

Chapter XI

The Flesh and the Spirit in the Church Age

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES AND THE WHEAT

After our Lord explained to the disciples why he spoke to the Jews in parables: *Another parable put he forth unto them saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which 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 blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 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? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 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 13:24-30).*

This parable is a continuation of the first parable. In the first parable our Lord used the

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sower and the seed to represent the preaching of the gospel in the world and the various types of people who would hear the gospel; but our Lord did not identify the type of seed that was sown, only the types of ground upon which it could fall. In this second parable we learn that the seed was wheat, and we learn that the enemy of the householder came and sowed tares (*zizania*: spurious wheat) among the wheat and went his way. Now if the wheat represents the gospel, as it did in the first parable, the tares must be a reference to *another gospel*, and this agrees with our Lord's interpretation of the parable.

After relating the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares and wheat, our Lord spoke two more parables to the multitude: the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven; and then He sent the multitude away and called His disciples into the house, where they said:

... Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 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 [the] iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 13:36-43)

In the first parable we learned that the birds of the air, which caught away the seed that fell by the wayside, represented the wicked one. In this parable we learn that the enemy, represented by the birds in the first parable and identified as the devil in this parable, has a more active role than just catching away good seed: he is also actively engaged in planting his own seed (*zizania*:

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spurious wheat: translated as tares). Further we learn that he has done this nefarious work while men slept. The men who slept must be those who had the responsibility of caring for the wheat. Thus, by interpretation, they must be ministers who have neglected to warn the people who hear them of the insidious nature of the lie of the devil. Remember the admonition of the apostle Paul to the church at Corinth:

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present ... a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him....

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (II Corinthians 11:1-4 & 13-15, emphasis mine)

In this church age the devil is using his lie, as represented in the tares, as he used the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden. There is a parallel, then, between the deception of Eve and the deception of the nations with *another gospel*. The lie was, *Ye shall not surely die: for God [Elohim] doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods [Elohim], knowing good and evil*. This lie produced death and not life. It produced the concept that man could be like God (or have a right relationship with God) by his knowledge of good and evil (right and wrong), which he received in disobedience to God. The devil continues to sow his counterfeit gospel of moral goodness in the field (the world) where the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ has been sown.

Our Lord said, *Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables* (Mark

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4:13)? This statement is about the parable of the sower. Thus the understanding of the parable of the sower leads to the understanding of the parable of the tares and the wheat. The parable of the tares and wheat is an enlargement of the first parable and so on with each succeeding parable. Consequently the proper understanding of the parable of the sower provides us with a key to understanding all of the parables.

The devil has something for everyone. If an individual has an aversion to Christianity, and is hardened against it, the devil will catch away the seed as he did in the first parable. If an individual has an inclination to the moral principles and traditions of Christianity, but does not see himself depraved and in need of the saving grace of God, the devil will provide that individual with *another gospel*. The devil operates in the realm of the truth, and the devil operates completely outside of the realm of the truth. It does not matter to him how he keeps a man in darkness, so long as he remains in darkness.

Consequently the devil interferes with the true gospel by the preaching of *another gospel*, or the devil goes outside of the realm of the truth altogether and supplies man with a varied choice among the religions of the world. These, after all, have their origin in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. Thus man worships ignorantly, or if he is not interested in expressing himself religiously, then the devil offers him the allure of the world, or of the flesh to keep him in the realm of darkness.

One of the greatest hoaxes the devil has foisted upon the human race is that he does not exist, or that he is a hideous ogre (out of a fairy tale) who inhabits the pits of hell, reveling in fiendish glee every time someone is cast into hell. This is a far cry from the fact that Lucifer, who

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became the devil, was lifted up in pride because of his great beauty.

Returning to our Lord's interpretation, we find that both seeds were sown in the same field, which is the world, the realm of man. The world has the potential of rejecting the truth, or the lie, or of producing children of God by the acceptance of the truth of the gospel or children of the devil by the acceptance of *another gospel* in lieu of the true gospel. This means there are three kinds of people in the world. There are the children of God, the children of the devil, and the children of wrath (also called the children of the disobedience), which is the potential of unregenerate men among whom both gospels, the truth and the lie, are preached.

The tare system (which has involved man's corrupted sense of morality into his relationship with God) has been so effective that today its advocates make up the greater part of what is called Christendom. The tare system developed coincidentally with the true system. Therefore the early church was confronted with the false teaching expressed by the tares among the wheat, the same as the churches of these latter days. The devil has clouded the truth with his lie from the beginning. When Israel was the custodian of the truth, there was only a *very small remnant* in Israel which believed the truth, and so it is with the church. For this reason, the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles warned the church about false prophets and false Christs and the counterfeit gospel which they preach:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the

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world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of [the] truth and the spirit of [the] error. (I John 4:1-6)

The identification of the true and the false centers around the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. A denial of the Person of Christ, or of the work of Christ, or a denial of both the Person and the work of Christ constitutes *the spirit of the error*, which is proclaimed in the world under the guise of Christianity. The apostle John said the spirit of the truth is identified by saying the same thing about the fact that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh as God does. This is the meaning of the statement, *Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ [has] come [or, in II John 1:7, is coming] in the flesh is of God.* *Confesseth* is the Greek word *homologeō*, which means *to say the same thing about something as another*. The other, in this case, is God. The things that God has said about His Son are recorded in God's Word. Therefore to confess that Jesus Christ has come (or is coming) in the flesh is to be in agreement with what God says about His Son in His first and second advents upon this earth. This involves both His Person and His work, as recorded throughout all of the Word of God.

