

# OpenTheo

## Wheat and Tares, Dragnet (Part 2)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this message, Steve Gregg discusses the parables of the wheat and tares, and the dragnet. He emphasizes that it is not the church's job to separate the wheat from the tares or the good fish from the bad fish, as that is reserved for God's angels during the last judgment. While churches should practice discipline for blatant sin in their ranks, there may still be false converts who do not exhibit scandalous behavior. The focus should be on understanding the mysteries of the kingdom and sharing the gospel with those who haven't heard it.

### **Transcript**

...removal of such leaven from the church. That's another story. But you see, everybody who's not in the church is a sinner.

Everybody is damned who's not a Christian. And therefore, to single out homosexuality as a particularly odious sin, as Christians are wont to do in our present time, makes it look like we're just paranoid, prejudiced, unsympathetic. A lot of these people, of course, have orientations that are probably due to child molestation when they're young.

It's hard to say what influenced them in the way they've gone, and there's certainly no excuse for what they're doing, but there is no doubt some factor or another that has influenced them in the direction they've gone. And we are seen as totally unsympathetic to these factors, and we're just the bigots and the creeps and the unloving. The irony is that when sinners saw Jesus, they saw him as the only guy who'd give them any compassion.

He's the only guy in the religious scene who would eat with them, who'd love them, who'd welcome them, who wasn't ashamed to be associated with them, although he didn't participate in their evil deeds. And the church is seen as just the opposite. We're the main campaigners against sinners of particular categories.

And the saddest thing of all, of course, is that many of the Christians who are leaders in the anti-homosexual, anti-abortion movement are people whose own records are not all that clean, or even their present lives. We had in this very town a few years ago an elder

in a church who was highly active in the pro-life movement. He got arrested and thrown in jail for sitting in front of an abortion clinic.

He was sort of a rallying point for the local pro-lifers. And in the very midst of that, he was having two affairs. He was an elder of a church, but he was having two extramarital affairs, both with women who were in the pro-life movement with him.

They were both married women too. So there were three adulterers heading up the McMinnville pro-life movement. Now, that doesn't discredit the pro-life cause.

I mean, it doesn't philosophically say that pro-life is the wrong position. But it certainly shows that we are perceived, and rightly so, as hypocrites. When we are out there telling women that it's wrong for them to kill their babies, but we're out doing things that are apparently, in God's sight, equally wrong, committing adultery, but letting ourselves off the hook, not judging ourselves.

We've got beams in our eyes, and we're out trying to pluck motes, or maybe beams out of other people's eyes. The point is, you can't get a beam or a mote out of someone's eye if you've got a beam in your own. And the idea here is that you have to have your conversation honest among the Gentiles, so that even though they may not appreciate you, and you're a righteous human, they may be threatened by you, they can nonetheless say nothing wrong against you.

That's what Peter said in the passage we just read. The point is that by taking a political approach to the homosexuality problem in our culture, Christians have effectively alienated a major sector of needy sinners, who will no longer even give it a consideration of looking to Christianity for hope for their problem. They'll go to the Democrats, they'll go to the liberals for help, and they don't have any real help for them.

But the point is, Christians, by trying to judge the world, instead of judging themselves, as they're told to do, have simply destroyed their testimony, and may have lost, for maybe a decade or two, or maybe a whole generation, any opportunity to win homosexuals in large numbers. Now, some homosexuals are still going to get saved, but the point is, just think, if Christians, instead of getting caught up in the world's ideas, instead of being kingdom builders in the worldly sense of that word, trying to legislate the kingdom of God to an unsaved world, if they had instead done what Jesus said to do, and said, listen, we're not even going to get involved in this anti-gay rights thing, you know, a lot of conservatives who aren't Christians could have put forward that agenda. But the point is, such anti-homosexual actions, those forces are going to be in the society, vocally, whether Christians are involved in it or not, but if Christians keep their hands clean of that kind of dirty work, and go out and reach out to the homosexuals, now, who wants to do that? My goodness.

If you win one of them, you've got to take them into your home or something, because

you've got to get them out of the homosexual community, or they're doomed to failure. And if you win one of them, good heavens, you might have to bring them into your home. Where else are you going to put them? They might have AIDS.

You might become infected. You might die. Far be it.

Let's let the government take care of them. Let's let the government get rid of them. Now, of course, if you win a homosexual to Christ and effectively disciple them, they will stop their sinful lifestyle, including their homosexuality, but also the other sins in their life.

The problem is the church has found an easier way to live in the world and punish sinners, and that is not to address sin in the church, but to get politically active and to try to get the government to judge the sinners. I personally think it misses the whole point of what Jesus is saying here. The tares are going to be in the world, and homosexual tares are bad, but they're no worse than any other kind of tares.

