

Why Is the Church So Messy

Matthew 14:24-30

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 23, 2017

Alright, well, how many of you have heard of the name Charles Spurgeon? You've probably heard me mention it about every Sunday here, I think. I mention him so much because Spurgeon was one of the most popular preachers of all time. He was known as the "Prince of Preachers". And his sermons were published once a week every week for 37 years, translated into 30 different languages. If you count them all up, they come out to 2,000 sermons, and they equal more pages than an entire set of the encyclopedia Britannica. It went out all over the world at his time, in a day when the Internet didn't exist. Modern communications didn't exist. It was even said that David Livingston had a Spurgeon sermon in his hat when he died in Africa. They found him, David Livingston in the jungles of Africa, with just a few possessions, but one of them was a Spurgeon sermon in his hat. He was enormously popular.

But I think it's important to mention that everyone didn't love Charles Spurgeon in the 1800's. He had his enemies. The conflict started over his views on election. Then it continued with his views on baptism, and it finally ended with what became known as the "Downgrade Controversy". His ministry was full of this kind of conflict.

Just to give you some kind of idea of what it was like, let me say a few words about the "Downgrade Controversy". Toward the end of Spurgeon's life, the London Baptist Union, to which he belonged, became enamored with what is today known as liberalism. Liberalism is the idea that you can call yourself a Christian and deny everything supernatural in the Bible. You can be a follower of Jesus and reject the afterlife, the sinfulness of man, the inerrancy of the Bible, the deity of Jesus, His substitutionary death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, a literal seven-day creation. You can reject all these things and still call yourself a Christian. The Baptist churches in London in the 1800's were swallowing this stuff by the truckload and Spurgeon spoke out against it. In his magazine, "The Sword and the Trowel", an article was published calling this a "Downgrade Controversy", and it said this. It said,

A new religion has been originated which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese. And this religion, being destitute of moral honesty, pawns itself off as the old faith with slight improvements, and on this plea, usurps pulpits which were erected for gospel preaching. The Atonement is scouted, the inspiration of Scripture is derided, the Holy Ghost is degraded into an influence, the punishment of sin to a fiction, the resurrection to a myth, and yet these enemies of our faith expect us to call them brethren and maintain a confederacy with them.

I would say that's the direct approach. Wouldn't you? But Spurgeon's concern was that if things started going downhill in the churches, if people started throwing out things like inerrancy and the deity of Christ, soon, there would be nothing left. It was a downgrade. It was like being on a downhill slope and a snowball, and it just got worse and worse and worse and worse. And because of this, churches in London wanted nothing to do with him. He was looked at as some kind of usurper or rebel rouser.

Just four years before his death, he resigned from the London Baptist Union over this. And as a result, the union censored him. The most famous Baptist preacher possibly of all time, was thrown out of his denomination. They told their people not to read his books, not to listen to his sermons and to have nothing to do with his people. It got so bad that just a few years later as he was dying of gout, Charles Spurgeon told a friend in a letter that his fight in the “Downgrade Controversy” cost him his life. He died at the age of 58.

Which leads to an important question this morning. Why is the church so messy? You ever wondered that? Why is the church so messy? Why do churches do things like that? Why do they throw men like Charles Spurgeon out?

If you're joining us for the first time today, we're currently in a series called “Foundations of the Church”, where we're looking at some foundational or fundamental issues of the church. And so far, we've looked at what the church is and what the church does. And we've talked about how the church is different from the world and the parachurch. And last week we talked about what the perfect church looks like. It looks like a body where all things work together in harmony. But it raises the question, why isn't the church like that? Why doesn't it work together in perfect harmony? Why do Christians fight, bite and devour each other? If you've been a Christian for any period of time, I'm sure you've wondered about this, right? I'm sure you've seen this before.

As I was studying for the sermon, I came across a website that listed out 25 things that churches fight over. It was actually a survey done by a gentleman named Thomas Rainer where he sent out a survey and asked people, “Send me reasons why churches are fighting in your community,” and he came up with 25 of them. And here's what some of them are.

