

PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.

Technical Notes of Matthew Poole

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 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.' "

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." 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. 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, 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!"

The design that Christ had in this parable was to show that though he laid a good foundation of a church in the world--calling some home to himself and making them partakers of his effectual grace, laying the foundation of his gospel church in such as took his yoke upon them--yet in process of time, while those who should succeed him in his ministry slept (not being so diligent and watchful as they ought to be), the devil (who is full of envy and malice to men's souls and is continually going about seeking whom he may devour) would sow erroneous opinions and find a party, even in the bosom of his church, who would hearken to him. Through their lusts they would comply with his temptations, both to errors in doctrine and errors in practice. And it was his will that there should be in the visible church a mixture of good and bad, such bad ones especially as men could not purge out without a danger of putting out such as were true and sincere. But there would be a time at the end of the world when he would come with his fan and thoroughly purge his floor and take to heaven all true and sincere souls, but turn all hypocrites into hell. This appears, by our Savior's exposition, to have been our Savior's plain meaning in this parable.

Hence he tells us that by the sower here he meant himself, *the Son of man*. By *the field* he meant *the world*. By *the good seed* he meant *the children of the kingdom*; such as had a true change wrought in their hearts, were truly regenerated and converted. By *the tares* he meant *the children of the wicked one*, that is, of the devil; such as did the works of the devil (John 8:44). That *the enemy that sowed these tares was the devil*, who by his suggestions, presenting objects, &c., makes himself the father of all wicked men.

Our Savior here says nothing to that part of the parable where the tares are said to be sown

while men slept; that was plain and intelligible enough. The devil has a power to seduce, persuade, and allure, but none to force. If particular persons kept their watch, as they might, the devil could not by his temptation force them. If magistrates and ministers kept their watches according to God's prescription, there could not be so much open wickedness in the world as there is.

Neither does our Savior give us any particular explication of that part of the parable where the servants say to their master, *Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?* And he said unto them, *Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.* Our Savior by this teaches us that every passage in a parable is not to be fitted by something in the explication. It was not the point that he designed in this parable to instruct them in how far church officers might or ought to act in purging the church; but only (1) that in the visible church they must expect a mixture till the day of judgment, and (2) that in that day he would make a perfect separation. Therefore, those who would conclude from this passage in the parable, that all erroneous and loose persons ought to be tolerated in the church till the day of judgment, forget the common rule in divinity that parabolical divinity is not argumentative. We can argue from nothing in a parable but from the main scope and tendency of it. However, it is bold arguing from a passage in a parable, expounded by our Savior himself, when he has omitted the explication of that passage; nor can anything be concluded but that such must not be rooted out as have such a resemblance of wheat from the outward appearance that they cannot be rooted out without a hazard of a mistake, and a rooting up of the wheat with them. But our Savior reserves the point of the ministerial duty in purging the church to another more proper time. He here says nothing of that, but of his own design to purge it at *the harvest*, which he interprets *the end of the world*, that is, the day of judgment. By *the reapers* he tells us that he means *the angels*.

As in the common practice of men--when they have a mind to pick their corn and have it clean when it is reaped, to set men to clean the wheat and to pick out the tares, and having tied them up in bundles to burn them--so (says he) I will do. I will send my angels at the day of judgment, and they shall take out of my church all impenitent sinners, all those who in this world have been scandals, and offences, and mischievous to my people, and who have made it their business to work iniquity. *And shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.* That is, into hell, which, in regard of the severe torments which the damned shall feel there, is often in Scripture compared to fire, as chap. 25:41, and in other texts by which is only set out to us the dreadfulfulness of the punishment of the damned, that is proportioned to, if not far exceeding, that of the burning living bodies in fire.

Having thus expressed the punishment of wicked men, he expounds what he means by gathering the wheat into his barn, viz., the taking of righteous men to heaven. *Then*, he says, *shall the righteous*--those whom I have clothed with my righteousness and who have lived in obedience to my will to that degree, that though they be not perfectly righteous yet are sincere and upright so as I have accepted them--*shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.* This is an expression much like that of Dan. 12:2,3, signifying that glorious state of the saints in heaven which, no eye having seen nor ear having heard, no tongue is able to express. He concludes in the same manner as he concludes the parable of the sower, exciting his hearers to a diligent consideration and belief of what he had said.