

STRAIGHTWAY

And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him [Mark 1:18].

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The End-time Church World of Wheat and Tare Religion

Dr. H. T. Spence

The recent events of the passing away of John Paul II and the installation of Benedict XVI as the Roman Pope have truly given evidence that the times in which we live are hastening us quickly to the end of the church age. Only God knows the time that is remaining before the culmination of this age. The amalgamation of all religions is becoming more and more a global hope and philosophy; public Christianity is pressing for such a reality. To understand this imminent movement towards religious and political globalization, we must first acknowledge the Scripture's perspective of where we are in history.

In Matthew 24, one of three questions the disciples asked the

Lord concerned the signs of the "end of the world" (24:3). In this passage *world* is the Greek word *aion* or "age"; thus, their question concerned the signs of the "end of the age."

The eschatological presentation in Scripture (the doctrine of the last things) includes three concepts of the "end": (1) the end of the church age (which will be resolved by the Rapture), (2) the end of the Tribulation Period and Daniel's Last Week (which will be resolved with the Battle of Armageddon), and (3) the end of time itself and of the earth as we presently know it. Following the end of the third concept will be a new heaven, a new earth, and eternity. In light of history and the Scriptures, it is

becoming more evident that our present history is at the first end, the end of the church age.

An End-time Doctrine

When the child of God finds himself in the “end-time” age, there are certain Bible doctrines that come to the forefront; these doctrines must be acknowledged in his daily living. One of these end-time doctrines is the concept of *apostasy*. It is true that apostasy has been here since the early days of the Christian church; however, in the end time it will be found at a unique and monumental proportion. Perhaps a closer view of the term *apostasy* and its meaning will assist us to understand why it is a unique end-time doctrine.

The term *apostasy* comes from the Greek word *apostasia*, which means a defection, a desertion, a falling away from Biblical Faith. In II Thessalonians 2:3 the word is translated “falling away,” or a defection, a revolting; in Acts 21:21 it is

translated “to forsake”; in Acts 13:13 it is translated “departed.” The Greek preposition *apo* has the understanding of separating a part from the whole whereby the whole is destroyed. The Greek stem *stasis* means a standing. When the preposition is combined with the stem, the word means “a leaving of one position for another position” or an abandonment of what was once believed. *Apostasia* is a strong word that denies the hope of a return. From a biblical perspective it is a turning away from the Faith, even though at times there may be a continuation of the “form” of the godliness (II Timothy 3:5).

Although apostasy has existed since the early days of the Church, the Bible doctrine of apostasy teaches that this defection will increase as the Church age progresses and as we near the coming of Christ. Paul speaks of this in I Timothy 4 and in II Timothy 3. The epistles of the New Testament prove that the activity of apostasy was already working in the churches; they also speak of a global or worldwide apostasy that will lay hold of the visible church.

The potential of worldwide apostasy is the accompanying danger of the preaching of the gospel throughout the world: worldwide apostasy is a defection from the gospel preached worldwide. There can be no Christian apostasy without the presence of Christianity; there can be no global apostasy without the Gospel being preached throughout the

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world. With such an apostasy the Gospel becomes another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9), Jesus becomes another Jesus (II Corinthians 11:4), and the Holy Spirit becomes another Spirit (II Corinthians 11:4). When such powers of reaction and resistance permeate the public understanding of Christianity, the church world/age has entered into what Paul called (in the Greek language with the definite article) “the” falling away (II Thessalonians 2:3).

Two Distinct Churches in the New Testament

One of the problems the Christian faces in reading the New Testament is understanding that there were, and still are, two separate streams of Christianity presented. This cannot be underestimated! These two separate streams continue to exist side-by-side in Church History.

