

The Wheat and Tares

Kingdom Parables · Parables of Jesus

This parable directly follows the Sower and addresses a perplexing reality: Why does the kingdom contain both genuine and counterfeit members? A householder sowed good seed, but 'while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.' The servants' discovery and alarm—'Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?'—reflects believers' confusion when encountering false professors within the church. The householder's response identifies satanic agency: 'An enemy hath done this.'

The Greek word ζιζάνια (zizania) refers to bearded darnel (*Lolium temulentum*), a poisonous weed virtually indistinguishable from wheat during early growth. Only at maturity, when wheat produces grain-bearing heads while darnel remains barren, does clear differentiation emerge. This biological reality underlies the parable's central command: 'Let both grow together until the harvest.' Premature attempts to purge tares risk uprooting wheat—overzealous church discipline might expel genuine believers whose faith remains immature or whose outward appearance raises suspicions.

Note: Roman law specifically addressed malicious sowing of darnel among neighbors' wheat, indicating the practice's prevalence. The parable doesn't counsel absolute passivity toward error and sin within the church—Scripture commands church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5). Rather, it warns against assuming infallible discernment of others' spiritual state and attempting to create a perfectly pure visible church through human effort. Final separation awaits divine judgment at harvest.

Christ provides authoritative interpretation (Matthew 13:36-43): The sower is the Son of Man; the field is the world; good seed represents children of the

kingdom; tares are children of the wicked one; the enemy is the devil; harvest is the end of the age; reapers are angels. At history's consummation, angels will 'gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity' and cast them into 'a furnace of fire' where there shall be 'wailing and gnashing of teeth.' Meanwhile, 'the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.'

The parable corrects two opposite errors: First, perfectionism expecting the visible church to contain only genuine believers. The kingdom's present form inevitably includes false professors; wheat and tares grow together until harvest. Second, indifferentism unconcerned with truth and purity. Though believers cannot infallibly distinguish all false professors, they must still exercise discernment, maintain doctrinal standards, and practice appropriate discipline while acknowledging final judgment's reservation for God alone.

Key Verses

Matthew 13:24-25

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.

Matthew 13:28-30

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 13:38-39

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.

Matthew 13:41-43

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 Timothy 2:19

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

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