Genuine believers in Jesus Christ have an immediate bond with one another because of their love of the truth of the Word of God. Simply stated, God's children love God's Word. Even so a counterfeit believer in Jesus Christ may give lip service to the Word of God; otherwise he would not be much of a counterfeit. A really good counterfeit will state that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God. He will also declare his belief in many of the fundamental truths of the Word of God; but despite the confession of many truths, at some point he will deny either the Person or the work of Christ, or both His Person and His work. Some deny the deity of

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Christ; others deny the total sufficiency of His work by requiring a cooperation between man and God in man's salvation. Thus there is almost always a denial of the sufficiency of God's grace as provided in the work of Christ.

The deceiver may give lip service to the grace of God, especially for salvation. Despite this, he will deny the total sufficiency of grace in some manner. He often does this by a subtle emphasis upon *holy living* and the works of man. Usually, at some point, he will suggest it required his faith for his salvation. Then, by human reasoning, he will say if he produced the faith to believe, he could also quit believing and lose his salvation. This is a denial that *Salvation is of the Lord* and that faith is a gift from God. When this error is refuted they will flee:

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us: but they went out, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. (I John 2:18-23, emphasis mine)

Thus it is so very important for the believer to fully understand the basis of the gospel. It is predicated on federal headship. Paul wrote, *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive* (I Corinthians 15:22). Thus man is under the sentence of death because of Adam's sin. He does not die because of personal sin, he dies because God said to Adam, *the day thou eatest thereof, dying, thou shalt die.* Adam died spiritually and began to die physically, and as the federal head of the human race he transmitted this condition to his entire race.

Nevertheless God promised salvation in the *Seed of the woman*, so that the hope of

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salvation from the awful condition imposed on the human family by Adam was predicated of Jesus Christ. God could not be merciful and gracious towards man without a righteous basis for doing so: *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons* (Galatians 4:4-5). The Son provided the righteous basis for the bestowal of God's love, mercy and grace upon the human family. Christ, as the Federal Head of a redeemed race, stood in the stead of sinners in life and in death, fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law and then dying the Just for the unjust. Consequently our Lord said, *I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me* (John 14:6).

It is evident then that salvation was accomplished by the grace of God through the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no place in the gospel of the grace of God for the corrupting influence of man's self-efforts, because *no lie is of the truth*. In this regard our Lord made an interesting statement to the Jews when He said, *Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness* (Luke 11:35).

It must be remembered that Jesus made this statement to the Jews while they were the custodians of the truth. If a man's hope is based upon a lie, it is a false hope. He is in darkness. No matter how much of the truth the tares express, they are still in darkness. The more truth they espouse, the more difficult it is to identify them. Nevertheless one of the primary keys to their identification is found in the heresy that was preached at Galatia. Paul wrote:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect

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by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:1-5)

The teaching of the Judaizers who came to Galatia is typical of the teaching of the tares.

The Judaizers said the Gentiles could not be saved unless they were first circumcised according to the law of Moses. After their circumcision, the Judaizers required the Galatians to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. This requirement of ritual and law for salvation was a corruption of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and Paul called it *another gospel*. This error has not disappeared. There are many churches under the canopy of Christianity that have substituted baptism for circumcision; and, from puberty on, they have made their members responsible to the law of Moses, as well as the laws of the church, to maintain their salvation. Those who hold this kind of a position preach *another gospel* instead of the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. They are tares and not wheat.

Paul's warning to the Corinthian church is a disclosure of the truth contained in the parable of the tares among the wheat. The ministers of Satan transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, so they profess to be ministers of Jesus Christ. Instead of preaching the Righteousness of God, which is Jesus Christ, they preach the righteousness of man. Consequently they have a form of godliness, but they deny the power of genuine godliness, which is imputed to the believer by judicial decree. They preach a counterfeit gospel, with a counterfeit Jesus, and by the power of a counterfeit spirit. This should not awe us. Satan has already done the same thing during the public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember our Lord said: *Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he*

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it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve (John 6:70)

Judas was declared to be a devil, *diabolos*; so he must have been possessed by, or an incarnation of the devil, because there is only one devil (despite the fact that in the King James Bible the Greek word for *demon* is translated *devil*). Satan himself was transformed into an angel of light, a minister of Jesus Christ, in the person of Judas Iscariot, and his ministry was indistinguishable from the ministries of the other apostles. The devil's counterfeits are very effective, because the devil is not opposed to giving lip service to Jesus Christ, if by doing so he can keep the unsaved of this world in darkness.

Finally, in the sermon on the mount, when our Lord spoke of the broad gate and the narrow gate, it is evident that the broad gate that leads to destruction encompasses the tares, who preach in Jesus' name, and cast out demons in His name, and do many wonderful works in His name. He said of them, ... *depart from me ye who work [the] iniquity, I never knew you (Matthew 7:23)*. This roadway also includes all of the other religious systems of this world, as well as all of those who believe nothing at all because they have all accepted *a way which seemeth right unto a man* as a way of life.

Our Lord invited the nation of Israel (as well as the Gentile nations of the world) to: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14)*.

The strait gate is entered in by the good seed of the Sower; which has been, and is, sown by the preaching of the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, *which is to them that perish,*

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foolishness, but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God (I Corinthians 1:18).