

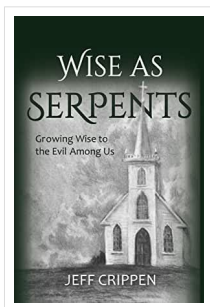
Wise as Serpents

26 Messages *Clearly Explaining What Went Wrong* with Witness Lee's "[The Lords Recovery](#)" Movement

Pastor Jeff Crippen's Website: <https://unholycharade.com/recommended-sermon-series/>

A Practical Theology of Evil

This 26-part sermon series was given by Pastor Jeff Crippen at Christ Reformation Church in 2015-2016. These talks offer a practical theology of evil and clearly expose how evil will operate, especially so within a religious setting. The teaching method was not primarily intended to produce an academic, theoretical, nor philosophical treatise, but rather to encourage an experiential and real life (yet profoundly spiritual) walk by the footsteps of Christ's people - those being sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt 10:16). This series recommends many practical truths for consideration by genuine followers of Jesus Christ who, whether they fully realize it or not, actually **DO** have a roaring lion on the prowl seeking to devour them.



Update 2020: We have published a 300+ page book based on this sermon series. Here is the affiliate link to the [paperback version](#). A [Kindle version](#) is also available. For more information, the book was first introduced [here](#) on the blog.

Links to messages and sermon notes will be provided on subsequent pages.

[MendingMinistry](#) – February 1, 2022

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About

About Pastor Jeff Crippen

I have been a pastor since 1983, having been a police officer for 14 years before that. In 1993 I came as pastor to Christ Reformation Church in Tillamook, Oregon. We live-stream weekly Bible studies and sermons, and write at our online sites:

- unholycharade.com
- lightfordarktimes.com
- sermonaudio.com/crc
- facebook.com/Lightfordarktimes
- Youtube at [Light for Dark Times channel](https://youtube.com/LightforDarkTimes)

In the early years of my pastoral ministry (really in the first 25 years!), abusive men and women were almost always in the pews. These were people, both men and women, who saw themselves through a mindset of entitlement to power and control. They were the “Diotrephes” (see 3 John) who lusted to be “first” and punished anyone who stood in their way through various abusive tactics.

I did not understand it for many years, but this abuse affected me so deeply that eventually when someone outside my own family was kind to me, it seemed like a foreign, strange thing. I ultimately realized that I had been isolated and robbed of any confidence that other people would want to have a relationship with me. When I finally told someone my story, they affirmed me and then said, “you and your wife are incredibly wounded people.” I still did not understand what he meant at the time, but years later as I researched the topic, those words came back to me and made sense. As I learned about the tactics of abusers and their effect on the church, I began to share my insights.

Eventually I preached a sermon series about domestic abuse which I originally called, "[The Psychology of Sin.](#)" Reactions were mixed, to put it mildly. They ranged from extreme gratification and excitement to anger that I would even mention this subject.

This sermon series was posted [online at Sermon Audio](#), where it remains available to this day. More people heard it than I would have imagined. That series became the foundation for my first book, [A Cry for Justice](#). Three more years of hearing people's personal testimonies and coming to even greater understanding of the nature and dynamics of abuse and its effects on the victims resulted in a second book, [Unholy Charade: Unmasking the Domestic Abuser in the Church](#).

I have interacted with many abuse victims, their friends and relatives, their pastors and fellow church members (very few pastors want to hear about this subject), and others. Most of these victims are Christians and as such their abusers also claim to be Christians. The favorite chosen facade of these "Christian" abusers is one of pious, saintly, eminent "Christianity." They cruelly abuse their families day after day behind the scenes and yet show up at church on Sunday playing their chosen roll which I call the "unholy charade." They are the "poor pitiable victim" of a difficult wife, or the suffering, patient saint, a man of God who is a model of servanthood to others, and so on.

It is my settled conclusion that these "Christian" abusers are the most hard-hearted of any hard-hearted sinners to be found. It would not surprise me at all when we stand before the Lord at the final judgment to learn that these wicked ones were the "[Esau](#)" for whom repentance was impossible, so knowingly did they trample underfoot the blood of Christ (see Hebrews 6:4ff, 12:15-17).

As I have worked to expose abusers and validate their victims, there have been many attacks – mostly from within the visible church. But in over 38 years now of pastoral ministry I have never experienced anyone more grateful or enthusiastic than these abuse survivors who have endured so much evil. Evil not only at the hands of their abuser, but in their churches where they should have been able to find help and rescue.

They are disbelieved, discounted, their abuse minimized, while their abuser is enabled, considered to be a fellow Christian who has issues that through patience and forgiveness and counseling can surely be “fixed.” When victims do not go along with this fiction, they are punished, ostracized, and even excommunicated from the church.