They are fighting over the length of the worship pastors' beard, and over the fact that he doesn't wear shoes in worship. Now, that might bother me because of the smell, but they're fighting over that. They're fighting over whether to build a playground out back or to use the land for a cemetery. I would say those are two very different directions to go with your property. Maybe you could put the playground on top. I'm just kidding. They're fighting over whether to use dividers in the women's restroom. They're fighting over whether to keep a clock in the sanctuary. They're fighting over whether to put the picture of Jesus in the foyer. The article actually said, “Well, who took the picture of Jesus?” I thought that was funny. They're fighting over whether to use cran juice instead of grape juice at the Lord's Supper. They're fighting over what type of green beans to serve at potluck. They're fighting over who has the authority to buy postage stamps for the church. They're fighting over whether to put vanilla syrup next to the coffee in the foyer because it looks too much like liquor. I mean, if you've been a Christian for any period of time, this isn't funny because you've seen churches fight over this stuff, right? You've seen them devour each other and attack each other over green beans, and you've probably seen it done pretty violently.

I heard once about a church in L. A. that got into a fistfight over its budget. It got so bad that they had to call the police to break up a fight in the elders' meeting. Why do churches do this? Why is it such a mess? Well, to answer this, turn in your bibles with me to Matthew chapter 13. To Matthew chapter 13.

As you're turning there, there's a lot of ways to answer the question, "Why is the church so messy?" There's not just one way to do it. I mean, one answer is, is that the church has sinners in it and sin is always messy. I've told you before that if you find the perfect church, don't join it because you'll make it imperfect. We bring our own mess into the church. That's one reason it's a messy place. Another answer is that good people do bad things in churches even when they don't mean to. I mean, good people can make a mess of things.

I was talking with a pastor friend years ago and he told me he had confronted a lady in the church over some books she was reading and he said, "I shouldn't have done that. It was not a big deal. I could've let it go." Good people do that kind of stuff. They make a mess of things.

Another way to answer this question is found in Matthew 13. In Matthew 13, Jesus says the church is messy because it has tares in it. It's messy because it has tares in it. If you look in Matthew 13 in verse 24, let me just read this parable to you, so you can kind of have it in your minds as we go through this. But in verse 24,

24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slave said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

To give you a little context or maybe a little understanding of this, in the wheat fields of Central Illinois, where we used to live, is a plant that the farmers called cheat, because it looks just like a wheat plant, but it isn't. It's an imposter. It's a fake. It grows as high and as wide as a wheat plant. It's the same color and texture, but it's not the same thing. It's a tare. It's the same plant Jesus refers to here in Matthew 13. Some cultures call it ryegrass, some call it bearded darnel. But it grows in the fields of Palestine and it grows in the fields of Central Illinois and several other places in North America. But it can really do a number on you if you eat it. Horses get indigestion from this stuff. Barn owls have been known to get dizzy and faint from the top of the barn after they eat it. Human beings can actually die if they ingest too much.

But in this parable, in Matthew 13, the Lord says one reason the church is so messy is because it has this stuff in it. It has cheat among the wheat. It has ryegrass among the good crop. I don't have to tell you that everyone doesn't come to church for the right reasons. Some people come because they want to fake it. Some people come because they want to lie and deceive you into thinking they're something that they're not. To say it another way (and you know this) not everyone who calls themselves Christian is a Christian. Not everyone who says they believe, believes. That's the point of this parable.

And now, before we get into it a little more, I want you to look ahead to Jesus interpretation of this. If you look down in verse 36, the Lord explains to you what this parable is all about. And we're going to kind of have this in the back of our minds as we go through it. In verse 36, it says, "Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.'" It's kind of interesting. He gives them several parables here, but that's the one that stuck with them. In verse 37,

37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 And then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus says that during this age, during the Church Age, the devil will plant tares among the wheat. He will put lost people in the church who look like Christians. And Jesus will plant the good seed, the devil will plant the bad seed. And both are going to grow up together in the church until the end of the age when the angels separate them. But in this life, there will be no separation. In this life, the cheat will grow up with the wheat, and it will make the church a mess. That's what the parable means. Satan wants to mess up the church. It's no accident that churches today are like this. I just mentioned 25 things churches fight over. That's not random. That's a work of Satan. I mean, it's no accident that churches fight over green beans. It's no accident that police have to be called to break up our meetings. It's no accident that some of you have gotten your noses busted, your heads broken and your toes stepped on in a church. Satan causes all of this. This is the devil's work.

