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Wheat and Tares, Dragnet (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg reflects on the parable of the wheat and the tares from Matthew 13, which deals with the growth of the kingdom of God. He explains that the enemy maliciously sowed tares among wheat as a way to cause harm. Gregg draws significance from the fact that the parable of the wheat and the tares, which is a seemingly common and everyday occurrence, applies to the subject of the kingdom of God. Furthermore, he emphasizes the importance of church discipline to maintain order and purity within the church. Ultimately, he asserts that God's kingdom is not of this world, and that its citizens have a responsibility to maintain positive influence in the world, but not to clean it up entirely.

Transcript

Okay, we'll turn to Matthew chapter 13. We're continuing to work with the parables of Jesus, and we looked at some of Matthew 13 yesterday, but we were working mainly from Mark 4. In Mark chapter 4, we have the parallel to the first parable of the kingdom that we have in this chapter. Also, that was the parable of the sower.

We talked about that, but then Mark also had another parable that is not found in Matthew or Luke, and that's one of the reasons we were in Mark yesterday, so we could get that one. It was unique to Mark, and that was the parable of the growing seed that grows even when the person who planted it is asleep or awake, it just grows in ways that he doesn't know. There's something miraculous, something that defies human understanding about the growth of the kingdom of God, just like there is about the growing of plants.

It's really a work of God, not entirely a work of man, in fact, perhaps not very much a work of man. It's God's power and God's wisdom that makes the kingdom of God advance, not man's. Now, we come in Matthew 13 to what is, in Matthew's version, the second parable.

Having just finished discussing in verse 23, he finishes discussing the parable of the sower, we come to verse 24. It says, another parable he put forth to them, saying, The

kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.

But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares? He said to them, An enemy has done this. The servants said to him, Do you want us then to go and gather them up? But he said, No, lest while you gather up the tares, you also uproot the wheat with them.

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the 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. Now, he follows this with a couple of other short parables that we won't consider today, but a little later on down, about verse 36, he begins to explain this parable we've just read. Now, before we read that explanation, let's look at what the parable itself contains.

The scenario he paints, the situation he describes, is not unheard of in ancient Palestine. In an agrarian society, a man's wealth was very often in the form of his land, or more particularly, the crops that grew on his land. Of course, his land was worth something in itself, but he didn't realize any living off of it unless he grew crops.

A very small percentage of the Jews, or people in most societies, were business people. Most were farmers, and therefore a man would very often live dependent solely on the production of his land, as of course farmers have in all times, even to this present time. It's just more common.

A higher percentage of the population in those days were farmers. And therefore, many people could relate to what Jesus was talking about, a man who plants wheat in his field. Now, he plants good seed in the field.

Now, he could have just said plants seed in the field, but he emphasizes good seed, because as the parable develops, there are some other seeds planted that aren't good. And he has only planted the good ones. He hasn't planted the bad ones.

And that's something that comes up in the explanation. An enemy has done this. Now, there is another plant that malicious persons would sometimes plant among the wheat of an enemy, which is called the bearded darnel plant.

It's what is here referred to as tares. Tares is, I don't know if we have the modern word tares, I don't know if that's applied to any modern plants or not, if that's an old King James word. I think some modern translations say weeds or something like that.

But there is a particular kind of plant, it's not just a generic thing that he planted weeds. Weeds are pretty easy to spot, but tares are not easy to spot, at least not in the initial stages when they are planted among wheat, because they look almost exactly like

wheat when they sprout. And that's what made this such a devious and nasty thing, is that here a man is growing his crops and he can come into financial ruin if these crops are spoiled or fail to bring the profit.

And now an enemy comes and he sows these tares in there which can be mixed with the wheat. Now you might say, why is that so disastrous? Well, as I said, for one thing the tares look a lot like wheat, so there is the danger of mistaking wheat and tares for each other. But there is the other problem is that if you happen to make that mistake, if you happen to harvest some tares and eat them, it can cause you to be quite sick.

They are not edible, really, plants. And therefore to mix inedible plants with edible plants is to certainly compromise the integrity of the crop, to say the least. Now the servants of this man shortly thereafter saw these things springing up.

Apparently some that were particularly astute were able to look very carefully. Perhaps they saw some growing where they hadn't scattered seed as well as where they had. And they said, wait a minute, where did this come from? And they looked at them more closely and discovered upon close examination that they were tares and not wheat.