The first church is the *true* church, composed of true saints, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail (Matthew 16:18). They have been called out of the world; the Greek word *ekklesia* declares this understanding as well as our English term *church* or *kirk*, which means “belonging to the Lord.” Until Christ’s return, the true church of history has and will be persecuted, hated, despised, and looked down upon by the world and the false church. In the beautiful book of the Song of Solomon we see this view between the Shulamite and the Daughters of Jerusalem. This true

church has been the light and salt of the earth; she has been the hindering force against the powers of darkness and heresy. Christ promised to *this* people, “and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” She is the church that is spoken of in Ephesians 5:23-32.

The second church of which the New Testament speaks is the apostate institutional church. As two millennia have unfolded, this church has increased in number and wickedness. She is represented as a woman who hides leaven within the meal *until* the whole is leavened (Matthew 13:33). Symbolically, leaven is never presented in a good light in the New Testament; leaven is always seen as an evil and wicked ingredient that continues to corrupt (I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9; and Mark 8:15). Some have tried to interpret Matthew 13:33 in a good sense, but there is no hermeneutical exception that is given by the Lord in the interpretation in that passage. We truly have come to the entire leavening of the institutional church. It has taken two thousand years to get to this point. The leavened flour or meal in the public, global context is apostate Christianity, proclaiming another gospel, another Jesus, and another Holy Spirit.

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares

One of the parables given in Matthew 13 is that of the Wheat and Tares. The first seed to be sown was the wheat, a principle grain that

is a type of the saints on earth. In the first parable (the Sower and the seed), the seed is the word of God sown in various types of soil in the world. The soil is the ground of the individual's heart as the Word of God comes to it. But in this second parable, the seed is referring to individual saints saved by that Word (see Christ's interpretation of this in Matthew 13:38). This is the wheat seed sown by the Son of Man or Jesus Christ.

"But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (13:25). This is a very vivid observation and one that gives insight to the dilemma of Church History. The enemy is the devil (13:39), and his sowing was literally "sowed upon" or "sown again." The enemy deliberately sowed "darnel," "tare," or "bastard" wheat over in the midst of the true wheat. This bearded darnel is common in Palestine and resembles wheat except that the grains are black. In its earlier stages it is indistinguishable from the wheat stalks so that it has to remain till near the harvest.

The symbol of the tare seed is an important observation about the false church: it began immediately after the true church was birthed by the Holy Spirit and after the Lord began adding to the church (the true church), such as should be saved (Acts 2:47b). Very quickly, after the wheat was sown, we view this second sowing in the New Testament. It is

not prominent in the book of Acts, for this book was simply to show the growth of the church throughout the Roman world. But we do find very clearly evident in the epistles that problems were arising within the visible church, or the institutional church.

The earliest book to be written in the New Testament was the book of James, about fifteen years after the ascension of Christ. This epistle, written by the half-brother of the Lord becomes the "State of the Church" address. How sad it is to read of the spiritual condition of the Jewish church only fifteen years after its birth. But the epistles that follow the writing of James only indicate deeper problems arising (Galatians, I & II Corinthians, Colossians, the Pastoral Epistles, the Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude).

Within the parable of the wheat and tares, the servants did not see the problem initially; but when it matured, they asked, "Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?" They knew that the master had sown good seed; they knew not the origin of the bad seed. He responded, "An enemy hath done this" (Matthew 13:28). The next few verses declare the reason for this close association between the true and false church of today:

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 (13:28-30).

It must be acknowledged in our day that we are witnessing the two growing together. The tares are what the world sees; for the wheat in its full stage growth is bowed down with the burden of its fruit, while the bastard seed (the children of the wicked one, 13:38) are standing tall and recognized as “The Church.”

The Laodicean Church World/Age

The Philadelphia Church Age, marked by the Great Awakenings in America and the Evangelical Revivals in England, brought a proliferation and evidence of true wheat to the Church. It was a time of great insight to spirituality, more than any time in history. However, any honest student of Church history will acknowledge we are now in the world and age of the Laodicean Church spirit. Now the tares, the bastard wheat of illegitimate professing sons, have come to their great hour of maturity. They have taken over the world in renown and visible power. They have defined a materialistic Church age. Their trilogy of power is the flesh, the world, and money.