Let me say this another way (and you can say amen to this) there will be no church splits in heaven. I'll be out of a job, because you're all going to get along just fine. And the reason there'll be no church splits in heaven is because there'll be no devil. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. This is a serious sermon.

I was talking with Kevin Laser before, and we were talking about some sermons you're excited about. I'm not excited about this one. This is a sad sermon, because we're going to be talking about the work of Satan in the church. It's nice to talk about the work of Satan in politics. It's nice to talk about the work of Satan in your workplace. It's nice to talk about the work of Satan somewhere else, but this is about the work of the devil in the church. So, if you're taking notes in Matthew 13, I want to give you four ways that tares mess up the church. So, here's four ways that tares mess up the church.

And the first one is this, the tares are sown by Satan. We just talked about that. This is where it all starts. This is where it begins. The tares are sown by Satan. He makes things messy in the church. I mean, if some of us are following the devil and some of us are following God, that

makes a mess, doesn't it? That's a recipe for disaster and that's what you have going on in the church.

Just a little background on this parable. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus spoke it from a boat. It was a very interesting place to preach. I've preached in a lot of places before, but I've never preached from a boat or a fishing boat, nonetheless. He wasn't out on a yacht. He was probably out among nets and maybe even some fish in the boat with Him. But at this point in His ministry, the crowds has gotten so big that Jesus couldn't teach them by land anymore. There wasn't enough space, He has them stand on shore, He goes out in a boat and He teaches them about things they could understand.

In verse 24, the Lord teaches them about this. It says, "Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.'" Galilee, where this was occurring, was a very rural part of Israel. It was way up north where the farmers live. So, sowing good seed was something they were familiar with. In the ancient days, before tractors and combines, to plant a crop, you had to do it by hand. This was a lot of work, as you can imagine. And what they would do is they would have a slave or an indentured servant kind of guy, drape a sack of seed across his shoulders and just spread it around like this. Do you remember the parable where some of the seed falls on good soil, some of it falls on the road? Well, we would say, "Well, why is it on the road? Shouldn't the combine not go on the road?" Well, they're just throwing it everywhere. They just do it like that. It was a lot of work. You couldn't cover ground very quickly.

So, what happens next is unusually cruel. If you read in verse 25, it says, "But while his men were sleeping, after they sowed the good seed, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went away." Because this was so cruel, and because they could starve you out, the Romans actually had laws against sowing tares in another man's field. You could be jailed for this, you could be whipped. But while the slaves of the first farmer are sleeping, the enemy, the devil, we find out later on, plants tares among his wheat. He puts poisonous plants among the good ones. You would have to really hate someone to do this because this took a lot of work. I mean, you had to really have it out for them, going row by row, hour by hour, scattering seed. But this is what the devil did. I heard it said once, that the busiest person in the church is the devil. He never sleeps, he never rests.

The phrase "among the wheat", by the way, shows he did this everywhere. There's not a square inch of the church where the devil is not doing this. You go to the church in Alberta, you'll find tares there. You go to the church in Saskatchewan, you'll find tares there. You go to the church in Ontario, in Newfoundland, the church here in BC, the tares are everywhere because the devil has sowed his seed everywhere. You can't get away from him.

For some of you here this morning, this needs to be a wakeup call to you. You could have been planted in this church by Satan. You might've been sent here by the devil. Now, I believe J. C. Ryle was right when he said that those who are tares today can be wheat tomorrow. Those who are lost today can be saved tomorrow. God may change your heart as a result of your being here, and I pray that He does. But that doesn't change the fact that you could have been sent here by the devil.