And then they thought that was peculiar because tares didn't grow wild. They figured that they had been planted. So they go to the master and say, well, master, didn't you only plant good seeds here? Who planted these tares? And the master, of course, comes up with what would be the obvious answer.

I mean, since he wouldn't plant them in his own field, it's obviously done maliciously. An enemy has done this, he said. So there's two possible courses of action that could be done to remedy the situation.

The servants who first discovered the problem suggest maybe we should go out and get those tares out before they get any larger. But, of course, the danger is that at that stage in growth, they look so much like the wheat that one might accidentally uproot good wheat when they are attempting only to remove tares because they might mistake the one for the other. And the owner of the field says simply, no, let them grow together.

In the harvest, it will become evident because in their mature stage, the wheat differs from the tares in looks considerably. And, therefore, it would be much easier to get the tares out and to not mistake any real wheat for tares. And he said in that day, they'll go and gather the tares first, and they'll burn them.

And then they'll gather the wheat and bring it into the barn. Now, once again, this story has nothing remarkable about it. What's remarkable about it is that Jesus would tell it without an explanation to the multitudes because, again, it just sounds like an everyday kind of a story.

It probably wasn't everyday that somebody had an enemy sow tares among their wheat,

but it was not an unheard of thing. In the Old Testament, we find malicious acts of a similar nature. We find persons salting the fields of people they hated just as a malicious act.

In the Old Testament, from time to time, we read of these things happening. You'll probably come to it in, well, I don't know if it's happened already, and, you know, you haven't studied judges, but you'll encounter it in the books of Kings and so forth. Now, to spoil a person's field or his crops was just to spoil him economically, to spoil a man's livelihood.

And so that would happen from time to time. It would take an incredible degree of malice, I suppose, or an unusual degree of malice for someone to do that to a person. But there's a lot of malicious people around who have grudges, and they just love to do that kind of a nasty thing to someone.

And I'm sure that Jesus' readers, or hearers, I should say, if they didn't know of an actual case of it in their own experience, probably knew that that kind of thing was sometimes done. So what Jesus told doesn't present a remarkable story that's unheard of. He just talks about things that would normally be done.

Now, when the master of the field says, oh, an enemy has done this, you know, there's no new revelation given here. That's what anyone would deduce, an enemy has done this. And as far as deciding to let them grow together until the harvest, and then do the isolating of the tares from the wheat instead of doing it at the early stage, that too would probably be common sense.

In all likelihood, most people would do that. But Jesus is not here trying to give agricultural advice to people who find themselves in this situation. Well, what you're going to have to do now, and you probably wouldn't have figured this out yourself, so you're lucky I came along and told you this, let them grow together.

And then you'll have an easier time when they're growing, telling the difference. Anyone would have known that by common sense. So nothing that is in the parable is something that was news to the people hearing it.

It didn't give them any insight whatsoever about its seeming subject, which was agriculture. But what was profound about the parable is that he could take something that was so everyday, so common, so true to life, and apply it across the board to an entirely different subject. Namely, of course, the subject of the kingdom of God.

He begins in verse 24 saying, The kingdom of heaven is like this. Now, in many parables, there are not a large number of points of correspondence between the parable itself and the thing it means. It is usually said by scholars that a parable and an allegory differ from each other in this particular aspect.

An allegory is something like, if you're familiar with Pilgrim's Progress. How many of you have read Pilgrim's Progress? Okay, not very many. You'd better read it.

It's a classic. It's one of the most edifying books ever written. It's the best-selling book in history, other than the Bible.

If you haven't read it, you have simply, you're not well-read as a Christian. No condemnation, but let's just see to it and read that book. Pilgrim's Progress, written by John Bunyan a few hundred years ago while he was in prison.

He was in prison because in England it was against the law to preach the gospel outside of a church, and he was not an ordained clergyman, so he got caught preaching the gospel outside a church and was thrown in jail for 13 years. And there he had a dream, which most would suggest it was inspired, and it was the book Pilgrim's Progress, which is, as I say, one of the most edifying books ever written. Anyway, in Pilgrim's Progress, this guy named Christian sets off from his home in the City of Destruction to go in response to a message by somebody named Evangelist who told him about this city called the Celestial City.

And he sets off with this load on his back, and he follows the instructions of the Evangelist. He comes to the cross, the load falls off. In the course of his journey, he comes to the Hill of Difficulty, and he comes to Vanity Fair.

