



Jesus' Revealing Parable Of The Wheat And The Tares

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Revised 7.15.25

Matthew 13:24-30

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matthew 13:36-43 records Jesus' explanation of the parable.

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;

38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Preface

The parable before us is perhaps the weightiest of all that Jesus taught. Therefore, it's a good idea to understand its Author a little better before interpreting it. Viewing this parable in the light of other teaching that reveals Jesus' mind is helpful.

Jesus was the most salient and truthful Person of all time. He did not pander to the prevailing personalities or ideas of His day. He was aligned with God, not man. It is quite remarkable to consider His teaching against the smug environment in which He

lived. While not trying to be a maverick or to purposely offend, He frequently cut across the deep grain of Jewish belief and custom. He said things that were absolutely countercultural. He was unorthodox in His approach to teaching and setting up His Kingdom. He did not go through the normal educational or hierarchical channels of the established religious system, but called common men from society and began a Kingdom totally apart from the norm.

The unique teaching of Christ

Christ's teaching was the most honest of all time. He was not tainted with a sinful nature or carnal associations. He was the Word of God incarnate. He, while being human, was God and, therefore, perfect. In fact, the writer of Hebrews referred to Christ as *the express image of God* (Hebrews 1:3). He was the most informed person of all time and the greatest communicator to ever live.

His teaching was compassionate. That's the nature of truth— but sometimes raised the ire the backslidden religious elite. He had come to bear witness of the truth (John 18:37). He was light without any darkness. He was the One to Whom every person owes his understanding (John 1:9). He came to His Own but was not received by them (John 1:11). One reason was because His teaching cut across long-established assumptions and He made no apology for it.

A few examples of His teaching will serve to point out the character of the Teacher that brings us this weighty parable of the wheat and the tares we're about to consider.

God's righteous standard

For example, in His Sermon on the Mount, He said that unless one's righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, he could in no case enter into the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). Hardly anything could have been more striking to those who heard it. These whom Jesus just singled out were widely considered to be the most religious and righteous people of that day. Jesus' words had the effect of a stone thrown against glass. He intended to shatter a misconception and reveal the much-needed truth that God had proposed a much higher standard for His people than what they were living.

The Jewish conception that wealth necessarily indicated God's favor

The Jews of Jesus' day commonly held the belief that those prospering materially were enjoying the favor of God and, thus, were in right standing with Him, while those who experienced misfortune were certainly amiss from God. This is evident in

Luke 13 when He spoke about the fate of those who suffered under Pilate and some upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. His correction to their perception was that those who suffered their unexpected fate were not at all sinners above the very people to whom He spoke. He added that, apart from repentance, they would suffer a similar end.

Add to this Jesus' account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, which defied, in the most shocking and graphic way possible, the illusion that wealth and apparent good fortune were evidence of God's approbation and good pleasure. Here, in Christ's narrative, and contrary to their thinking, the rich man went to hell and poor, sickly Lazarus was rewarded by going to paradise, referred to as Abraham's bosom.

What's more, Jesus', "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven", statement (Matthew 19:24), after the sad departure of the rich young ruler, was another example of Christ shattering the concept that personal wealth indicated God's favor. What Jesus postulated was so contrary to the popular conception of His day that it dumbfounded even the Apostles who, out of stunned surprise asked, "Who then can be saved?" (v.25).

Christ's prediction of the Temple's destruction

Jesus' foretelling of the destruction of the prized Jewish Temple was one of the greatest affronts He could have made to His generation. The Temple was at the hub of their religion. It was part of their identity as Jews. It was a kind of symbol of their God, Whom they assumed dwelt within. Destruction of their Temple was only too poignantly associated with apostasy in their well-known history. Jesus' prediction of its ruin to the extent that not one stone would be left standing upon another was a rebuke to their own religious state of being.

The revelation that few would be saved

Christ closed His famous Sermon on the Mount by declaring that few would be saved and that many people of faith would be cast out (Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23). In the latter reference, His reason— that He didn't know them— indicated rejection of them was due to their failure to be in sole, intimate covenant relationship with Him, the only way God has dealt with His people from the beginning of time.

