

Seeming Contradictions – the parables of Jesus Christ

Discovering the Rules of Interpretation

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." – Daniel 7:13-14

THE MYSTERY - A Look at the Historical Context of 1st Century

1st) The Jews - A blinded people encountering an unexpected Messiah who preached an unidentifiable Kingdom: The Jews were expecting the arrival of the Messiah to restore Israel as a sovereign, independent nation, like as it was in the glory days of the Old Covenant. Even the disciples, guided by the same thought, asked the Lord Jesus the question, "Lord wilt Thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)? Jesus Christ's parabolic arguments were an answer to how the Kingdom would be established, and unexpected by all, Christ was the long hoped for Messiah to the 1st century Jews. This Kingdom's beginning and rise was an unknown *mystery*, and yet, it was prophetically foretold in exhaustive detail, such details like: the Kingdom would come by suffering persecution and death on a cross (see Ps. 22:1-22, Isaiah 53), which in turn, in its consummation, would accomplish the birth of a worldwide Kingdom over all nations (Ps. 22:27-31, Isa. 55:5), and the King, a human being, who would be born and raised in Israel, but this child was, nevertheless, GOD Himself (Isa. 9:6-7), who also, by the power of His own saving arm (Isa. 63:5, 53:1), would redeem humanity and overcome the grave (Hos. 13:14, Isa. 11:1-9, 1 Cor. 15:51-57).

2nd) The Gentiles – A suddenly, un-blinded people, who became citizens to a crucified King's Kingdom, who also are, mysteriously, being used by Christ for the Kingdom's beginning and progress, but at the Kingdom's consummation, a formerly blinded people (the Jews) will be un-blinded: Because the Jews were rejecting their God-sent Davidic King and Messiah, profound and unseen consequences ensued. The Jews rejected their Messiah thus God rejected them (generally speaking), a rejection they assumed was impossible. Christ continually defended God's ability and willingness to *replace the Jews* (partially and temporarily speaking) because of their abominable rebellion, and with the sinfulness of Israel's sin provoking God thereto, to the surprise of the Jews, God was turning *towards the heathen instead!* The Jews would have gasped to learn it, "The heathen! The God of Israel loves *the heathen!*!" Yes, my reader, the God of Israel, in Christ, was choosing, turning towards, and mysteriously establishing His Kingdom with the anti-Israel *heathen* of the world! My reader, God's sovereignty determined it, God's omniscience prophesied it – this great *turning point* – yes, God was always intending to extend salvation to the Gentile world [Abraham being called, "a father of many nations" – Gen. 17:4-5, 4:17-18]! But also, my reader, and nevertheless, the event which vindicated this *turning point* of God away from Israel and to the Gentile world was – **ISRAEL FELL!** It was "**through their fall** [*Israel's fall*] salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11). Because Christ "came unto His own, and His own **received Him not**" (John 1:11), through this, God turned unto and chose the Gentiles, calling them His own (Hos. 2:23, Rom. 10:19-20), and by His irresistible grace they received Christ (Rom. 10:20, 11:25)! Had Christ been received instead of rejected by Israel, God would have never turned to the Gentiles. Speaking of the Gentiles, it was written, "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy **through their unbelief** [Israel's unbelief]" (Rom. 11:30). The scriptures declare, "**through their fall**" and "**through their unbelief**" (namely Israel), the Gentiles arose and believed! The Gentiles, my reader! The longstanding enemies of God – fallen, unbelieving, and alienated from God for millenniums – locked up in the blackness of darkness which is human depravity... unto them, the Gentiles --- Light shined! Christ, the day star of humanity --- rose upon them! They, longstanding in darkness --- rejoiced in His Light!

Because Israel's fall from God, blindness, and unbelief was the cause for which God turned toward the Gentiles, and this, also, was of such vital relevance to how the Messiah's Kingdom would eventually become physically established, Christ made this **the central topic** of His parables. Christ was, in *parables*, answering the confusion and controversy surrounding His coming Kingdom. Within time (God in the Ways of Man), Christ is parabolically depicted as One sent by God to be Israel's King and Savior, for God was minded to bless and save His people. Israel, had they received Christ, would have been blessed in Him (Lk. 13:34-35, 19:41-44, 13:6-9, Mk. 11:12-21, Matt. 21:33-46, Lk. 20:13, Isa. 63:8)... but my reader, what happened? The Lord's *good will* was spurned! His *genuine love* rejected! Israel sinned against God's goodness and incurred upon themselves a

terrifying WOE. A people defiant of God's love and compassion, how awful the memory! This defiance aggravated Heaven's retributive wrath, and it, being heated sevenfold, weighed upon the heart of their persecuted Master, Jesus Christ. Do you remember the scene? The Lord Christ, being scorned, mocked, spat upon, beaten, and driven to His crucifixion hill – He perceived the Heavens were drooping to release the anger of God – yea, my reader, while Christ was in the very thrall He prophesied of Jerusalem's *final hour*. Oh, consider the awful scene again, my reader! Christ was in the very swarm of biting dogs, the women were weeping as they watched on, THEN CHRIST PROPHESED!

“And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but **WEEP FOR YOURSELVES**, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”
- Luke 23:27-31 (see also Luke 19:41-44)

The Herald of the Messiah, John the Baptist, cried aloud against the Jews of the 1st century, saying, “And now also of the axe is laid unto the root the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matt. 3:10). John the Baptist, defying hypocritical, once-born Judaism to the face, rebuked their false confidences. Such false confidences like: The Jews believed that because they were “the children of the Kingdom” (Matt. 8:12), or in other words, the select persons to whom the Kingdom was promised, to whom it belongs (see how they were acknowledged to possess “the Kingdom of God” in Matt. 21:43)... because of this, my reader, and because God has continually, as He said unto them, “stretched forth My hands” – hands which were the outstretched arms of saving love – because of this, the unconverted Jews affirmed, “We have Abraham to our father” (Matt. 3:9). In believing this they reckoned that they were *beloved of God*, and with this reckoning they denied that they, as a planting before the Lord, could be THREATENED with an AXE to the ROOT (Matt. 3:10)! The greatest of the prophets, John the Baptist, knew otherwise!

John's ears were open to hear – he heard of wrath, he cried aloud of “unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12)! He heard that “the children of the Kingdom [*the Jews*] shall be cast out into outer darkness” (Matt. 8:12), that the Kingdom shall be “taken” from them [*the Jews*] and “given to a nation [*the Gentiles*] bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 22:43), that God, in His wrath, would not spare the Israelites just because they are *the children of Abraham* by *natural* birth. No my reader, God will not spare them even though they be the beloved “natural branches” of God's Tree (Rom. 11:21). Baptist knew, because of the Lord's “unsearchable” wisdom and judgment (Rom. 11:33), “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matt. 3:9) – and so God *did!* Shockingly, the Gentile world, longstanding in darkness, beheld the shining face of the Savior, Jesus Christ – He became their Savior! Christ turned away from His own people to whom He was sent, and He turned to the Gentiles! Christ turned to all other nations to bring many Gentile-sons to glory! The Gentiles, who were *an after-thought* of God (by God's condescension in the ways of man), and yet in another sense, they were ever in the mind of God, destined to be saved, even from everlasting, for “God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all” (Rom. 11:32)! Seeing that this is the case, that the brood of heathen men, *dead as stones*, suddenly became “Abraham's seed”, “heirs according to the promise” which was first given to the Jews...and now, shockingly, the Gentiles can be rightly called, henceforth and forevermore, “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-29)! This is a great mystery! A “mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God” (Eph. 3:9)! My reader, because the 1st century Jews were deluded into rejecting their Messiah, and this rejection was, in God's sovereignty, Christ's predestinated course of worldwide redemption, God baffled His murdering people! By rejecting and killing their God-sent King – *through this* – He rose again and conformed the nations of the world into His Image. Christ, possessing the nations, surrounded His people who thought to be rid of Him, and in the Gentiles, shockingly, Christ's Kingdom does mysteriously rise in power and population until, eventually, He will make His way back to Jerusalem to be crowned as King! The Jews – being made jealous that God turned to the Gentiles – they shall see Christ enter Jerusalem yet again, and upon His arrival, shouting again, “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord” (Lk. 13:35), “ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED” (Rom. 11:26)! Even so my reader, Christ prophesied of the Jews: a desolation first...then salvation.

