

Marks of Authentic Christians - Introduction, I

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Matthew chapter 13 starting in verse number 24. We read this account of a parable that the Lord Jesus taught.

Another parable he put 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.¹

Drop down to verse number 36.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, 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 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.²

¹ Matthew 13:24-30.

² Matthew 13:36-43

The Lord Jesus did a lot of teaching with parables. In fact, we have a record of 29 different parables that the Lord Jesus taught, using them to explain gospel truth. This particular parable is in a series of parables in which he taught about the kingdom, the kingdom of heaven.

This was very prominent in the minds of the Jewish people and of those around him as he travelled throughout Israel. They wanted to know about the kingdom because they wanted the Messiah and they hoped that maybe this was the Messiah and they wanted to know about the kingdom.

Well, of course, the kingdom that Jesus presented to them, especially in the parables, differed greatly from their vision of the kingdoms. And he needed to clarify for them the reality of the kingdom as it was to come through his administration as the king. This is one of those parables, the parable of the wheat and the tares.

I bring it to our attention because it causes us to focus upon a crucial issue in our day. In our day we have the very prevalent, common thought that everyone is a Christian.

“Oh, yes, I am a Christian. I have been born again. I love God.”

And everyone seems to have this notion that they are believers. Furthermore, to complicate the issue—at least in my mind I view it as a complication—we have alongside of it this notion that we can't distinguish between those who really are and those who aren't. And so therefore there is kind of this subtle implication that everyone who comes along and professes to be a believer in Christ you have got to shake their hand and say, “Welcome, brother, sister,” and welcome them with open arms as though they are Christians.

And the Lord Jesus in this parable, in a very simple easy to understand picture, reveals to us that isn't true. Not everyone is a believer. There are unbelievers. And he uses the picture in parabolic form of the wheat and the tares and he does so to picture the kingdom, his kingdom, as he was established to be the king, the sovereign over all things. And he describes for us in a very clear picture the kingdom.

And I want us to examine it in brief in our study because it presents to us some very clear truth that we as true, authentic believers in Christ must understand and that even those who claim to be Christians must understand. Not everyone is a believer. Not everyone is a true child of God. And this parable defines and demonstrates it for us.

I want to present just a few things that this parable points out for us that we must understand in the body of Christ, not only for our own individual spiritual welfare, but for the well being of the Church of Jesus Christ.

First of all, I want us to notice the definition of the terms. Who and what is what in the parable? Well, I don't cover every aspect of the parable because my emphasis is not upon understanding the parable in its totality. It is only understanding a portion of the

parable because it is the foundation of a series of examples and studies that we will present and examine as to the characteristics of true believers. And so we will examine this parable from just very tight section and coverage of it.

So the definition of the terms. Well, Jesus gave somewhat of the definition to his disciples as they asked him, but just to refresh your mind and to go over them, we will just cover the ones that I want us to grasp.

First of all, the first sower, the first man who sowed the good seed, that is Jesus. And he presents himself as the Son of Man. That is what he called himself. He called himself, the Son of Man came who came to seek and to save those who were lost. And he scattered seed. Those were his children. So he is the sower of the good seed, the Son of Man.

The sower of the tares, of the evil seed, of the evil children, that is the devil. And notice he is described as his enemy. He came in stealth and sowed seed among the wheat and it grew up to be tares.

We notice also that there is a distinction between the plants. There is wheat, those are the children of God, the ones who came from the seed that Jesus planted, the children of God. They are called the wheat. And then we have the tares, the weeds, the darnel. They are the unbelievers.

So the wheat describes for us those who are the children of the kingdom, the believers, those who are saved, those who are Christ followers, those who are the true ones, those who are the followers of Christ and his disciples. They are distinguished and called the wheat.

Then we have the tares, the children of the devil, those who are unbelievers, those who are not saved, those who are the false ones, the pretenders, the posers, the ones who profess to be followers of Christ, the hypocrites, those who are posing as believers and they really are not.

So we have a very clear distinction and separation made between the wheat and the tares. The children of the kingdom, the children of the devil, the enemy of the kingdom.