Some of you don't come here because you want to know God. You come here because you want people to like you, to respect you, to say, "That's an honourable man there. That's an honourable woman there because they go to church." Or maybe you come here because you want to be known for being moral or you want to please your family or your friends, but you don't believe. That's not why you're here. You don't trust in Christ, you haven't turned from your sins. You haven't called on His name. It all means nothing to you.

The story is told of a zoo in London that lost its gorilla. So, they hired a man to pretend to be one and through a series of events, he landed in the lion's cage. And he started screaming, "Help, help save me, save me." Until the lion said, "Be quiet, you're going to ruin it for both of us." Some of you may be doing that this morning. You're pretending to be something you're not. And I pray this is the case with none of you. Listen, I don't have anybody in mind as I'm saying this, and I pray it applies to no one. But I wouldn't be your pastor if I didn't tell you what this parable means. It means that some people are placed in the church by Satan. God is not the only one with a church growth strategy. The devil has one too. And if you're here to impress your friends or to be respectable, I have to warn you, that doesn't please God. It pleases the devil. It's the meaning of the parable. If you sit under the teaching of the word, if you enjoy the fellowship of the saints, if you participate in the Lord's Supper and watch people get baptized, and hear their testimonies, and cheer with the rest of us, and you don't believe any of it, and it all means nothing to you, you're here for Satan.

I heard another story once of a preacher who ministered in a little country church, where an elderly man came up to him every Sunday after the service. And he said, "Oh, that was a great preacher. I'm so glad brother so and so was here to hear that. Pastor, that was a great message. I'm so glad sister so and so was here because she really needed to hear that." Week in and week out the old man would come and say that to the preacher. Then afterwards, one day a storm came and everyone couldn't make it to church, but this little old man. The preacher was preaching to the little old man and he preached with all his heart and he said, "You know what? I got him now. There's no way he can say that so and so needs to be here." And sure enough, after the service, the little old man came up to him and said, "Preacher, that was some sermon. You really brought it tonight. I only wish brother so and so was here to listen to it."

Some of you may be approaching services like that. "I wish so and so was here. I'm glad so and so was here." Friends, if that is the case with you, you need to be warned. You might get saved as a result of being here, and if you do, I'll be the first to hug your neck and praise God with you and rejoice with you. But you might not - you might remain in your damned condition for all eternity. To quote J. C. Ryle again, he said,

Some men want to repent and believe on their deathbed, but in my experience, most men die the way they lived. There was a thief on the cross to remind us that God can save dying men, but there was only one thief on the cross to remind us how rare that sort of thing actually is.

This should be a warning to you friends. Let this grab your attention. Tomorrow may be too late for you to repent. Your deathbed may be too late. Repent now, believe now, make things right with God now, and He will change you from a cheat into a wheat. God is in the changing

business. God is in the resurrection business like we talked about last week. Come to Him and let Him change you. Don't stay a child of the devil. But this is the first way that tares mess up the church. They're sown by Satan. They have a totally different agenda in the people of God.

That leads to a second way that tares mess up the church. They create different sprouts. They create different sprouts. They create a different type of fruit. Not only are they sown by the enemy, but they look like the enemy. They do what he does. They act like he acts. And that creates problems as well. The parable goes on, if you want to read in verse 26. It goes on to say, "But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also." I mentioned to you earlier that you can't tell the difference between a wheat and a cheat until harvest time. But around harvest time, the wheat plant sprouts a cone-shaped, fuzzy ball full of seeds, and the cheat plant doesn't. That's the only way you can tell them apart. They look the same week in, week out, month in, month out until it's time to harvest them. And then one of them creates a cone for its seeds. It's the only way you can tell them apart. And the Lord says it's the same way with the church. You can tell a Christian from a non-Christian by their fruits, by their sprouts, we could call it. You can tell the real thing from the fake by their works; what comes out of their lives. Works don't save you, but they show whether you have been saved or not. They're a barometer for salvation. Watch someone's life over the long haul and you can tell what's going on in their heart.