Everybody's heard the expression Vanity Fair. It comes from this book. It was a city where everyone was into vanity and pride and frivolity and so forth.

And he's got a companion who's joined him on the road by this time named Faithful, and they both are thrown in prison for being uncompromising, and his friend Faithful is killed by the people. He dies a martyr. Anyway, he meets people like Mr. Worldly Wise Man and Mr. Legalist.

You can tell by the names of the people and the places in the story, they all stand for something. They all represent something. This is a typical allegory.

In an allegory, virtually everything in the story stands for something in the antitype or in the thing that it's referring to. Now, parables, generally speaking, are not that way. Parables often can be an elaborate story with a single point that is important.

The parable of the prodigal son is a good example, or the parable of the king who forgave a great debt to his servant, and then the servant went out and did not forgive even a small debt to his fellow servant and was thrown in jail. Both of those stories are quite long with quite a few details that are not that necessary to the story. Those are just examples of fairly lengthy parables that occupy maybe a dozen or more verses each.

And yet the point of the story could have been, you know, the story could have been

shortened a great deal, but there's details given. The prodigal son's out feeding pigs. Well, that doesn't, the pigs don't stand for anything in particular, probably.

They're just part of painting the picture. The story is about restoration, reconciliation, and, you know, that kind of thing. And the specifics of what the boy did in the earlier part of the story are just window dressing to the story.

They're just props that fill out the story and make it more interesting to listen to. But there's one thought there and not a whole bunch of thoughts. Same thing with a lot of the parables.

That's usually considered to be the difference between a parable and an allegory. That an allegory corresponds at many points, almost every point, with whatever it is it symbolizes. Whereas a parable may not correspond at any point at all except for one.

The parable of the unjust judge is an example of this thing where Jesus tells about a judge who didn't care about God, he didn't care about man, he didn't care about justice. And this widow had a complaint, she was being oppressed by some wealthy person and she couldn't get justice because the judge didn't care about her and the judge could take bribes from the wealthy to rule against her or to ignore her. And Jesus says finally by her pestering him, she finally got from him what she wanted.

Now, if we were to take the parable as if it were an allegory, we'd have to say, well, this woman's pestering is prayer, of course, and that's what it is. It's a parable about prayer. In fact, Jesus, or Luke, in telling it, in Luke chapter 18, he introduces the parable by saying, Jesus told another parable to the end that men ought always to pray and not to think.

And then it gives the story. Now, that's the message of that parable, that men ought always to pray and not to think. But there's many things in that parable that do not correspond.

For example, the woman is asking a judge. You would think, therefore, that the judge represents God. But he can't represent God.

The judge in the story doesn't care about her. He doesn't care about justice. He doesn't care about anything except himself.

But he only breaks down because he's annoyed by this woman pestering him. Certainly it is not Jesus' intention to give us the impression that God is annoyed by people praying, and finally, though he cares nothing about us or our needs, he goes ahead and gives in because we simply wear him down. In fact, that's the opposite of what Jesus teaches on prayer elsewhere.

The point of the parable is that a woman in that condition, even when she's finding

resistance from the person she's asking, doesn't give up if the matter is important to her. And you need to not give up in your prayers. You need to be persistent like this widow was, but not because God is like that unjust judge.

The point of the parable is simply that people ought always to pray. The point of the parable is not that God is like an unjust judge and doesn't care and you need to twist his arm to get justice out of him. This is the case with parables.

They often have almost nothing in the story that corresponds with the thing that's being talked about except for one point. Now, I say all of this difference about parables and allegories because this particular parable, which is called a parable, verse 24 says another parable he put forth to them, actually is treated by Jesus as if, by the definitions I've just given, it should almost be considered an allegory. And it's, you know, the parable of the sower is a little like that too.

Jesus gave a meaning to every kind of soil. He gave a meaning to the seed and so forth. But if he did that in the parable of the sower, he did it far more so in this particular parable.

These parables, therefore, are somewhat unusual in that the entire story with every detail seems to find correspondence with what's being discussed. And we can see how many points of correspondence there are when we read Jesus' explanation. Let's look at verse 36.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field. And he answered and said to them, He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

The field is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom. But the tares are the sons of the wicked one.

The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels. Virtually everybody in this story stands for something.

