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Nine Characteristics of Tares—The Believer's Enemy



In more than 40 years of ministry, my experience has been that most of the time a believer's greatest persecution comes from other people who identify themselves as believers.

Why is that?

Remember that even the most faithful believers can be used by Satan if they are not careful. When Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer many things, Peter protested and denied that would happen. Jesus said to him: ***Get behind Me, Satan!*** (Matthew 16:21–24). Jesus knew that Peter wasn't Satan, but He made it clear that Peter was being influenced by Satan.

In addition to misguided believers, some people are Satan's outright partners who are determined to cause chaos and turmoil in the believer's life. Jesus refers to them as ***tares***.

An investigation of Scripture reveals that sometimes aggressive, attacking people are not true believers—even though they say they are. In reality, they are agents of Satan who have a goal of robbing you of your joy and sidetracking you in your calling.

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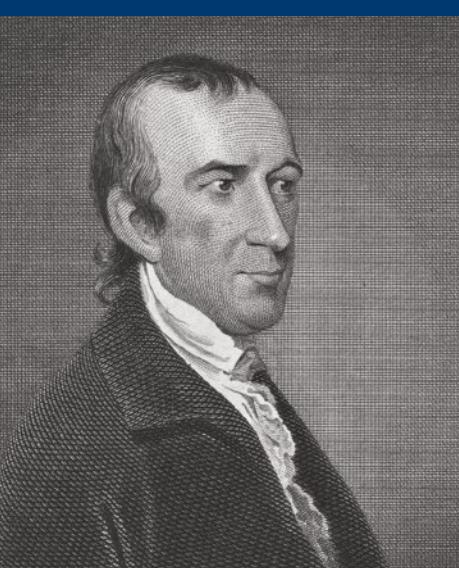
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Former Cabinet Members/White House Senior Staff: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.
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The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible study sponsor.



Thomas Stone



“Shun all giddy, loose, and wicked company; they will corrupt and lead you into vice and bring you to ruin. Seek the company of sober, virtuous and good people... which will lead [you] to solid happiness.”

— Thomas Stone, signer of the Declaration of Independence, selected as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

John Sanderson, *Biography of the Signers to the Declaration of Independence* (Philadelphia: R. W. Pomeroy, 1824), Vol. IX, 333, Thomas Stone to his son, October 1787.



Nine Characteristics of Tares—The Believer’s Enemy

You must be aware of this biblically evidenced truth and equipped to respond appropriately. Remember, Ephesians 6:12 states, *Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, [but]...against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* So beware!

Let’s investigate the Word of God relative to this subject and study some of the copious New Testament (NT) passages that speak about tares and serve to instruct the believer how to astutely identify his enemies.

Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous NT passages identify “christians” (lower case intentional) in the church—even in leadership positions—as being other than who they profess to be. Coming to an objective realization of this fact and an understanding of how to properly respond to them is a mark of spiritual maturity. Jude 1:12 calls these folks (relative to their presence in the church) *hidden reefs in your love feasts*. This is a good mental picture of what I am referring to. As a believer, do you wonder why your knees get skinned up when you swim through the seas of life with certain “christian” people? This study will provide you with insights and added discernment as to why that is the case and, in fact, will always be. *You can learn to eliminate much resultant pain via the application of what follows in this Bible study.*

II. THE INEVITABILITY OF TARES

Every believer needs to be alert to the prevalence of false believers among the truly redeemed of God. In Jesus’ parable of the *tares* as recorded only in the

Gospel of Matthew (13:24–30; ref. Luke 3:17), the Savior teaches the multitudes that *tares* will be sown in with the *wheat*, a tactic of the enemy containing largely *indivisible* consequences until the day of judgment:

“But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this! The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn”’” (vv. 26–30).

Since Jesus states in this passage that He has no intention of rooting out false believers from genuine ones, an appropriate subtitle to this Bible study could be: “How to Cohabitate with Tares.” This observation is an important,



sobering, stand-alone takeaway in and of itself from this parable.

A *tare* (*zizanion*) was a darnel weed prevalent in the Palestine biome that is largely indistinguishable from *wheat* until it matures and bears fruit. Opposite of the taste of *wheat*, in the end, the tares are choking, bitter and inedible. Jesus' use of the word and the picture it evoked in an agrarian-based culture provided a powerful metaphor—as it does today!

Here to follow is a survey of nine NT passages and the respective indicators that lend huge insights into this subject: a theology, so to speak, on *tares*.