They're all lost. They're all sinners. And sure, they've got a life-dominating problem.

And no doubt, homosexuals are different in this respect. They are evangelistic about their lifestyle. I was going to say most adulterers keep it to themselves, but a lot of adulterers are always on the make, and so they're trying to promote adultery with women they work with or whatever it is.

Some sins are more aggressive than others. Some sins are more in your face than others. And there's a sense in which the pride of the church is hurt because we've lost our cultural influence.

It used to be that a guy like Billy Graham could speak to a president, and the president would respect him and take his opinion as important. Nowadays, Billy Graham represents a hated minority in America, a culturally despised group. And the world just sees this as a bunch of creeps, and it's quite clear that if the homosexuals get in our face with their agenda, pride would say, well, we're going to get back in their face and fight fire with fire.

But you can't put out fire with fire. You fight fire with water, and you don't respond in kind. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but we do have weapons that are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds and casting down imaginations and bringing into captivity every thought to obedience to Christ.

And if we would use those, we might be surprised that we'd have some success because Paul says the weapons we have are mighty ones. The ballot box is not mighty. It really isn't.

I mean, Christians have been spending millions of dollars the last few election years,

millions of dollars campaigning for righteous candidates, Christian candidates and so forth. To my knowledge, very few have won. I don't know of any who've won.

Well, a few have won on local level and so forth. But basically, it has not had any effect, any noticeable effect on society for the good. All that money could have been spent on supporting a few people to go down in the inner city every day and just kind of be merciful, be like Jesus.

Go down among the homosexuals, go down among the gangs, go down among the people that we see as the problem and serve them. Serve them and love them, feed them, help them. I mean, isn't that what the good Samaritan did? You know, the Jews were his enemies, but he was like Christ.

He served, he attended the medical needs, all things for the person. And that's what Jesus said to go and do likewise. But the church simply is apparently going by some other instructions other than those of its head because we've missed the whole point.

We think that the interests of the kingdom of God are advanced by our getting rid of the sinners out of the world. But in fact, that's not the case. Jesus said, don't try to pluck out the tares.

They're going to be here until the end. Try to isolate wheat. I mean, try to cultivate wheat.

Let's put it that way. And some of those tares turn out to be wheat in the end, too. For all you know, those that you thought were tares.

Now, there is another part of this that needs some comment. And that's the eschatological part. It says in verse 41, the Son of Man will send out his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend.

By this time, the whole earth will be claimed by Jesus as a kingdom and whatever tares are there are going to be removed forcibly by him. And those who practice lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire, there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now, one thing I would point out to you here is that the angels are sent out and they gather who? This I presume is the end. He says it's the end of the age, the end of the world or something.

It's the second coming of Christ, I understand. He's going to come with his angels. They're going to gather the tares out.

Now, of course, you and I have heard most commonly that when Jesus comes back, it's we the Christians who will be gathered out. Jesus never said a word about that. Jesus

never indicated the Christians are going anywhere.

Now, I realize that Paul said in 1 Thessalonians that when Jesus comes, the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain to be caught up together to meet them in the air and ever to be with the Lord. We're caught up into the air. But at what point? Well, I would like to suggest to you, not until after judgment has come on all the wicked and we're not taken up to heaven and we're brought back to a purged earth.

Jesus nowhere teaches that when he comes back, he's going to take away his people. He's going to take away the wicked, not rapture them, but destroy them, cast them into fire. I'm sure we've talked about this before.

There's another parable a little later in the same chapter, one of the last ones in it. In verse forty seven, Matthew thirteen, forty seven says again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels and threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age, the angels will come forth and separate the wicked from among the just and cast them into the furnace of fire.

There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Now, in this chapter, there are several couplets of parables. We haven't studied them all yet, but you're going to find in this chapter two parables next to each other, the pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in a field.

These two parables have essentially the same meaning, but they're short and they and they basically give the same idea twice. You'll find also a parable about the mustard seed and about the leaven put right next to two short parables that both are saying essentially the same thing as well. I think this issue that Jesus is teaching in the parable of the wheat and the tares also has a second parable about it, and that's this one about the dragnet.

It drags in fish indiscriminately. Later, they're sorted out. And in both cases, both parables end the same way.

Both of them mentioned the angels being sent out in verse forty nine says the angels will come forth and separate the wicked from among the just. Well, about the wheat and the tares, it said in verse forty one, the son of man will send out his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. So the angels are set out to do the work.