There is one exception which I'll point out in a moment. Therefore, as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend or that stumble and those who practice lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire and 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, this parable is actually quite profound in that it answers or at least it addresses a question that has been a conundrum and a mystery and a problem for philosophical types of people, religious and otherwise, forever.

And that is the question, how do you explain the phenomenon of evil in the world? Now, of course, Christians, if someone says, how can you explain the fact that God is a good God and yet, you know, children are molested, women are raped, people are murdered, teenage sons blow their parents' face out with a shotgun. These things are happening in the world. How can this be evidence that there is a good God? Of course, the Christian answer is that these are free choices that people make.

God is good because he has given man free choice. Man has an option to do evil if he wishes. God does not approve of evil, but he does not prevent it.

And therefore, when these people do these things, we don't blame God for that because that's their own free choice, choosing the sin. But then, of course, the question arises, where do these evil people come from in the first place? Did God make evil? Now, this doesn't really answer the question directly in the parable. The parable doesn't say God did or did not make evil.

The seed of the terrors are the children of the wicked one. And the one who sowed the terrors is the wicked one. But I think we would go way beyond the boundaries of Christian theology to say that this is teaching that the devil created evil people.

The devil is not a creator. The devil is himself a created being. It is not the purpose of this parable to say that some human beings came into existence as an act of God and others came into existence as an act of the devil.

The good seed are the children of the kingdom. But children of the kingdom become children of the kingdom sometime after they've come into existence. They do so by becoming converts.

They become Christians. They do so by a choice. And whether we should carry this to the other side or not, you can decide.

I personally think it makes sense to say that the children of the devil, in this case, the children of the evil one, they become such by a choice also. Now, of course, I realize that the doctrine of original sin teaches that everyone is sinful from birth. And we may be inclined to say everybody who is a sinner is a child of the devil.

I'm not sure that I would say so in quite that way. I know it's common enough to do so. But when Jesus said to the Pharisees, you are of your father the devil, or when the Bible says of Cain in 1 John 3, that he was of the wicked one, he was one of the children of the devil, that it may not be speaking necessarily of the condition in which they were born.

In both the cases where people are said to be children of the devil, elsewhere than here, they are people who made choices. Now, some people, like the Calvinists, for instance, would probably say, well, these people were born children of the devil and they were destined to be children of the devil. Now, that's another issue.

That's not addressed in this parable. Whether they were destined to be children of the devil or not is not the issue. The question is, how did they become children of the devil? Well, we know that people become children of the kingdom by a choice they make, a response to the gospel.

And I think it's fair enough to say that people who are called children of the devil, at least those who are specifically called such in the Bible, are, in every case that I've read, cases of people who've made a specific choice to reject the truth and to resist it. Now, does that include all non-Christians? Maybe. It could.

I couldn't argue that it doesn't. But I'm at least open to the possibility that it's specifically talking about those who are in opposition to the truth. At least all the people who are spoken of as being children of the devil, specifically elsewhere in the Bible, were murderers.

Cain was of that wicked one and slew his brother, it says in 1 John 3, and I think around verse 12. And of the Pharisees, Jesus said, you are of your father the devil, and the will of your father you will perform. He was a murderer from the beginning.

And Jesus is basically saying, you're going to be murderers too, you're going to kill me. So, at least in the specific cases of individuals who are singled out as children of the devil, they were murderers, and they were people who had rejected the truth, although they had a chance to respond to it. And I'm not sure that they were in the same class, in all respects, with every unbeliever.

Some unbelievers are not resistant, at least actively or consciously resistant to the truth. They may be resistant at some level unknown to them, but they may not have hardened their hearts. And of course, a great number of unbelievers later become believers.

But a person who is a child of the devil, at least the ones spoken of in the Bible, Cain and the Pharisees, were people who probably were beyond the point of being converted. They were beyond the point of being able to be converted. They had made their decision to suppress the truth and unrighteousness.

They had thrown in, it says that they had sold their soul to the devil, not by a conscious act, like some people nowadays are spoken of as doing, like Jimi Hendrix selling his soul to the devil to be a great guitar player or something like that, or Mick Jagger. There's rumors about those people. But that usually suggests that they've consciously thrown in their league with the devil.

I don't think Cain knew a thing about the devil. And I don't know that the Pharisees saw themselves as agents of the devil. But by their hardening of their heart against truth, and by their rejection of the truth, they were, whether they realized it or not, buying in to the devil's program at a level that made them basically part of his family.