In that *tares* are disguised in the beginning (such as were Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5), they begin to overtake, as they mature, the valuable plants that surround them. That word picture illustrates the following:

They blossom into false leaders from originally being incognito; such was the case with Diotrephes in 3 John and the false apostles mentioned in Revelation 2. Even though what follows is presented in parallel order to the NT books, I expect you to take notice of these stages of *tare* maturation in each of the nine points and nine passages that follow. What should result from this study is not only an awareness and intellectual understanding of this phenomenon, but a heartfelt conviction about this ploy of the Devil and how one should deal with the inevitability of *tares* (cf. Matthew 7:15).

III. THE INDICATORS OF TARES

A. THEY ARE DISOBEDIENT (MATTHEW 7:20–23)

"So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me,

'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Many struggle to comprehend what Jesus is teaching in this passage, but when indexed through the lens of *tares*, the passage becomes easy to understand. The overarching true test of genuine belief in the Lordship of Christ is unveiled by Jesus Himself in this profoundly insightful passage: indicative of true belief is not what someone *says*; rather, it is the *fruit* of their actions. *He who does the will of My Father* is Jesus' litmus test of true belief; talk is cheap and can be misleading.

Coach Wooden used to instruct his players to concentrate on their opponents' numbers—not their head—a player's head often goes in a different direction than his body.

Notice in Matthew 7 that Jesus contrasts a person who does God's *will* with someone who does not—yet claims Jesus' name regardless. *Lawlessness* (*anomia*) means “without law.” The presence of *lawless* behavior (someone who takes license with scriptural precepts and obedience to them) is therefore evidence of the existence of a false “believer”—a possible *tare*. Likened to the skillful moves of basketball players, *tares* in the church know how to fake it.

Furthermore, since the Greek verb *anomia* is in a present participle form (indicating a continuous action), Jesus is stating that disobedient-to-Scripture behavior is a continuous, regular action

VERSE OF THE WEEK

Ephesians 6:12

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.



The believer's battle is a spiritual one.





John Witherspoon



"No man, whatever be his character or whatever be his hope, shall enter into rest unless he be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ."

— John Witherspoon, signer of the Declaration of Independence, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, member of the Continental Congress, president of Princeton.

John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon* (Edinburgh: J. Ogle, 1815), Vol. V, 245, Sermon 15, "The Absolute Necessity of Salvation Through Christ," January 2, 1758.

Nine Characteristics of Tares—The Believer's Enemy

of people who *talk* like believers but don't *act* like believers. Lastly, *lawlessness* depicts unrighteous actions in both Old Testament (OT) law and a civil law sense.

Illustrative of tares is disrespect for the law of the land and the laws of God.

Summarily, *tares* will be known not by what they say or profess, but *by their fruits*,¹ and one of those will be a continuing spirit of disobedience to outside authority. What follows are eight more passages revealing additional signposts:

B. THEY ARE PRETENDERS (ACTS 5:1–3)

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

The context from Acts 4:32 further evidences that Ananias and Sapphira were members of the church of Jerusalem, but even though members, they were not believers, rather pretenders. To fake their spirituality in front of the true believers, they acted in concert with them. In this case, wanting to appear generous, they were instead hypocrites intent on impressing others through deception. *Tares* are often camouflaged pretenders who lie and cover-up to outwardly come across as spiritual. Make special note of this reality: *tares* are characterized by pretending. Again, *you will know them by their fruits*.

C. THEY ARE ARROGANT (2 CORINTHIANS 11:14–15)

No wonder, for even Satan disguises

himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

Adding more light to the previous point, notice that Satan *disguises* (*metaschematizo*), i.e., "to change in fashion or appearance," his *servants* in a cloak so as to appear *righteous* (*dikaiosune*), i.e., "just." But keep in mind that those who portray themselves as a *servant of righteousness* will appear as clumsy to true believers. Such a demeanor stemming from an unbelieving heart lends itself to a legalistic kind of *righteousness*—an air of superiority often lacking in graciousness toward others.

The principle of this Pauline passage is a near twin to the principle of Jesus' parable of the *tares* in Matthew 13 but what is additionally revealed in our 2 Corinthians passage is this evidence of a self-righteous, arrogant, "holier-than-thou" spirit. Remember, *tares* exist alongside; they are masqueraders, but if you look carefully and long enough, protruding out from underneath that mask is a stinking air of superiority.