Furthermore, you'll notice that in verse forty two, it says and will cast them into a furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth verbatim the same as verse fifty and cast them into a furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Obviously, the two parables end exactly alike and have the basic, the same basic action, the sending forth of the angels from the son of man comes and the gathering out of his

kingdom. Now, I'd point out to you in the parable of the dragnet and of the fish being brought in, it specifically says in verse forty nine, so will it be at the end of the age, the angels will come forth. And separate the wicked from among the just.

Now, you and I have heard that the Christians are going to be raptured out of the world. And you know, there's going to be one taking the other left. A woman in her bed will wake up and she'll look over and her husband will be gone.

He's a Christian. He's been taken away. He's been removed.

All the Christians have been removed from among the wicked and the earth. But this is opposite. This doesn't speak about them taking the righteous from among the wicked, but removing the wicked from among the just.

And that's very plainly stated in the parable of the tares. In fact, even before Jesus gives the explanation, just read the parable itself. There's an emphasis in verse thirty.

Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, first gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn. So there's a stress on first you gather the tares.

First you judge the wicked. Then we'll talk about gathering the wheat. Likewise, in verse forty-one, he sends out his angels and they don't gather out of the kingdom his people.

He gathers all the devil's people out. All the children of the wicked ones. Those that offend, those who practice lawlessness, those are who the angels gather out.

So the picture that Jesus gives at the end is that the righteous are there along with the wicked until he sends his angels. And when they come, they take the wicked away. Now, look back at Proverbs chapter two and bear with me if you remember last time we talked about this.

It seems to me it's been a long time, so I think it'll bear repetition since it's so contrary to what we usually hear and the pictures that have been painted for our minds. Proverbs two, verses twenty-one and twenty-two say, for the upright will dwell in the land and the blameless will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the earth and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it. Now, it seems clear that it's them that's going, not us.

They will be uprooted and cut off. They will be judged. We will stay.

Sure, we'll be caught up in the air. We have to be in the air when Jesus consumes the world with fire, which he does in a second. I don't want to get my feet burned.

So, I mean, he'll catch us up in the clouds while he renovates the earth and then we'll come back down. But that'll be after or at the same time or I think just apparently from what Jesus said, just following his judgment on all the wicked. By the time we're lifted up,

there won't be any wicked left.

We're not going to be raptured out from among the evil society and everyone will be, the newspaper headlines will say, all these fundamentalists have disappeared. You know, planes crash because the pilot was a Christian, you know, and then they have to think of some explanation. Where'd all the Christians go? We hear these scenarios from time to time, but that's not going to happen.

All the wicked are going to be dead before we go anywhere. They're going to be severed from among us. Look at Psalm 91.

Now, before you do that, look at Psalm 37, I think. Or maybe it's 34, but I think it's 37. Yeah.

Psalm 37, verse 9 and following. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait on the Lord shall inherit the earth for yet a little while and the wicked will be no more. Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more.

But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. Now, this idea that the meek shall inherit the earth and the wicked will be cut off from it, if you think that, well, that's maybe an Old Testament idea. Obviously, it's more than that.

Jesus said, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. He was practically quoting this verse. Certainly, he carried his validity forward to his own disciples.

You who are meek can look forward to inheriting the earth. You're not going to be taken away to heaven and the wicked inherit the earth. They're going.

You're staying. Now, we can turn to Psalm 91. Psalm 91 is about judgments that come from God on the wicked.

It talks about a number of things we don't have time to talk about in detail, but it says in verse, well, let's look at verse 5. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you, only with your eyes. You shall look and see the reward of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the most high, your dwelling place, no evil will befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling, for he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.

Now, the point here, of course, is verses 7 and 8, that a thousand or ten thousand may fall at your side, and yet you are unaffected by the judgment. This I take to be the Old Testament parallel of Jesus' New Testament words, two will be in one bed, one will be taken to the other left. Two will be working in the field, one will be taken to the other left.

Side by side. One is judged, the other is left. And, of course, the context in which Jesus said these things clearly indicates that that's the correct interpretation.

Although, of course, people have often thought that passage is about the rapture, that comes from not paying attention to what it says. If you look, for instance, at Matthew 24, where it talks about that, one being taken to the other left, for example, it says, in verse 38, Matthew 24, 38, For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark, verse 39, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken in the other left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken in the other left. Now, if taken in verse 40 and 41 means the same thing that taken or took means in verse 39, which is the most reasonable way to understand it, those who were taken, in verse 39, were the wicked who did not enter the ark. And they didn't know what was coming until the flood came and took them away, just killed them.

They were killed. So will it be when Jesus comes back. Two people will be in close proximity, one's going to be taken.

One will be left. Noah's family was left. The wicked were taken.