The saying is still shocking today. It destroys the common misperception among humans that nearly everyone will be saved— all but about five of the worst people that ever lived.

Christ doubly reinforced His assertion in Luke 13:22-23.

The Jews' loss of their favored position as the people of God

Perhaps the greatest of all Jesus' assaults on the corrupt Jewish religious system and their smug confidence of divine favor was His forecast that they would lose the kingdom and that it would be given to another nation. It's contained in the parable of the Vineyard (Matthew 21:33-43). So alarming was this prediction that His hearers responded, "God forbid" (Luke 20:16).

That announcement, along with the one concerning the destruction of the Temple, spelled the end for Jewish national pride. They would become a persecuted and despised people for the next 2,000 years until the time of the Gentiles was fulfilled and God would once again turn to them prior to the Millennial Kingdom, in which they would reign in a favored position.

Jesus knew where history had been, where it was, and where it was going.

The import of this teaching of Jesus is often overlooked in our reading of the New Testament. But it is actually spectacular that He spoke with such force against conceptions they held, and to which any resistance was most unwelcome.

The same resistance is met in our own day, and probably in every generation. Who today is open to the fact that only a few will be saved or that there is only one plan of salvation (Matthew 7:13-14; Ephesians 4:5)? In a day when easy believism rules, who is open to Jesus' stern warning that *many* people of faith will be denied eternal fellowship with Him?

The reason I cite such sharp teaching of Jesus as a preface to this look at His parable of the wheat and the tares is to show His keen understanding of the world into which He came and of the events that would take place historically, some of which, since, have changed history. Surely, heaven and earth shall pass away, as He said, but His words shall not pass away (Matthew 24:35).

With the sense gained from these references of Jesus' earnest desire to present the true condition of Israel, we can appreciate His care and concern to show us what would be the future state in the Gospel dispensation, the dispensation into which we are so graciously placed. But, with Jesus' warnings, grace from Christ should be coupled with fear on our part, which never goes out of style (Romans 11:22; Philippians 2:12).

Listen to Jesus.

When Jesus spoke the parable of the wheat and the tares, He forecast Church history that would take place over the next two thousand years. This period of time is often called the Church dispensation. It is also called the Gospel dispensation since salvation occurs by the presentation and acceptance of the Gospel, meaning obedience to Gospel terms.

Christ had a devoted evangelism team in place. The Gospel He placed in their hands would present to the world for the age to come the remarkable Person of Jesus, the God-man, and the exceptional life He would offer to take away our sins. The Gospel would also contain the unwavering covenantal terms of salvation, the faith response to the Good News, what theologians for generations have called, the plan of salvation, to be announced on the first occasion of preaching after the said sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Jesus had no illusions as to what would take place when He left this world. He also knew the opposition His enemy and the enemy of the race created in His image would mount against the precious saving Gospel. He was aware the devil was going to tamper with the Gospel just as he had done with the Word of God that bound Adam and Eve to their Creator (Genesis 3).

The chief area of the devil's strike against the Gospel would strategically be the plan of salvation itself. The devil doesn't so much care what is taught about Christ and His wonderful sacrifice of Himself He gave for us. That knowledge, apart from its Christ-mandated faith response in the Great Commission, is insufficient to save. The truth about His virgin birth and tremendous death, burial, resurrection, and ascension have remained largely intact throughout the stormy history of Christianity. To this day, agreement abounds across the many denominational lines. Even in medieval times, when the apparent Church was at its worst state, these tenets had been maintained.

The devil's chief concern is not that people lose faith in Christ. That's not necessary to accomplish his goal of keeping humanity lost. He cares not that people believe. He does so himself, to no avail (James 2:19). His sole concern is to keep them from the proper faith response to the New Covenant ushered in by our Savior. He is laser focused that they don't receive the benefits of Calvary, all of which were declared on the momentous Day of Pentecost, including remission of sins and the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost. With faith in Christ, the devil has no problem. New birth as a result of that faith, he is determined to prevent.

Summary of the parable

In the parable, Jesus teaches what will take place in Church history using the metaphor of a sower of wheat, who would be expecting a joyous harvest of the same. The wheat represents the pure seed of the Gospel which Christ gave to His Apostles via His teaching while on earth, but most specifically from His Great Commission, which identifies the plan of salvation. (A full-orbed study of the Great Commission reveals the plan of salvation to involve repentance, baptism in Jesus' name for the remission of sins, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. Accordingly, this is what Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost—Acts 2:38-39.)

