

Tares among the Wheat

Matt 13:24-30, 36-43

In the first parable, the bad news was that 3 of 4 places where the seed was sown, it was wasted for nothing good came of it. But there was also good news for the one seed out of four that fell on good ground was very productive, bringing forth fruit that was thirty fold, sixty fold, and a hundred fold. The parable taught patience for those engaged in the ministry of the word for the sower cannot allow negative results to discourage him. It also taught responsibility for as the word is sown in our hearts we want to respond as good soil rather than as hard ground, rocky soil or soil that is inundated with weeds.

The next story Jesus told seems to be a sort of sequel to the first. A man sows good seed in his field. This appears to be an ideal situation. Good seed is sown in good soil. There is nothing to suggest in this instance that there is but a 25% chance of success. Good seed is sown in good soil. Optimism is in the air. Expectations are high. The planting has just been completed but the harvest seems so certain that everyone is already "spending their bonuses." Then, the field workers notice that the good seed has been compromised. There are tares among the wheat. The owner of the field is called in, what has happened? What should we do?

So, just as soon as there is enthusiasm over the prospect of a great harvest, the devil comes and sows bad seed among the good in an attempt to ruin the harvest. We are faced with the reality that there is not only the problem of evil in the world, there is also the problem of evil in the church.

Here are two still popular bumper stickers, one is "Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven." The other is, "PBPGINFWMY" The letters are code for the saying, "Please be patient, God is not finished with me yet. Each saying has a positive interpretation. The acknowledgment that we are not perfect is an expression of

humility and a consciousness of our failures. It is true that we are not perfect. And yet, the bumper sticker suggests an unhealthy

acceptance of this reality that puts the burden on those who suffer the consequences of Christian imperfection to live patiently with behaviors that are simply never going to change. The Christian cannot be expected to change and they really don't have to worry about it for they are forgiven.

The second saying originated through the ministry of Bill Gothard who taught a course he called "The Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts." The saying was meant to convey a consciousness of God's continuing work of sanctification in the life of the Christian while admitting that this work is unfinished. The saying was meant to convey that as a Christian, "I'm working with God's help on my imperfections." Negatively, the saying puts the responsibility for patience on the victim of Christian imperfection. Together, the two sayings suggest something of a cavalier attitude that is common among Christians in respect to issues that are clearly inconsistent with their faith.

We live at a time when the world wants to equate Christianity with other world religions and see no advantage in one over another. If we discuss the evils of an Islam that promotes terrorism, the skeptics answer, "Christianity is no different, look at the crusades." And, there is the seemingly sincere who have said that "If it weren't for Christians, I think I would want to be a Christian."

All of this to say that the tares among the wheat is harmful to the harvest.

But are the tares Christians who struggle or are they the evil ones whom the devil has planted among the faithful and who, themselves, have no relationship with Christ? I have had pastor friends who were good men and who swore that none of their deacons were saved. I was skeptical of their analysis. I have had lots of problems with people in our churches but have found that there is good as well as bad in them all.

The witness of the story is that Satan sows evil seed among the good. The reality of our experience is that there are moral and character flaws in the lives of Christians that never seem to get fixed. In either case, the harvest will suffer.

Here are three of the common moral and character flaws that plague the lives of Christians and hinder the work of the church. Addiction, abuse, and accomodation. If you have an addiction whether it is alcohol, drugs, prescription drugs, or pornography you keep your addiction secret. You know that your addiction is inconsistent with your faith. You are miserable and unhappy. You can get help. Healing is possible. Come out of the closet. Get the help you need. God can set you free!

Abusers use any and every means to control the people in their lives. Bursts of anger, carefully planned manipulations, a need to win no matter what it takes, these are common methods of the abuser. This is not a darkness that usually shows up at church but most often in the home with the affect of great harm to the family. The spiritual persona of the abuser is often maintained in the church while in the home, everyone knows better. The abuser knows nothing of genuine love or is completely detached from its real meaning. The abuser is lonely. There is no one who really understands the pain and troubles of the abuser. But which life do you want? The life where you control everyone around you and keep them as miserable as you are? Or the life that you give to God and that you entrust to Him knowing that He is able to heal you and to bless you? Let go and let God!

Accomodators are those who enable the behaviors of addicts and abusers. Addicts will destroy themselves if they are not supported and enabled by their loved ones. Accomodators cover up for addicts. They lie for them. They do everything they can to keep their loved one from experiencing the consequences of their own behaviors and choices. Unwittingly, they keep the addicts where they are, living in ways that destroy themselves and others. The best hope for an addict is if his support system stops supporting. He will have to hit bottom before he will seek help. You cannot know what will happen if you let them go. But you can be reasonably certain of what is going to happen if you keep propping them up. Nothing will change. Take heart and be courageous enough to hope on behalf of your loved one. Give your addict to God and let them go.

Accommodators also enable their own abusers. They think that they are trapped and that they have no choice. The possible outcomes of confrontation of or

departure from the abuser seem to all be negative. You hang in there and hope for incremental change but it truthfully is illusive. Things will get better but then they get worse. As an adult, you can only be abused if you are willing to be abused. If your child is being abused, you share in the responsibility for what you are allowing to take place. When nothing changes, neither do abusers. Face reality. Do you want to continue to live in fear and uncertainty? Do you want to be punished according to the whims of your abuser? Do you want to continue to try to please and accommodate only to be punished again? Your abuser has no moral right to treat you as they have. You have no moral obligation to stay there and take it. Imagine a life free of abuse and then go for it. You will have to overcome more pain and abuse to get free but freedom is attainable. The alternative is more abuse and pain in a life of hopelessness. Break free because it is right and because God made you to be free. But you can also understand that your abuser will never need to change so long as you are there, accepting the abuse.

When they asked Jesus to interpret the parable of the tares, He did not discuss the causes of evil or describe its character. He spoke instead of the judgment. Leave the tares among the wheat until the harvest. Then, separate them from the wheat and burn them. Jesus answer to the devilish and to the weak among us is... think about the judgment. One day we will each stand before the Lord, He will hold us each accountable for the way that we have lived. I have only tried to give some examples of common failings of believers in our times. The list is not complete at all. Live your faith. Don't live any other way. Pay attention to your weaknesses and seek healing from the Lord. Take a stand for Christ. Trust Him with your life and don't be deceived by the devil.