DEALING WITH THE FUNGUS OF SIN

Not long after a young family moved into their very first house, the father went to the bathroom and couldn't believe what he saw: there was a mushroom growing out of the floor! Through a previously unnoticeable crack, the unwanted fungus had grown even though the bathroom was cleaned regularly. Humidity had joined an airborne fungus particle in the crack and voila, the mushroom appeared. Disgusted and confused, he pulled it up and sprayed enough fungi-killing chemicals on the spot to eradicate all traces of it.

Somehow, the “fungus of sin” sprouted in God’s perfect universe, leading to a rapid growth of accusations toward God and a seemingly endless flood of wickedness. Sin, pain, suffering, decay, wickedness, death—none were ever part of God’s plan for the universe. No created being was ever intended to experience such things. God created all things perfect. The universe was clean of sin, and yet here we are, daily faced with unexpected tragedies, the never-ending question of “why,” and the search for whom to blame.

Fortunately, God has dealt with sin and will restore all things to vibrant purity and perfection. The delicate process of eradicating sin, dealing with its originator, and ensuring the “sin fungus” never sprouts again is very costly to God. It’s a process that takes a long time and involves the entire universe, including you. It can cause frustration for those who wish for all of this to be over, but as this week’s study will reveal, there is a reason these things take such time.
Write out Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Matthew 13:36–39. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

The parable of the wheat and the tares is unique to the book of Matthew. It was included to give us a glimpse into some basic but important questions regarding sin and its origin. The parable's primary purpose is to explain certain realities about the kingdom of God in its current state on earth. It seeks to clarify why there are bad people among those who claim to follow a good God and why evil exists in a place created by a good God—legitimate questions most (young) people have probably asked at some point. These questions have caused much confusion and pain over the millennia.

In the beginning, God. In eternity past, long before our creation, there was only the Godhead—a unity of perfect, ever-flowing selfless love. Out of this love, God chose to share His life and create sinless, holy beings with the capacity to respond to His love based on their free will. Besides humans and animals on earth, the Bible mentions a variety of extraterrestrial created beings such as angels (e.g., Gen. 3:24; Dan. 7:10) and “living creatures” (Rev. 4:6). It also mentions “sons of God,” which some believe are representatives of other planets, each with their own civilization (see Job 1:6; Luke 3:38). When we consider the immeasurable vastness of the universe, even atheists often agree that there must be other sentient beings out there (see for example Sophie Lewis’ article “There May Be More Than 36 Intelligent Alien Civilizations in the Milky Way, Scientists Say” in CBS News, June 18, 2020).

The more beings God created with free will, the greater the risk that one of them would one day choose the path of unrighteousness became. Though it was irrational and inexplicable, Lucifer, the “anointed cherub” (Ezek. 28:14), made that choice, introducing evil and wickedness to the perfect universe. Jesus clearly identified who carries the responsibility for the origin of evil: “An enemy has done this”; “The enemy... is the devil” (Matt. 13:28, 39), whom the book of Revelation describes as the great dragon, “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9).

God is responsible for creating Lucifer, but He is not responsible for Lucifer’s actions. We can’t place the responsibility for a terrible crime on the criminal’s parents, yet God gets blamed for the evil in this world all the time. “An enemy has done this” (Matt. 13:28, emphasis added). Satan is God’s enemy, and he is the originator of sin. Every horror and wickedness in human history finds its beginning in that fateful hour when Lucifer chose to rebel against God, love, truth, righteousness, holiness, and life.

While many questions remain about what God should or could have done (many of which we will tackle throughout the next few weeks), Jesus’ parable ends with a promise: sin, evil, the devil, and all who have joined his insurrection of lawlessness will eventually be destroyed, never to return (vv. 30, 41, 42). The great controversy will end, and the God of love has already won!
ENSURING MAXIMUM REDEMPTION POTENTIAL

Often when the immediate future is uncertain, such as when starting a new job, a first date, or launching a business, we say platitudes like “We’ll see how it goes,” “It’s up in the air,” or “We’ll play it by ear.” Uncertainty can cause anxiety or hesitation about doing something new, but no matter how you feel about it, only time will tell whether the endeavor will succeed or not.

When God was faced with Satan’s rebellion, He had to decide how to respond. To God, nothing is uncertain. In His omniscience, He knows the future. He has no need to say, “We’ll see how it goes.” So, why was Satan not immediately destroyed? Why wait thousands of years of misery and pain before He “cast[s] them [Satan and all who joined his rebellion] into the furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:42)? Why not eradicate the disease of sin in its infancy? Jesus’ parable offers a surprising answer: “‘lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.’” (vv. 28–30). Uprooting evil too early would have caused collateral damage among those who had not yet seen the full results of sin.

The war between Christ and Satan is not occurring in secret and private meetings between the two parties; it began in the open (Rev. 12:7–12) and takes place in public still today. A public controversy requires a public process by which the questions raised and the pain inflicted are addressed. This procedure is called the judgment, which will be the topic of Week 11. The parable teaches us that for the sake of the wheat—“the sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38)—God withholds judgment for a little while longer.

