

Have you ever watched a tug-of-war contest? I love the ones where there is a huge mud wallow in the middle, and the losing team gets dumped in it. What a mess! There nothing like a pound of mud in your nose! I've never been in a tug of war with a mud bath like this, but I've been in many struggles that have a certain similarity to it. It's just that it was not always a rope that I had in my grip.

We always seem to be fighting over something. Picture the scene where two children are struggling over a toy until it breaks. This is a common image which I can remember being a part of when I was young. Whenever we fight like this we end up ripping our precious treasure apart so that it is useless to either party involved. We have to learn that possession of something means nothing if the item becomes worthless. Remember the story of Solomon's great decision: the true mother preferred a live child in someone else's arms than a dead one in her own.

Sometimes we just have to let go of something we want very much; this is something like not being able to keep our children at that "cute age" forever. To try to keep them from growing up could cause severe problems for them. On another level, children caught in a divorce can be hurt badly in the struggle between their two parents. No one really wins in this kind of fight; it can get really low-down and mean. This is why some people choose to let go even though they could win the battle. The children are fragile, like an egg in the grip of some tightening web. And they don't understand what is going on. To fight over them would just make it worse. But so many people are selfish and want to win at any cost.

Jesus presented a similar idea in a parable in Matthew 13:24-30:

*The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' " "An enemy did this," he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' " "No," he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'*

If you have ever done any weeding, you know how the roots of the various plants (some that you want, and some that you don't) become intermingled together. The farmer in the parable depends on the yield of his crop to survive, and is in quite a dilemma about what to do. He decides to leave the weeds, even though he knows that they will compete with his wheat and choke it out. He realizes that it is better to have a limited crop than none at all.

Christ's parable has to do with the cosmic struggle between God and Satan for the soul of man. As He later explains his story, the sower is Himself, the field is the world, the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom, the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. There will be a separation at the last day, when God will be able to extract without harm those who are His followers. But in the meantime we must live on this earth with those who are not filled with God's love.

Earlier we pictured two children struggling over a toy, and two parents struggling over their children. Now we can imagine God and Satan fighting over us. God could certainly win by ripping us away from the devil, but He wants us "alive" and "intact", so He has to leave us in the soul building place that the world has become. God is sensitive to man in his struggle and knows the power of the evil one; He wants to save his people. I picture mankind as trapped in a web, being assaulted continually by Satan. Then Christ, our mediator and Savior, descends to cover us and take the blows meant for us. As His followers we are effectively "in Him" (1 John 4:13), and we are thus protected. We must just endure the weeds for the present, and we will be saved. The tug-of-war will be won by God, and we will not have to be pulled through the mud.

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