The tares represent a distorted, disturbed, tampered, altered, or otherwise, perverted message of the Gospel. Again, that usually takes place in the faith response area. That's what the first Church had to battle as well. In that day, the temptation was to add the Old Testament rite of circumcision to the Acts 2:38 response. In ours, it's to diminish from Acts 2:38, often to the point of mere faith alone. Anything other than the plan of salvation revealed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38), when three thousand souls were saved, constitutes a false Gospel, and is tare (Ephesians 4:5; Jude 3).

Jesus' Purpose In Giving The Parable Of The Wheat And The Tares

I believe this is the most luminous of Jesus' parables. It must be considered in earnest. It's a heavy parable packing a heavy message. It is both a parable of victory and of tragedy. It is joyous and sad, terribly sad. It portrays the saved and the lost, along with the reason for their respective outcomes, that reason being their acceptance of either the true or false message of the Gospel.

It would be great to focus only on the positive side of the parable but Christ, its all-knowing and all-caring Author, was intent on revealing the negative so as to provide a potent warning to unwary souls, a state that is natural to all of us.

The parable graphically displays truth and deception as central to the sphere in which we live. It could hardly be plainer in describing the Gospel dispensation and the final outcome that awaits us all. While it may be uncomfortable to consider such a weighty parable in a day when we would all rather hear something inspirational, it begs our attention. It is a mercy of Christ that we have it. To slight the content of this parable is to leave oneself vulnerable to the very deception it warns against.

Why did Jesus describe false doctrine as tares?

The subject of tares is what makes the parable so significant. In fact, the aspect of tares is the reason for the agrarian metaphor. To understand the nature and

significance of tares is to grasp the meaning of Jesus' teaching and to see Christianity and Church history for what it is.

Tare is not just a harmless weed. Tare is a noxious seed that can cause convulsions and even death. It is toxic. Wheat, of course, is desirable. It sustains life. That's the reason it was sown. Tare is so sickening and useless that, at the harvest, it was burned. The contrast in the seeds that Jesus introduced into the parable were given to illustrate the characteristics and effects of true doctrine and false. This is a substantive part of the parable.

Can you tell the difference?

But, perhaps, the chief significance of Jesus' use of the tare seed in the parable is the likeness of the tare stalks, while growing, to the wheat stalks. When the tare sprouts and grows into a stalk, it cannot be detected from wheat. The stalks of both look identical until the grain begins to appear. (Wheat grain was known for its golden color while tare was dark.) Jesus was capitalizing on the undetectable aspect of the tares in the midst of the wheat to teach that false doctrine can go unnoticed in Church settings due to the very religious nature of it. Often, the subtle way in which false doctrine departs from Apostolic orthodoxy easily escapes attention. In such a setting, people still gather for worship, pray, sing, preach about Jesus, etc. Everything may look valid and churchy, as it's supposed to. But, consistent with what we've already said of the devil's strategy, most false doctrine occurs in the vital area of salvation doctrine, for the obvious reason of keeping people from being saved. Sadly, and largely because of ignorance, departure from the truth in this area is not noticeable to many. So, the parable emphasizes that true doctrine saves, while false doctrine, concealed like a counterfeit in a setting that may share similarities with the truth, ultimately destroys. It is the devil's subtle attempt to sabotage Christianity.

Accordingly, the tares of the parable represent, not the false religions outside of Christianity, but the false doctrine—the heresies—within the name of Christianity. Non Christian religions do not resemble Christianity. The only possible thing that could resemble Christianity is a false christianity. Like the parable suggests, the false can be hard to detect for souls unaware of the devil's trickery. To such a person, all forms and variations of "Christianity" appear valid. Tare, thus, is a vicious attack of the enemy to deceive people in order to keep them from Christ's true saving grace all the while they're convinced they have it.

How can we know which Christian doctrine is wheat and which are tares?