“Behold, your house is left unto you *desolate*: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, **Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**” – Luke 13:35

My reader, if this is the course by which physical Israel is destined for their final restoration (a restoration of the Kingdom which was promised of old), the Messiah's enthronement is an unexpected and mysterious Kingdom in its *beginning* and how it would *progress*, a mystery “which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). It was, alas, “hid” from their eyes (Lk. 19:42)! And the Gentiles shout – “Alas, and did my Savior bleed, and did the Sovereign die?!” Christ lamented at their blindness to God's mystery, and that for this – *their blindness* – He

said to Israel: “thou **knewest not** the time of thy visitation” (Lk. 19:44). The mystery of the Messiah and His Kingdom was revealed to a chosen remnant who were elected to believe. Christ said to them, “Blessed are **your eyes**, for they see: and **your ears**, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Matt. 13:16-17, see also Romans 11:5-7). Beloved readers, Christ revealed these things to His disciples, a “little flock” (Lk. 12:32), while the vast and numerous Israelite nation groped in spiritual blindness, deafness, and confusion of face. Christ preached IN THEIR HEARING, the mysterious *beginning* and continual *rise* of His Kingdom, how He would be rejected by the Jews, how this would turn and allow the engraftment of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:7-25), and how that finally, through the Gentiles, a final salvation of physical Israel would consummate the ages – a consummation which, shockingly, would usher the whole world into a regeneration of sinless bliss and paradise – somehow, a worldwide experience described as “life from the dead” (Rom. 11:12, 15), where the creation itself will be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21)! Hallelujah!

Who can expound such mysteries? To so unlearned a people? In so few sentences? By open air sermons? To an impatient, unbelieving, proud, and self-confident Israel? Through *parables*, my reader, Christ did. Why parables, you ask? For good reason. Christ used parables to explain the untold “mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 13:11) because, by using parables, He *hid the meaning* of the parables from the damned and *revealed it* to the elect. These parables would metaphorically and pictorially reveal: (**Firstly**) how the Kingdom would suddenly *begin* and *rise* in power – through the death of One Man, as a mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32), falling into the ground and dying (John 12:23-24). This marks the beginning of the Messiah’s everlasting, unconquerable Kingdom and Throne (Dan. 2:44-45), the throne of David (Isa. 9:6-7, Zech. 14:9, Ps. 72:8-11, 110:1-7, Acts 2:22-36), and this Kingdom, (**Secondarily**) though it be by the smallest of beginnings, like as a pitiful mustard seed is the smallest of seeds (Matt. 13:31-32), this Kingdom will one day rise from the earth in which it was buried, and it, surpassing all other trees, will extend its branches into the very heavens above. By interpretation, the Messianic Kingdom will consummate in *worldwide sovereignty*, thrusting earthly humans upward into heavenly citizenship, calling heaven’s otherworldly powers to come down for earthly regenerations. Its roots extending down into the earth, its branches high into the heavens, it will come to be that, in Christ, heaven is the home of clay-made humanity while they abide on earth, whereabouts staggeringly, heaven cometh down to earth and earth up to heaven (Col. 2:20, 3:1-4, Matt. 6:9-10, Heb. 3:1, Rev. 21:2, 22:16-17)! Alas, and did my Savior bleed, and did the Sovereign die?! So that, for me, even for me...I see “a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Gen. 28:11-12)! Do you understand? Do you have ears to hear? My reader, the parables of Christ explain the mysterious beginning of Christ’s Kingdom, how that, in its continual rising, it is undetected and unconquerable in progress, to the end that an eventual and unthinkable consummation would fulfill all things. The following two passages below located in the left column (Matthew 13:31-32 & 13:33) are parables that aim to express this unutterable picture, giving clarity to the mystery for those who have ears to hear:

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and **sowed in his field**: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” -Matthew 13:31-32

“Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and **hid** in three measures of meal, till **the whole was leavened**.” - Matthew 13:33

“He shall cause them that come of Jacob to **take root**: Israel shall blossom and bud, and **fill the face of the world with fruit**.” -Isaiah 27:6

“And in that day there shall be **a root of Jesse**, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall **the Gentiles** seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” -Isaiah 11:10

“...**all the earth** shall be filled with the glory of the LORD” – Num. 14:21

“...and the stone that smote the image became A GREAT MOUNTIAN, and **filled the whole earth**” – Dan. 2:35

“...let **the whole earth** be filled with His glory” – Ps. 72:19

“...the LORD shall be King over **all the earth**”, “...the governor among **the nations**” – Zech. 14:9, Ps. 22:28

“...**the earth** shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” – Isa. 11:9, Hab. 2:14

“**All nations**...shall come and worship before Thee” – Ps. 86:9

Psalm 22:1, 6-31 (Death and Rise Prophesied) → Acts 2:22-36 (Death and Rise Declared) → Zech. 12:10 (Consummation Prophesied) → Rev. 11:15, 15:4 (Consummation Declared)

This is utterly astonishing and staggering! That the Kingdom would come as a dying seed: a seed who is One Man, and He, by the spirit of resurrection (for “**it is sown**” see 1 Cor. 15:42-44), will be savingly **planted** within all of redeemed humanity like as a seed is buried under the soil (Matt. 13:8, 23, 1 Cor. 15:35-50), and throughout the centuries of Gentile-reconciliation which

precedes the time when God will turn to the Jews for the consummation of the Messiah's Kingdom, redeemed humanity will live in the same condition that Christ lived while He was in the flesh ("accounted as sheep for the slaughter" – Rom. 8:36). The world sees Him again, Christ's "Image", only now it is formed in Christian men of all nations and languages (Rom. 8:29). Christ, in them, appeals to their own national people like as Christ appealed to the Jews, therefore, as Christ suffered... Christians suffer. Rather said, Christ living in Christians will be at conflict with their present age, yet again, suffering at the hands of lost humanity. "Father forgive them" (1 Pet. 2:21, 4:1, 1 Thess. 3:3, Heb. 13:10-16), is still the Christian's cry, suffering as willing servants before those that want them to die. Like Christ was... so they are, "baptized for the dead" (1 Cor. 15:29). Though redeemed humanity trods the course of suffering and rejection, this awesome seed of the resurrection which is **sown** within them, it will grow... **its roots** reaching forth to the ends of the earth (Rev. 5:9), until suddenly this Tree of the Lord will, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), cause all the redeemed of humanity, both living and dead, to be "caught up together" "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)! Do you see it, my reader? The seed that is **sown** will shoot forth from the grounds in which it died! This shooting forth, it is of an impossible speed, a Divine burst of resurrection power! As a stone cut out of a mountain without hands, it will rise from thence, break in pieces every king and kingdom (Dan. 2, Ps. 2), for it is written, "this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53)! Hallelujah!

My reader, in the midst of this scene, what Hebrews 12:3 called "such contradiction of sinners" (Heb. 12:3), and it, a contradiction against so loving a Man... consider Him. Christ, who was *born to be broken* for them, to establish an everlasting Kingdom which, staggeringly, was *born when He died*, and they, thinking to extinguish this Man, a single flame, released Him from the confinements of His earthly body so that He might enflame the world with Himself! Death sent him to hell, yes, and He got its keys (Hos. 13:14, Isa. 11:1-9, 1 Cor. 15:51-57, Rev. 1:18)! He arose from the dead and returned earth, and He, presenting Himself in the scarred body in which He died, demonstrated that He was the prophesied King who would be absolve the sting of death and overcome the grave, and now, having overcome it, He gathered His disciples to see the glorified body of redeemed humanity which, when His Kingdom is finally established, all humanity will have. Those He left behind, being eyewitnesses of His glory and baptized in His Spirit, were enflamed with other-worldly courage to preach this Christ, unflinching in the face of death, for they knew the Lord had overcome it! This Christ, then ascending into Heaven, gathered His angelic hosts to send them forth to war. The Jews of Jerusalem shrank in dismay at Christ's disciples on earth – earthly men, evidently, clothed in heavenly power, outnumbered by earthly humanity but helped by Heaven's Army – these saints, now supported by Heaven's army, are Christ-empowered to cry aloud the alarming truth, Heaven's King has placed rebellious humanity before His eminent invasion, and He, just behind the clouds, is ready to dash the Kings of the earth like a potter's vessel is broke in pieces. These Christ-empowered heralds of Heaven's King, they are His ambassadors, and He, being full of compassion, has sent the world a forewarning. Jesus Christ, the King, commands the white flag of surrender (Lk. 14:31-33). All who cower before the victory of Heaven's King, they will call upon Him as their Lord (Rom. 10:13). Knowing this, that Christ's unconquerable army shall soon arrive, they are encouraged to escape their inevitable destruction. The King, offering them a priceless redemption, a blood-bought pardon, causes all of who surrender to be enveloped in His transcending and omnipresent Person – thus they, left in the world, remain at the hands of the army from which they defected (Satan's army), and here, bearing witness to the truth, they suffer Christ's passion once again. These witnesses, awaiting the eminent day of the Lamb's vengeance (Heb. 10:30-31), do rejoice in the day of salvation. This Man, a single flame, the Jews sought to extinguish from the earth... they unknowingly released Christ from His earthly body like the rending of the Most Holy veil, and He, exiting the confinements in which He was held, filled all things with Himself! The Jews, blood red with His murder, are overshadowed by this Exalted Christ! They should stop and consider, are they able to go to war against this King and win? Will they be able to meet His other-worldly army with any success? While Christ is "a great way off"... oh man! Will you hearken and consider His "conditions of peace" (Lk. 14:31-32)? When He finally arrives... IT IS FOR WAR!

