

An enemy has done this. An enemy of God has sown the seeds of sin and death throughout the broad field of the Lord's good creation. He is your enemy, and he hates you, and he seeks to destroy you, because he hates the Lord your God, your Creator and Redeemer, who loves you and has given you life. That is why the devil storms against you, determined to let you have no peace within or without. Mortal man cannot redeem himself, and he cannot preserve or save the world. It withers and fades, perishes and crumbles into dust all around him, as he himself returns to dust.

Not only is everything dying, but the devil stirs up anguish and pain and rebellion. The rain not only waters the earth, but floods and drowns and crushes and washes away. Fire not only gives warmth and light, but burns and consumes and destroys. The earth itself is not stable but trembles and ruptures, sometimes spewing hot lava, sometimes swallowing whole towns into the depths.

Your body, too, your flesh and blood, your parents and children, all have been sown with the devil's seeds of sin and death. What God has raised up from the dust of the earth, created holy and good by His Word and Spirit, the devil attacks with great wrath and deadly fury. On the one hand he sneaks in with subtle cunning, like a serpent slipping through the cracks, and then, on the other hand, he is suddenly a fire-breathing dragon, a monstrous serpent with fangs like steel that pierce your flesh and wound you to the core of your being.

There are the hurts, the wounds, the scars, the bruises, scrapes and broken bones. There are the breakdowns and failures of one bodily system or another, or one after another, robbing you of freedom, of dignity, of pleasure, and finally of life. There are cancers that eat up your flesh, and diseases that eat away at your mind; illnesses that poison your blood or stop your heart.

An enemy has done this: an enemy of God, who hates you because he hates your Creator. And so great is his hatred, his anger, his wickedness and spite, that he is not at all content to attack your body of flesh and blood, your health and well-being, and the whole world of nature.

As the devil warps and ruins God's good gifts of creation, so does he manipulate and misuse God's good gifts of language. Because the devil is no god, but a creature himself, he can only steal and destroy what God has made and given. He whispers and murmurs at your ear, unnerving and distressing you. He poses questions that raise doubts and fears in your heart and mind. He plants assumptions and accusations against your neighbors, so that love itself is broken, wounded and destroyed.

He sows in you the seeds of evil, like unto his own: arrogance and pride, envy and jealousy, rage and resentment. He strokes your ego and stokes your passions, but then sends shafts of guilt and shame deep into your heart and soul, so that you cannot stand but you reel and fall like a drunk.

He plants weeds that pose as virtues, masquerading in self-righteousness, as though they were grains and fruits and healthy foods. Thus, He sows gossip and retribution and stringiness, harsh words, unreasonable demands, destructive criticisms, and party spirit. He sows the seeds of hurt in the guise of help.

He sows the seeds of competition, which leads to jealousy, which leads in turn to resentment and bitterness, then to anger, arguments and fights, and finally to death. Even brother against brother, so caustic are the devil's weeds. He sows the seeds of covetous lust, which leads to fornication and adultery, then to betrayal and deception, and again to death.

And where he has first sown such seeds of wickedness, he follows with the weeds of accusation, condemnation, a guilty conscience, a troubled heart, a restless soul, and the terror of punishment. The devil haunts you with such fearful specters, and he taunts you with such threats, scattering his seeds into every nook and cranny of your mortal life.

An enemy has done this, and his devastation fills you with dismay, or with desperation. You cast about frantically, and there is hardly any wheat to be seen or to be found anywhere. Instead there is this thick and overgrown jungle of deadly weeds. What may have looked like wheat at first, or like a beautiful flower or good fruit, has turned out to be a tangle of thorns and thistles, brambles and brush, deadly nightshade, and dangerous man-eating plants of every kind.

If you are not overwhelmed with hopeless despair by all of this, it might seem as though the remedy were obvious. Clearly, all of these weeds have to be removed — rooted out and destroyed, by whatever means necessary — or none of the wheat will survive.

So, then, you may wonder why the Lord does not do this; why He does not get busy and deal with the mess. Lots of people wonder about that very thing: Why does He allow so much evil in the world? Why doesn't He stop it, and get rid of it? Why won't He weed the garden already, instead of leaving it go and apparently not doing anything about it.

And when you haven't seen that kind of action that you're looking for, and you haven't received the answer or response you were hoping for, you may volunteer — like the earnest and eager servants in the parable — to do it yourself. Hacking and thrashing, ripping and pulling, picking at your neighbor, digging through the dirt, rooting out every suspect plant you can find. Pull out the machete, the flamethrower, the poison, whatever it takes.

That's some satisfying work and effort, isn't it? Because you can readily see the results, and so it's something that feels productive. Left and right you go at it, clearing a larger and larger patch of field all around you. And every time another weed peeks out of the ground, you pounce and remove it — almost like one of those first-person-shooter video games. If there's more and more collateral damage along the way, as you're caught up in the frenzy, and the wheat is rooted out along with the weeds, well, at least you're getting rid of the weeds.

Except that, every time you pause to catch your breath, or turn around, or go to sleep for awhile, the weeds keep coming back — because the enemy is still on the loose. What is more, your own efforts to root out the weeds have done as much or more harm to the wheat as the enemy himself, no matter what your good intentions may have been. And there is yet another problem you had not bargained on at first, one that you cannot fix or resolve. Not only are the weeds all around you, surrounding you on all sides, tangling your feet and tearing at your arms, but they have taken root within you, in your fallen flesh, deep within your heart and mind, in your sinful thoughts, words and actions.

