on the 'mess' of it.

We have to give attention to the mess, which David did, but *it does not define our sonship*.

'Although my house is not so with God, yet [even so] He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.'

Will you rejoice in that today?

The Lord has made an everlasting covenant with *you*. That covenant is the promise, the oath, that you will be a son of God and your fellowship, or your citizenship, is with Him. Praise the Lord for that!

God brings the increase on the ground of our family

'For this is my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it *increase*?'

This is true riches - we do not make it grow.

We are not agitated and driven by fear to make something substantive. All we need to do is to *turn* again and *trust* His word, and to *walk* in His ways; and *He* brings the increase.

Isn't that exactly what Paul said? 1Co 3:6-7. Col 2:19.

The rain comes down and He *brings the increase* from the ground for the benefit of the one who cultivated that in his heart.

Thorns not dealt with result in rebellion; resisting the word of God

'This is all my salvation and all my desire; will He not make it increase? But the sons of *rebellion* shall be as thorns thrust away, because they *cannot be taken with hands*.' 2Sa 23:5-6.

Now, this is just a passing comment, but we see that David connected *thorns* with *rebellion*.

And it applies to us if we are not dealing with, and being delivered from, the thorns in our life. This is where the word is being proclaimed and, instead of just 'deviating slightly', we actually begin to *resist the word*.

Hands are not able to be laid on us so that we can be secure in our work; we cannot be taken hold of.

And, not only that, but when we do minister or participate, we are not bringing with us the fellowship from which we have come.

That is why hands cannot be laid on such a person; they are actually *revealing themselves*.

So David is saying, 'That is the way of the rebellious, and I have had that in my household. However, I am finding recovery in Him, because His word is sure to me. I believe His Everlasting Covenant.'

Deliverance from thorns

Let us consider, then, how we are *delivered from our thorns*.

I am sure that all of you, like me, know that we have thorny responses at times; but how are we delivered from them?

The solution to the issues of thorny ground is found in *how we eat and drink the communion elements*.

Remember that we are people who 'have a right' to the communion table because we have *entered the kingdom of God*. So, being delivered from thorns actually has to do with how we eat and drink the communion.

'We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have *no right* to eat.'

So, we have a right to eat from this altar because we are part of a kingdom of priests.

The altar was where the burnt sin and peace offerings were offered. And what was offered with it? A meal offering and a drink offering were offered. We have a right to eat from that altar.

'For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned *outside the camp*.'

So, we are eating of those elements; and the bodies of those animals are burned outside of the camp.

'Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, *suffered outside the camp*. Therefore [*as those who partake of that altar*] let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.' Heb 13:10-13.

Bearing His reproach; bearing prickly responses - joining His death and resurrection

Now, 'reproaches' are all of the prickly responses and actions that we have toward one another. All of those reproaches were *laid on Him*.

We know that we have prickly responses, but we interface with the prickles of others all of the time. And we find that, when other people are being prickly towards us - particularly those closest to us in our families and marriages - we *become prickly back*.

When we do that, we are *not* bearing His reproach.

When we partake of the altar, we are saying that we are going outside the camp, *with Him*, to bear His reproach, and to accept that those reproaches that we are experiencing are *for our sake*.

They are our *fellowship* in the reproaches that Christ endured.

'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.' Heb 13:14.

Isn't that the same as 'go about Zion and look about her palaces, her bulwarks', and see your palace, your or place, there?

You partake of the altar, you join the reproaches, *because* you are part of a heavenly city.

The reproaches of Christ were the sufferings that He experienced at the hands of wicked men as He journeyed from Gethsemane to Calvary. These reproaches were laid on Him *by the Father*.

When the Father made Him to be sin, He suffered these reproaches as the body of sin. He has been made the body of sin, and all these reproaches are being laid on Him.

Through baptism and our ongoing participation in the communion, we are joined to the death that He died as the body of sin. Having been united in His *death*, we are also raised with Him in the likeness of His *resurrection*.

Hebrews Chapter 6 explains this doctrine of baptisms, the laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead.

This is the context of our life.

Illuminated concerning the true riches

A son of God who partakes of communion in faith for the purpose of joining the reproach of Christ has been *illuminated*. They are seeing clearly; not seeing through the deception of the riches of this world.

We are hearing the *word*, and to 'eat' the elements of the communion is not merely to eat a piece of biscuit or bread.

We partake of them because we are *committed to hearing and receiving His word*, which are Spirit and life.

Do you see that you can only do that if you *turn*; if *repentance* is your beginning point?

And what happens when you turn? You *see* Him face to face. This is where illumination is.