Now, I'm not opposed to someone arguing that all non-Christians are children of the devil. That may be so. But Jesus only deals with two categories here, children of the kingdom and children of the devil.

Perhaps we could say all human beings are potentially children of the kingdom or children of the devil, potentially children of the devil. But that takes us beyond the scope of the parable. The point is, people want to know why is there evil in the world.

And the only parties in the parable that are not given an explanation in his exposition on it are the servants. Now, the reapers are mentioned as the angels. They're going to go out at the end of the age of the harvest and gather the tares and the wheat.

So they are the angels. But in the parable, the reapers are spoken of as if they're someone other than the servants who first discovered the problem and asked the master about it. Because he says to them, wait till the harvest, then I'll send the reapers out.

It sounds like the reapers are a different category than those who ask the question. Now, Jesus doesn't identify those who ask the question. He doesn't identify who the servants were who discovered the evil and wanted an explanation of it.

But maybe that's because it's a generic question that everybody has at one time or another. What is the origin of evil? Thinking people have always wondered that. You know, if God made this earth and if God's a good God, where did this evil and destruction and wars and things come from? Everyone wonders that at some time or another.

Therefore, the servants just represent anybody. Anybody who discovers and is sensitive to evil in the world and wonders where it came from. They ask God, God, where did it come from? His answer is, well, this is the work of an enemy.

Now, of course, in the parable, the enemy actually sowed the seeds and created the tares, as it were, almost from scratch. That's an area where the parable doesn't correspond exactly because the devil doesn't create people. But the devil influences people to become enemies of the truth and he has his plants, as it were, in the world.

Now, one thing I want to point out very carefully here because Christians often are heard expounding on this parable differently than Jesus did. He did not say the field is the church. He didn't say the field is the kingdom.

He said the field is the world. Now, I point that out because it's extremely common for Christians in talking about this parable to talk about how the church is a mixture of wheat and tares. And that, you know, it almost becomes an argument against church discipline to say, well, Jesus said let the tares and the wheat grow together.

He'll sort it out later on. When he comes back, he'll send the angels and they'll divide between the two. As if it is a wrong thing for us to try to make a distinction within the

church walls of who belongs there and who doesn't.

Now, I realize that we don't know everyone's hearts, but the Bible certainly calls for the exercise of church discipline in certain circumstances. There are a number of places, maybe I'll take just a few moments to show you a few of them, even in the teaching of Jesus. In Matthew 18, which we will not read the passage at length since no doubt you all know we've talked about it before, where Jesus says if your brother sins, go to him, and if he doesn't hear you, go with two, and if he doesn't hear the two, then take it before the whole church.

The final bit of that is in verse 17, Matthew 18, 17, Jesus says, and if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church, but if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector, and that certainly would mean not a member of the church. Presumably the man is in the church at the beginning of this whole exchange. He is your brother.

He sins against you. The very fact that you're capable of taking him before the church suggests that he is in the church, or else how would a person who has no concern about the church ever allow himself to be drawn before the church council? But if someone in the church, once he proves himself to be thoroughly unrepentant, and unwilling to consider repentance, then you treat him as if he's not a member of the church. You kick him out.

You discipline him. Now, in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, which you've studied not too long ago, I'm sure Phil brought up these points, but you remember there was a man in the church in 1 Corinthians 5 who was living in an incestuous relationship with his father's wife. A thing that Paul said would be astonishing and shocking even to unbelievers, and yet the church was somewhat more tolerant than they ought to be, considerably more.

And he said in verse 3, For I indeed, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, him who has done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of Jesus Christ. This is disciplinary action. The desire is to get the guy saved again.

But he has to be delivered over to Satan, which is understood, generally speaking, as nothing more than just kicking the guy out of the church. The devil is always after people, but there's a certain sheltering, there's a certain safety in the fellowship of the saints, where you have prayer support and accountability and counsel and regular teaching and just the group dynamics of a godly community. It does tend to keep you on the straight and narrow, but if you're excluded from those advantages, then you're on your own against the devil, and he's after you.

And you kick him out of the church, you've delivered him over to the one who's like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Now, this is all done not out of malice, but to get them to repent so that their spirit might be saved in the day of Jesus Christ. Now, further down in the same chapter, he says in verse 12, For what have I to do with judging those who are outside, meaning outside the church? But do you not judge those who are inside? Those who are outside, God judges.