He, in a moment of time, put off the garments of humanity and arrayed Himself in His Divinity – the Person whose presence they sought to extinguish suddenly became omnipresent – and Christ, looking down, seated upon the circle of the earth, has vengeance and redemption burning in His eyes. They killed Christ, they were happy that He was delivered to die... but they will suddenly, in the blink of an eye, turn around and see Him whom they pierced! They, finding themselves standing in His shadow and looking up, will perceive His Kingdom is above all! Realizing He is *this Jesus*, the rejected Man, the One they killed and left for dead... they will be baffled with fear. The heavens rolling back as a scroll, even so, the Messiah's Army is unveiled, and it, like an army of shining stars caught up in the clouds, will be seen in their courses following the Lamb (Matt. 13:43). Arrayed behind Him – the King of kings – they will be seen making themselves ready for the charge. The Lamb, seen at the forefront, will be the Brightest Light of the flaming army which follows. The King-led Host, riding upon the heavens, will cause the earth to melt for fear before the brilliant eyes of Christ. This recognizable Jesus, still marked in scars, they will look upon Him who they pierced. This One who was, who is, who then will come... He will exalted in the mantle of Divinity! The earth, fleeing away

from Christ's unquenchable wrath, will cry out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come: and who shall be able to stand" (Rev. 6:16-17)? This Jesus who cannot die, returned to the stature in which He always was – seated upon the "Great White Throne"! Oh my reader, do you know Him? "Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them" (Rom. 20:11) – only now, shockingly, the redeemed of Gentile humanity can be seen standing with Christ and beside Christ, in the glory God gave Him before the foundation of the world (John 17:24)! Christ purchased and won for Himself what He prayed for, saying, "Father, I will that they... be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me" (John 17:24)!

Christ's Parables Are Snapshots of Unutterable Mysteries

In seeing the complexity of these mysteries, let us understand... Christ's parables depict unique snapshots of unsearchable glories. The parables are spoken-pictures of unutterable mysteries, open only to elect saints, and let it be noted: the pictorial language is general, peculiar, and vague enough that, the mystery remains veiled and hidden to damned humanity. Before mixed multitudes of the elect and non-elect, Christ preached parables! Parables which He spoke publically to all people, and yet qualifying them to a peculiar audience, He said, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). One such parable Christ said was the greatest of all parables (Mk. 4:13), what is commonly known as "The Parable of the Sower".

The Parable of the Sower

"Know ye not this parable? And how then will ye know all parables?" – Mark. 4:13

"The Parable of the Sower" is a guideline to understanding the mysteries of the Kingdom which will be in view in all other parables. The Kingdom of God as it is presented here, all others will follow suit. "The Parable of the Sower" is the interpretive lens which gives clarity to Christ's parabolic language. If we can understand this parable, we will be enabled to understand and interpret all other parables. It is sure, my reader, if we cannot understand this parable, we will not understand all other parabolic mysteries of the Kingdom of God. This means that, when seeking an understanding of "The Tares Among the Wheat" (Matt. 13:24-30), "The Grain of Mustard Seed" (Matt. 13:31-32), "The Leavening of the Meal" (Matt. 13:33), "The Hidden Treasure in a Field" (Matt. 13:44), "The Pearl of Great Price" (Matt. 13:45-46), and "The Fishing Drag-Net in the Sea" (Matt. 13:47-52), we must first understand "The Parable of the Sower" (Matt. 13:3-23), all of which were thematically recorded in consecutive order in Matthew chapter 13. Other parables and situational statements of Christ, like Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:16-24, Matthew 8:5-13, Matthew 21:33-46, Luke 13:1-9, & Matthew 21:19-21, are some of the "all parables" which, as Christ said, are meaningfully connected to the contextual grounds laid in the most important and stage-setting parable of all – "The Parable of the Sower".

The 7 parables of Matthew 13 exist to answer such mysteries like:

- ❖ If the Messianic Kingdom will not come in physical and earthly sovereignty, how will it come, how will it spread, and how shall it consummate into earthly sovereignty? First century Israel wrongly expected the Messiah to revive the Israelite nation into an isolated sovereignty. To their folly, they knew not that Christ was prophesied to be the sovereign King of the whole world – the King of all earthly kings. The subduction of the world itself under the Messianic Kingdom was the great expectation of the prophets, this is what was prophetically foretold, and Israel, blind to this, were instructed of a Kingdom they understood not. They wanted to "see the Kingdom of God" that, at present, they were unable to see (John 3:3). Do you remember the answer to these mysteries? Keep in mind as you read, *the spiritual sowing of the resurrection within men (1 Cor. 15:35-57) will suddenly consummate in the "manifestation" of the Kingdom of God – meaning that, the invisible Kingdom of God will suddenly become visible (Rom. 8:19)! Yea, the resurrection Spirit (which began as a seed sown), He is the Second Adam, and He will disrobe redeemed humanity from their mortal flesh, clothe them with His immortality, and in the twinkling of an eye there will be – rooted to the ends of the earth and branching into the outer-regions of heaven – an all-surpassing Kingdom (Matt. 13:31-32)!*

"The Parable of the Sower" is of first importance, therefore it is the 1st of 7 parables spoken in Matthew chapter 13. In various other chapters in The Gospels, like Mark 4 and Luke 8, a similar parable order can be seen. The alteration of parable placement in different orders as seen in various Gospels, this accents their peculiar meaning one from another. For example, the parables of "The Mustard Seed" and "The Leaven", though very brief, aim to envision for us *how* the Kingdom of God will grow and consummate.

The Kingdom's mysterious growth and consummating end into worldwide sovereignty:

- ❖ The Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32)
 - ❖ The Leaven (Matt. 13:33)
- (See also Mark 4:26-32 & Luke 13:18-21)

The most staggering mystery that these brief parables impress me with is, Christ's Kingdom will be *worldwide*. He will be King over *all the earth!* Therefore Christ's Kingdom is said to "a Great Tree", "greater than all herbs" because it "shooteth out great branches", and it, having incomprehensible greatness, will reach to the uttermost parts of earth and heaven. It, like leaven, will spread through the whole lump of meal until "the whole [is] leavened"! Furthermore, it will mysteriously and suddenly appear. Though the world looks to watch its appearing, they "knoweth not how" it will appear (the verses in quotations can be found in the citations above)!

The placement of these parables ("The Mustard Seed" and "The Leaven") within Matthew 13 was in between "The Parable of the Sower" and "The Tares Among the Wheat", and their meanings taken side by side enlarge upon each other. Seeing that the Kingdom will spread and progress until the world is subdued beneath it, one may wonder *how* the Kingdom of God will spread during the time before its consummation. The answer is momentous, by the preaching of the gospel!

"The dragon was wroth with the woman, and wen to make war with the remnant and her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"

-Rev. 12:17

When the Kingdom of God advances across the nations, nations which are, spiritually speaking, Satan's dragon-inhabited territory, it is "by them that have preached the gospel" "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:12)! Angels desires to watch this kingdom-conquering, Satan-defeating preaching, the scripture said! This is because preaching Christ is, spiritually speaking, is a sword battle, an all-out war, fought and won by the sword wielding Person of God, the Holy Ghost. Therefore it is written, Jesus Christ is the King of Heaven, the One and only "Lord of Sabaoth" (Jas. 5:4), which means the Lord of Armies – thus His visitation among us is "with His sword drawn in His hand", and He has confirmed us, saying, "as Captain of the Host of the LORD *am I now come*" (Josh. 5:13-14), therefore the Kingdom of God can advance by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). My reader, do you preach "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven"?