And that's what it'll be like. The parallel in Luke 17 is even more useful in understanding this concept, I think. In Luke 17, from verse 34 on, it says, I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed.

The one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together. The one will be taken and the other left.

Two men will be in the field. One will be taken and the other left. The disciples answered and said to him, Where, Lord? Where are they going? Where are they being taken to? So he said to them, Wherever the corpse is, wherever the body is, the eagles will be gathered together.

Meaning, of course, that wherever there's dead bodies, they can be located. Because there'll be gatherings of vultures, if you are, or eagles. Somebody told me recently that eagles do eat carrion.

I had read many places that eagles do not eat carrion. Who told me that? Someone here? No, it was someone down in Santa Cruz, a guy who spent a lot of time up in



Alaska. He said that he'd see eagles, actually, on the garbage dumps in Alaska, eating dead animals.

I've always read that vultures would be a better translation here, although eagles is what the word means. Because vultures are carrion eaters. They eat dead meat.

Whereas I always had heard or read that eagles only catch live prey and eat it. But I've been re-educated about that. I guess eagles are known to eat dead meat as well.

And that's what Jesus seems to be saying, that carrion birds gather wherever there's corpses. Now, what's that got to do with the question the disciples asked? They said, Where are these people? These people who are taken, where, Lord? Well, they're corpses. Look for the birds.

You want to know where they are? If it really interests you, you can find them. Wherever there's corpses, there's vultures gathered. And so, obviously, those who are taken are not raptured into heaven.

Those who are taken are destroyed. They're killed in the judgment of God in his second coming. They are taken care of first.

And we are taken care of second. That is what the parable of the dragnet and the parable of the wheat and the tares both teach. That when the angels come at the second of Christ, they'll deal with the wicked first and the righteous next.

Luke 17.29 But on that day, Lot went out of Sodom. It rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Oh, well, the point he's making there, the basic thing is that when his people were safe, he destroyed Sodom.

He destroyed the wicked. Now, Lot didn't leave the valley. Lot didn't leave the world.

He didn't even leave the valley where Sodom and Gomorrah were. There were five cities that were supposed to be slated, but Lot's presence in one of them spared that small city and the rest of it got destroyed. But the point is that once God has secured his people, he can judge the wicked.

And just like Sodom and Gomorrah, just like the fire came down and destroyed them. Now, I realize that some people have compared Lot and his leaving of Sodom to the rapture of the church. That is a stretch that I think the text itself won't bear.

He didn't leave the world. He didn't even leave the place of danger. The particular place he was was spared because he happened to still be there.

But it was part of the world that was slated for destruction, too. It's like the Jews in Egypt, you know, when the plagues came. They were there in Egypt.

They weren't taken out of the world. They weren't even taken out of Egypt. They were spared from the plagues and the judgment of God came on them, but not on the Jews.

Now, I might just make one other observation about the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13. We just read it quickly and the main thing I pointed out is that it's similar in meaning. It may be identical or it may not be quite identical in meaning.

It obviously ends the same as making the same essential point. But the dragnet gathers in fish. I don't know to what degree we're supposed to carry the images from other parts of the New Testament into this parable.

But you recall that when Peter was called from his vocation of fishing, he was told that he would now fish for men. Now, everyone I know, including myself, believes that that is referring to evangelism. That's referring to calling people to Christ.

Fishing for men is to catch them alive and bring them to Christ. That's evangelism. Now, I don't know if Jesus is shifting the metaphor here, changing the imagery.

It's possible he is. But it's also possible he isn't. In which case, the dragnet that brings in the fish could be seen as the evangelistic efforts of the church.

Now, the net pulls in good and bad. And the sorting is done later. In fact, just like the wheat and the tares, it's done by the angels at the end.

Now, if we understood the dragnet to be the church or those that are brought into the church, being a mixed lot, then someone might argue, well, therefore, we are not supposed to sort out the fish in advance. But you see, we don't have in that story someone saying, shall we pick out the bad fish prior to the time that the net's brought to shore? There's no occasion in that particular story to raise the question of whether Christians ought to try to get the bad fish out of the net. In the particular of the story, you can't go sorting through the fish until you get them ashore.

You just can't jump down in the water and start doing your sorting then. So it's not like the parable of the wheat and the tares where there's actually a question raised, should we do something about this before the harvest? And the answer is no, do nothing until the harvest. But this parable, the dragnet, without raising the question of the church's activity in cleansing its own ranks, does point out that at the judgment, even if we allow the net to be the church, there will be some that the church has missed.

There's going to be some false ones in there. There are some false Christians that we can't identify. Only God knows who they are.

