

The religious scene of the 21st century bears little resemblance to the church of the 1st century. God's blueprint has been discarded and denominational pandemonium has prevailed. Yet, this development has been no surprise to Almighty God. It was foreknown, predicted, and even warned against throughout the pages of the New Testament.

In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus told a parable about the kingdom, which is His church. He compared His kingdom to a man who planted wheat in a field. As the man slept, an enemy came and sowed weeds in the same field. Later, when these "tares" were found to be growing among the wheat, the farm hands wanted to pull them out; but the farmer said to let them grow together, lest the wheat be uprooted by the removal of the tares. Wheat and tares look somewhat similar in the early stages of development; but later, and upon closer inspection, they are seen to be two different things. Jesus' explanation of this parable in verses 37-43, helps us see quite clearly that the kingdom of God is now occupied by two separate groups. One group is the product of seeds planted by God; the other group is the product of seeds planted by Satan. In Luke 8:11, the seed of the kingdom is said to be the word of God, which Jesus defined as "truth" (John 17:17). We then conclude that the seed of Satan is error since Jesus called him a "liar, and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Those who come from the good seed are called "sons of the kingdom" and the tares are "sons of the evil one." Yet, they are growing together in His kingdom and look a lot alike. The difference is the seed which produced them. Jesus said the "harvest is the end of the age" in verse 39. At that time, the angels will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire (Matt 13:40-43).

The incredible thing is that Jesus knew corruption would enter His kingdom. He said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Paul knew it too. He told the elders of the church in Ephesus that after his departure, "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves," Paul said, "men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). Paul gave fair warning to his friend Timothy. He said the time would come when people "will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (II Timothy 4:3-4). Again, Paul wrote: "The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons ..." (I Timothy 4:1). In another passage, Paul gave a name to this "falling away." In II Thessalonians 2:3 he called it "the apostasy," a word which means "defection from the truth" according to Strong's Concordance. Paul said it would be accompanied by a spirit of lawlessness and vain conceit which would allow for one to be seated in the temple of God, which is the church, exalting himself and putting himself in the place of God (II Thessalonians 2:3-4). In verses 9-12, Paul predicted that Satanic power would be at work in this movement, that signs and false wonders would deceive those who perish "because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason," Paul said, "God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."

Any honest textbook of church history will tell you that the "apostasy" has taken place. According to Robert H. Brumback, in his book History of the Church Through the Ages, the fall of the Roman Empire opened the door to the papacy, and with it came great corruption in the church. He wrote: "Bribery, corruption, immorality and bloodshed marked the course of the papal church among the children of men. Kings habitually sold church offices to the highest bidders the corruption of the clergy brought about the corruption of the doctrine also. Men drifted away from the word of God, forgot its warnings, ignored its teaching, and substituted human ideas to make a religion that was attractive to the world. Councils legislated for the churches, bound upon them human doctrines,

formed rituals to be used in church services, introduced new ceremonies and created offices unknown to the word of God.”

The church became so foul and corrupt that brave and daring men of God attempted its reformation in the 16th century -- but these attempts only generated a host of denominations while retaining most of the unscriptural and erroneous doctrines of the apostate church. So ... here we stand, at the brink of the 21st Century, spinning in a whirlpool of religious error and confusion. It is too late to “reform” the apostate church or the web of denominationalism it has spun. What can we do now? How can the People of God in the 21st Century be certain that we are a part of the same church that began in the 1st Century? The solution is readily available.

We must look to the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God. If the same seed is planted in the hearts of people today as was planted at the beginning, the same fruit will be produced today - Christians simply and Christians only. Paul recommended a simple, yet effective, remedy to this dilemma. He said, “Preach the word” (II Timothy 4:2). We may never undo the confusion and damage of the apostasy, but we can begin where we are and seek a “thus saith the Lord” for our doctrine and actions. Each independent, autonomous congregation of God’s people can make a commitment to examine their own doctrine and practice and compare it to New Testament teaching. And we can plant in the hearts of a new generation the imperishable seed which brings about a new birth, that is, “the living and abiding word of God” (I Peter 1:23).



1. From Matthew 13:24-30, briefly summarize the story line of Jesus’ parable.

From Matthew 13:37-43, list the realities represented by the following figures:

The sower _____

The field _____

The enemy _____

The harvest _____

The reapers _____

According to Luke 8:11 & John 17:17, what kind of seed produces “sons of the kingdom”?

Knowing the nature of Satan (Jn 8:44), what kind of seed produces “sons of the evil one”?

Did Jesus realize that “stumbling blocks” and “lawlessness” would creep into His kingdom?

When would these things be removed from His kingdom? (Matthew 13:41)

2. What do each of the following scriptures teach about “false teachers” in the church?

Matthew 7:15

Acts 20:29-30

II Timothy 4:3-4

3. What does the word “Apostasy” mean?

What does Paul say about people falling away from the faith in I Timothy 4:1-3?

How does Paul describe the “man of lawlessness” in II Thessalonians 2:3-4?

When will he be punished for his deeds? (II Thessalonians 2:8)

What kind of activity will accompany his appearance? (II Thessalonians 2:9-10)?

What is the major flaw of those who are being deceived? (II Thessalonians 2:10-12)

What has God provided to protect us from being deceived? (Ephesians 6:14; John 17:17)

4. Looking back through history, what kind of behavior has accompanied the papal church?

5. What has been the result of the “Reformation” movement?

6. How can we restore in the 21st century the same church that was built in the 1st century?