If you can live with all the collateral damage to your neighbors, what are you going to do with yourself? Self-discipline is good and right — especially for your neighbor's sake! — but do not suppose that your self-discipline will get to the real heart of the matter. Your self-discipline may end up becoming self-mutilation and self-destruction, if you really go after all those weeds within you, and still you won't get them all. You can't. You'll do more harm than good if you would cleanse the field that way, and you won't uproot the weeds without undoing yourself altogether. Is the answer self-destruction, Satan may tempt. Don't believe it, and don't go there. That's another seed of Satan, a weed that will not save the wheat but only strangles it and kills it all the faster.

Why, then, does God not do something? Why does the Lord not cleanse the field and rescue the wheat? What is He waiting for? Can't He see that everything is out of control and getting worse all the time? Doesn't He care about His field and His wheat?

Yes, dear friend, He does care. He cares more deeply and far better than you can yet perceive or imagine. Be at peace, for that is why He waits with such patience and long-suffering. He is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, full of kindness, tender mercy and compassion. Therefore, He will not risk collateral damage. He will not uproot the weeds at the risk of the wheat. He will not uproot you, though you are full of weeds, because He loves you, and He is intent upon your life and salvation.

He has actually taken the curse of sin and death upon Himself. He has suffered thorns and thistles to crown and cover Him, the weeds to entangle Him, to choke and strangle and kill Him. He has not uprooted them at once, but He has returned Himself to the dust of the earth, and planted Himself in the ground like a Seed.

The Seed of the Woman, indeed, is bruised and beaten and bloodied by the devil's seed.

Yet, the Son of Man is not destroyed.

He is put to death and buried, yes, and with Him — in His Body of flesh and blood — the weeds are also put to death and buried. But He does not suffer corruption or decay. He is raised up from death and the grave. The weeds have all been done away with in His Self-sacrifice, but now He is raised all-glorious, immortal and imperishable. His Cross is proven to be the Tree of Life, His crucified and risen Body the First Fruits of a New Creation. His holy and precious Blood has been poured out to heal and cleanse the earth, atoning for the sins of all mankind, redeeming creation from the bondage of death, and reconciling the whole world to God.

This is how He thwarts and defeats His enemy, cleanses His field, and preserves each and every grain of His wheat. He gets to the heart of the problem, and He bears the curse, the consequences, the inevitable hurt and pain and death of sin in His own flesh, so that the devil is undone from the inside out. Satan can no longer hold your sin against you, because Jesus has removed it from you and suffered all its sting and received all its poison. Satan can no longer scare you with death and the grave, because Jesus has already been there, done that, and returned to life and glory at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

So the devil's seed is rendered impotent and sterile. Whatever weeds it may produce will neither destroy the wheat nor force the Landowner's hand. For the harvest is sure and certain, already in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wheat will be gathered, none of it lost, into the Lord's granary, and the righteous will shine — with His perfect righteousness — in the Kingdom of His God and Father.

That is the Lord's long-suffering patience — with the fallen world, with His weed-infested field, with you and your weeds, and with your neighbor, too. He's not wringing His hands in worry, nor twiddling His thumbs (unsure of what to do), nor simply hoping for the best. He waits in mercy and peace, having already resolved the assault upon His field and His wheat, and as surely as the Father has raised His Son, so shall He raise you in the harvest at the end of the age.

That is your patience, too, although it is hidden beneath the Cross and crowded by weeds. The Resurrection of Christ is your sure and certain hope — not just wishful thinking, but as steadfast and true as the Lord Himself — even though you do not yet see Him or His Resurrection. For now you wait upon the Lord, who shall indeed preserve your life and save you. And you are able to be patient with your neighbor, resisting the urge to pick and pull at his or her weeds, because the Lord is likewise so patient with you. You and your neighbor's sins are all forgiven.

In the meantime, despite the enemy's best efforts to sabotage the field and destroy the wheat, even the weeds must serve the gracious purposes of God the Lord. For the harder they press, the more they weigh you down, the tighter they choke and strangle, the more you are put to death with Christ, unto repentance. His Cross, looking to all the world like the biggest baddest weed of all, crucifies and buries you with Him. Daily it returns you to your Baptism, so that daily you die to sin and every evil.

But so, too, because it is the Cross of Christ, it does not destroy you, but it brings you — by the way of repentance — through death into faith and life, into the prayer and intercession of Christ and His Spirit. You call upon His Name, and you are heard and answered. In this way you are exercised in faith; you learn to hope and trust in God, and such hope will not be disappointed.

The weeds are daunting, to be sure, and all around you, within and without, they confront you with your own futility. They choke and strangle and put to death all your self-reliance, all your obvious solutions, and all your strategies of self-righteousness. Well and good that you should thus despair of yourself.

But the devil with his bag of evil seeds could not contend with, the Son of Man and His good Seed of the Gospel. The enemy has more than met his match in Him, who is the true and only God — in human flesh and blood like yours. He has planted Himself in faith and love, in peace and hope, in the midst of the devil's overgrown jungle of weeds, and up from the dust of the earth He has risen, for you and for all, forever and ever.

The Lord's Cross is your Redemption, His Resurrection is your righteousness, and His very Body and Blood are the First Fruits of your own bodily resurrection unto the life everlasting. Your sins forgiven, what you now hope for and wait upon shall be fully revealed in all its grace and glory, far exceeding all the suffering of this present time.

In the Name + of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.