



One Man's Perspective

JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Some people sow wheat. Others sow tares. Tares, once planted in a person's mind, will stay there until they are removed. This is the reason that confession and apology are absolute necessities once a Christian has scattered poison about some else.

Eric Segal had his young man say in *Love Story*, "Love means you never have to say 'I'm sorry.'" That sounds sweet and sentimental, but it is not what the Bible teaches. Love means you *always* have to say, "I'm sorry."

Sometimes we prematurely judge people. That's not so bad for we can always change our minds. The problem arises when we share our prejudice with others. Later, when we learn we were mistaken, we not only have to ask forgiveness of the person we pre-judged, but true love will compel us to go to all those we blabbed to and set the record straight.

How much easier it would be to keep our mouths shut until we know the facts.

Or look at another situation. Perhaps a brother is genuinely wrong. Perhaps he is teaching false doctrine, stealing from the offering plates, or committing adultery. We discern his error and publicly (or privately, to "just a few") denounce him. Surely, we say, that is proper.

But then the very next week the Holy Spirit convicts him and he genuinely repents. Only he is still not free. Why? Because the word WE spoke is still making the rounds, passed from person to person, growing all the time.

This is the danger of passing judgment on another child of God, or sharing some partial revelation when we don't know all the facts. The only way tares can be removed is for the person who planted them to go back and pluck them out — briar by briar.

A man's opinions of his neighbours is an eternally reliable index of his own character. At no time does one's real self become more evident than when he is out sowing tares, or sitting at home on his folding judgment stool giving opinions.

Any psychologist will tell us that the things we tend to be most bitter about in the action of others are the very things which we ourselves are most tempted to do. Even clear water, when flushed through a dirty filter, comes out impure.

A Nigerian Christian put it this way: "There may be a hundred things you know about a person — all of them bad. But there may be just one thing you don't know, which if you did know, would completely change your opinion."

Remember, the person you sow tares about may be carrying an unknown burden, he may be sick and in pain, he may be ignorant of his job, he may have come a long way already even though he doesn't measure up to your standards of righteousness. Or, most tragic, he may be on the verge of changing and it will be *YOUR* tares which choke out the wheat in his life.

Unlike wheat, which grows gradually, tares can't wait to spring out of the ground and multiply. Last month I was teaching at a writers conference sponsored by *Guideposts* magazine in New York. About 30 people were present at the dinner table when one of our editors passed the tares. He started one of those whispered rumours around the table about the magazine's distinguished publisher, Norman Vincent Peale.

"Dr Peale has kidneys," he whispered.

The rumour flew around the table, mouth to ear. The fact that some people had their mouths full of food and others were partially deaf made the results hilarious. One person heard, "Dr Peale has kidney stones." Another heard, "Dr Peale has just had a kitten." Someone heard, "Mrs Peale has been kidnapped," and the final tare turned out to be, "Dr Peale goes out each morning and drowns baby kittens."

There are enough people planting tares without the children of the King joining the crowd.

An old preacher of another generation used to say: "Be kind to one another; we're all carrying heavy burdens."