We can conclude that the process of “seeing how it goes” is vital for angels who pledge allegiance to God. The Father knows the truth, but they (and we) need to see the ripened results of rebellion against God and His law of life and love. The effects of sin and their inevitable result of death must become evident. The lies must be uncovered and disproven beyond a shadow of a doubt. Prematurely destroying Satan and his followers might have resulted in trust issues among the redeemed and the other created beings, and more might choose rebellion over salvation. God decided to confront this rebellion in the more time-consuming way because it’s the only approach that provides the maximum amount of redemption potential while still honoring free will. Everyone, including the lost, must understand why sin is evil and righteousness is good. All must see the matured outcome of both sides so that there will be no more questions about God’s benevolence and righteous integrity for all eternity. God’s patient handling of Satan’s accusations wins the love, trust, and confidence of all living beings so that none will ever again choose to rebel against Him.

Read more at www.inversebible.org/GC01-4
What relationship do the following verses have with Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43?

Matthew 13:47–50
Revelation 20:11–15
Romans 2:5–11
Galatians 6:7–10
2 Peter 3:9, 10
Revelation 12:7–12
John 15:1–6
Revelation 15:3, 4
Philippians 2:9–11

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

MATURING WITH THE SON OF MAN

Anyone who has a garden knows that good seeds are essential. Various factors such as genetics and seed vigor must be considered when selecting seeds. High quality seeds are genetically pure, meaning they haven’t been crosspollinated with other varieties or with foreign seeds. Seeds with high vigor produce stronger and more resilient plants that can better resist pests and diseases. Good seeds are crucial for lasting, repeating, and abundant harvesting cycles.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field,” and“He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man” (Matt. 13:24, 37, emphasis added), who, of course, Jesus. This statement is incredibly important in light of the great controversy. Satan claims that God cannot be trusted—that He is not good, but here, we are presented with the truth that Jesus only sows good seeds. He only does what is good, for He is only good. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

The “good seeds are the sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38). These are the people who, in their “germination” and continued development, choose to make God the source of their lives and salvation. Jesus ensures their purity through His righteousness and their spiritual vigor through His Word and Spirit. Consequently, and by God’s grace, their lives are marked by repeatedly yielding an abundance of good fruit.

The tares (weeds) represent “the sons of the wicked one” (v. 38). The reason they will ultimately be destroyed is that they “offend, and... practice lawlessness” (v. 41). The Greek word used in the text indicates that this is not just the occasional sin but a continued attitude of offense—an unrelenting or unchanging practice of lawlessness. These individuals have chosen to remain continually in rebellion against love, truth, and righteousness, repeatedly rejecting the offer of grace and the joy of an eternal friendship with Jesus Christ.

As the Lord of the universe, Christ provides abundant mercy and grace for all—enough to ensure the salvation of anyone who responds to His offer. He will not return and harvest the earth until all the people on earth have made up their minds and sealed their decisions. Those represented by the wheat will have confirmed their place in His kingdom through the lifelong, persistent choice of love-based surrender, letting Christ dwell in them and allowing His Spirit to transform them. Those represented by the tares will have hardened their hearts through an unrepentant, continued rejection of the Holy Spirit’s invitation to accept Jesus’ love.

For us, the call is to remain under the divine Sower’s care today and every day. Then, one day soon, “the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (v. 43). May we allow His work in our hearts to make us into good seeds.

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Meditate on Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43 again and look for where Jesus is.

What is He saying to you personally through the text of the week?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What about Jesus makes you trust, love, and surrender gladly to Him?

Prayer Response:
UNMASK THE DECEIVER

“In His dealing with sin, God could employ only righteousness and truth. Satan could use what God could not—flattery and deceit. He had sought to falsify the word of God and had misrepresented His plan of government before the angels, claiming that God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from His creatures, He was seeking merely the exaltation of Himself. Therefore it must be demonstrated before the inhabitants of heaven, as well as of all the worlds, that God’s government was just, His law perfect. Satan had made it appear that he himself was seeking to promote the good of the universe. The true character of the usurper, and his real object, must be understood by all. He must have time to manifest himself by his wicked works.

“The discord which his own course had caused in heaven, Satan charged upon the law and government of God. All evil he declared to be the result of the divine administration. He claimed that it was his own object to improve upon the statutes of Jehovah. Therefore it was necessary that he should demonstrate the nature of his claims, and show the working out of his proposed changes in the divine law. His own work must condemn him. Satan had claimed from the first that he was not in rebellion. The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked.

“Even when it was decided that he could no longer remain in heaven, Infinite Wisdom did not destroy Satan. Since the service of love can alone be acceptable to God, the allegiance of His creatures must rest upon a conviction of His justice and benevolence. The inhabitants of heaven and of other worlds, being unprepared to comprehend the nature or consequences of sin, could not then have seen the justice and mercy of God in the destruction of Satan. Had he been immediately blotted from existence, they would have served God from fear rather than from love. The influence of the deceiver would not have been fully destroyed, nor would the spirit of rebellion have been utterly eradicated. Evil must be permitted to come to maturity. For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might forever be placed beyond all question.” (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [1911], 498, 499.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How does the parable of the wheat and the tares illustrate the great controversy between good and evil?

Why is Lucifer, not God, responsible for the origin of evil?

Why did God not destroy Satan at the beginning of his rebellion before he could do more harm?

Why does God allow bad people to exist among those who claim to follow a good God?

What can we learn about God’s character from the way He deals with sin and evil in the world?

How do we daily remain faithful to Jesus?

How can we trust in God’s ultimate victory over sin and evil even in the face of tragedies and problems?