

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES AND THE WHEAT (Part 2 of 6)

In our Lord's interpretation of this parable, the tares are not portrayed as the lost who need to be reached with the gospel. Instead, the devil sows them among the wheat (Matthew 13:25), for the purpose of undermining the successful advance of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In other words, the wheat is sown by our Savior, in order to infiltrate our lost and fallen world with the good news of God's plan of salvation through the building of Christ's Church. The tares are sown by the devil in order to infiltrate the wheat so that they can hinder the building of Christ's Church.

In the agrarian world of Jesus' day, the disciples would have recognized the tares as darnel, a weed which is indistinguishable from wheat in the early stages of its growth. During their development, the roots of both plants become intertwined with one another as they ripen. In this parable, even though the weeds serve as stumbling blocks to the fulfilment of God's redemptive purpose for our world, the laborers (true believers) are given strict orders by the landowner (Christ), to allow the wheat and the tares to grow together until the harvest in order that no harm be done to the wheat.

How can this allowance for the counterproductive influence of the tares be reconciled with our Lord's clear desire for unity within His Church, as expressed during His High Priestly prayer in John 17? Are not these tares responsible for the divided condition of the Christian faith in our world today? The answer is to be found in the nature and purpose of the Church as the body of Christ for this age. The Church does not possess theocratic authority within a particular nation. Its purpose is to function as responsibly and peaceably as possible under the jurisdiction of various human governments. This is precisely why Jesus said what He did to Pilate in John 18:36, where we read the following –

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, THEN MY SERVANTS WOULD BE FIGHTING (emphasis added) so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.’”

Even though a local church has the authority to excommunicate an individual member, it does not possess authority for their execution. That ultimate dominion rests with the Lord himself, and will be carried out by Christ through the agency of His angelic host (Matthew 13:40-43). Which begs the question: How should we respond to this “allowance” for the ongoing existence of the tares? That answer is critical in counteracting their influence, which we will delve into, next.