In the posts on this blog, you will find that I repeat these two points which I consider to be fact and wisdom. Many people bristle when they hear me state them. Here they are:

1. *Abusers never change.*
2. *A marriage to an abuser does not need to be fixed. It needs to be ended.*

Sound too harsh to you? Do those statements seem to go against everything you have been taught in your church about salvation, forgiveness, repentance, marriage, and divorce? Well, before you click “exit” and walk away, I encourage you to stick with us and read on as [we post weekly articles](#) that, I believe, will prove these points and more. Perhaps, just perhaps, we who have been raised in local evangelical churches have not always been taught the truth of Scripture as our teachers claimed.

May the Lord use this ministry and bless it to the ends of exposing the Unholy Charade and setting captives free.

Jeff Crippen

swordtrowel@gmail.com

**Sermon
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01

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 1 – Introduction)

December 6, 2015

Sermon Text: Matthew 10:16-17a

Scripture Reading: Matthew 10

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men..."

(Matthew 10:16-17a)

In the years prior to World War II, as Germany under Hitler was re-arming in violation of the treaty that ended WWI, naivety, arrogance, and a fantasy view of world peace almost destroyed England and her allies. Hitler's efforts were not unnoticed, but the warnings given were not heeded for the most part until the cost of

stopping this terror rose to what was ultimately paid – millions of lives lost. One exception to this naivety was Sir Winston Churchill who repeatedly warned his nation of the impending threat. Few would listen. But one of the things thing Churchill was able to do was to participate in efforts to find a way to detect enemy airplanes while they were still a distance away from England. Germany was obviously building its air force and this is where the real threat would come from.

Churchill noted that when people truly perceive a threat and set their minds to devising a way to meet that threat, incredible things can be invented. And so it was with this thing called RADAR which proved to be a life saver for England in coming years. A small group of scientists and leaders spared no effort to perfect this system of radio waves. Why? *Because they saw the threat. They knew the threat was real. You might say, the enemy was on their radar.*

Largely, far and wide, the church of our day does not have *evil* on her radar screen. Why? Because the evil is not

there? Of course not. It is there in droves. But evil is not on our radar because *most Christians do not want to admit of its existence among them.* They have a fantasy worldview. They talk a lot about Satan in many cases, but believe that he is surely anywhere but in their own circles and definitely he would never visit their church.

This new sermon series that we are embarking upon, *Wise as Serpents*, is a *practical* theology of evil. By that adjective, I mean that my purpose is to expose evil in its presence and *practice*. To show what it looks like and who its agents are. I also mean that our method is not primarily to produce an academic, theoretical, nor philosophical treatise, but rather an *experiential* and real life (yet profoundly spiritual) walk in the footsteps of Christ's people sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves. It is *practical* truth for *practicing* followers of Jesus Christ who, whether they fully realize it or not, actually *do* have a roaring lion on the prowl seeking to devour them.

How can I best introduce this topic and demonstrate the vital need for us to understand it? Let me try by giving some real illustrations and then considering the typical response to these things. Many of you here in this church have heard some of these examples before, but we will repeat

them now for the benefit of others who, hopefully, will listen to or read this series.

How Evil Comes to Church

As a new pastor, I had been a police officer on Friday in 1993 and by Monday I was the pastor of a small church way up in the mountains of Montana. I had 14 years experience in police work, so I was no novice when it came to dealing with man's wickedness. The problem was, what I dealt with as a police officer was for the most part *outward, visible evil that violated criminal laws*. You could see it. Robbery. Assault. Murder. Drunk driving, and so on. But when it came to the evil we so often face in the church (or even in other relationships in our lives) I was a novice. It would be over 25 years before my eyes were really opened to the nature of this evil, what its goals are, and the tactics it uses to destroy Christ's people. Here is how evil came to every single one of the churches I have pastured, and one example comes from another church that I have had firsthand experience with:

- A man and his wife profess to be Christians. He is on the church board and is well thought of in the community. Over time, in weekly Bible studies, he opposes the idea of God's perfect holiness

and how we must be perfectly holy in order to be in His presence. When his wife is ill, he takes the pastor aside the next week and says “you are not fit to be a pastor. When we are sick we expect you to visit us.” This man later runs off with another man’s wife.