Just a couple of passages on this. Matthew 7:16 says, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles." First John 2:3-5 says,

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.

Jesus says you'll know them by what they do. I've told you before, if it quacks and has feathers and hangs out at ponds, it's a what? It's a duck, right?

We've talked about this before, so I don't want to say too much here, but keep your finger in Matthew, and turn with me over to the book of Galatians chapter 5, just to see what kind of fruit we're talking about here. Jesus doesn't go into a lot of detail about the issue of the sprouts or the fruits in this parable, but let's see what kind of fruit we're talking about in Galatians chapter 5. If you're saved, if you are born again, if you're not a cheat but a wheat, what are we talking about here? How can you tell that? If you look in chapter 5 of Galatians verse 22, Paul tells us. And he uses the same idea. Again, this is a very agricultural society. In the first century, a lot of these people were farmers, so the authors of Scripture say a lot about fruit and crops and fields, but in verse 22, Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Paul says, "If you are saved, if you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you, then you will produce this fruit." He doesn't say you'll all be six foot tall and have blonde hair. He doesn't say you're all going to speak this way or look this way or this and that. He says, "You will show it by being a loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good-natured, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled person."

Now, you may struggle with these things from time to time. A friend of mine says, you can hold your breath for three minutes and still be alive. But if you hold it for three hours, it's a good chance you're dead. It's the same thing here. You can struggle with these things at times, but this will be the pattern of your life. I would dare say that none of us are always patient, especially parents in this room. "Are you crying again? Seriously. Son, life is not that sad. What could you possibly be crying about?" You guys know what talking about. "Did you break your toys again? You've broken it three times. I'm not going to give you any more toys ever again in this lifetime." You say that stuff. But we all struggle with these things from time to time. But Paul says, this is the pattern of your life. You are generally a patient person. You are generally a joyful person, generally peaceful or kind. When someone looks at you, they say, "That's a patient man there."

And Paul says it's different for unbelievers. They have a different type of fruit. If you look up in verses 19 and following, he gives their list of fruits. He says, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have done, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Paul says, "This is the fruit of the tares. This is what the cheat looks like. They're immoral, impure, and so forth and so on." If this describes you, you may have your good days and bad days. You may have your holy days and your not-so holy days. I think we all act a little more religious around Christmas and Easter, right? We're all Christ-like, then when that's over, it's back to this. This is the pattern of your life.

You may say, "Well, you know what, Pastor Jeremy, this doesn't describe me because I'm not immoral, impure. I don't do sorcery. I don't do drunkenness and carousing." Well, maybe you don't, but are you jealous? See, that's what Paul's talking about here. Are you dissentious, factious, envious? Is that the pattern of your life? Because when you put that stuff in the church, it spells disaster, doesn't it? It creates a mess.

Some time ago, a church in California went through a horrible church split. They went from a thousand people down to 300 in one year. Because one of their elders was making a big deal over some nitpicky issue. I don't even remember what it was. It doesn't matter. But he wouldn't back down on it to the point that he split the church over it, and later on it was found out he was having an affair. You see, he was a tare. He was manifesting the deeds of the flesh. He was acting like a child of Satan and it ruined that church. It tore it apart. We could mention other men and women who have taught lies in the church. They've written books and they've led seminars promoting heresy and bad, evil doctrine, until it's found out that they're embezzling money or breaking the law. See they're tares. They're cheat among the wheat. This is serious stuff.

What you do in your private life matters. What you do day in and day out has an impact on the kingdom of God. If you're quarrelsome, if you love to pick fights and argue and bicker and go at it with people, that creates disaster in here. That will ruin Grace Fellowship Church. If you're an angry person, if you blow up at the slightest provocation, if everybody has to walk on eggshells around you, same thing. That will bring this body of believers down to our knees. If you're immoral - I just showed you what that can do, if you're jealous, same thing. See, the deeds of the flesh are disasters for the church. People like to say, "Well, it's just a little sin." That's rubbish.

Look at how many churches have been ruined by just a little sin. And that leads to another way that tares mess up the church. And we'll go through these other two pretty quickly.