The world views the Church through the image of the tares. And

in this church’s thinking and standing before God, she believes she has need of nothing. She does not know that the Head of the Church views her as “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

Although these seven churches are not the true church, within them there is the plea to the “overcomer” and the one who has “an ear to hear”; within these churches is the true church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. In Revelation 1:9-18 Christ, the Head of the Church, was walking in the midst of the institutional church. By the end of these seven institutional churches, Christ is outside knocking at the door. This last church age is a Christless institutional church. Although the true saints of God are part of this institutional church in visibility, they find themselves more and more having to withdraw from such churches that are not conformed to the Head and His Word.

Notice Christ’s exhortation to this church age:

Buy of me, [or “buy from me”] gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. (Rev. 3:18)

The tares have refused to buy from Christ; the seed within them is of the devil’s sowing; he controls and heads the universal institutional church, just

as he controls and heads the political world. Two of his own, the Beast out of the Sea (the Antichrist) and the Beast out of the Earth (the False Prophet) will bring both worlds, religious and political, together for the finality of man's kingdom and rule (Revelation 13).

Yet Christ declares what is needed for this end-time Church age. He counsels them to buy of Him gold, Christ's righteousness (imputed and imparted) through the New Birth. He also counsels them to buy of Him the "white" raiment for clothing "that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear." This raiment is heart purity; this is the work of holiness to cover the shame of our nakedness. And finally, He counsels them to buy of Him the eyesalve of the Holy Spirit to anoint each to see and discern in this dangerous hour. *Only the remnant, the true church, is heeding this call.*

The true child of God must keep this clear in his thinking and in his preaching. There is the prosperity of the apostate church and there is the persecuted, hated, despised true Church. Only those of the true Church who are alive at the rapture will be taken by the Lord; the apostate church will face the Tribulation Period and become the woman coming up out of the wilderness in Revelation 17.

The Wheat and Tares Together

We must carefully acknowledge that the growth of wheat and tares

will be in the same field, side by side with one another. This combination could be seen in the same family: while brothers, sisters, parents, and children declare themselves to be Christians, one is of the true Church and the other is of the bastard wheat Church. This is the hour that the Wheat and Tares are as close as they have ever been in Church history. Although under the soil there may be an interweaving of roots, each is of a different root. They both are found in the same local church; they are found in the same movement or denomination. The deception is now so fine that if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived (Matthew 24:24). This is the way it will be until the end.

The Judgment of the Church

There are three distinct judgments that are to come from the Lord upon the earth in the end time. First, there will be a final judgment upon the Church. Note First Peter 4:17:

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Secondly, the Tribulation Period will have at least nineteen judgments from the Lord upon the earth and the Gentiles. Finally, Daniel's Last Week will be the final judgment upon the Jews, lasting for seven years.

The first judgment is to bring

about the separation of wheat and tares; much of it will be through the preaching and stand of the remnant as messengers of God. This judgment must come because we are living in the time of three prominent mixtures.

The first mixture appears in Daniel's interpretation of the image that had "feet part of iron and part of clay" (Daniel 2:33):

Forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay....they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay (Daniel 2:41b-43).

This mixture of iron and clay symbolizes the fickleness, uncertainty, and lack of stability of all earthly governments, because of the weakness and lack of genuine wisdom of its leaders.

A second mixture is seen in Jesus' interpretation of the last Church world/age (Laodicea):

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. (Revelation 3:14-16)

This verse means that a spirit of lifeless formality will pervade the Laodicean church age. They will have a form of religion and godliness, void of the saving and purifying power of the Gospel.

And the third mixture appears in the parable of the wheat and tares in Jesus' interpretation of the end of this age:

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. . . . 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 13:24-30, 36-43).

This parable reveals the mixed condition of the visible church or kingdom of heaven during this age. There will be pretenders among the true saints until Christ comes. Some of these false "professors" outwardly resemble the true saints so much that it will take the judgment time to perfectly separate them. Even such seed will arise among God's people (see Acts 20:29-30).