Gospel preaching is an impossible conflict with eternal consequence, and for it, praise be to God, humanity is clothed in the mantle of God's "heavenly gift" – the Holy Ghost! Redeemed humanity, being sent forth by their risen King, "these are they which follow the Lamb withersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Rev. 14:4)! And He also, the Lamb of God, is affectionately standing with them to strengthen them, for He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). The gates of hell are raging against them, it is true. The enemy of their souls like an angered lion, roars to devour them, "notwithstanding the Lord stood with [them] and strengthened [them], that by [them] the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and [they were] delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17)!

Do you see, my reader? This is not mere preaching, as an orator of earth my give some finite speech... No! This is a battle for souls, a war, and the devil aggravates lost humanity into a deadly conflict against the saints who seek to spread the seed of the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth, for Satan knows... after the seed is sown worldwide, the time of his torments have come. Satan transforms men into violent, irrational, and merciless "beasts" when Christian preachers come to town (1 Cor. 15:32). The preaching of the gospel is like Israel's commission to conquer the nations, nations which were greater and mightier than they. But like them, we too shall prevail, as grasshoppers before giants, as babes before a great dragon, for He, the God of Israel, does stand with us! We, clad in the "whole amour of God" (Eph. 6:10), shall be taught war yet again (2 Cor. 10:3-4)! We, charging the gates of hell to cast the seed of the gospel within, shall keep courage in God that we have, in Him, already "overcome them"! "Greater is He that is in [us], than he that is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4)! Even so, "Thou has given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah" (Ps. 60:4). In the light of such a conflict, my reader, you may be happy to meditate upon certain parables spoken by Christ (see below).

Judgments which are now implemented in the earth by the Living Christ:

- ❖ Matthew 12:18-21 & Isaiah 42:1-7
- ❖ Mark 4:21-34
- ❖ Luke 8:16-21

How happy I am to tell you, my reader! Jesus Christ did judge *His people*, Israel, and in turn He established *another people* to worship Him “in Spirit and in Truth” (Jn. 5:23-24). This *other people*, who became “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people”, they are employed in a Great Commission – to “shew forth the praises of Him who hath called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous Light” (1 Pet. 2:9)! This *other people*, “which in time past were not a people, but are now, the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:10), they relate to God as Jews, for “he is a Jew which is one inwardly” (Rom. 2:29). As seen in the former parables: Christ is, through the people of God, filling the world with the proclamation that He is King over all humanity (the first fruits bearing Him witness, see Num. 13:20-24), and also Christ is, for the progression of the Kingdom throughout all humanity (reaching every nation, tribe, and tongue), fighting against those who fight against His people (Rev. 3:9-10). Remember this, dear saints, we are promised to encounter great resistance as we endeavor to fulfill “The Great Commission”. With all of this in mind, my reader, let us move forward and bring to our view *the parable of parables* – “The Parable of the Sower”.

The scattering of the seed upon the soils is, preaching of the gospel in the *hearing* of humanity, and seeing that three of the four soils were not savingly affected by the word of God, this scattering of the seed upon the soils is the preaching of the gospel to **the world** – all of lost humanity (elect and non-elect). The seed falling upon the hearts of men is, simply put, humanity *hearing* the gospel (“one heareth” – Matt. 13:19). These soils do not, therefore, represent the population of humanity which maintains a *Christian profession*. Nay, these are persons of **the world** who have, simply put, *heard* the preaching of the gospel, and depending on the condition of their heart (their soil), the seed (which is the word of God) proportionately works within them. Depending how much the word of God is effecting each individual, representing this, the parable shows how the word of God affects their hearts (taking root, being planted, sprouting to life, growing, and bringing forth a perfection of fruits). This means that, like these similitudes, depending on the heart condition of the *hearers* the word will have *varying effects*.

The Way Side:

- ❖ “they that hear; then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” – Lk. 8:12
- ❖ “when they have heard, Satan cometh...taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts” – Mk. 4:15
- ❖ “one heareth the word...and understandeth it not, then cometh then cometh the wicked one” – Matt. 13:19

The Stony Places:

- ❖ “receive the word with joy...which for a while believe” – Lk. 8:13
- ❖ “immediately receive it with gladness...so endure but for a time: afterward...” – Mk. 4:16-17
- ❖ “anon with joy receiveth it...but dureth for a while...is offended” – Matt. 13:20-21

The Thorns:

- ❖ “entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful” – Mk. 4:19
- ❖ “are choked...and bring non fruit to perfection” – Lk. 8:14
- ❖ “choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” – Matt. 13:22

When the seed has some form of life or growth in one person, and in another, lesser or more growth, we are shown the differing degrees of effect the word of God is working within the lost individual. “Go into all the world” and preach to public strangers, you will see these things at work before your very own eyes – (1) some, upon hearing the word, are so hard hearted that they cannot even understand it, (2) some are so shallow hearted and fickle that they receive all the good things about the word with joy, but in the face of adversity or suffering they reject it, (3) some are more ready minded, and so they are greatly affected to seek God for some time, but after a length transpires they are, alas, dissuaded from their course by worldly lusts, cares, and riches, (4) and some, by amazing grace, hear the word, understand it, believe it, and upon conversion they, with endurance, keep it unto eternal life! How will this Kingdom be mysteriously spread throughout the whole world? In this very way, in these similitudes, having these differing effects in the heart of lost humanity. Those who hear the word of God and are converted, these are those in whom the seed has taken life, and it, being rooted and grounded (Col. 1:23, Eph. 3:17), comes to a

full manifestation of what Christ's indwelling is. Let the reader understand, Christ's indwelling within the person is easily detectable by the yield of "fruit to perfection" (Lk. 8:14-15).

The soils of the three unsaved men (1. "the way side", 2. "stony places", 3. "the thorns") never changed from what they were, even after the preaching of the word did have an effect upon them. If their hearts (the soils), never changed from a condition which lacked saving faith and repentance, for this reason the word of Christ did not effectually work in them. To the last soil which was spoken of, the soil called "good ground", these men have saving faith and repentance, which means it can be said of them, "when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, **which effectually worketh also in you that believe**" (1 Thess. 2:13). My reader, the former three soils which represent the heart of unconverted, damned humanity, upon the *hearing* of the gospel – take note – the condition of their heart never changed (the soil never changed)...had it changed, had they been enabled to become "good ground", this is the as saying, God changed their heart by manifesting faith and repentance within them, and consequentially, the word of Christ was able to effectually work in them (the seed was able to be soundly planted, it took root, it was nourished up, and brought forth a perfection of fruits). This parable pictorially reveals how the preaching of the gospel has a varying effect upon lost humanity based upon the condition of their heart, and one can be sure that a conversion experience by this effectual word is discoverable and distinguishable from those persons who lack it. Christ, "the word", strives with all of lost humanity, and according to the condition of the heart, some are more or less effected, but be sure of this, the Lord strives with them to repent and believe in Him! Thus we can understand that, as the gospel is preached to the whole world, all are effected by it to some degree, though one man – woe to him – cannot even understand it, so that, whatever effect was wrought within him was quickly taken away by the enemy of his soul (see Matt. 13:19).

Only one soil (one kind of heart) is a place where the word of Christ has a saving effect ("some thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold"). With all this in view, **worldwide humanity**, unto which cometh the preaching of the gospel, is **God's field** from which He will send forth reapers to gather a final harvest (see Mark 4:29 & Rev. 14:15 – "the harvest of **the earth** is ripe"). Within this harvest there are plantings, good and bad (like "the wheat and tares", the "good" and "bad" fish), for all of saved and unsaved humanity is reaped, only on this mark though, when the saved of humanity have reached the ripened stage in which God is glorified with the yield – the reaping will come. The seeds are far reaching to the ends of the earth because, "this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world" (Matt. 24:14), thus all of humanity is represented in the field-arena of harvest. The fields of soils are not, therefore, the *professing Church*, nay...it is the world who **heard** the gospel, not the Church which **professes** faith in Christ. According to the promise, all the world heard the gospel, thus the seed was sown in every soil, like a net dragged to the uttermost parts of the sea to gather every kind of fish, every kind of person in the world is to hear the gospel (every nation, tribe, and tongue) before the Kingdom consummates. All this being the case, as the seed was far reaching (worldwide) so the net was in its catching, all are thus affected by the word in some way and in differing degrees, but not all are good soils, and likewise, not all are good fish.

