Bible Class 18.04.2024

The Wheat and the Tares

Dear brothers and sisters,

This parable has been at the centre of much controversy among those who claim to be the servants of the Lord Jesus. It has been misused and misapplied and used as an excuse to avoid the plain teachings of the Lord Jesus and the apostles. Excusing laxity in doctrine and practice, such as taking no action against transgressors of the law of Christ; excusing the avoidance of personal responsibility towards God to contend earnestly and preserve the purity of the faith once delivered to the saints.

Yet perhaps the worst example of abuse of this parable is where it has been presented as a reason for rejecting the declared purpose of God at the present time, of calling out a people for His Name, separating them from the world and uniting them together as the many members of the One Body of God's dear Son. A modern Christadelphian writer 'corrects' Paul when he concludes from this parable:

"*Upon this teaching it becomes increasingly obvious that whilst scripture reveals the existence and nature of the One True Body, yet the concept of a visible identifiable One True Body and Fellowship today or at any other time, is a figment of the imagination and is completely unscriptural"!!!* Thus, according to this writer, there is no such thing as an identifiable Body of Christ today or any other time!

Yet the word of God plainly declares that the One Body of believers was visible in the apostles' day, as we read in Rom.12:4, *"So we, being many, are one body in Christ and every one members one of another, and v.16 be of the same mind one toward another.*" Their unity was acknowledged throughout the whole world. It was comprised partly of believers in Corinth, to whom the apostle wrote, "By one spirit are we all baptised into One Body" truly then a visible body!

There were also believers in Ephesus who were reminded how they as Gentiles together with the faithful Jews were reconciled unto God in One Body. God did not work with the Jews and Gentiles as separate peoples; no! He broke down the middle wall of partition, and that work was being accomplished in the one body which was growing into an holy temple

in the Lord. So Paul reminds them to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That unity is declared to consist of seven essential elements, the first of which states "**There is One Body**". This could not be done if there was no visible body!! No! the scriptures reveal that in the time of the apostles there was One Body with a recognised standard of faith and practice to which all the believers identified themselves as members of the Lamb's wife in course of her preparation.

But why should the parable of the wheat and the Tares be argued to contradict this plain scriptural truth? It is because those who once had the truth as a united community have now become riven with divisions. Notwithstanding their present separation, all the different sections recognise each other as brethren, and it is claimed that those at the right hand of Christ will be taken from all the different sections, regardless of their present separation. It is also claimed that by the explicit teaching of Christ, his brethren have no power nor right nor duty to exclude those "tares" from their fellowship! Thus, in asking for an explanation of their present position, the parable of the wheat and tares is urged as a reason for not disfellowshipping false doctrine!

'We must not separate', say they, 'we must let the wheat and tares grow together until harvest, Christ has commanded it." If this <u>was</u> the application intended by the Lord Jesus, then there would have been no injunction in the New Testament to "beware of evil workers" Phil 3:2, "from such withdraw thyself." Nor would there have been any condemnation of those who harboured false teachers in their midst, Rev.2:20. Therefore such use of the parable is a misapplication of the word of God. Christ's words must not be placed in opposition to apostolic injunctions.

However, we can go back further than modern day misapplications of this parable. In the fourth century after Christ, a people known as the Donatists of North Africa separated from the main body of the Church because of its growing association with the State and subordination to the decrees of Constantine. They opposed the corruptions in Church and denied that many who claimed to be Christians were entitled to be so described. The Church leaders opposed the Donatists, particularly by Augustine, one

of the fathers of the Catholic Church, who has the distinction of establishing the doctrine of the immortal soul, and that the Church was the Kingdom of God! The Donatists were exclusive, and one of the arguments used by Augustine was based on the parable of the wheat and the tares, believing that the wheat and tares had to grow together until harvest; therefore, the discipline called for by the Donatists was unscriptural

In answer, the Donatists showed that whereas the Church taught that the field in the parable was the Church, the Lord Jesus taught that the field was the world, (similarly today Christadelphians sing in their hymn, "We ourselves are God's own field"!) and the lesson of the parable had nothing to do with whether spurious and heretical Christians should be excluded from the church.

The parallels between the controversy of the fourth century and today are there; and we believe that in the interpretation of any parable no meaning should be attached that conflicts with plain scriptural teaching. This being our rule, any other views must be erroneous.

Seeking now the true meaning of the parable, we notice that it follows that of the Sower and the Seed, which is given a full explanation by the Lord Jesus. In Mark 4 where the same parable is explained to his disciples, Jesus said, *"Know ye not this parable, how then shall you know all parables*?" He then proceeds to show how each part of the parable, the Sower, the Seed, the different types of ground all have their corresponding counterpart. Even so it is with all parables. Each part or character has a real counterpart, and when taken together they harmonise with an underlying meaning, illustrating the work and purpose of God.

As with the Sower and the Seed, so also with the Wheat and the Tares. The parable was put forth to the multitude, but when they were sent away, the disciples asked for an explanation. Jesus said, *"He that sows the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world…"* Here we pause, for as we have already noted, many say that the field is the church or ecclesia. But that same field also produced the tares which in v.41 is related to the kingdom; for in gathering the tares together to be burned, Jesus explains that this is the gathering out of his kingdom all things that offend. So

the doctrine that makes the field the church also makes the church the kingdom, which it patently is not!