We are in the time of the siftings and shakings of God upon His House; a time has come when if it were possible the very elect would be deceived (Matthew 24:24). As Israel will be sifted, so the House of God is being sifted now:

For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth (Amos 9:9).

Here is a principle of action by God to Israel that is comparable to the New Testament principle of “shaking” things so “that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:25-29). God is sifting and shaking the Church today! Through the “many” false prophets, greedy nations, bloody wars, the “falling away” church-age, as well as domestic sins, God is sifting and shaking the true Church-saints, the bride! But thank God, the sifting of God in these last days does not and will not destroy the true saints who are abiding in Christ. Rather, things that could destroy us “shall turn to you [us] for a testimony.” There is this sifting of the “tares” and the “wheat,” and it is acting with divine purpose. This will bring the removal of every external influence that could destroy the purity of the Bride of Christ.

Conclusion

How close the tares and wheat are now within the church, within families, within Bible schools, within denominations, within movements, and, yea, even within evangelical fundamentalism! They all profess to be saved; they all profess to be on their way to Heaven. Yet only a small remnant is of the wheat; the vast majority of Christianity is in the bastard wheat, the darnel, the tare. While we are living in the worst Church age of a wholesale falling away, God is sealing His *true* Church through sanctification and His Holy

Spirit. The promises are true to the wheat saints:

There shall not an hair of your head perish (Luke 21:18).

Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand (John 10:28,29).

Keep yourselves in the love of God (Jude 21).

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him [the Rapture], that ye be not soon shaken in mind [by false teachings], or be troubled, neither by spirit [by an individual's claim to a divine revelation], nor by word [some falsely professed to be Paul's messenger], nor by letter as from us [evidently someone claimed to have received a private epistle from Paul, using it to spread false ideas], as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means (II Thessalonians 2:1-3a).

Remember, dear reader, there are two distinct churches in the world today: the one popularly observed and embraced is the false; the one most hated is the true.

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The Twenty-third Men's Prayer Conference

June 9-11, 2005

Theme:

"Watchman, What of the Night?"
(Isaiah 21:11)

June 9th (Thursday)

5:00 P.M., Evening Meal: The Dining Common

Welcome & Song

Evening Meal

A Heart Meditation – "Study to Shew Thyself Approved"
(II Timothy 2:15)

6:30 P.M., First Preaching Session –

"Watchman, What of the Night?"

7:30 P.M., A Season of Prayer

9:00 P.M., Second Preaching Session –

"Watchman, What of My Night of Sin?"

10:00 P.M., A Season of Prayer

11:15 P.M., A Season of Prayer or Rest

(Throughout the night until 6:00 AM)

June 10th (Friday)

6:00 A.M., A Season of Prayer

7:00 A.M., Breakfast: The Dining Common

Breakfast

Songs

A Heart Meditation – "Shun Profane and Vain Babblings"
(II Timothy 2:16)

8:30 A.M., Third Preaching Session –

"Watchman, What of My Night of the Passover?"

9:45 A.M., A Season of Prayer

11:45 A.M., Lunch: The Dining Common

Lunch

Songs

A Heart Meditation – “Depart and Purge”

(II Timothy 2:19-21)

1:30 P.M., Fourth Preaching Session –

“Watchman, What of My Night at Peniel?”

2:45 P.M., A Season of Prayer

4:30 P.M., Evening Meal: The Dining Common

Evening Meal

Songs

A Heart Meditation – “Flee and Avoid”

(II Timothy 2:22-23)

6:00 P.M., Fifth Preaching Session –

“Watchman, What of My Night of Burnings?”

7:15 P.M., A Season of Prayer

8:45 P.M., Sixth Preaching Session –

“Watchman, What of My Night of the End Time?”

10:00 P.M., A Season of Prayer

11:00 P.M., Refreshments and Rest

June 11th (Saturday)

6:00 A.M., A Season of Prayer

7:00 A.M., Breakfast: The Dining Common

Breakfast

Songs

“A Postscript of the Prayer Conference”

Benediction

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