We are illuminated concerning the true riches that are found in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings.

Moses, likewise, was illuminated to see this reward.

Choosing, by faith, to suffer affliction; receiving the culture of Christ

'By *faith* Moses...' Heb 11:24.

'By faith' means that it comes by *hearing the word*. And this word is being proclaimed to you today. You can obtain faith that is the same faith that Moses received, simply by receiving this word.

'By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing...'

Choosing is possible because of faith. We need to *give* our ear and eye to that. By faith we are able to choose.

'...choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing *pleasures* of sin.'

There are two types of plant on the ground, which should be good. One is 'passing pleasures' and is *thorny*; the other is what has been 'born of God'.

And, by faith, which is coming in the word like rain on the ground, *you* can choose today; choose to suffer affliction with the people of God.

Do you see that your sonship and attainment of firstfruits is not independent of the fellowship of Christ?

So then, where there is division and strife, and prickly engagement with one another goes unresolved, *you have not chosen to suffer affliction with the people of God*.

'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ...'

This means that it is your treasure; you love it; it is at the forefront of your sight. You are 'esteeming the reproaches of Christ'.

'...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.' Heb 11:24-26.

For what reason did he choose affliction? It was because he looked to, or was illuminated to see, the reward.

Now, Moses did not receive it. But you and I *are receiving* it because, as we join the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, that life is becoming ours. We are obtaining the reward right now. Praise the Lord!

That is the *culture* of Christ becoming our life.

Choosing to suffer with Christ in the thorny aspects of our marriage

These reproaches include the thorns that afflict us in our relationships, including in our marriages and families.

In our marriages, one person may be 'prickly' towards the other, so we try to attain some semblance of cultural order by being prickly back to them.

We note that the prickles that have come up on the ground of our inheritance, or on 'the plot of land', are because of our *disobedience*, aren't they?

They are because of our *laziness*.

The Lord said to Adam, in relation to his disobedience and the thorns that came up, that it was *cursing for his sake*.

If you will not despise that promise, and do not react in kind, then that thorn will do a work in your own heart to *deliver you* from your own thorn.

This sounds like giving less attention to the little 'splinter' that you see in another's eye - your spouse's eye or some other person's eye - realising

and accepting that you have a great thorn, 'log', in your own eye.

And, when we do that, many of our reactions to the prickles that we face fade away, because *we are choosing to suffer with Christ*, knowing that that is how the prickle is removed.

If we will accept these thorns as our *fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ*, we will be delivered from our propensity to the flesh.

Deliverance from our thorny responses to find grace to minister to another

Further, we will *find grace to minister* to those who are prickly toward us. This includes in relation to our children.

We cease from asking for the prickly circumstances or person to be removed from us, or for the Lord to deal with that person, or for grace to cope with the prickly character whom we have to work with – when we should be asking, 'What are You saying to me, Lord?'

Remember that we are to be *diligently attending to the word*.

'What are You saying to *me*, Lord? Please deliver me from my prickly reactions to this person. Deliver me from the big log in my own sight. I am letting go of being worried about the prickle that I am seeing in others.'

A person who is looking to the reward has been born to *see* it. They are *born of God* and they are choosing to *suffer the reproaches* of Christ with the people of God, because that is where their treasure is.

The treasure of the gospel of sonship hidden in the field of the ground of the presbytery

It is notable that Jesus spoke about the Devil sowing tares among wheat in Christ's own field. This is an amazing passage.

But the very next statement that He made in relation to these tares, or weeds, which had been sown among the wheat of His field, was the answer to it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.' Mat 13:44.

Now, I don't know about you, but I have often wondered about this because, if I went to a field,

and I stumbled across a treasure buried in it, I would dig that treasure up and 'bolt' with it.

It is strange that he went and *sold everything* to buy the field to get the treasure?

So, why did Jesus say that he bought the field?

It is because the 'treasure' is *the gospel of sonship*; and the 'ground' in which the treasure is buried is *the ground of fellowship* from which *the word* is proceeding.

This is 'the ground of the presbytery', and this ground has four dimensions to it. It is the apostles' doctrine, the apostles' fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers. That is the ground defined by the word of Christ, and proclaimed by His messenger.

When you receive the gospel of sonship, you realise that the gospel of sonship is not independent of the *ground* from which it is coming.

Do you see that a person who is truly illuminated to the gospel of sonship recognises that you cannot have the *treasure* without the *field*?

Jesus was saying that the treasure is not independent from the ground of fellowship from which it proceeds.

In the end, the treasure is the *fellowship* that is the *eternal reward that remains*.