The tares are spared for a season. They're sown by Satan, they're seen by their sprouts and they're spared for a season. This one might be the most concerning of all. But the tares are not pulled up right away in this parable. You would think that as soon as they're spotted, they will be weeded out, but that's not the case here. They're left where they are, which means that they can make a real mess of things in the church. If you look back in Matthew 13 in verses 27 through 30, this is what the Lord goes on to say. It says,

26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to the master, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

The ratio of tares to wheat in this parable must've been pretty high, because the slaves go and tell their master about it. I mean, you think if there's just a few of them, it wouldn't have been a big deal. But there must've been a lot. They go and tell the master and the master's answer is interesting. He says, "Don't go harvest the tares yet, for while you're gathering them up, you may uproot the wheat with them."

There's a couple of reasons why he might have said this, the roots of the tares and the wheat could have been so intermingled that if you pulled one up, you pull the other one up too. You yank one of them out of the ground, you could have yanked both of them out of the ground and killed both of them, and he doesn't want to do that. So, he said, leave them alone. It could have been that some wheat matured later than others. And if the slaves pulled the tares up now, they would have pulled up the wheat by mistake. Remember, you couldn't tell until the end anyway. So, they might have pulled up the wrong plant. So, he told them not to do that.

But whatever the case, Jesus says, this is how it will be in the Church Age, the tares will stay among the wheat. The lost people will stay among the people of God. And there's some encouraging part of this. This is a tough passage to preach, but there is some encouragement here. Let me give you some encouragement. The encouragement is that it's not your job to weed out the tares. Does that encourage you? Is that some hope? It's not your job to go around determining who's saved and who's not. "This one's in, this one's out, this one's in, this one's out." It's not your job. It's our job to ask people to give a proper testimony of faith in Christ before joining the church. It's our job to confront the deeds of the flesh when we see them, but it's not our job to try and figure out who's saved and who's not. That's God's job. That's God's business.

To say it another way, we are fruit inspectors, we're not root inspectors. I mean, we look at the outward fruit. We look at their works, but we don't go underneath and dig up the roots. We can't

do that. We don't have the skills to do that. Only God knows what's going on in someone's heart. I can think of people I've known for years who I can't tell if they're a Christian or not. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? You might not know what I'm talking about. Have you ever left your house and visited friends? I mean, one minute they're living like they're saved, the next minute they're living like pagans, right? I mean, one minute they're living like a saint, the next minute they're living like something else. You know what the good news is? The good news is, I don't have to tell, God does that. The good news is I don't have to judge them, God does that. He's the Lord of the harvest, He's the king of the fields, leave that up to Him. Does that encourage you a little bit? It gives you some hope, right? He's the one who passes judgment. That's the good news. That's the encouraging part of this passage.

The discouraging part is that the tares will always be with us until Jesus comes. That's the bad news. That's the tough part of this. Satan's missionaries will be with us until the end. The Puritan Cotton Mathers said that God has Satan on a chain, but it's a very long chain. And it's the same way with these people. They're on a very long chain. God has given them all kinds of freedom, which means they can do a lot of damage in the church. They can make it really, really messy. I don't know about you, but I'm always amazed at the type of people who are allowed to lead churches. Some of the men and women who are allowed to lead the flock of God, they don't love the Scriptures (or they don't act like they do anyway). But they're in leadership. Why? Because Satan has a very long chain.

I've told you about the church I grew up in, but the pastor who baptized me when I was eight-years-old was later convicted of marijuana possession and sent to jail. Now who let that guy in the church? Who let him in a pulpit? I can think of other leaders from that church I grew up in who were involved in dishonest business. They were wheeling and dealing underhandedly to get a restaurant or business recognized in the community. Satan has a long chain. The church has tares in it and they're spared for a season.