- A man and his wife move into the community, profess to be Christians, and become active in the church. After two years he calls a secret meeting together to air his complaints about the pastor, and specifically about the subject of the sermons (a series on the Gospel of John). This group invites the pastor and his wife to the fellow’s house for “lunch” and the women ask the pastor’s wife to go for a walk. After they leave, this man and his group begin to criticize and accuse the pastor of not being “available” to them. The ring leader pauses occasionally to read Bible verses and say prayers. When his charges are rejected, he leads 20 people out of that small church.
- Rick is a young single man in his 20’s who craves to work in youth ministry. He frequently invites younger boys to go camping with him. Rick is actually molesting

the boys and when he is found out *years* later, he kills himself with a rifle just before the police arrived to arrest him. The pastor had warned the church board members about Rick, but they did not believe him.

- Linda is the church choir director, skilled in music and a performing pianist. She refuses to work together with the pastor or a worship team and announces that this “ministry” is her own. Linda holds her power by letting everyone know that if she doesn’t get what she wants she will burst out in anger, storm out of the room, and threaten to quit. It has worked well for her for over 10 years, including throwing tantrums right before the worship service where many people could see her.
- Brook leads a women’s Bible study in her home. She is accountable to no one in regard to what she teaches, even though she is a church member and so are most of the women in that study. When the pastor asks her what she is planning to use as study material in the new year, Brook angrily responds “this is my ministry, it has nothing to do with the church, and you can just stay out of it.”

- Gary is regarded as the finest example of Christian fatherhood and husbandry in the whole church. He quotes Bible verses often, teaches a children's class on Sundays, and is constantly inviting people to his home (especially new people in the church). Gary loves to "disciple" people and he can point to numbers of men in the church who he has met with one on one for years. Gary holds a leadership position in the church as well. But Gary is a person the pastor and a few others have never been comfortable around. Gary is very quick to accuse and criticize them, causing them great discouragement. It will be years and years before the full extent of Gary's efforts to destroy the church ministry are exposed and even then he will take his followers with him who believe that Gary has been treated terribly by the church leaders.
- George has enjoyed power and prestige in the church for years. George is the "go to" guy. Most church members view George as the pillar of that church and doubt that it could ever survive without him. George is the board chairman and virtually everything must be approved by

him before it can happen. When George is called on the carpet for his abuse of power and control at the last congregational meeting, George storms out of the board meeting in a rage. Eventually he will do the same thing at the close of a Sunday worship service, unleashing an angry barrage of accusations against the pastor, then exiting the sanctuary after his tantrum.

- Randy came to the church some years back, telling the pastor he was considering suicide and asking for help. The pastor befriended him, but as years went by the pastor noticed some troubling signs in Randy. Randy liked filthy jokes. Randy was a pro at maintaining "believable deniability" which permitted him to say and do things which were inappropriate (most of which had sexual undertones). Ultimately, after being confronted with these things by the pastor and another board member, Randy called a secret meeting in one of the church members' homes to discuss his "concerns" with the church and the pastor.
- One Sunday the pastor visited the young married group's morning class. The leaders, Bob and Angie (husband and wife) were

sitting on opposite sides of the classroom. Bob started off the class by announcing that he had a “confession” to make. Angie, arms crossed, stared at him. It seems that Bob and Angie had had an argument the night before. When the pastor suggested that Bob and Angie should work this matter out between themselves rather than airing it before the entire class, they refused to stop. Others in the class said “yes, this is really good. We need transparency and accountability as Christians.” Church members continued to regard Bob and Angie as model Christians. In fact, they were a couple in bondage to patterns of sin who had no business being in any ministry position in the church.

- Jack and Gail were members of the church. Some years back, Jack had been caught having a homosexual relationship with a man who had AIDS, and who would eventually die from that ailment. Jack and Gail continued to live together in separate bedrooms, and one day announced that they had “led the other man to the Lord and invited him to church” where he sat in the pew together with them. Many regarded this as a fine example of Christian charity.

- Jim and Rhonda were “preeminent Christians” who sacrificially and zealously devoted their money and energies to youth ministry. They had done so for years. When they came to the small church in their new community, everyone was excited and soon the pastor and others were involved helping Jim and Rhonda “reach young people for the Lord.” Soon, it was apparent that in order to work with Jim and Rhonda, everything had to be done as they said. Rhonda in particular would emotionally punish others when she felt they weren’t doing what she said. Rhonda had a fine singing voice and would sing solos at church, but more than once, just before the service, she would let others know that she was “struggling” emotionally and needed them to gather round her for prayer. Years later when the pastor confronted Jim and Rhonda about their pattern of selfishness and control, they would admit no wrong of any kind. Yet anyone who worked with Rhonda in the business that she and Jim owned would readily acknowledge that Rhonda could be a very cruel person.

