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Has the Gospel Been Corrupted? (Part I)

Matthew 13:25: (NASB) *But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.*



So much of what Jesus taught was about the practical parts of living - learning to love, forgive and encourage one another, and these are the parts of his teachings that seem to garner the most attention. Jesus did, however, spend significant time imparting prophetic teaching as well. He had come to earth as a man to ransom the human race, and in so doing, to call out "a people for his name." Much of his prophetic teaching was focused on how that calling would work and what that calling would face by way of challenges and pitfalls. Jesus was specific about what to expect regarding that calling and Christianity in terms of corruption and deceit. It sounds odd to think about Jesus calling out some future failures of what would come to be thought of as the Christian world, but he did. How did he do it? What did he say? What did he mean? What should we be paying attention to?

Context for the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: Matthew 13:1-3: Many commentators say this was Peter's house by the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum. It appears that the seven parables spoken in Matthew 13 are all on the same day. Jesus will go on to uncharacteristically explain two of his parables (*the Sower* Matthew 13:3-9 and *the Wheat and the Tares*) to his disciples.

Now the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: Matthew 13:24-30

The first parable in Matthew 13:3-9 - the **Parable of the Sower** - has several similarities to the **Parable of the Wheat and the Tares**. People in that day would have understood the example of someone sowing seeds.

Observe the similar picture language used in both parables: Seeds were sown, there is a field, the seeds are interfered with, the grain matures, and both parables are explained.

In the book of Matthew, the **Wheat and Tares** story is placed right after the **Sower** is explained. There is a key difference in the introduction of these two parables: of all seven parables in Matthew 13, **The Sower** is the only parable to omit the beginning phrase of the *kingdom of heaven is like...* Why? The answer: People versus Process. **The Sower** is about individual people and the other six parables are about the process of the *kingdom of heaven*.

Often, we think the kingdom of heaven/the kingdom of God is a future, perfect environment, filled with peace and harmony: Daniel 2:44: We like to think about the kingdom as a finished picture, but we suggest that when the *kingdom of heaven* is spoken of in parables, it is not about the finished picture but the process of getting to that finished picture; the process of developing the church, Jesus' footstep followers who are promised a heavenly reward if faithful.

Our perspective on this parable is that Jesus was prophesying about some serious future problems regarding his followers that would happen generations after his sacrifice was complete. The mere fact of problems and enemies tells us that the *kingdom of heaven* cannot be all clouds and harps. Let's prove this through Scripture and the other teachings of Jesus:

1. **Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares sets the kingdom of heaven in a very tumultuous time:** Matthew 13:38-39: Remember, this parable started with *The kingdom of heaven is...* but here we see conflict.
2. **Jesus and John the Baptist pointed to the kingdom as being with them way back then:** Matthew 3:1-2: The king is Jesus. If you understand what the kingdom of heaven is (the development process of the true church) you can see where the corruption happens. Corruption has been happening for thousands of years within Christianity since Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus warned us this would happen.

Mark 1:14-15: Jesus knew John was taken into custody. "Because I am here, the kingdom of God is here. By extension, if you follow me, you are part of the kingdom of God." But there was corruption in the belief system. How do we avoid the corruption or the false seed? If we know something is destined to be corrupted, we are forewarned and can prepare against it. We need to be focused on what Jesus was telling us.

3. **The kingdom is described as a present experience of those who are begotten by the**



spirit: Romans 14:16-18: The *kingdom of God* here refers to the followers of Christ presently living righteously and having peace and joy in their lives.

In the Lord's Prayer, what did Jesus say about the kingdom? He told us to pray *God's kingdom come, His will to be done*, implying the kingdom is yet future. But here we are saying the kingdom of God was happening while Jesus was alive. How can both be right?