And then we have the field which is the world where God's kingdom resides. Those are the definition of the terms that I want us to examine pertaining to the issues that I have in mind for us to see in time.

The second thing I want us to see that this parable present to us is the diffusion of the plants. Notice there is a mixture. It isn't the wheat over here on the one hand and the tares over here on the other hand and there are a separation in between them, no, they are together. They grow up together. There is wheat and tares mixed together in the same field. There is the existence of wheat and there is the existence of tares, but they are comingled, if you will. They are mixed together. They are diffused throughout the whole

field. There are wheat and tares, but they are mixed together. They are growing simultaneously in the field.

The third thing I want us to see from this parable is you can discern the difference. You can discern the difference.

Now when wheat plants are young and tender and tares are also young and tender it is extremely difficult to distinguish between them. They look a lot alike. And to the untrained eye—which I would call myself as far as plantology is concerned, to an untrained eye you couldn't distinguish them. They look a lot alike. They are very similar in their appearance and their color and their style of growth.

But there comes a day when it is very clear which is the wheat and which is the tares because when it comes fruit time there is a clear distinguish between the two.

And notice in verse number 26 it says, "But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also."³

And verse 27 the servant said to their master, "Sir, something ha gone wrong here. There is wheat and there are tares. Where did these tares come from because we know you didn't plant those?"

So there comes a time when you can distinguish with clarity the distinction between a wheat and a tare.

Now in this day the tares were distinguished by a rather stiff stalk that had 12 little clusters of seeds on it at the end. At the top of the stalk there were 12 clusters of seeds. And within each little cluster there may be two or three seeds so that the maximum number of seeds that a tare stalk could have would be 36. And it was a very small seed, a very distinguishable. It was a kind of a stiff blade. It didn't bend. It was kind of stiff in its nature, but it was characterized by the very clear listing of the clusters of seeds upon the top end of the stem of the tare.

The wheat isn't so. The wheat at fruit doesn't look like that at all. The wheat stalk on the end is very flexible. In fact, some of us have probably seen it as we have driven through the country side and we have seen wheat fields. When the wind blows you can see where the wind is blowing beaus the wheat kind of falls with it. It is kind of a flexible stalk. The tare is a stiff stalk. Wheat is flexible. It bends.

And also the appearance of the fruit on the end of the stalk, all of the seeds are together.

Now there is some little clusters, but they are all right together on the end. And the wheat stalk at fruit season, when it comes to maturity can have anywhere from 30 to 100 seeds.

³ Matthew 24:26.

In another parable the Lord talked about how some seeds bring forth 30 fold, some 60 fold, some 100 fold. So when the plants begin to mature you can discern the difference.

There is a tare. There is wheat.

The fruit distinguishes them very clearly so that you can identify the wheat from the tare. I am making a spiritual application here real quickly. There comes a time in the lives of individuals when it is fruit time and you can distinguish and discern the difference. A child of God will have different kind of fruit than one who is not a child of God. And yes we dare say there is a tare, there is a wheat. And that has become very unpopular in our day. In our day we have become all inclusive and we dare not single out anyone as saying they are not a wheat, they are a tare. Everyone is a wheat.

No, my friends, everyone is not a wheat. Some are tares. For much of their lifetime they have given the appearance of being a wheat, but now it is is fruit time and their lives have attained a certain level where we can examine their fruit and we can see they are not wheat.

Then we had better know they are not wheat. And don't call them wheat if they are a tare. So it is possible for us to discern the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. There is a difference. The fruit reveals the difference.

Jesus taught in his parable, yes, they both grow up together and yes within our congregations where we worship there is that collection as there is outside in the world. There is a mixture of believers and unbelievers. It is true in the places where we worship. There is a mixture of believers and unbelievers. And we dare not call believers those who are not believers.

We can discern the difference between the two.

Now, the fourth thing I want us to see, I have alluded to the fact that there are some distinctions between them. I have described the wheat and when it comes to maturity how it appears and the fruit within in the wheat plant. And we have looked at the tare and there are some distinguishing features about them and there are ways to identify the false from the true and to make that distinction.