Before if that's too discouraging, let me remind you that it's always been this way. There's always been tares among the wheat. That's nothing new to God. I mean, just think of the church in Corinth and you've got to ask the question, what in the world, right? I mean, who was leading that mass? It was just tare after tare. You could put in parentheses, First Corinthians in parentheses, "The Church of the Tares", right? It was just a mess. Let me encourage you that God is in control just as He ever was. He's sovereign over the church back then, He's sovereign over the church today. Martin Luther said, "The devil is God's devil." And what he meant by that was the devil will never go farther than God allows him to go. And let me also tell you that the Lord is going to deal with this in the end.

That brings us to the next point. A final way that tares mess up the church; is that they're headed in the wrong direction. They're headed in the wrong direction. To say this another way, the tares are headed for hell. They're headed for hell. I think it's safe to say things get real messy in the church when we're headed in different directions, right? If some of us are going to heaven and we have heavenly priorities in mind, and others of us are going to hell and have hellish priorities in mind, that creates all kinds of mess. I don't delight in telling you this, but this parable goes on to say that there are people who sit among us week in and week out, they sing with us, they pray with us, they read Scripture with us. They laugh and cry with us, and they're headed for hell.

They're headed in the wrong direction because they don't believe in Christ. They don't love Him. They haven't embraced His work on the cross. After the master tells the slaves to wait, he goes on with his instructions and he says in verse 30, which we just read. He says, "Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares, bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

In the first century like it is today, farmers got rid of the trash by burning it. They would just throw it all in a pile and light it on fire. And here Jesus says, this is the ultimate fate of the tares. They will be lit on fire. It will be thrown into a pit and burned eternally in hell. They haven't changed on the inside. They're not turning away from their deeds of the flesh. They sing but don't mean it. They pray but don't mean it. They read Scripture but don't mean it, and as a result, they suffer eternally in hell. That's the end of this parable. You would think that in verse 31, Jesus would go on in the parable to kind of soften the blow, and He doesn't. He wanted His audience to get this.

And just to show you how serious this is ... (I've already told you what it will look like if you are headed for hell, if you have the deeds of the flesh.) ... But let me show you what hell itself will look like. Jesus says down in verse 42, that it will be a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. I don't know if you've ever seen those cowboy shows where the cowboy gets shot up and they had to take out the bullet. And they put something between his teeth. You know what I'm talking about? They do that because when they take the bullet out, he's going to gnash his teeth in pain. That's what verse 42 is talking about. Hell is a place of immense, immense pain.

Verse 42 also says, it's a furnace of fire, which means it's a place of destruction. Fire destroys things. Hell is a place where things will be eternally destroyed, not burned up and then it ends. There is no indication in Scripture that it ever ends. They will be continually destroyed. Other passages in Scripture say it's dark. It's a place of fire, but there's no light there. Luke 16 says, you'll be thirsty there and beg for water and never get it.

Let's kind of dive into this a little more because I just want this to be understood by everybody. Let me quote some from a very brilliant man, Jonathan Edwards. On July 8th, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards preached what some consider to be the most famous sermon ever preached on American soil. It was called "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". It's kind of interesting that it's considered to be the most famous sermon because so many people don't even talk about hell anymore. But Edward's sermon was a huge, huge impact on New England in the 1700's. In the sermon, he says this about hell. He says,

There is nothing that keeps wicked men out of hell at any one moment except the mere pleasure of God. By mere pleasure of God, I mean His sovereign pleasure, His all-powerful will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty. Nothing else, but God's sovereign will has a hand in the preservation of wicked men.

Your wickedness makes you as heavy as lead, it drives you down with great weight and pressure towards hell. And if God were to let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless golf. At that moment, you will see that your health, your own care and prudence, your best contrivance and all your

righteousness have no more influence to hold you and keep you out of hell than a spider's web has to keep you falling from a rock.

The bow of God's wrath is bent. The arrow is made ready on a string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart and strains the bow. It is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God without any promise or obligation at all that keeps the arrow from being made drunk with your blood at any moment.

You who remain in an unregenerate state, consider this: The fact that God will execute the fierceness of His anger implies that He will inflict wrath without any pity. When God beholds the unspeakable extremity of your condition and sees your torment to be so vastly disproportional to your strength and how your poor soul is crushed and sinks down, as it were, into an infinite gloom, He will have no compassion upon you; He will not hold back the executions of His wrath or in the least lighten His hand.