And they no doubt will remain in the church until the time that Jesus comes and sorts them out himself or sends his angels to do it. I don't know whether the dragnet parable is exactly identical in meaning to the previous in which the dragnet would just be the

world. The world gathered to judgment.

Or whether it is giving a slightly different spin on the same thought. Namely that the wheat and the tares is about the world. The dragnet would be maybe about the church as a microcosm of the world.

And the only reason for saying so, there's only one reason for saying so, and that's the similarity to the concept of dragging fish in with a net and Jesus talking about Peter's evangelistic works as if that was fishing for men. I had a strong temptation on my part to see the net as the results of the mission of the church and evangelism. And therefore the gathered fish would be those who are in the visible church.

Those who have responded, those who have been caught. Those who have been brought in. But not all of them have really been converted.

And while we, of course the church has to discipline blatant sin in its ranks, there's a lot of false converts who don't have blatant sin in their life. There's just people who've just, they've never really been born again. They've never really surrendered to Christ, but they're not living scandalous lives.

So they've never come under church discipline. But they will be sorted out later too. When Jesus comes and sorts out the wicked from among the just in the world, he'll do the same thing with those who are in the church, the wicked that have infiltrated there.

Now one is at liberty to not understand the dragnet that way, but as I say, enough is said elsewhere about fishing by Jesus to relate it to evangelism that I tend to see it that way. So the two parables are the same, but not exactly the same. They both talk about God settling all the scores, doing all the isolating at the second coming.

But one may focus on the worldwide situation, and the other more specifically on the church, or those who are gathered into the visible church. And the church is sort of a cross section of the world in general. I mean, churches are full of people who aren't born again, but never will do anything so scandalous as to get them kicked out.

And so even if the church did practice church discipline, and did try to keep wickedness out of the church, there'd still be some sorting out to do at the end that only God knows about. Yeah, Corey? Yeah. I don't think so.

That's a good question. For those listening by tape, the question is, first of all, Jesus is telling all this to the disciples. That is correct.

But the question then is, were the disciples supposed to go teach it to the people? The fact is, I don't think they were. Jesus was not at this point dispatching his disciples to explain these things that the multitudes didn't understand. There were few enough people who were disciples that he could explain it to them himself.

And the mysteries of the kingdom that were contained in these explanations were not for the multitudes. That's why Jesus didn't tell them himself. He could have given the multitudes the explanation along with the parable.

I mean, obviously, he preached to huge crowds. He taught them the parable. He could easily tell them what the meaning was, too, if he chose to.

So, I don't think that in telling the disciples the meaning, that there's the implied mission. Now, the apostles, you know, now you go out and tell these people this stuff. Of course, after his ascension and so forth, they were told to go and, you know, communicate everything that had been whispered in their ears, shout it from the housetops.

But during his ministry, he didn't send them out but once or twice to do any kind of missionary work or teaching on the people. Most of the time, the disciples in the gospels are simply learners, not preachers. They become preachers in Acts.

They do preach in Matthew 10. They are sent out, the 12 are sent out on a short-term outreach to do some preaching. And then in Luke chapter 10, we read of 70 being sent out.

And no doubt the 12 were among them. So, the 12 probably had a couple of outreaches that they were involved in during the time they were with Jesus. But their principal function in the gospels is students.

They're learning, not teaching. Until the book of Acts, then that changes. Good question, though.

I have nothing more to say. We've actually finished a little early. I hope no one objected.

Okay, the angels in these parables are agents of judgment. They're not agents of gathering Christians to heaven or anything like that. The passage in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 says the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout.

The voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise. There's no reference to the angels gathering them. Jesus comes himself.

He's got his angels together. Now, you may wonder how the dispensationalists understand this. Since very clearly the tares are gathered first and then the sons of the kingdom are gathered later, and the dispensationalists believe that the church is raptured long before the wicked are judged, I think the dispensationalists would say that the rapture of the church occurs unmentioned prior to the end of this parable.

It just occurs and Jesus doesn't make any reference to it. But those sons of the kingdom that are still on the earth when the tares are removed are the Jews who get saved during

the tribulation. This is not the church.

The church has been gone now for seven years at this point. The Jews who got converted during the tribulation are the saints who are rescued. The problem with it is, with that explanation, is that this would mean the entire parable would have to be confined to the tribulation period because the sons of the kingdom who are at the end of the parable are the same persons who have been growing throughout the entire thing.

Certainly at an earlier stage in history, they are the church. At what point do they change their identity from being the church to being some group of Jewish believers who are not the church? Dispensationalism has some serious problems in some passages like this that in my opinion don't have any adequate explanations.