The kingdom Jesus taught us to pray for is the finished product of the kingdom when righteousness will reign (refer back to Daniel 2:44.) The kingdom of God at hand right now has to do with the development of those who will be inaugurating that process later on. *The kingdom of God at hand is just for those being developed.*

Once those are faithful even unto death, then God's kingdom will rule throughout all of the earth. It is developing the governmental system in individuals now, so the full kingdom can be inaugurated later.

4. All of the above are describing God's own people under the guiding hand of their king, Jesus: Matthew 28:20: Jesus promises his presence with his people throughout the Gospel Age - the age where the gospel has been preached for the last 2,000 years. The true gospel has never ruled throughout the earth. You can see the development of the kingdom because the king is there working with them in the development stage.

1 Peter 2:9-10: *A royal priesthood* serves the people. Christianity is not yet serving the people. The development of the true church is still in a corrupted state. Therefore, we can see the *kingdom of heaven/the kingdom of God* as being the context in which the true church is developed. This being said, we can now approach the parable from a clear position.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: Matthew 13:24: **Jesus' explanation of the parable:** Matthew 13:37-38: Two distinct differences from the previous parable to show People versus Process: The **Parable of the Sower** is about individuals and the condition of their hearts and minds when they hear the gospel. It is about individuals - **people and their own lives** versus the **Parable of the Wheat and Tares**, which is about the journey of the true church as a **class** throughout the 2,000 years of the church's development - **it is the process by which their collective faithfulness is achieved**. It highlights the process of the church surviving massive corruption, violence and hypocrisy. There are obviously people within the process of the wheat and tares, but the lesson is that the true church survives Satan's corruptive efforts.

Hindsight is always so much easier than living an experience. For us to say they should have been more careful will of necessity require us to ask that same question of ourselves. Further, God's plan at every stage has allowed sin to play a role as spoiler and this allowance tells us that it is there for the testing of our fidelity to God's truth. We are being tested because we know there is corruption.

First, a bit more on the son of man (Jesus) sowing the good seed in the world: Matthew 28:18-20: Jesus is showing us the sowing of the good seed by his commission before he is raised up to heaven before his disciples. He does not say "make all nations into disciples." He says, *Make disciples of all nations*. By doing what he commanded, his disciples would expand the call of the church. In that call far and wide, we unfortunately find corruption.

Continuing the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares: Matthew 13:25: Corruption began right at the very beginning *while his men were sleeping*. **Jesus' explanation:** Matthew 13:38-39: What are tares? Tares look like wheat in their early stages while they are maturing. When the wheat is ripe, all the seeds are very heavy and they bow down. The tares stand straight up and proud. The "wheat class" are humble and "bent over." In the Parable, the master said, *Allow both to grow together until the harvest* and then they could tell the difference. The picture of the harvest is the end of the age or period of time of development - so far this time has been about 2,000 years since Jesus died. As the *good wheat* are children of the kingdom, so the bad wheat or *tares*, are children of Satan, those opposing Jesus' true message. (Not individual people, but classes of people.) There is definitely a warfare here being described between Jesus and Satan. Corruption comes because Satan intentionally planted it!

This battle between Satan and Jesus was prophesied right from the start - Satan's curse and the "line in the sand" started in Genesis: Genesis 3:15: The *seed of the woman*, Jesus, will ultimately deal the destructive blow to Satan. Satan would wound him but not destroy



him. The battle continued in Jesus' day with the Scribes and Pharisees. They took the purity of the Jewish Law and built requirements around it, elevating themselves morally over the people.

Jesus called them out: John 8:41-42,44: One way to understand corruption in Christianity is to look at corruption within Judaism. We find there are many parallels between the age when Jesus came on the scene and was wrapping up the age of Jewish favor to our present time leading into the kingdom. Have we in our churches built the same kind of thinking as they did in Jesus' day? If we have, we could fall into the same category of serving the devil.

