

CHRIST AS A SOWER.

In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, are given two parables, in which the Son of Man is represented as a sower. The first of them is usually called the parable of the sower, and the second the parable of the tares and the wheat. These parables are related to each other, but should not be confounded. We may learn something by comparing them; and in the application of these two parables, we have the advantage of the fact that the Saviour explained them both. We must regard it as a fundamental principle in the interpretation of parables, that when the Lord explained them they need no further explanation. It is probably true that no two parables teach, or illustrate, exactly the same thing. So, after having given the parable of the sower, and explained it, when the word says, "Another parable put He forth unto them" (Ver. 24.), we may safely conclude He had something more to communicate – that some additional truths were to be illustrated.

Christ is the sower in both parables. It is stated so of the second parable (Ver. 37.), but we learn that He is the sower of the first parable by the nature of the seed sown. We think all admit this.

In the first parable the seed sown is the "word of the kingdom" (Ver. 19), and in the second "the good seed are the children of the kingdom." (Verse 38.) In the first it is truth, and in the second, persons. Some one has called this distinction a foolish one, and said that the Son of Man does not sow persons. This only proves that such an one does not understand the parables. Whoever calls the distinction foolish charges the Saviour with folly, for it is His own explanation. The reasonableness of the distinction

between the two kinds of seed will be seen when we consider the distinction in the fields.

In the first parable the field of operation is the heart of each individual, who hears the word of the kingdom (Ver. 19.), and in the second "The field is the world." (Ver. 38.)

We, be it remembered, are not responsible for this distinction – these are the Lord's own words. The word "world," above quoted, is not *aion*, as in the next verse – "The harvest is the end of the world" (*aion* – age), but it is translated from the Greek word, "kosmos." This word is used when the general order of things is meant, as when the "world that then was" (before the flood) is referred to. (2 Pet. 3:6.) It is also used when the people are meant, as "God so loved the world;" "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world;" and all similar passages. There is another shade of meaning in the word, as used in several places, as: "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world." Jno. 3:17. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (1 Tim. 1:15.) "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." 1 Jno. 2:15. Any thoughtful reader will readily see the difference between the world as a place, as used in these several scriptures, and the world of mankind who live in that place, and whom Jesus came to save.

"The field is the world" – that is, Christ planted His church in this world to accomplish a certain work which Christ came into this world to do, or to set in motion.

Any one might see that there is a clear difference between sowing the word of the kingdom in the hearts of men, which work began where the personal ministry of Christ began, and the planting of the church in the world, which did not take place until the day of Pentecost. As the church of Christ was to be composed of converted sinners, it was necessary that the word of the

kingdom, as a converting power, should be preached, for a time, before the founding of the church. For proof that the word, understood, is the converting power, see verse 15. The sowing of the word, in parables, and the explaining of them to some, went on during the ministry of Jesus, but He spoke of the building of the church as future. "On this rock I will build my church." Matt. 16:18. The foundation was not even laid until Christ was risen – a spiritual being. The building is a spiritual house, and is built on a spiritual rock. The true church has always recognized and worshiped a living spiritual Christ – there is no other. Keeping in mind the above facts, we will see that the parable of the sower must have begun to be fulfilled three years and a half sooner than that of the tares and wheat, and we may see why it is never said, "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a sower." It is simply, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." In the other parables it is "the kingdom of heaven" that is represented. The reason is obvious: there was no church of Christ, or kingdom of heaven, until the day of Pentecost. The work of sowing the word was to prepare for the establishment of the church in its due time, and the "holding forth the word of life," or preaching to the unconverted, has been carried on through the whole dispensation, for the purpose of converting them, and so preparing them for a place in the kingdom. The relation and harmony between the two parables can be seen far more clearly by preserving the distinctions made by the Saviour, between the two kinds of seed, and the two fields, than by confounding them. The first parable prepares the way for the other. The first deals with the individual; the second, with the church collectively. The first parable has only one kind of seed – the world. Three out of four classes of hearers brought forth no fruit. In the one class that received the word in good ground ("an honest and good heart;" Luke 8:15), there is a variety in the amount of fruit – "Some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, and some thirty fold." Ver. 8. All

who bear fruit in any degree, are evidently "the children of the kingdom" – the branches, weak or strong, of the living Vine, for "Every branch in me [says Jesus] that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." Jno. 15:2.