The answer to that question is the most important thing regarding the teaching of the

parable. The parable wouldn't be helpful if one couldn't determine by it what salvation doctrine is wheat and which are tares. The answer is quite simple. Jesus, in giving us the parable, provides that key. The parable lets us know that the wheat was sown first. In other words, the true Christian salvation doctrine was sown first. Tares came later. That fact enables us to easily identify the truth.

The Christian harvest began on the Day of Pentecost. That's when the first sowing of Christian salvation doctrine took place. There is nowhere else in the New Testament to point to as the beginning of the Christian Church era. This occasion involved the very first preaching of salvation after Jesus provided for it on Calvary. The plan of salvation that was preached was Acts 2:38. That makes Acts 2:38 necessarily the wheat. Any message that is presented as a means for Christian salvation other than Acts 2:38 came later and must be tare. It's a matter of simple chronology. God is not the Author of confusion (1Corinthians 14:33); the devil is.

Acts 2:38-39

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

Acts 2:38 is the true plan of salvation for the Christian era, the actual benefits of which every denomination agrees is necessary— turning to Christ, remission of sins, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

This is the new birth experience of water and Spirit that Jesus categorically declared to be vital (John 3:3-5). This is how we are born again of Christ, the perfect, sinless Man, and become children of the Kingdom. By fulfilling Acts 2:38, we are raised from the Fall and are organically connected to God's redemption. Failure to obey Acts 2:38 is to miss the salvation offered by God. Such failure renders a person unsaved and still connected to the Fall— the initial rebellion that the devil perpetrated in the Garden of Eden. Hence, one in such condition would still be, as Jesus said, a child of the wicked one— our natural state, as opposed to a child of God (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12).

The blood of Jesus: there is nothing as valuable.

One of the main reasons the devil supplants Acts 2:38 with tare is to keep people from the saving blood of Christ. No soul can be saved without the application of Christ's blood. The New Testament is clear that the precious blood of Jesus is applied

to us at conversion through baptism in Jesus' name, which is clearly designated to be for the remission of sins (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Colossians 2:13).

In Romans, Paul explains exactly how baptism is efficacious to remit sins. It is the means whereby we come into contact with Christ's blood due to our burial with Him into His death (Romans 6:3-5). In the rest of the chapter, he places our hope of resurrection on this important burial.

Resistance to baptism in Jesus' name is resistance to Christ's blood. There is no area in which the devil's presence is more detectable than in opposition to baptism in Jesus' name.

Tare is deadly.

The devil tries to replace the Acts 2:38 plan of salvation with various religious expressions or with verses of Scripture, misinterpreted or misapplied.

Some of the non biblical, religious expressions widely used are:

"Accept the Lord as your personal Savior", or, "I know I'm saved because Christ's blood has atoned for my sins". While sounding valid, these are substitutes for the actual plan of salvation.

Tare can also be a misapplication or improper use of Scripture itself. Such can be especially unsuspecting simply because it is Scripture. The devil is not above using the Word of God in this wrong way (Matthew 4:6). Oftentimes, misguided souls use Bible verses wrongly as the basis for claiming salvation. The end result is disastrous because verses of Scripture that were not given as the plan of salvation cannot produce salvation. Every Scripture has its specific purpose for being in the Bible. No Scripture can replace the actual plan of salvation that God gave to save souls. Faith must be properly founded on Scripture to be valid and effective to save (Romans 10:17).

Notice that after revealing Acts 2:38 as the plan of salvation on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said it was the sole salvation to which God would call all souls (Acts 2:39).

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

The most common examples of misapplied Scriptures for claiming salvation are John 3:16, Romans 10:9-10, and Ephesians 2:8-9. While they summarily touch on elements of salvation, none of them is the New Testament plan of salvation. None was presented to the Apostles by Jesus in the Great Commission. None was used on the Day of Pentecost or in any of the examples of salvation in Acts. When wrested

from their true, inspired meaning and misapplied as the plan of salvation, they present a corruption of the Word of God, resulting in them being used as tare.

Recall that the devil is seen to tamper with the Word of God in Genesis 3, bringing down our race. He supplanted God's truth with a lie, upon which Adam and Eve placed their faith. Hence, they removed their faith in God's Word and placed it upon a perversion of His Word. The terrible Fall of our race resulted.