The battle continued after the Apostles - the sowing of the tares came while *men slept*: Acts 20:28-30: *I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.* In the parable, Jesus warned that when the Apostles died, once *men slept*, corruption would come in. Throughout the history of God's plan, Satan has sought to subvert it. Think of the birth of Moses and how Pharaoh tried destroying the newborn boys, the infancy of Jesus, the three temptations... Satan simply is continuing his devious work to try and destroy God's plan! One of the great ways to destroy something you do not like is to infiltrate its numbers and corrupt it from within. Jesus warned us that Christianity would become corrupt.

There is a saying that goes something like this, "Those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it." Our lessons are powerful. We live in the end of times. We have the advantage of 2,000 years of Gospel Age hindsight. These things add up to our ability to be utterly prepared for standing for good while evil seems to rule. We need to be able to tell what is the corruption of the gospel and what is not.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 1 Corinthians 15:22: A perfect man had to die for a perfect man. The word for *ransom* means "corresponding price." We test all our beliefs around this core belief of the ransom. Belief in the ransom weeds out error.

Matthew 13:26-28: Jesus offers no explanation for these few verses. Perhaps there is no explanation because the conversation that takes place is not transferrable to prophetic reality. Jesus does not assign a prophetic identity to the slaves of the landowner as they are only in the story to explain the devious work of Satan to the listener.

We need to be prepared personally against any forms of pseudo-Christianity: 1 John 4:1-6: *Test the spirits* - test the powers and influences in your life. One way to *test the spirits* is to use the fulcrum doctrine of Jesus dying as a ransom for all men. If something does not line up with the ransom, we need to question it.

The word for *spirit* means "power" and "influence." It is the same Greek word used for wind, *pneuma*. In English, we get the word "pneumatic" from this word. Wind is a power that can literally move things without being seen. God's spirit is explained to us in that way. God's influence and power cannot be seen with our eyes, but it can work within us to change our hearts and lives. ²*By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God;* ³*and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.* To "confess" something is to truly believe it, to own it. Confessing or owning that Jesus is from God is far more than lip service to a doctrine - it is much more than saying words; it is heart service to a life-changing core belief. It also exposes the error that Jesus is God. He obviously is not; he is God's son. *Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God* - confessing is not just saying words, it is following Jesus with every step. **For more on "confessing," please see the CQ Bonus Material.**

The point of the **Parable of the Wheat and the Tares** is that Jesus sows the good seed of the gospel and there is corruption alongside of it from Satan. We need to understand the spirit - the power and influence of truth - versus the spirit of error and what it produces. Because of our responsibility to *try the spirits* against the truth of Scripture, and because of our deep personal confession of Jesus as God's son, coming as a man to be our ransom, we can find firm footing. The importance of this ransom is the centerpiece.

Preparedness in discerning spiritual influences will not protect us from sad realizations: Philippians 3:17-19: The Apostle Paul warns us *they are enemies of the cross of Christ*, but they are walking as Christians. Things they glory in inevitably are shameful. They may not see



it that way. It means their worship is feeding their own appetite. The things they are doing are bringing them to destruction. There is a blindness that can be purposeful, or it can be the "wool pulled over their eyes." A lot of Christianity is going in the wrong direction, just as the Apostle Paul warned us.

Preparedness requires us to always remember who we are, what we stand for and what protects us: 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8: There is no room or time for night or darkness in our lives. We are children of the light. We can be armed with the ability to discern. Now we need to focus on godly goodness.

Back to the **Parable of the Wheat and Tares**: Matthew 13:28-30

Jesus' explanation of the parable: Matthew 13:39-40: Reminder: This is not about individual people; it is about the process of the development of the true church. If the true church is developing in a context where there is a lot of corruption, we call that the false church. If the two are working and growing together and you can hardly tell the difference until the harvest time, there has to be a sifting out or separation work.