Matthew 13 contains to more major parables commonly known as, "The Tares Among the Wheat" and "The Fishing Drag-Net in the Sea", and in them there are *seeming contradictions* to the doctrine of Church Purity, as we have been studying it thus far. Before addressing these seeming contradictions, it is needful to understand certain perplexities which appertain to parabolic language. By understanding this, it will be easier to comprehend the peculiar language found in these two parables.

Notable Perplexities: Parabolic words that, by definition, defy doctrinal rules.

❖ Of Notable Context – most parables address God's dealings with unconverted Israel

One thing that we must understand is, these parables are primarily addressing unconverted Israel, depicting God's relationship with them based upon their rejection of Him. Several parables are very similar, and repetitively spoken, to drive deeper the burden of God. A few of these parables depict unconverted Israel as a planted Fig Tree (Lk. 13:1-9) and a Vineyard (Mk. 12:1-12, Matt. 21:33-46, Lk. 20:9-19). In an actual event where Christ encountered a barren fig tree, Christ prophetically demonstrated what He was about to do to Israel. The metaphorical application from this literal and historical Barren Fig Tree (see Mk. 11:12-21 and Matt. 21:19-21) depicts the same burden of God as the former parables. *Unconverted, once-born Israel* is a planting, yes...like a land owner plants a Fig Tree and a Vineyard, and God, who evidently *owns* these plantings, expects and hungers after fruit thereon. And yet, after doing all things necessary that fruit should come forth, they remain fruitless. God's desire, as a longing and hungering man looks after fruit, is left empty, bitter, and betrayed. Because of God's labor over their

planting, His money spent for necessary *hiring*, He holds the Fig Tree and Vineyard responsible to bring forth a satisfactory measure of fruit. But the fruitless tree is sick, like a hired husbandmen empowered with all the means to cause a Vineyard to prosper, and yet he, being perverted by depravity, refuses to work to gather the yield, is heartless to serve God who hired him, and he, treacherous beyond measure, beats, mocks, and even kills the Land Owner's servants and son. This situation has only ONE END: both the Fig Tree (for its sickness) and the husbandmen (for their audacious wickedness) are doomed for God's damning curses.

You see, Israel is *God's planting*, like a Fig Tree or a Vineyard, upon which God has invested above and beyond all things necessary for them to yield their fruitfulness (Isaiah 5:1-7), and upon their rebellion - the plant is *cursed* and the hired husbandmen are *killed*. Likewise, Israel is *God's Israel*, but the people are *denounced* (Hos. 1:10, 2:23). Israel is a "*House*", but the house is left "*desolate*" (Lk. 13:35).

- ❖ **Historical books & parabolic expressions contain recognizable complexities which cause well-known words to vary in definition. This is because in these two situations (historical accounts or parabolic expressions), the persons and circumstances guide the authorial theme, argument, and word choice. A notable danger: if these variations to doctrinal rules remain undiscovered to the reader, unlearned men will use them to subvert biblical doctrines which are exhaustively established by doctrinal rules.**

Spoken words which are parabolic, are not to be included in those words which God has established as *doctrinal rules*. Parabolic words are, by definition, connected to the specific contextual or historical situation in which they are spoken in, so much so, the definition of the words being used are often contrary to previously established definitions which serve as *the doctrinal rule*. In historical books (like Kings, Chronicles, the Gospels, and Acts, to name a few), the author accounts of things said or done from a situational angle. For a notable example, consider the historical book of Kings. It was written, "So they **feared the LORD**" (2 Kings 17:32), "They **feared the LORD**, and served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33), "So these nations **feared the LORD**, and served their graven images" (2 Kings 17:41). Do you see, my reader, how "the fear" wherewith they feared the Lord was of a different definition than what has already been written and established, like as Proverbs 16:6 it states, "by **the fear of the LORD** men depart from evil"? These men in 2 Kings 17 "feared the LORD" and ran after evil, serving their idols and sacrificing their children! The definition of this "fear" is, obviously, contradicting other scriptures which serve as *the doctrinal rule*. To "fear" the Lord in 2 Kings 17 is different than "the fear of the LORD" in Proverbs 16:6, the former is depicting a certain meaning characteristic of the historical situation and authorial context, the latter is a spiritually sound definition which is applicable in every generation and for every age. *The doctrinal rules* are sure, like unmovable foundations, without openness to variation or contradiction. Their definitions never change, are increasingly confirmed from prophet to prophet and century to century over the vast expanse in which inspired scripture was written. Thus we have it, again and again, doctrinal rules are apparent, easily discoverable, and above all memorable – they are *the rule*. The "fear" of the Lord in 2 Kings 17 is peculiar, isolated, contextually and historically definitive according to the situation, and therefore its meaning is disqualified from inclusion into *doctrinal rules* that are defined by God. Simply put, my reader, parabolic words must not usurp the definitions of *doctrinal rules*. Historical and parabolic words can overlap, contradict, and vary, but those things which are written for *doctrinal rule* are precise, razor sharp, without division, and in perfect unity.

For another well-known example, now in the New Testament, from the historical book called, The Gospel of John. Here, in John 8:31-44, "those Jews which **believed on Him** [Jesus Christ]" WERE NOT SAVED, contrary to the definition of "**believe**" which serves as *the doctrinal rule*: "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and THOU SHALT BE SAVED" (Acts. 16:31), and again, "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we **believe on Him** that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 4:24). These Jews which "believed on" Christ, they were contextually and historically, "the servant of sin" who need to be made "free", men who are characterized by Christ, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John 8:44). The situational circumstance makes clear that these Jews "believed on" Christ according to the common manner of the apostate generation (for healing, for food, to see signs, to follow him for a while, to recognize him as a teacher and Rabbi, to name a few), and this is just like the situational "fear of the Lord" as seen in the apostate generation of 2 Kings 17. These men of both generations, corrupt according to their deceitful lusts, were dead in their sins and in the gall of deception, thus their *doctrinal rules* were defiant of God's. Disciples of the Lord, take heed, "Let God be true but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4), and never bring into doubt a doctrinally established *rule* of the faith because of a situational, historical or contextual variation, as seen so often in the parables of Jesus Christ. What do I mean? Well, my reader, let me ask you the following questions:

By doctrinal rule, what are the torments of hell? The torments of hell are not

As for doctrinally inconsistent parabolic sayings: the use and

temporary and enduring like as the chastisement of a “few stripes”, are they (Lk. 12:46-48)?

By doctrinal rule, who is God? Is God a mere neighbor to you, whose affections are as shallow as an earthly, human friend of yours (Lk. 11:5-10), is He? God is not an unrighteous, merciless, and harsh Judge, is He (Lk. 18:1-8)? God is not “an austere man”, is He (Lk. 19:21-22)?

definitions of these words are not to become *the rule*. What hell is like, or God, or any group of persons, their actuality is not to be held in question because of parabolic variations to *doctrinal rules*. NOTE: Parables communicate significant meanings which are isolated to situational circumstances, and without such circumstances giving plot to the words, the peculiar definitions could not be edifying, meaningful, or even recognizable, and certainly not appreciated...and “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