We may have to wait a while. We may have some questions along the way and not quite sure. But there will come a day when you can discern the difference.

The fifth thing I want us to see is the source of the seeds, the source of the plants. Notice one source, the wheat, the believer, the child of God. That comes from the Lord Jesus. He has children. He has seed that he has planted.

Notice there is only one other kind, not 10 kinds. There is not five kinds. There is not 20 kinds, there is two kinds: children of God, children of the devil. And, no, it is not

unscriptural nor is it unkind to describe an unbeliever as a child of the devil because that is what they are. And it is not false to call a believer a child of God because that is what they are. Jesus described them that way. Children of God, children of the devil. Both growing together, but distinguishable. One of wheat, one tares.

The last thing I want us to see is this. There is coming a day when they will be divided. They will be separated. Harvest time is coming. I don't know when that is. The Scriptures don't give us definitive statements as it will be today, it will be tomorrow, it will be on the 15th of November. We aren't given those kind of timetables. But we are assured of the fact—as this parable reminds us and throughout Scripture we are told—of a coming day of harvest. There is coming a day of separation when there will be a division made between the wheat and the tares. And the future of each differs dramatically.

Jesus presented this parable for us to help us understand the kingdom. I have not taken time to examine every aspect of this parable. That is not my intent. I have presented the parts that I have to you because it lays the foundation for my theme. And the theme is this. We are going to examine the marks of authentic Christians as Jesus described them. We read throughout the gospels on numerous occasions where the Lord Jesus describes his disciples, describes those who can truly be called Christ followers, not imitators, not professors, not posers, not hypocrites, true authentic children of God. He describes them.

We are given those characteristics. We are shown them. We are going to examine some of those. I won't attempt to cover all of them because there are many of them. But we will take a select number of them and we will examine these marks of authentic Christians. And this parable lays that foundation because, yes, contrary to public opinion, you can identify them. And, yes, contrary to common popular opinion they are different from those who are not followers of Christ and you can distinguish between them. Jesus said so.

And Jesus gave the description and the characteristics of his children.

Now, I do so for several reasons, why I want to do do this. I do it for several reasons. One is for us to understand the basic truth of Scripture. That is one reason. And I pray that the Spirit of God will open our eyes to understand the truths that are laid in foundations formed here in this parable. And then as we examine the different characteristics that the Lord Jesus presents to us regarding true children of God and their characteristics that the Spirit of God will help us to grasp them. So one of the reasons for doing it is for us to understand the truth because there is truth. And I pray that the Spirit of God will guide us into that truth to see the truth.

I do so for another reason and that is because, as I have indicated as we have progressed thus far in this study, there are some very common problems in professing Christendom today that I want to examine and I want us to see their fallacies. I want us to see that everyone is not the same. We are not all believers. All of your neighbors up and down the street and who live in the neighborhood. They are not all believers. And your

companions at work in the workplace who profess to be believers. They say, “Oh, yes. I love Jesus. I am a Christian.”

Oh, there are some characteristics of authentic Christians and Jesus gives them to us. And not everyone who says unto me, “Lord, Lord,” shall inherit the kingdom, Jesus said.

And there is coming a day when those who will profess with their great works and, “Look at the wonderful things that I have done in your name.”

And he will say, “Depart from me. I never knew you.”

There is coming a day and not everyone is a believer. So I want us to be able to identify the inherent fallacies present and prevalent in our world today regarding a true believer and a professing believer. Not everyone is going to make it. There are going to be some who will be tares, who will be gathered together and thrown into the furnace, some who much of their lives like the tares professed, gave the appearance of being a believer. But, oh, when harvest time comes it will be shown they weren't. It is important for us as authentic Christ followers to be able to identify and distinguish the wheat from the tares.

Why, you ask? Well, for several reasons.

First of all, on what basis do you choose the leadership in your church where you fellowship? How do you choose them? What are the criteria? What are the characteristics of those that you elevate into positions of leadership and positions of teaching classes and teaching other people within the congregation and you elevate them and you promote them as teachers. On what basis do you do that? Are they a wheat or are they are tare?