Next time on this subject we will consider the next two very short parables - **The Mustard Seed** in Matthew 13:31-32 and **The Leaven** in Matthew 13:33. We believe these other two parables are describing conditions that the timeline of the wheat and tares has brought us to. Jesus continues to describe what the corruption looks like, feels like and produces. When the servant asks, *Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up? He said, No, for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot (damage) the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together.* He would not take the chance of damaging that which is good to get rid of that which is bad. The true church grows in the context of the false church. In this age, God allows sin to do its work and will not let anything harm His true church. In the end, they are gathered into the barn.

Matthew 13:30: (NASB) *Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers...* **Jesus' explanation of the parable:** Matthew 13:39

The age of Jewish favor began its end with Jesus casting off Israel: Matthew 23:37-39: Jesus proclaims they had the opportunity to keep the favor by simply following him. He proved in many ways that he was from God and that his way was the right way. The religious leaders did not want him to change what they had in place. That is what corruption is. They had to keep their power.

The ending of the Jewish age continued with the calling of Gentiles to Christianity: (Here is Peter explaining the call of the Gentiles.) Acts 15:8-9: The Apostle Peter explains there is no distinction between a Jewish Christian and a Gentile Christian. Both can be true Christians given God's spirit. The call was expanded beyond the Jewish nation to anyone who would listen to that call and follow in Jesus' footsteps.

The ending of the age of Jewish favor culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the scattering of the people. Jesus forewarned this: Matthew 24:1-2:

The age of the Gospel will end when the call is complete and this corrupted world order is brought to an end, as predicted by the **Parable of the Wheat and the Tares**. Just as the Jewish age was brought to an end and the nation lost its national favor for a long period of time, so will this world's order come to an end: Daniel 2:44: What does it mean? How does it happen? What about false Christianity? How do we tell who is who? More in Part 2!

***So, has the Gospel been corrupted?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***

More on the RANSOM of Jesus on the next page...



The concept of the RANSOM is important because it is the entire basis for our Christian faith and the plan of God for the world of mankind.

What does it mean to say "Jesus is the ransom?" 1 Timothy 2:5-6: (NASB) ⁵*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,* ⁶*who gave himself as a ransom <487> for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*

Ransom: Strongs #487, antilutron, a redemption price

Strongs #487 is only used in this one place in the Bible. It is derived from two Greek words:

anti: Strongs #473, instead of or because of; used to denote substitution or correspondence

Lutron: Strongs 3083, a redemption price, ransom

So, the word ransom in this one text means a "corresponding price."

Adam, a perfect man, chose to disobey God resulting in sin and death for him and all his offspring. The entire human race was doomed to the prison of death in order to satisfy justice - Adam paid the penalty of his disobedience to God. (Romans 6:23: (KJV) *The wages of sin is death...*) All of our race are either dead or dying.

Without the intervening sacrifice of Jesus, the cycle of sin and death would continue in misery until eventually the human race died out.

The death of the perfect man Jesus became the *substitute* or *corresponding price* for Adam. Jesus willingly volunteered to die and thereby paid the ransom by his perfect obedience to God. The man Jesus would take Adam's place in death, thereby satisfying justice.

Having paid the ransom price allows the work of the ransom to begin.

1 Corinthians 15:22: (KJV) *In Adam all die even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

This legal equivalency of "a perfect life (Adam) for a perfect life (Jesus)" allows for the resurrection of mankind and their opportunity for everlasting life in the kingdom. Mankind will finally have the full opportunity to be obedient without inherited sin. As a reward for his sacrifice, Jesus was resurrected as a highly exalted spirit being to complete the great work of bringing mankind back into a relationship with God.

The ransom does not excuse the sins committed by those in this lifetime - it does not suddenly count sinners as saints and usher them into everlasting bliss. It merely releases the accepting sinner from the first condemnation and its results, and places him again on trial for life, in which his own willful obedience or willful disobedience will decide if he may or may not have life everlasting.

John 1:29: (KJV) *...The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world...*

Romans 5:18-19: (NASB) ¹⁸*So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.* ¹⁹*For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.*