In the parable of the tares and wheat there are two sowers and two kinds of seed, both explained by the Saviour. The Son of Man sowed the good seed – "the children of the kingdom," as we have seen, and the devil sowed the tares – "the children of the wicked one." There is a clear contrast between the "children of God" and "the children of the devil." There is, as we have admitted, a variety among the children of God – some are babes, and some are more fully developed, but the Bible recognizes no such absurdity as that the children of the devil are at the same time Christians, and it is passing strange that any Christian ever should have invented or promulgated such an idea.

The apostle John speaks of the variety among Christians – little children, young men and fathers – (1 Jno. 2:12-13), but makes a contrast between the Church and the world. "We know that we are of God, but the whole world lieth in wickedness," (literally "in the Wicked One"). 1 Jno. 5:19. "In this the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." 1 Jno. 3:10.

It is true that Paul recognizes the fact that Christians have the old man – the flesh – to contend with, and hence the warfare spoken of in Rom. 7. But Paul clearly shows that whoever has the Spirit of Christ is a son of God, and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. Rom. 8:9-14. "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." Those in whom the good work of the Spirit is ever begun, are counted on the living side – "risen with Christ," – and not on the side of death

and the devil. This is our encouragement, and also makes us debtors, not to live after the flesh but after the Spirit. Ver. 12-13.

When Jesus says, "the tares are the children of the wicked one," let no one say, the tares are errors, sown in the hearts of Christians, or that the tares are carnal Christians – "babes in Christ." If the tares are errors, then the tares are not persons at all; so if the wheat be truths, they are not persons at all. But again, if the wheat mean truths in the heart and the tares mean errors in the same heart, then the harvest is not a separation of persons at all, but simply a cleansing of the hearts of Christians from error; but this would neither agree with the teachings of Jesus nor with the theories of men who make such applications. The harvest is a separation of two classes of persons, who were permitted to "grow together until the harvest." Ver. 30. But if the tares are of the world, are all the world tares? No; only men of the world, who get so far out of their place as to profess to be Christians, are tares. The tares are the unconverted men in the Church – sown among the wheat. Ver. 25. If a farmer sows a field with chess, the chess is not then a weed, but it is a weed when sown among the wheat. It has always been the duty of Christians, to grow in grace and in knowledge, and no person can advance in knowledge [R98 : page 3] without discarding some error or mistaken ideas. The Apostles were constantly exhorting and warning the early Christians against errors, and those who advanced them. "Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good," has always been both the duty and privilege of Christians. But if wheat be truth, and tares, errors then these Apostles contradicted the Saviour. How would his words sound thus paraphrased: "Shall we root up the error? He said nay, lest while ye root up the error, ye root up the truth also. Let both truth and error grow together until the harvest, and then I will say to the angels, gather ye together first the errors, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the truth into my barn." And the

errors are to be cast into a furnace of fire, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. If we would escape such absurd conclusions, let us cling to the Saviour's own explanation of wheat and tares. But, it may be asked, has it not always been the duty of the Church to cast out unconverted men? I answer, no. Men who committed outrageous sins, could be known, and were to be dealt with; but merely for not being Christians, they could not be dealt with. An unconverted man, a man who loves not our Lord Jesus, might be outwardly consistent in conduct, and yet give no real evidence of being spiritual. But man is not competent to judge in such cases. Hence Paul says: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the [R98 : page 4] hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the councils of the hearts." 1 Cor. 4:5. And yet, in the next chapter, he tells them to deal with the fornicator, "To deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh," &c. Man could deal with sinners, but when it was a heart work, a question of motive, they could not deal with it. They might make a mistake, and men have often made such mistakes. Of such Jesus said: "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat also. Let both grow together till the harvest." Then the angels, of superior power and wisdom, will do the work of separation. In harmony with this, Paul says, "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha," that is: Let him be cut off. The Lord cometh. 1 Cor. 16:21.

This may be an additional proof that the coming or presence of the Lord and the angels is due in the time of the harvest.

As the parable of the sower begins sooner than that of the tares and wheat, so it ends sooner. The first does not include the harvest work, while the latter does. The harvest of the Jewish age

was the beginning of the gospel age; so the harvest of the Gospel age is the beginning of the Millennium.

There was a sense in which the Jewish age ended at the Cross, and another sense in which it was extended 37 years. So, we believe, there is a sense in which the gospel age ended in 1878, and another sense in which it is extended 37 years, or until 1914.

The closing work of the Jewish age included the burning of the chaff; Matt. 3:12, and the closing of the gospel includes the burning of the tares; Matt. 13:40. In this there is a parallelism, but there is one grand event here that had no pattern at the dawn of the gospel – that is, the translation of the saints. "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape those things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of Man." The saints shall execute the judgments written, as did Aaron with Moses. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the Sun."

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