By doctrinal rule, who is unconverted Israel? Unconverted, once-born Israel, identified by Christ to be the devil’s family (John 8), described as miserable rebels and slaves to sin, the same people who were, yet again, denounced by God in Hosea 1:10, God declaring that they are not His family...nevertheless, contrary to these *doctrinal rules*, can unconverted Israel be called God’s family, as a Hen her chicks (Lk. 13:34-35)? Can they be called “His own” (John 1:11)? **Concerning more specified persons within unconverted Israel:** The Pharisees and Scribes, they are not “just persons who need no repentance”, are they (Lk. 15:1-7)? The unconverted sinners of Israel, they are not “lost sheep” are they (Lk. 15:1-7, 8:10)? As seen in the parable known as “The Prodigal Son” (Lk. 15:11-32), the Pharisees and Scribes are not God’s eldest son, and God, He is not their father is He? They are not God’s eldest son who is, as seen in the parable, a faithful son, to whom belonged everything that God the Father possesses, and he, being the firstborn, is not the heir of everything, upon whom belongs the Father’s blessing (“all I have is thine” – Lk. 15:31), is he? Are the Pharisees and Scribes, standing in this familial position, able to confess to God the Father, “these many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandment” (Lk. 15:29)? Are the Pharisees and Scribes “ever”, always, not dead but spiritually “alive” to God, unlike their rebellious brethren (the youngest son), who, being spiritually dead to God, left His family, wasted his invaluable inheritance, and yet, upon returning came alive again (Lk. 15:32)? Those who bask in the eternal pleasures of God’s heaven, they will not be those of an evil eye, murmuring against the goodness of God, will they (Matt. 20:1-16)? In their unconverted estate, the chief priests and elders (as one group representing one son) alongside the publicans and harlots (as another group representing another son), they are not sons of God the Father, are they (Matt. 21:23-32)? Again I say, the unconverted, once-born, spiritual children of the devil, also known as the 1st century Jews, are not “the children of the Kingdom”, are they (Matt. 8:12)? The unconverted, once-born, spiritual children of the devil, also known as the 1st century Jews, they are not “the good seed”, as written in Matt. 13:38, like they are called in another place, “the children of the Kingdom” (Matt. 8:12), are they? Are they not rather, rightly called, “the children of the wicked one” (Matt. 13:38), but how then are they called “children of the Kingdom” in Matthew 8:12?

These examples within the book of Matthew, standing alone, represent how parables exhibit isolated and situational definitions which are in contradiction to their *doctrinal rules*. While looking carefully at the present situations in which these parables were spoken, the authorial intent becomes clear. According to the context of the situation the author successfully communicates historically relevant meanings to the reader. The context, audience, and situation at hand are vital for the interpretation of these variables, and because of this, the reader should allow variation from *doctrinal rules*. Again I say, these variables are not to be *the doctrinal rule*, they are the exception. By God’s grace, the apostles have provided for us inspired *commentaries* on the metaphorical, parabolic, and mysterious language used in The Gospels and elsewhere, and this written *commentary* is what we categorically call, “The Epistles”. These books are direct applications of *doctrinal rules*, many of which are introduced in The Gospels. That which Jesus Christ preached and introduced to the world, the apostles interpreted and applied to NT Churches, see “The Epistles”.

The doctrinal rule of *Church Purity* – seemingly defied?

In the Epistles (as we have heretofore studied) *the doctrinal rule* for Church purity is clear, overwhelmingly exhaustive, and without variation. Most of God’s people in this age, being oblivious to this *rule*, are unknowingly led into unbiblical conclusions when reading the parables of Jesus Christ.

The Doctrinal Rule: The Church is to be entirely pure and perfected in holiness (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). The doctrinal rule is, congregational *separation*. The doctrinal rule is, an unleavened Lump (1 Cor. 5:6-8), a Lump whose persons are all in the Light

(1 Jn. 1:3-7, 2 Cor. 6:14, Eph. 5:7-17), a Sacrifice whose entire body is of unblemished members (Rom. 12:1-2, 15:16-19, Eph. 5:26-27, Jas. 1:26-27), etc. In summary, those who are *gathered* in the Church assembly must be *separated* from all other peoples (unconverted or backslidden).

The Seeming Defiance: The parabolic sayings of Christ seem to argue *the impossibility* of *separation* amongst those who are in the Church. Most of all, “The Tares Among the Wheat” (Matt. 13:24-30) and “The Fishing Drag-Net in the Sea” (Matt. 13:47-52), appear to teach that the Church is a *gathering* of persons who are both true and falsely converted, righteous men and wicked men. People conclude that (**Firstly**) to separate this mixed multitude would be harmful to the righteous and true converts of Christ (“the wheat”), and (**Secondarily**) the separation of the mixture will be done by God (using holy angels)...for God alone, and none other, is capable and sufficient to “*sever* the wicked from among the just” with inerrancy (Matt. 13:49). Therefore as for now, it is an earthly impossibility for *Church officers* to accomplish this *severing* between the righteous and the wicked (for we, *Church officers*, have the capacity to err in discernment while judging persons who stand in question).

The Tares Among the Wheat

By the parable of “The Tares Among the Wheat” (Matt. 13:24-30) men do wrongly conclude: (1) the tares and wheat represent the population of *professing Christianity* (commonly known today as *The Church*), (2) “the field” represents God’s ground, or God’s field, and into it, therefore, He planted the gospel seed (“the good seed”), meaning that this “field” is the community of saved individuals, (3) “the field”, also called “His Kingdom” in Matt. 13:41, means that it is God’s Kingdom, and therefore it is assumed that the field must be *The Church*, (4) the end time **gathering** which is *permitted* to be done by the “angels” of God, they, not Church officers, *separate* the tares from the wheat, the righteous from the wicked (they “gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” –Matt. 13:41), therefore it is concluded that *Church officers* are forbidden to attempt a **gathering** before the end time Judgment (and by *gathering*, the scripture means, Church officers make a separation between the righteous and the wicked in the Church). They conclude that since “the field” is *the Church*, it is to remain a mixed multitude of righteous and wicked persons, for, alas! At the suggestion of “the servants” (Matt. 13:28) to “go and gather them up” into separate companies, they were denied the right! Is this the correct interpretation?

My reader, **FIVE WORDS:** “**The field is the world**” (Matt. 13:38)

The field is the world, not the Church. “The servants” were denied the right to separate the false converts from the true converts because, **CHRISTIANS ARE TO REMAIN IN THE WORLD UNTIL THE FINAL RESURRECTION**. The world, according to *doctrinal rule*, is to remain a mingled population of saints and sinners, a company of righteous and wicked men, of twice-born and once-born men. This end time *separation*, which was a harvest **gathering**, also called “reaping”, this was done by the resurrection of the dead at Final Judgment, and this is not to be confused with the separation which *Christian officers* are commanded to uphold amongst the Church (for it is written, “come out from among them and **BE YE SEPARATE**” – 2 Cor. 6:17). If the Church is supposed to be a gathered company of persons who are wicked and righteous, this puts us into a staggering dilemma! For then, how shall we obey the commandment, “Therefore **put away from among yourselves that wicked person**” (1 Cor. 5:13)? How shall we obey the commandment, “be ye *separate*”, if we believe that we cannot “**come out** from among them”? Oh, let me plead with you again, my reader! Shall “tares” remain “**among** the wheat”, when God said, “come out from **among them**” (2 Cor. 6:17) and “put away from **among yourselves** that wicked person” (1 Cor. 5:13)? Shockingly, these false interpretations are so widely accepted, and yet, so glaringly problematic! These men – swallowing a camel – uphold convictions of absurd and damnable contradiction to scripture! Woe to us! The New Testament Israel of God which was “called out”, regenerated, and commandment-bound to remain pure, “he hath **mixed himself** among the people...**strangers** have devoured his strength, and **he knoweth it not**” (Hos. 7:8-9)! These pastors! They believe that the righteous and the wicked, the twice-born and the once-born, are supposed to be “together” and “grow together” (Matt. 13:30) in *the Church*, when the scriptures warn that this mixture in the Church makes impossible spiritual growth (1 Cor. 5:6-7)! The parable stated, “Let them both **grow together**” (Matt. 13:30), yes it did...but can the tares and wheat, when knit together, unseparated, and mixed within *the Church*, successfully “grow together”, when such a mixture within the Church is decried as a growth-stunting!? The effect of this mixture is beyond this... beyond a mere growth stunt - it is sincerity and truth impaling; it is an uncontainable pandemic of malice and wickedness overtaking the whole congregation (“know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”). In other words, God promises that this mixture is congregation-leavening, congregation-killing, and congregation-damning... except the wicked are un-mixed from the Church and cast out (1 Cor. 5:13)! My reader, **the field is the world**.