D. THEY FALSIFY SALVATION (GALATIANS 1:8–9)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

Whereas the former passages describe somewhat incognito *tares*, Galatians is descriptive of fully flowered *tares*. The big problem of the church at Galatia when Paul wrote the Galatian epistle was that false teachers had recently engulfed it. More specifically, the now-in-bloom



false teaching was about salvation: the now-in-charge *tares* pridefully taught that salvation was not achieved by faith in Christ alone but, in part, by keeping the OT law (cf. Acts 15:1–9)! Perhaps the *tares* had cloaked themselves for years, making little to do about their doctrinal differences until the time was just right.

Tares do not believe that salvation is by grace alone in Christ alone; deep down they believe in their self-pride that a person can save himself via his self-righteous acts. But here's the problem: when salvation is not based in grace, that person's treatment of others will not be based in grace. Grace is a foreign concept to *tares*. It follows, therefore, that *tares* tend to possess a stunted or non-existent vocabulary and demeanor regarding God's grace and mercy and personally lack humble praise in adoration of the Savior Who, to them, is not the Author of salvation (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3–11). They believe their salvation is based on personal performance versus His sacrifice, and they arrogantly judge others accordingly.

E. THEY BATTLE INCORRECTLY (EPHESIANS 6:12)

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Tares desire believers to be consumed by fights other than spiritual ones. In the above passage, the Apostle Paul dialls in as to what is the *ultimate* battle in this world: it is a spiritual battle first and foremost.

The discerning Christian public servant realizes his or her need to become

spiritually mature so as to be a player in the outcome of a spiritual battle.

If the ultimate battle is a spiritual one, then the one who is spiritually immature or spiritually unarmed cannot effectively fight in it (cf. Ephesians 6:13–20). Knowing political issues is one thing; being able to persuade, speak, and build personal relationships in order to fight for correct policy is another. But such issues are not the ultimate battle in this life. Spiritual maturity is the transcendent quality necessary for spiritual battle in the ultimate sense of the fight—a fight that lightweights, i.e., babes in Christ, cannot effectively participate in (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1–2). Keep in mind, the spiritual battle is where both the eternal destiny for souls and the cultural wars of today are ultimately won or lost.

Spiritual maturity and a biblical understanding inform the believer that satanic lying, deception, disguise, and false moral superiority are forever in constant play in the nation's capital and in the public servant's state and home community. To think otherwise is to say that the profound and insightful truths revealed in Ephesians 6:12 do not exist in the Bible. What is it that you believe in this regard?

Struggle (pale) means “hand-to-hand combat.” Only the spiritually discerning can see through all the fallaciousness of the physical world, deal with it effectively, and not be deceived or side-tracked by the Devil. Again, *tares* would have believers be improperly focused and consumed by fights other than the ultimate one—the battle for the souls of men, where the victory is ultimately won or lost. This very cunning tactic of Satan is designed to distract you from what is most important! You must keep in mind and be obedient to this great and informative passage: *our struggle is not against flesh and blood!*

F. THEY ARE SENSUAL

(2 PETER 2:1–2)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.

The sixth characteristic of *tares* is revealed in this Petrine passage. Aptly here, Peter uses the synonyms of *false prophets* and *false teachers* to illustrate *tares*.

In this passage, Peter underscores many of the truths previously identified in this outline by Jesus, and human Bible authors, including Luke and Paul, relative to ascertaining the existence and characteristics of *tares*. But here he adds another indication: they *follow their sensuality* (*aselgeia*). These are those, he says, who are *among you*, indicating yet again that *tares* will be a part of your everyday life. This may be a legislator on the floor who claims to be a “Christian”—but is known for his or her sexual license. Beware! Scripture is helping you to see people for who they really are! Don't be fooled! Not everyone who names the name of Christ is the real deal, my friend.

Furthermore, Peter says in this passage, these are those who *malign the truth*. Think of this descriptor in terms of sub-committee hearings where a “clergyman” or a fellow “christian” colleague testifies to some bill and rips Scripture from context in order to “prove” their point, therein *maligning the way of truth*.

There are *tares* among you in your home church, and there are *tares* among you in your committee rooms!

Tares are Satan’s tools to lead you astray and to lead our nation into the pit of hell. Fake clergymen who speak in opposition to clear biblical precepts may deceive your colleagues, but will they deceive you? As a true believer, do you have the spiritual maturity to not only identify but also admonish them? Can you, like Jesus, see through their various forms of deception? One glaring evidence herein is their *sensuality*, and can you say *Get behind Me, Satan?* Can you bring light to darkness? Can you arrest a Scripture twister and set the record straight? Herein are indications of your own spiritual maturity—or lack thereof.

