

# Scrupulosity

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

Psalm 86

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-30

I don't know many card tricks, but I do know one that goes along with the parable of the wheat and the weeds. The red cards represent the weeds and the black cards represent the wheat. During the trick, the cards are all shuffled together, yet, at the end of the trick they "magically" get separated (red/black)!

Many years ago, I was demonstrating the trick to the school kids at Immaculate Conception in Fort Smith when I messed it up. I dramatically told them the story of the wheat and the weeds while using the playing cards to illustrate the story. However, at the end of the trick, as I fanned the cards for them to see, the cards were *not* separated red from black. Instead, they were still all mixed together! As the kids stared at me in confusion, I remember thinking, "Will they be confused about that Scripture story for the rest of their lives because of me?"

The parable of the wheat and the weeds is not meant to be confusing; but rather, it describes a very practical scenario in the ancient world. In the first century, there were Roman laws that forbade the sabotaging of crops by planting weeds. The most destructive weed for crops back then was darnel, which is a poisonous plant with roots that intertwine themselves with the roots of other plants.

This very practical parable is a lesson for us about the Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling us that while His Kingdom grows in this world, the kingdom of darkness also grows. Rather than trying to weed-out the bad, we should focus on the good, trusting that God is ultimately in charge. We can apply this parable not only to our world, but also to our individual lives. Within each of us, there is a daily battle between the Kingdom of God, seen in virtue, and kingdom of darkness, seen in sin. This parable reminds us that our job is not to violently rip sin out of our lives, but rather, to nurture virtue while trusting in the forgiveness and healing of God. While this sounds fairly easy, it can be particularly difficult for people who struggle with scrupulosity.

Scrupulous people are so intensely focused on the sins in their lives, that they often don't acknowledge the Kingdom of God. They see only the weeds of their sins, not the wheat of God's grace. Scrupulous people tend to frame their lives in the context of their sins rather than in the context of their relationship with God. Their violent attempts to root sin out of their lives often causes more harm than good, much like attempts to remove weeds from among wheat. This does not mean, of course, that we are supposed to apathetically ignore our sin, but rather, we are invited to keep our focus and attention on what is most important—God, who is Love and who has the power to forgive us and heal us.

Scrupulosity can be a serious obstacle in our spiritual growth. Here are some signs that a person is struggling with scrupulosity<sup>1</sup>—

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<sup>1</sup> I borrowed these from Fr. Don Miller's "Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous"

- We repeat sins in confession that we have already confessed because we doubt we confessed them sufficiently or completely.
- We confess sins that we think *might* be sins, even though we're not sure.
- We sometimes do our penance more than once out of fear that maybe previous attempts at doing the penance were not sufficient.
- We obsess over following various church teachings, such as the Eucharistic fast before Communion.
- We frequently question whether we're guilty of bad thoughts, desires, or feelings.
- We feel the compulsion to do general confessions of previously confessed sins because we still feel guilty.

While these do not completely describe how scrupulosity can manifest itself in our spiritual lives, they do help to give us a sense of whether we are letting sin consume our focus rather than Christ. Finding healing from scrupulosity begins the same way we find healing from *any* emotional and spiritual hurt—gently turning our attention to Christ's unconditional love for us. One of the great ways we can do this is by spending time in prayer each day reflecting on Scripture passages that teach us about the gentle, unconditional love the Christ has for us.

Rather than wasting our time and energy on trying to rip sin out of our lives, God invites us to let His love grow in our lives and to accept His forgiveness. Then, when He, the Lord of the Harvest, is ready, He will heal us of what we could not heal ourselves. Unlike my botched card trick, God will perfectly separate the weeds from the wheat in our lives.

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Read Matthew 6:25-34 and reflect on God's love for you.
- ✚ Here is the "Prayer for the Scrupulous," read as if speaking to that scrupulous part of ourselves:

I behold the Christ in you.  
 I place you lovingly in the care of the Father.  
 I release you from all anxiety and concern.  
 I see you as God sees you, a spiritual person,  
 created in the image of God,  
 endowed with qualities and abilities that make you needed,  
 and important--not only to me but to God and His plan.  
 I believe that you have the understanding you need to choose life.  
 I bless you.  
 I have faith in you.  
 I behold Jesus in you.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from the Liguori Press website: <http://mission.liguori.org/newsletters/scrupulosity.htm>