Therefore, put away from yourselves, from the church, the evil person. Paul makes a clear distinction between an attempt to purge the church on the one hand, and an attempt to purge the world on the other hand. You don't purge the world.

God judges the world. Those who are outside the church, that's God's province, not yours. But in the church, that is our province.

And it is necessary to judge. When there is unrepentant, blatant sin on a person's part, the church is obligated to do something about it. And what they're obligated to do is treat them like a non-Christian, put them out of the church.

Paul said something like that in Romans chapter 16 also. And verse 17. Romans 16 and verse 17 says, Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.

Now, if you're going to avoid someone, you have to have fellowship with them. If a person is to be marked out of the crowd and avoided, it is clear that that person is what we would call disfellowshipped, what the Roman Catholic Church came to call excommunicated, which to them meant being kept away from the mass, kept away from communion. The point, however, is there's a disciplinary action of removal of the person from the church because of their misbehavior, their divisiveness and so forth.

Perhaps one other, well, there's a few more, but in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 in verse 14 says, If anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with them that he may be ashamed. Obviously, this is disciplinary. It's not punishment.

It's discipline. You want him to be ashamed. Why? Because you want him to be converted.

Do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. That's 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 14 and 15. Did I give a different reference before? Okay.

So here again, mark him, note that person, do not fellowship with him. That is called church discipline. It's called disfellowshipping.

And there are certain things that the Bible says you should treat Christians in the church this way about. If they're divisive and cause divisions, contrary to the sound doctrines of

the apostles, if they teach people to depreciate the authority of Paul's writings, if they live in sin without repentance. One other passage comes to mind.

Titus chapter 3, verse 10. Titus 3.10 says, Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition. As you warn him twice, after that you reject him.

Knowing that such a person is warped in sinning, being self-condemned. So you're not condemning him, he's condemning himself. If he's divisive and he's admonished twice and he doesn't repent, then you're not the one judging him, he's judging himself.

You're not condemning him, he's condemning himself. But you take action, you reject him, you put him out. Now, churches, I have found, very seldom practice this.

For one thing, they'd lose all the leading members of their congregation if they did. And some of them have money. And I have known churches who knew for a fact that their deacons were alcoholic drunkards and that they were masons.

And the church didn't approve of the masons, of course, nor of alcoholism, but they wouldn't confront the sin because this guy was a leading contributor to the church and a deacon. I've known that kind of thing to happen in churches. Unfortunately, there's not, in many churches, there's not a strict adherence to what Jesus and Paul said on these things.

But I would say this. The very fact that Jesus and Paul both tell us to discipline, to exercise discipline within the church, that judgments have to be made within the church, though not necessarily those who are outside, proves that Jesus' parable about the wheat and the tares is not saying, keep the tares in the church until the day Jesus comes back. The story is not about Christians finding there to be false Christians in the church and saying, God, shall we get rid of them? He says, no, let's keep them there.

That's not what it's about. It's about the world at large. It's about evil people in the world.

Now, this is very, very significant and timely for us because it addresses the question of what are we supposed to do about evil people in the world. Now, we read a moment ago in 1 Corinthians 5 that Paul said, I don't judge those who are outside the church. Those that are outside, God judges.

That sounds an awful lot like what's here. Don't go out and judge the unbelievers. Don't pluck up the unbelievers.

Don't pluck up the tares. Leave it for God to do later. He'll judge the world eventually.

He'll send his angels out and he'll pluck out the tares. Now, the interesting thing here is there is an implication in the parable that one of the reasons that you don't want to pluck

out the tares now is you might accidentally pluck out the wheat. Well, if you are trying to eliminate wicked people from the world, suppose we made it our business to go out and execute criminals.

We became a Christian vigilante movement, you know, and we thought we're sick and tired of these murders being let off the hook by juries that don't know the difference between right and wrong. We're sick and tired of these child molesters spending a year in jail and then being released back into the community. We're going to start doing something about this.

We're going to snuff these guys. The Bible says these guys are worthy of death. They've done things the Bible clearly says are worthy of capital punishment.

The system isn't working. We'll take care of this ourselves. We'll go out and start killing these people off to clean up the neighborhood or clean up our society.

Unfortunately, there's too many Christians who think that something like this, only maybe a less drastic form of it, is exactly what we're supposed to do. Let's run the homosexuals out of the country. Let's run them underground.