My reader, have you never read how, by *doctrinal rule*, the inspired writers made a differentiation between the populations of the world and the Church. This differentiation commanded by God is in exact contradiction to the popular interpretation of the parable, “The Tares Among The Wheat”. It is written,

“I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators **of this world**, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; **for then must ye needs go out of the world**. But now I have written unto you not to **keep company**, if any man that is **called a brother** be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; **with such an one no not to eat**. For what have I to do to judge **them also that are without**? do not ye judge **them that are within**? But **them that are without** God judgeth. Therefore **put away from among yourselves that wicked person**.” – 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

This scriptural instruction in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 is *the doctrinal rule*, and as you can see there are careful distinctions made. (1) There is a company of persons which **must be judged now** (1 Cor. 5:11-12, 1 Pet. 4:17) – this is **the Church**. (2) By “judge” the scriptures mean, the Church company of persons must be **separated** from wicked persons, or in terms used in the former parable, they are to be **gathered** together into God’s Church (His “garner” -Matt. 3:12), and there they are to remain unmixed and distinguishable from all other earthly gatherings and persons – this is **the Church**. (3) There is a company of persons which **are not judged now** – this is **the world**. (4) By not “judging” the scriptures mean, they are left as a mixed multitude of wicked and righteous persons, and they, dwelling together without separation, remain undistinguishable and indivisible in their societies, vocations, and gatherings anywhere and everywhere they may be, and finally, this indivisible population of persons will be judged, distinguished, and separated from one another at the Final Judgment – this is **the world**. Separation among the populations of the world is impossible, “for then must ye needs go out of the world”, Paul argues. The populations of the world are to remain mingled and growing together until Final Judgment... then begins their final and irrevocable separation.

- ❖ **The Church is judged now:** Within time, the Church is **judged** by Church officers (implementing the command of the reigning King who said, “therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” -1 Cor. 5:13). These Church officers (or elders) stand as representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:3-5, 2 Cor. 2:7-10, Matt. 16:19, 18:18-20, Jn. 20:23), and in addition to this form of judgment, furthermore, Christ does judgment using ministerial angels (“the angels of the seven Churches” –Rev. 1:20, see also “angels” in Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14). Firstly, judgment is sought through Church officers, and if this judgment fails to amend the problem, judgment is executed through extra-terrestrial beings wielding Divine-powers (such Divine retributions are formerly addressed and titled, “The New Testament Curses of God”). [\[this order needs to be clarified and put in line with the other summary\]](#)
- ❖ **The World is reserved for The Judgment to come:** Within time, the world remains unjudged... one cannot separate wickedness from the world because “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 Jn. 5:19), “for then must ye needs go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:10). If one would separate wicked persons from the world, or in other words, if Judgment comes upon the whole world before the appointed time, some of the saints, currently backslidden into sin, would perish in the Judgment (or in other words, “while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them” –Matt. 13:29, for at the present time all of God’s wheat is not ready for Final Judgment). Therefore God, by His own admission, holds back *worldwide judgment* to prevent the saints from perishing in its sudden arrival. The Lord holds back the judgment of the world for the sake of the Church, “for us”, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). This Day of Judgment for the world is meant to be, “the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7), and God would have it that none of His children would perish with unconverted worldlings. At Final Judgment, the whole multitude of the world will be gathered together and judged (saints and sinners), and through this judgment there will be an everlasting separation between the two. The righteous will be separated and distinguished from the wicked, and being sent forth, each to their respective eternal abode... there they will remain unmixed for eternity. The House of God on earth, because it was judged within time, was a picture of the unmixed multitude which would eventually exist in heaven. Do you see this, my reader? Do you see how that that, in NT scripture, when a man is cast out of the Church he is accounted as a companion of the damned (“an heathen man and a publican” –Matt. 18:17)? Such a one is henceforth reckoned with those who stand in danger of the torments of Final Judgment, and they, being outside of the NT “Passover Feast”... will not be *passed over*. They will not be *passed over* by the angel of God’s wrath, no! They will not be *passed over* but *pounded upon* (for a closer look at those who are thrust out of the Passover Feast, see 1 Cor. 5:6-8 & Exodus 12:15)! Leaven in the Passover results in a ceremonial disqualification from its

benefits. When the death angel of God's wrath beholds its transgressors, he will not *pass them by*. It is written, "**that soul shall be cut off from Israel**" (Ex. 12:15). So it is in NT reality, my reader - HERE ALSO - those who are touched by leaven, they are "purged out" of the Church (for it is, in the NT also, a safe-house for those that will be *passed over* by the death angel of God's wrath, see 1 John 2:19, 4:5-6, Heb. 10:24-31).

Doctrinal Variation from the Rule – as seen in Matthew 8:12 & 21:43

Unconverted Israel Parabolically Called – “the children of the Kingdom”

“But **the children of the kingdom** shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
– Matthew 8:12

“Therefore say I unto you, **The kingdom of God shall be taken from you**, and **given to a nation** bringing forth the fruits thereof.” – Matthew 21:43

Unconverted Gentiles Parabolically Called – a part of “His Kingdom”

“The field is the world; the good seed are **the children of the kingdom**; but the tares are **the children of the wicked one**;...The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall **gather out of His kingdom** all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;” – Matthew 13:38, 41

The doctrinal variation within the parable, “The Tares Among the Wheat”, is, “the world” is called “His Kingdom” – meaning God's Kingdom. This is an unexpected variation from the definition of “the Kingdom of God” which is the doctrinal rule. By doctrinal rule, “the Kingdom of God” is the true Church, the regenerated community of humanity (Lk. 17:21, Col. 1:13). Misinterpretations prevail when reading this parable because: people are overwhelmingly ignorant of the doctrinal rules which pertain to the persons who attend, assemble within, and make up the company of “the Church”. At first glance, the people have no trouble believing the Church is a company of people who are not *separated* and *out from among the world*, who are rather, inseparable from the world, and at best, by the command of the Almighty, this mixed multitude of wicked and righteous persons are to grow together in the Church until Final Judgment. Alas, woe to us!

Are you perplexed? You may wonder, how then can Christ call “the world” “His Kingdom” in Matthew 13:41? The answer to this mystery is discoverable, but you must become acquainted with Messianic prophesy. You see, my reader, Jesus Christ is prophesied to be the King of the world – the whole world! All earth and land, every nation and every man under the whole heaven, it is the Kingdom of Christ by prophesy, by right, by gift, and His enthronement after His ascension began His Messianic sovereignty.

Just as unconverted Israel was parabolically called, “the children of the Kingdom” in Matthew 8:12, even so again, in another place, in a snap shot of Christ's Kingdom when its bounds cover the entire world, the Lord is able to parabolically call unconverted Gentiles a part of “His Kingdom” (as seen in Matthew 13:41). The doctrinal variation exactly parallels what God spoke when addressing unconverted Israel, only in this other parable, Christ intends to express how the boundaries of His Kingdom will cover the expanse of the whole world! His Kingdom will begin, progressively rise to power in that, He will send preachers and heralds of His Kingship into every city, nation, and language, and there – EVERYWHERE – the message will be the same. They will proclaim to them their King, His Name, Person, and Work, that His Kingdom is eminent and at hand, that they and their lands are a part of His possession, and they will either join with Him or die by Him – for He will soon return, piercing the skyline, riding into their earthly realm to slay those who refused to bow the knee. That which was first proclaimed by heralds in *every Israelite city*, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matt. 10:7), it must also be proclaimed *in all the earth!*

The King of the World – Jesus Christ

“Listen, **O isles**, unto me; and hearken, **ye people, from far**; The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his

“Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth **judgment to the Gentiles**. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised

hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God. And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: **I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.** Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and **his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship,** because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, **to establish the earth,** to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.” – Isaiah 49:1-10

reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have **set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.** Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” – Isaiah 42:1-7

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and **a King shall reign and prosper,** and shall execute judgment and justice **in the earth.**” – Jeremiah 23:5

“Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be **exalted and extolled,** and be **very high.** As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he **sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him:** for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.” – Isaiah 52:13-15

“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the **uttermost parts of the earth** for thy possession.” – Psalms 2:8