G. THEY ARE NEVER WRONG (1 JOHN 1:8)

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

In addition to point number 3 (**Tares** Are Arrogant), there is a similar but heightened form of hubris that is evidence of false believers: they’re never wrong! The heresy being addressed in 1 John by the Apostle John was *gnosticism*—a first-century movement whose purveyors believed they had a higher knowledge than Christians. Characteristic of these types of weeds in the Church is a condescending superiority of sinless self-righteousness. Cloaked in Christian garb, some **tares** are so arrogant they don’t think they’re ever wrong! John provides us with that discerning insight in this nifty passage. If you know someone who names the name of Christ but is never wrong, be warned: watch out! They’re probably not the real deal! Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, true believers are always characterized by humility and are willing to be corrected. They’ll ask you your opinion and listen.

H. THEY ARE CHURCH LEADERS (3 JOHN 9–11)

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, he himself does not receive the brethren, either, and he forbids those who desire to do so and puts them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

This very powerful passage represents the crux reason this brief letter called 3 John is included by the Holy Spirit in the canon of Scripture. (All else in this short epistle is redundant to other NT teachings, except for this powerful insight.) **Diotrephes** (v. 9) was the head of this church (umm, not Christ!). It is apparent that he unilaterally ran the show. Even though he was the church leader, John labels him as *evil*, someone who *has not seen God*. In other words, **Diotrephes** was a **tare** in full bloom—not a believer. Evidently, he had sneakily worked his way into the leadership of the ministry!

Watch out for controlling legislators, pastors, or board members of Christian organizations who are *accusatory* and always must be right, never wrong (per 1 John 1:8). A trademark of **tares** is that they will attempt to *put them* (you) *out!* Watch out! John wants you to know they’re disingenuous, unsaved (even though they pretend to be) and want to oversee everything “spiritual”! Again, per the introduction, do not be surprised by all this—*false Christian leaders are normative in the Church Age!* *Many churches—even denominations—are led by tares!* Be spiritually smart, mature and always on guard!

I. THEY TITLE THEMSELVES (REVELATION 2:2)

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false.”

Note that the **tares** at the church at Ephesus (to whom this passage is addressed) had given themselves the title of *apostles*. But Jesus (here quoted above in and from the book of Revelation) sets the record straight: *“and they are not....”* The Apostle John, recording herein what Jesus said to him through an angel (cf. Revelation 1:1), is commanding the Ephesian church for having had the spiritual discernment and courage to deal with **tares** (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20) who, among the other things we’ve learned about them, give themselves fancy titles (and I might add, oftentimes fancy garb and robes!). This passage is a good concluding aspect to suggest that every mature believer should have the training, spiritual discernment, and courage to do likewise: “You call yourself an apostle? You are not!”

IV. THE INSIGHTS TO INTERNALIZE REGARDING TARES

Parallel to the previous passages, what follows are the respective biblical gauges that in summary fashion unveil the presence of the believer’s enemy.

A. THEY BREAK LAWS

The takeaway principle of Matthew 7 is this: *You will know them by their fruits.*

We only need to taste the flavor of a tare to realize it is not wheat.

If someone professes to be a believer



yet habitually takes license with man's and God's laws and is unremorseful and impenitent, every biblical reason exists to doubt the genuineness of his or her profession of faith. Such actions are not commensurate with the indwelling Holy Spirit in the life of a true believer.

B. THEY PRETEND

The takeaway principle of Acts 5 is this: **tares** will mimic the wheat as closely as possible before blooming in order to outwardly appear similar and gain a following. Check their story; do your own research if you have doubts. Is there a pattern of lying?

C. THEY POSSESS AN AIR OF MORAL SUPERIORITY

The takeaway principle of 2 Corinthians 11 is this: in their attempts to disguise themselves and come alongside, they have no understanding of the concept of grace. Since they cannot imitate this quality, develop a keen discernment for the absence of self-deprecation. **Tares** often project moral superiority and lack basic kindness.

D. THEY ARE LEGALISTS

The takeaway point of Galatians 1 is this: akin to the three previous evidences above, **tares** have a legalistic (versus grace) paradigm of how one goes to heaven. When quizzed, they are found relying on self-effort, i.e., their own good works. They not only possess an aberrant orthopraxy (licentiousness) but an aberrant orthodoxy (legalism).