Let's outlaw their activities. Let's, you know, let's judge them through the courts, through the politics, through the legislative system. Let's outlaw their activities.

Let's do all this kind of stuff. Now, God does that. God judges such people.

But the church, that's not what we're called to do. Because you never can tell by getting rid of one of these people whether what you're really getting rid of is wheat. Now, I know that a homosexual who's a practicing homosexual is not wheat now.

But you never can tell which one's going to be wheat later. You never can tell. You got converted, didn't you? Maybe they will.

Yeah, John? Uh-huh. Bombing abortion clinics. Shooting abortionists.

Yeah. Now, see, this is exactly, this is exactly what I think grows out of a failure to understand the kingdom of God. These parables of the kingdom are revealing the mystery of the kingdom of God.

And Christians often haven't read Jesus' words enough or thought about them enough to know what the mysteries are. The mystery of the kingdom of God is this, that it exists in the world. But it is not there to judge the world.

Jesus said, I didn't come to condemn the world. I came that the world through me would be saved. They're already condemned.

Their condemnation is that we're going to be saved light came into the world and they

love darkness rather than light, but I didn't come to condemn them and neither are we here to condemn them. We're here to win them and if we can't win them then God will condemn them in due time. That's his business to judge them, not ours.

Now the reason that there is this mistake is that modern Christians in America have made the same mistake the Jews of Jesus' time have made. They think in the terms of politics. They think the kingdom of God has something to do with earthly society, that it has something to do with political structures and political enforcement, law enforcement and so forth, and that it's the duty of the church to clean up the neighborhood.

Now let me tell you something, I am very sympathetic with the goals of many of these people. I mean obviously I'm totally against abortion, I'm totally against pornography. I would rejoice, frankly in my heart I would rejoice to see people who do things worthy of death, who are offenders, who kill people and who rape people.

I'd love to see them get justice. But the question is, am I called to judge them? Am I called to go pluck up the tares out of the world? No, that's not the task. You never can tell when you pluck one of these guys up that you're getting somebody who might have later become a Christian had you not plucked him up.

He might have turned out to be wheat after all. After all you weren't all that sweet before you were converted probably and you might have been mistaken for a tare. In fact, you might have been one.

But you're not now. And that's why you don't pluck up the tares prematurely. Because lest while you do it, he says, remember what it says there? It says in verse 29, do not do it lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.

It's premature to go out and start shooting abortion doctors. Who knows, if they live a little longer they might get saved. Some have.

Not very many have, but some have and you don't know that they won't. We are not the executioners of the sinners of the world. This is one reason why I take a very kind of hands off approach to politics in general because politics is all about legislating and enforcing laws.

Now, once again, the Bible says when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice. And I rejoice if somebody is in authority making laws who is smart about moral issues. Somebody who knows that murder is wrong and homosexuality is wrong and abortion is wrong.

I pray for such people to be in office and I pray for the ones who are in there that they might learn that. But that's a different thing than saying that I'm going to go in there and or we send Christians in to infiltrate so that they can get involved in the judgment of the world. And that's what it really amounts to.

People for too long, Christians have for too long thought America is a Christian country. And therefore it's hard to see the difference between America and the kingdom of God. If America goes bad, it must be the end of the world because the kingdom of God is being corrupted.

Well, that's only true in so far as the church in America represents the cross section of sinners in the world. And what I mean by that is it's true. The kingdom has been infiltrated.

There is corruption in the church in America. But it's only because the church isn't taking a stand for holiness in the right ways. It's not requiring that its membership be Christians.

It's not doing the church discipline that Jesus said to do. If the church was doing that, the church would be immune from corruption within and it could live as a holy and viable option and alternative to the world in the midst of a hostile world it always has in the past. What I mean is in Roman times, I mean, let's face it, the entire church lived under an entirely pagan society without a shred of biblical conscience or Christian conscience.

The Roman emperors were total pagans. They murdered people for sport. I mean, our present administration might be guilty of doing some things like that, but if people find out, they'll be outraged in this society.

In Roman society, no one was outraged. They didn't have any Christian coloring to their culture at all. And yet the church flourished even under great persecution, which means that the church's faith is independent of the world's conditions.

The tares can flourish and it does not prevent the citizens of the kingdom from flourishing. Now, this is perhaps a corrective to what the Jews thought. The Jews thought the kingdom was going to come, the Messiah was going to marshal an army against the pagans.