How then are we to understand the field? We are told the parable is illustrative of the end of the world. "*So shall it be in the end of <u>this</u> world*," v.40. In what field did the Son of Man sow? Jesus answers this question when he says, *"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*," Mat.15:24. Jesus sowed personally in the land of Israel, going "*throughout all the cities and villages of Judea, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God*." The field therefore was not the universal globe. We see also that the parable has to do with "the kingdom of heaven" being likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. He is the Son of man, the field is the kosmos, the harvest is the end of the world, or aeon. So the teaching is revealing to us the condition of the kingdom of heaven at the end of the world or age.

As we have shown, two words for world are employed in this parable: kosmos, meaning order or arrangement of things without reference to time. It applies to the organisation of society, political or ecclesiastical. Aeon is also rendered world, expressing the idea of time but is more properly translated as age. In the parable it signifies the current duration of the kosmos or world in which the Son of man was sowing the good seed. Jesus specifies in v.40 "*So shall it be in the end of the end of <u>this</u> world."* Therefore, the immediate sense of his words is the end of the arrangement of things constituted by Moses law.

The good seed we are told are "the children of the kingdom". This phrase occurs only in one other place, Mat.8:12 where the children of the kingdom relates to the nation of Israel, the natural sons of Abraham. In the parable it was the natural born Jews who received the words of Christ.

The destruction of the tares, the children of the wicked one, was to be coeval with the subversion of the kingdom of Judea, the end or overthrow of the Jewish State. The agents employed are termed reapers: "*the reapers are the angels*," God's messengers. The business of these angels was twofold in the gathering of the harvest. The disciples clearly indicate that the word angel represents those labourers who gathered the wheat into the garner <u>and those</u> who burnt up the tares, the children of the wicked one, with "unquenchable fire".

God makes winds his angels and flames of fire His ministers; as we learn from Mat.22:7, the armies of the nations also do His bidding. When He sends forth these to do His will, though they may not know Him, they become His angels or ministers. Thus 37years after his ascension the Son of man sent forth the Roman armies into the field in which he had laboured; and by the measures they adopted they caused the ungodly Israelites, both of the law and the gospel they had heard to be bound together in bundles. They were concentrated together in the castles and fortified towns and cities of Judea, and in the Holy City. A separation was thus affected between the children of the kingdom who had heard the words of Christ and attending to his warnings, had remained in the open country or fled to the mountains, and the children of the wicked one who sought refuge in the strongholds of Palestine.

All persons who offended and practiced iniquity were collected out of the Hebrew kosmos and shut up principally in the city of Jerusalem which became a furnace of fire which no human power could extinguish. It was indeed a furnace of affliction in which was heard weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth: which is also illustrative of the truth of John the Baptist's words: "*He shall burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

As Jesus had predicted in the parable, so it came to pass. The enemy, styled the wicked one consisting of the authorities of the nation everywhere, stealthily neutralised the teaching of Christ. They disseminated their doctrines, and their sympathisers were scattered, who drew away the people and multiplied their own number by the energy of their operations. This was essentially the mind of the flesh, and its sowing effectively scandalised the work of the Truth in the apostolic age. These offenders of the scandalisers were those whom Peter rebukes as false teachers who used their enticements to seduce the brethren, and with feigned words made merchandise of them, using their following for their own ends.

The crisis at the end of Judah's commonwealth was favourable to the growth of the tares. As Jesus predicted, many were caused to fall and betrayed and hated one another. Many false prophets had arisen, and "*because iniquity abounded the love of many became cold";* but then came the end of the world! *"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, or armies,*

and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity," ch.13:41 Surrounding them and driving them back, causing them to enter Jerusalem for refuge, which would become a fiery furnace; and they shall wail and gnash their teeth.

"*Then, that is afterwards, shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*" But when is afterwards? A very long time it proved. To gather or drive out of a kingdom or territory is to kill all scandalising influences, expel or exile them to some foreign land. This was affected when the Romans caused the Jews to fall by the sword, to be gathered out of the territory of messiah's kingdom and led away captive into all nations. *"Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled; then shall the righteous shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father*," which as Daniel shows us is <u>after</u> the resurrection of the dead.

To summarise then:

The kingdom of heaven = the Israelitish nation.

The Sower = Christ

The field = the Jewish world

The good seed = the Truth as embodied in its true believers.

While men slept = the attitude Peter reports as "My Lord delays his coming."

The enemy = the Jewish authorities, priests, Scribes and Pharisees.

The children of the wicked one = the tares or Jewish sympathisers and disciples of that class.

When the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also = When Christ's teaching began to have an effect it was not so influential as his disciples imagined it would be, for the scribes and pharisees had stealthily influenced the people.

The servants of the householder = Christ's disciples.

Let both grow together = the development of the righteous in the young Jewish ecclesias would have been interfered with if the destruction of the children of the wicked one by the reaping angel armies had occurred then.

The harvest = the end of the Jewish world.

The reapers = the Roman armies.