“But unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” – Malachi 4:2

Jesus Christ was “the King of the Jews”, but not of them only! To the amazement of the Jews – when they crowned Christ with thorns, they crowned Him King of the whole world! He bought them by His blood! Through this sin-absolving act – the atonement – Christ became the King of sinners! Yea, not of this world only but every world! He became King over the visible and invisible universe! “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted HIM, and given Him a Name which is above every name: That at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Php. 2:9-11)! According to the prophecies Christ would, through the atonement, become “the King”, not of Israel only but the whole world...therefore just as the unconverted Jewish nation and people were called “the children of the Kingdom”, God calls all of unconverted humanity children of His Kingdom. Just as the Kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to all other nations (“**given to a nation** bringing forth the fruits thereof”), the essence of its existence, as it *was* - changed - it *was confined* to the borders of Israelite lands and *then extended* worldwide. The King of Israel became the King of the world! The gospel was preached “throughout the whole world” (Rom. 1:8) because – HEAR THIS – every city, nation, and people became the blood bought property of the King (“So shall He sprinkle many nations”-Isa. 52:13-15)! This Jesus is *the Christ*, the anointed of God, and He risen and ascended on high that He might be worshiped as King. Whether the world’s humanity remains unconverted or not, the parable gives a snap shot depicting – the world is the Messiah’s Kingdom! It is a doctrinal variation from *the rule*, yes, but it unveils a powerful mystery of this Great and Exalted Messiah! Look, my reader, see how Christ was ascended and enthroned high above all visible and invisible kings – “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” – which means He is far above Satan, who is the invisible king and “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), far above Satan’s minions, the children of Adam, which are the visible and earthly rulers of this world (“all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” –Mat. 4:8). This Jesus, scared with the wounds of his humble service to humanity, is exalted to an eagle’s soar

with “healing in His wings” (Mal. 4:2)! Worship HIM my reader, the darling of Heaven, the victor of Hell, the root of Jesse and the seed of David, “by Whose stripes ye are healed” (1 Pet. 2:24)! The second Adam, the Redeemer of the Gentile world of adamic-rebels, the Restorer of Paradise, the Seeking Savior of lost humanity, the Lover of all men – “And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a Name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16)! Take note of this, my reader, even though His Kingdom is still crawling with His enemies, enemies who, at present, remain unsubdued under His feet, He has taken His ascent on high, He sat down upon the everlasting Throne, and He began the everlasting Kingdom...and at the consummation of His rule He will be the Last Man crowned. Yes, my reader, He will have all men in derision with crown-casting-power (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Just as the realm, nation, and people of *unconverted Israel* were called “the Children of His Kingdom”, even so in this parable, the future of the Messianic Kingdom is viewed as it will be after Christ’s crucifixion, therefore in this view it can be rightly said, the realms, nations, and peoples of the *unconverted world* are “His Kingdom”. My reader, “the uttermost parts of the earth” are, *right now*, the Lord Jesus’ possession (Ps. 2:8)! He purchased the world with His blood. Praise be to God. Amen.

The Fishing Drag-Net in the Sea

- (1) As the soils represented all of worldwide humanity who will *hear* the gospel, even so, this is the net-gathered multitude.
- (2) The act of reaping or harvesting, like as the act of planting, exactly represents the act of fish-catching – all three of these depict Final Judgment at the resurrection. Contrary to their *doctrinal rules*, these acts do not represent conversions to Christianity performed by the preaching of Church officers.

The net-gathered multitude of persons is not what it may seem. It seems to be *the Church*, seeing that Christ called the apostles “fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19, Mk. 1:17). This is, indeed, *the doctrinal rule*, but the parable uses a doctrinal variation contrary to this *rule*. We can see here, like elsewhere, another isolated definition...and should we be surprised? At first glance the net-gathered multitude may appear to be *the Church*, but a closer look at the characteristics of such persons, in comparison with all *doctrinal rules* held in their place, one must conclude that the net-gathered multitude is “the world”, and in fulfillment of God’s decree, the whole world is in view because they are destined to *heard* the gospel (Matt. 24:14, Rev. 14:6-7). The mixed multitude of saints and sinners which were planted in the grounds which were called, “His Kingdom”, in the former parable, are here, in “The Fishing Drag-Net in the Sea” parable, the multitude which is caught in the net. The mixed multitude of “the field” were those in the world, as the former parable interpreted, so also here, the drag-net was drug throughout all the sea until they caught “every kind” of fish (Matt. 13:47) – meaning, the preaching of the gospel has reached “every kind” of person (every nation, tribe, and tongue) – and when the net is “full”, just as when the “harvest” was ripe and ready for reaping, the angels will, through the means of Judgment by the final resurrection, place the righteous into “vessels” (“mansions” –Jn. 14) prepared for them in heaven, and they will “cast the bad away” into the Lake of Fire, “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:48-50).

Three Acts: (1) seed planting (2) harvesting (3) fishing

The planting of the seed (who is Christ) within a person *would normally mean* salvation (1 Jn. 3:9), but in “The Parable of the Sower”, the **unsaved men** received the seed by implantation, and take note – it *remained* planted within them – but the entire time the seed remained within them they remained once-born and wicked! By *doctrinal rule*, if God’s seed remains in a man he is born of God and kept righteous (1 Jn. 3:9)! But here, in the parable, gospel preaching in humanities *hearing* is **the act** of seed implantation. Though contrary to *the doctrinal rule*, it is defined in this isolated way, and when *the rule* would say they have been converted, the parable is teaching they have only *heard the gospel*. The seeds which grew to different degrees of rooting, shooting, and fruiting, this represents the differing degrees of affect the preaching has upon lost humanity, and though only one kind of hearer is savingly affected, all are affected in some measure. In proportion to how the hearer is affected by the gospel preaching... the seed grows. If the word of God is fully established in the hearer, the plant is fully rooting, shooting, and fruiting... the man is regenerated. Likewise to the former characteristics, so also is **the action** of drag-net fishing. By *doctrinal rule*, to be caught in God’s net or implanted with God’s seed *is salvation*, but here it is not so. Contrary to *the doctrinal rule*, when these fish are caught in the net by the fishermen – behold – they remain unsaved (within the net is an indivisible multitude of wicked and righteous persons). By *doctrinal rule*, is say again, if fish are caught they are converted to Christianity... but here it is not so. Verily, my reader, Christ came to make the apostles fishers of men, but this parabolic fish-catching follows the

parabolic theme of the parable of parables (“The Parable of the Sower”). Finally for further reinforcement, *the doctrinal rule* for harvesting is also Christian conversion (Matt. 9:37-38, Lk. 10:2). Parabolic language is contrary to *doctrinal rule* because it defines **the action** of harvesting as Final Judgment in both of the former parables of Matthew 13 (see Matt. 13:39). When the harvest is “ready”, so also will the net become “full”. By interpretation according to the parable, this means, the gospel preaching has reached the hearing of all the people unto whom God sent it – then comes Final Judgment. In these three instances we see three **actions** which normally mean Christian conversion (seed planting, harvesting, and fish-catching), but these actions, because they are parabolic, consistently and unanimously defy their *doctrinal rule*. This is no wonder, for Christ is preaching these parables in the same paradigm as how the first and primary parable was spoken (the parable called, *the parable of parables*, the lens by which we understand all other parables, “The Parable of the Sower”). People interpret these parables with too much haste. They read the parables and quickly recall *the doctrinal rules* which appertain to these **three actions** – how these acts normally mean Christian conversion – but they have failed to be guided by *the parable of parables*, and so, they have failed to understand *all parables*.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Church is not made up of regenerate and unregenerate persons who remain indistinguishable from one another! My reader, woe to us! If this were, we would be defying *the doctrinal rules* of God! God judges the Church now... He judges the world later. God judges the Church now, yes, and this means that, in the Church, He separates saints from sin (worldliness and wicked persons). He judges the world later, and this means that, in the world, He forever separates saints from worldliness and wicked persons. If we interpret the doctrinal variations as *doctrinal rules*, this is to believe – the Church is to be treated like the world. Then, alas, the Church would be made up of a mixed and indivisible multitude, only separable by Final Judgment! Rather, God’s commands Church officers to **judge, purge, put away, and separate!** He threatens the saints with damning judgments if they don’t **remain separate** according to their calling! Thus, if we continue in this mixed condition – like as society in the world operates without separation between saints and sinners – God’s Fatherly love will be interrupted (2 Cor. 6:18), our inheritance as sons will be threatened (2 Cor. 6:18), New Testament curses will be enacted, until finally, the Church that Jesus Christ bled and died for, the Church that He commanded to be holy... it is worldly! If the assembly remains without separation from worldlings, the Church will turn from holy to worldly (sincere to insincere -1 Cor. 5:8, righteous to wicked -1 Cor. 5:6, 13). Alas, we have scorned the emphasis of God’s warning, “a little leaven”! We have been puffed up! We have not mourned when we were by uncleanness touched (1 Cor. 5:2, 6, 2 Cor. 6:17)! God’s threatening... it is mocked! The final effect of leaven will leave the whole lump shocked (1 Cor. 5:6)! At that Day, the Final Day, when we expect to be *passed over* (1 Cor. 5:7-8), God will visit our punishment upon us!