You had better know the difference. You had better be able to distinguish a wheat from a tare for fear that you elevate into a position of leadership a tare. No matter how they may look on some aspects of their life, they are a child of the devil and what are they doing to do in the leadership of the church. They aren't going to lead us to follow Christ? They are an enemy.

And, my friends, we have multitudes across our nation and throughout the world, tares in leadership in the Church. We have tares serving in positions of pastors. We have tares serving in positions as teachers and on deacon boards, on elder boards and on all kinds of leadership positions within the Church we have tares because we have refused to take a stand and determined that there is a difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. And what are those characteristic differences?

We don't know. We don't know.

It is obvious that we don't know because we have elevated people into position of tares, into positions of leadership in the Church who are tares. We have not been able to distinguish the difference between a wheat and a tare.

So for the sake of the welfare of the Church and of the congregations where you worship, you must be able to distinguish a wheat from a tare lest you elevate the ungodly into a position of leadership within the body of Christ.

Furthermore, it is important to you as an individual who professes to follow Christ to examine yourself to see if you are a wheat or if you are a tare. Because there is a difference and there are certain characteristics and demands and requirements that the Lord Jesus made of people. He said, "If you are going to be my disciple, here are certain things that must be true in your life."

Are they true in your life?

If they are not then you have legitimate cause for concern, to examine yourself whether you are in the faith or not. And as this parable teaches us there is an important day coming when you best be sure you are a wheat and not a tare because eternal damnation or eternal glory with Christ rests in the balance.

So we will examine and take some time on some characteristics that the Lord Jesus very clearly spelled out and said, "Here are my disciples. Here is what... you will be able to identify them because here are some characteristics of them."

And we are going to examine those not only for our own spiritual welfare and benefit, edification, encouragement, strengthening, confirmation, but to also enable us to be able to participate within their bodies of Christ where we worship to be able to contribute there and help in the discernment of that body to distinguish between wheat and tares.

Quite frankly, I have become... I am angry. My wife charges me every now and then, "You are an angry man."

Well, unfortunately there are areas in my life where I am an angry man and I wish I weren't an angry man. But there are some areas where I am legitimately angry. And one of the places where I am legitimately angry is how the devil has blinded our eyes to believe a lie. And the lie is this, that his children are wheat, tares. They are false. They are unbelievers. They are enemies.

We don't like to view them as enemies, but they are enemies. That is what Jesus called them. They're children of the enemy. And they have risen to positions of influence, positions of responsibility, positions of honor and we listen to them and we buy their books and we attend their seminars and we elevate them as leaders and they are tares. They are not children of God. And we must distinguish the difference for the sake of the body of Christ and for the honor and glory of his name.

Over the next studies we are going to examine some of those to help us discern the true from the false, the believer from the unbeliever, the Christ follower from the Christ hater.

Yes, that is what they are, Christ haters. Let's call them what they are. They are Christ haters. [?] of themselves.

I pray that the Spirit of God will help me communicate to you the truth and that he will open your eyes to see and understand the truth for your own personal benefit, and for the honor and the glory of the Lord Jesus in his name.

Let's close in prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, I thank you for this parable that you have given to us that helps us to grasp some understanding of the true conditions of our world. In our world exists both wheat and tares, children of God and the children of the devil. Yes, we can distinguish them from each other. You told us that we can. You have given example that we can. Father, it is so important for us to be able to discern the difference. I ask that together with the Lord Jesus you would send your Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see, first of all, ourselves, and to be assured in our own minds and hearts and spirits by the communication of your Spirit to our spirits that we are, in fact, children of God. And then making sure of our own childhood as children of God that we might then begin to discern the difference between wheat and tares among those about us and in the places where we worship you with other of those who are children of God that we might set aside those who are tares and cling to those who are wheat, the true children of God and elevate them and encourage them to be leaders within the body of Christ. Oh, Lord Jesus, that your Church might be purified, might be strengthened, might begin to honor and glorify your name as you so rightly deserve. And we will thank you, triune God, for what you accomplish. Amen.