E. THEY POSSESS AN IMPROPER EMPHASIS

The takeaway principle of Ephesians 6 is this: **tares** fight the wrong battles and possess no real interest in changing the hearts of people through the love of Christ. Theirs is a fascination with outward change with no real (God only can

give this) understanding of the concept of or need for inward change. They do not understand the gospel! Nor are they interested in evangelism and discipleship, rather power.

F. THEY ARE SENSUAL

The takeaway point of 2 Peter 1 is this: know from this passage and the authority of God's Word that **tares** are sexually out of control in their private if not public life. This identifier always comes out with time, if not immediately.

G. THEY CLAIM TO BE SINLESS

The takeaway point of 1 John is this: **tares** are not humble about their personal sin; they deny it. They are never wrong. The heretical Gnostics described in 1 John possessed a holier-than-thou attitude; accordingly, latent sinlessness acts as an identifying moniker of a **tare**. Are they ever humble in their demeanor? Do they ever admit they make mistakes?

H. THEY ARE CONTROLLING AND ACCUSATORY

The takeaway point of 3 John is this: **tares** tend to seek control and are unrelenting in their false accusations of true believers. In their slander, they bring about divisiveness. Stay away from power-hungry, overly controlling people, *especially if they name the name of Christ*; such qualities are not becoming of true godliness. As they seek and maintain power, **tares** will bite and injure those naïve to their ways and means.

I. THEY WEAR SELF-IMPOSED LABELS

The takeaway from Revelation 2:2 is this: have the courage to call out fake spiritual leaders. Be neither impressed nor intimidated by their self-titling or

fancy garb; in your mind, these trappings should only serve to indicate their pride and sense of self-importance. In reality, they are nothing but **tares**!

V. SUMMARY

Any of the above evidences by themselves are not necessarily indicative of the presence of a **tare**, as every believer struggles with sin to some degree and from time to time. However, when they're all continually present, beware! I pray that you, as a believer, can now better ascertain who the **tares** are that Satan has put in the path of your life. Will the **tares** be successful in their demonic mission of discouraging and derailing you? Can you now better discern their presence and purpose? It follows that you must identify their existence and purpose in order to keep your distance. Again, the believer's battle is a spiritual one, and he needs to see things from the perspective of Ephesians 6:12 (as quoted in and throughout this Bible study). *Our struggle is not against flesh and blood....*

In Revelation 2:2, the Apostle John records the fact that the Ephesian church identified and put such persons (Hymenaeus and Alexander) out of their midst (1 Timothy 1:20); they were those who called themselves "apostles" but were not! While you and I might not have the luxury of doing something as formal as calling someone out for their pretense, we can be wise by identifying and keeping distance.

Lastly, are you a **tare**? Are these previous descriptive characteristics indicative of you?

Second Corinthians 13:5 states, *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?*



Nine Characteristics of Tares—The Believer’s Enemy

Resist the urge to dismiss my plea to examine your heart on this matter. There are some in office who crow that they are spiritually mature while they attend only tare-led groups and avoid genuine in-depth Bible studies where the Word of God is regularly taught with accuracy. Search your heart and ask the Holy Spirit if this might be you.

Furthermore, God doesn’t call genuine believers to the capital to refrain from Christian fellowship and to be independent of one another. Such is in direct conflict with Hebrew 10:25 which states, *Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near*. Don’t be like some in the capitol who strut like a peacock and fan their plumage, positioning themselves as mature believers while at the same time avoiding *assembling together* with other believers that God has called into office.

In fact, the sin of (what I will term) “believer independence”—not associating with others in the body of Christ—harms Christ’s witness in the capital per John 17:23: *In them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me*. It is Christ’s witness in the capital that is most essential and foundational to seeing unsaved Members come to Christ! By forsaking your assembly with other believers, you are hindering the otherwise powerful witness for Christ that we could be having here!

It follows that it is incongruous and disingenuous to insinuate personal “spiritual maturity” back in your state or district, while at the same time, when in the capital, you fail to associate in *unity* with other genuine believers via fellowship, prayer, and serious Bible study on a regular basis. Either you are spiritually mature and in fellowship with other genuine believers, or you are spiritually immature because you aren’t. As a genuine Christian Member, you can’t have it both ways! Those whom the Bible designates as having “spiritual maturity” are those who are obedient to Hebrews 10:25 and John 17:23!

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1. Galatians 5:19–21 lists characteristics that are in opposition to the fruits of the Spirit. Accordingly, familiarity too with this passage greatly aids one in discerning the existence of tares, i.e., *immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these...* **Tares** manifest these things and others while at the same time verbally stating they are “Christians.”