There will be no moderation or mercy, nor will God then at all stay His rough wind. He will have no regard for your welfare, nor will He be at all concerned about your increasing suffering, except that you will not suffer beyond what strict justice requires. Nothing will be withheld with the reason that it is too hard for you to bear.

“Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them” (Ezekiel 8:18).

If there are tares among us this morning, if you haven't heard what I've said so far about being sown by Satan and seen by your fruit and spared for a season, if you're faking it and you know it, then please listen to me now, you are headed for a place where God will hear you no more. You are headed for a place where there'll be no consideration or mercy towards you. God will have no regard for your welfare, and please understand that it does not have to be that way. You don't have to go there. You may be headed in the wrong direction this morning, but God can change your direction. You may be hardhearted and have a soul that is dead as steel, but God can change your soul. He's in the soul changing business. You simply need to cry out to Jesus Christ.

You have broken God's law my friends. You have committed the deeds of the flesh, and God does not take that lightly. He will punish you in hell for it, but Jesus was crucified so you wouldn't have to go to hell. He was beaten and bruised and tortured to take God's wrath on Himself. He was humiliated and scorned and insulted to spare you from that dreadful place if you would trust in Him. The secular humanist, Marghanita Laski once said that, “The only thing I envy the most about Christians is your forgiveness. I have no one to forgive me.” Friends, you have someone to forgive you this morning. You have someone to spare you from hell. His name is Jesus Christ. Run to Him and He will spare you from that terrible place.

So, why is the church so messy? Why does it have so many problems? Well, it's because it has tares in it. That's why it's so messy. It has cheat among the wheat, and they are sown into the church by Satan. They're known by their sprouts, spared for a season and they're headed in the wrong direction. And while that may be discouraging to us, it's kind of hard to hear.

Let me close with an encouraging note. God knows that His church is a mess, but doesn't catch Him by surprise. And He's going to make it right in the end. That's the point of verse 30. He will purify His church. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but He will do it one day. And trust me, friends, God cares more about His church than we ever could. God gave more for His church than we ever could. He sent His Son to die for it. He sent His Spirit to live inside of it. The church is the apple of His eye. He will never, ever forget His church. So, you can rest easy on this issue of the tares.

That's another thing that's God's job and not yours. Let Him worry about this problem. It's not your job to go after them. The angels will do that on Judgment Day. It's not your job to weed them out, the angels will do that too. It's your job to stay faithful to Christ, to pray for those who are lost, to root sin out of your life, to confront it gently when you see it in others, and let God do the harvesting, amen? He loves His church. He will take care of it in the end. And let's praise and thank Him for that.

Father, I think this was a heavy message this morning. It's a heavy subject to think about hypocrisy, and can I just say evil in the church. Lord, for someone to sit in this church or any church for that matter and hear Your work proclaimed week in and week out and not respond to it. That's a serious offense to You. But Lord, I thank you that You are a God of mercy, and You're not a God that delights in punishing people. You delight in seeing them saved and born again.

I pray for those here this morning. If there's any who are tares ... Again, I'm so new here, I don't know who this would apply to ... but Lord, if there are any here who are faking it, I pray You would bring them to repentance today. Help them know that there are arms wide open with mercy at the cross.

For those who are believers here who wrestle with these things day in and day out, they live among professing Christians who don't seem to be saved, I pray this sermon would encourage them that You do care about your church, and You are taking care of it.

Father, thank you for being a good God. Thank you for being a God of mercy. You have a Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who preached on the subject of hell and then later went to the cross and died to save sinners from it. Your Son was not a person who talked something He didn't walk. He preached very clearly on eternal destruction, and then He died a very clear death to spare us from it. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ this morning.

Father, we pray that as we go out from here, You will be pleased in our fellowship; You will be pleased as we spend time together to honour Your Son, the Lord Jesus. And we pray this in His name, amen.