The devil tempted Jesus with a misapplication of a promise of protection in the Word in order to keep Him from being our Savior (Matthew 4:6).

His tactic is the same for souls today— replace the saving message of Acts 2:38.

The reason salvation doctrine (wheat) is so important

This parable has another striking feature about it. It shows why correct salvation doctrine is so important. In verses 24 and 25, the sowing is described as the sowing of *seeds*, which, of course, is to be expected. The seeds were wheat and tare. But when Jesus further explained the parable in verses 37 and 38, He referred to the sown wheat and tare in their advanced stage as stalks bearing fruit. He said *the good seed are the children of the Kingdom*, but *the tares are the children of the wicked one*. What was originally described as seed is now referred to as children.

From this we can see that what we accept as salvation doctrine is what we naturally become. What we believe cannot be separated from who we are. What we believe is literally who we become. Subconsciously, we know this. That's why we say we *are* Apostolic, or Pentecostal, or Catholic, or Lutheran, or Baptist, or whatever. Some try to avoid denominational labels by saying, "I'm a Christian". But they still have to believe a particular doctrine, whether true or false. And that doctrine makes them who they are. Doctrine and its consequential effect cannot be avoided.

There is nothing more important in the world than what we believe, especially as it relates to salvation. By true conversion, we become children of God. By false doctrine, we remain unconverted. In fact, worse than that, we become deceived. Notice the emphasis Paul placed on doctrine when writing to young Timothy (1 Timothy 4:16).

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

What the parable should do in us

To understand the parable of the wheat and the tare is to understand the large realm

generally known as Christianity, which is often contradictory with its many factions. It is to understand why there are so many different beliefs and ideas. It is to understand Church history and the great apostasy that has been taking place. It is to understand why those embracing forms of Christianity disagree and oppose one another. It is to comprehend the struggle that exists between God and the devil for souls. And it is to understand and appreciate the importance of Apostolic doctrine. I think the parable should affect one's emotions in the following ways.

Make us appreciate the mercy of God

The parable reveals the mercy of God in saving us. The casting forth of the wheat seed represents our being provided with the Gospel, which includes all that makes that possible. It includes Jesus coming to die in our place. It includes His sending someone to reach us with the salvation message. It includes Him preparing our hearts for the Gospel, and having a Church in place to receive us. Especially with the vivid contrast of tare, this parable should make us realize in a graphic way how blessed we are to be truly Christ's.

Evoke a love and passion for the truth

We should love and embrace the truth passionately. The true Gospel is so worthy to be cherished that Paul warned that whoever does not love it will not be saved. He added that God Himself will send strong delusion upon the person who does not love the truth (2Thessalonians 2:10-14).

Solomon said, "Buy the truth, and sell it not". We should love the true salvation message because it is of Christ, has come to us at the price of His blood, and is the means He has chosen to save our race. We should love the true Church of Christ, which is the pillar and ground of the truth (1Timothy 3:15), and support it in every way possible.

Incite hatred of the devil's false doctrine

The parable reveals the devil's evil nature and scheme to block souls from the grace of God. In understanding this, we should be upset and ardently oppose the devil and his deceptive doctrines. We should be moved by his malice against our race to do everything in our power to inform others of his wiles. Knowing what use the devil is making of false doctrine, we should say like David, and with the greatest resolve, "*Through Thy precepts I get understanding: therefore, I hate every false way*" (Psalms 119:104) and, "*Ye that love the LORD, hate evil*" (Psalms 97:10). We should contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Give one a burden for the lost

Realizing what is needed for souls to be saved, we should be impelled to pray for them, to witness faithfully, and to use every means possible to show them the truth and win them to Christ. Until they surrender fully to Christ, they are at the mercy of the devil. Nothing on earth is sadder than a soul without Christ's salvation. And especially grievous is the fact that some who believe they are saved are not. May God give us grace to help them.

Give us all a longing and anticipation for heaven

Solomon said, *"Surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off"*. We have the greatest hope ever offered mankind. Jesus is preparing a place for us and will return soon (John 14:1-3). The writer of Hebrews confirms, *"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry"* (Hebrews 10:37). Let's be ready, for we surely *can be!*