They're going to uproot all the heathen tares around. You know, the world's full of heathens who oppose the Jews. And like David, the Messiah would take the armies of Israel and go out and smite all their enemies and remove all the tares.

And then the kingdom would be, you know, everything would be rosy for those citizens of the kingdom. Jesus says, guess what? The kingdom is going to be here along with the tares for a long time, until the end of the age. And you know what? The presence of the tares is not going to hinder the crop from coming.

God will do the sorting out in the end, but you don't have to do it now. What you have to do is make sure which side you're on, of course. You've got to make sure whether you're a wheat or a tare.

And of course, the church needs to remain pure, purely wheat, and not have the tares in the church. But it is not the task of the church to clean up the world, except insofar as we're to evangelize the world and make disciples. Now I'll tell you something.

If you make disciples of all nations, you'll clean up the world as a fringe benefit. But you see, this world is not our home. Peter, look over at 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 11.

Beloved, I beg you, as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works which they observe glorify God in the day of visitation. Now he says, you are sojourners, you're pilgrims, you're strangers here in this world. That means it's not your task to clean it up.

If you were a traveler, literally in another country, let's say a tourist, essentially, you're just passing through a country, your home is somewhere else, you've come from somewhere else, you're going there, going back home, but you're temporarily passing through a foreign country. You don't take it on yourself to get involved in their politics, to get involved in their criminal justice system, but if the country you come from has a much higher standard of living, you might advertise it. You might appeal to people on the basis, try to raise their conscience about things they're doing wrong, even in the country you're passing through.

You can be a positive influence there, by your example and by your words, but it's not your task to clean it up. You're a stranger and a pilgrim, a sojourner there, and that's what we are in this world. We are not the ruling citizens of the planet.

Now this is very different, of course, from what the Christian Reconstructionists say, or post-millennial, they believe that basically the Church is the ruling citizenry of the planet, and the sooner we get charge of things, the better it is, because we can then clean things up through the legal systems, through government and so forth, but I don't believe that's what Jesus said. I think that again is confusing the Kingdom of God with the kingdoms of this world. It is true that the kingdoms of this world are going to become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, but not, there's not a hint in the Bible that it's going to be through political action.

Now I probably told you this story earlier in the year, but to repeat myself is not unprecedented, and as you know I'm not ashamed to do so, but this became so clear to me in the last election in this country, which was the presidential election, at the same time there were some statewide measures that were being voted on, including one called Measure 9. Measure 9 was about homosexuality. Now to tell you the truth, I never read the measure, and I don't care to really criticize the measure in detail, because I don't know exactly what it said. It might not really be susceptible to some of the criticisms I've been inclined to give.

As a matter of fact, I was favorable toward the measure. If I had been a registered voter, I would have voted for the measure. The measure was basically to prevent homosexuals from being given status as a minority group that would be, that would give them special privileges like black people and other minorities have in this country.

There'd be, you know, hiring quotas, you'd have to hire a certain percentage of homosexuals like you have to hire a certain percentage of black people and so forth. They'd be an established minority with special privileges that minorities get. That's what Measure 9 was trying to prevent from happening.

So Measure 9 was a conservative anti-homosexual measure. Now, as I understand it, some of the things in it were that they wanted it to be written into law that homosexuality was perverted and evil and so forth. Now once again, I don't have any real objection to that in principle.

I believe homosexuality is perverted and evil, and I would have no objection whatsoever if the laws of the land said so. The problem is that Christians, conservative fundamentalist Christians, were very visibly at the forefront of this battle. And what the result has been is that homosexuals now see evangelical Christianity as their principal enemy.

Now in my opinion, when Jesus was on the earth, the homosexuals and the evil people didn't see him as their principal enemy. They saw him as their only hope. But that is far from the way that the homosexual community in Portland today, for example, looks at the evangelical churches in Portland.

The battle lines are drawn. You know, there's vandalism done to the churches by homosexuals because the church is known to be out there condemning homosexuality. Now listen, God condemns homosexuality, but who am I to judge those who are outside the church? Let God judge them.

Now if I learn of somebody in the church that's practicing homosexuality, that's my business, because they're supposed to be Christians. They're professing Christians. And a little leaven, leaven's a whole lump.

You let that stay in there and it's going to corrupt a lot of people.