- Tom is thought to be a wonderful example of a Christian man. If you need something, Tom will be right there for you. Everyone in the church has seen Tom being sooo kind and shepherding to his children. Tom can tell you the answer to most any question or problem you might be facing whether it be a marriage problem or a parenting issue or a financial question, and certainly Tom knows the answer to any Bible question. But in reality, Tom is a wicked man. Tom is a narcissist, in love with himself and demanding the worship of others. This is the Tom that his family lives with behind closed doors. Worse, Tom attracts others just like him to the church.
- John is a local professional man, a member of a number community groups. When John and his wife and children came to the new church plant Pastor Jim had started from a small Bible study conducted for three years, everyone was encouraged. John and his wife had decided that a fresh, community type church was better for them and their family than the more formal denominational one they had been attending.

It wasn't long before John was volunteering to help in any way he could in the church and soon became the church treasurer. One day he met the pastor for lunch and said "I want accountability. I want transparency. I want you to know that I have a drinking problem." Pastor Jim was encouraged that John would be so forthright and honest and thanked him.

But not for long.

Only two weeks later, John was seen by the pastor and several other church members in a public place, drunk. Very drunk. So drunk that other people present noticed. Someone said "take that baby he is holding away from him or he is going to fall and hurt the child."

That was Saturday. The next morning at church, John behaved as if nothing at all had happened.

At the next board meeting, Pastor Jim brought up this incident and said that John needed to be removed from his position as treasurer and called upon to face up to his sin. The other board members, friends of John's, refused. They said "this is a cry for help from a struggling man."

Within six months John was elected to a deacon position in the church. Two months later, John's close friend and board member, Gary, announced at a board meeting that he was dissatisfied with the current sermons the pastor was preaching from 1 Timothy. Gary said he was speaking for the congregation and that "it is this church board's job to see that the people of this church hear sermons they like."

Pastor Jim responded by saying that he was preaching the very same way he always had, teaching what Scripture says, and that no one was going to stop him from doing so.

Within two months, Pastor Jim and his family were moving away, headed to pastor another church far away. Pastor Jim was never able to return to the church he planted out of the labor of many years of teaching Bible studies in a small back room at the local PUD building. Today virtually no one would even know who Pastor Jim is. John? John is still there, a pillar of that church. John loaned the money to the church to build a fine new parsonage and the congregation

has constructed its own very fine church building with all the amenities. John is regarded as a fine, eminent Christian man to whom the church owes everything.

- Pastor Mel has been the pastor of a small church for years. He prides himself in faithful adherence to the London Confession of Faith and Reformed Baptist theology. At first look, Mel appears to be a model pastor, father, and husband. His children can all spout memory verses from Scripture, answer difficult catechisms, and act in public with great politeness and respect for their elders. Mel's wife is a model of "submission" to her husband and even boasts to the ladies in the church and elsewhere that her husband "will not permit her to sin, but sends her to her room when she has a bad attitude." Pastor Mel loves to "disciple" young men. He teaches them theology and how to be a "godly" man and husband, helping them find a young woman to marry.

In reality however, Mel is not what he appears to be. Mel is a narcissist and a very abusive man. He dictates to his wife what clothes she will wear, and most of those clothes are immodest. Mel will tolerate no difference of opinion in his church.

He personally and solely distributes the communion elements, withholding them from those he deems unworthy. Mel will accept no correction from anyone. Those who question anything he does or teaches immediately become the focus of his rage and vengeance.

- Sharon and Wayne are a young couple, Bible school graduates, who have just moved into the community and visit the church. They seem pleased and when the pastor visits them they tell him how much they appreciated the worship service and that they plan to “plug in” to the church. They do so and Sharon becomes active in the music ministry while Wayne is faithfully present at all church gatherings.

But in fact, all is not as it seems. Wayne is addicted to porn. He stays up late at night, long after Sharon goes to bed, searching his computer for new sites. Eventually Wayne leaves Sharon, moves in with another woman, and before the whole sad scenario plays itself out, Wayne’s relatives blame the pastor and church for all Wayne’s troubles.

What is all of this? What do you say? What are these things that destroy so many churches, discourage and defeat so many genuine Christians and pastors?

Most church members and pastors would chalk all of these stories up to:

1. *communication problems*
2. *inter-personal conflict issues*
3. *lack of patience with one another*
4. *Or just some cases of relatively harmless “nut-cases” to laugh at and move on.*

But what I am recommending to you in this sermon series is that these things are anything but mere human shortcomings. They are, in fact, *all examples of very real evil coming in among the people of God with the Satanic and demonic intent of destroying and silencing the people of God and the Word of God. And I propose to you that these kinds of people who do these things while claiming to be Christians, are far more than mere “troubled, difficult” people but are in fact agents of the enemy sent in among us to defame the name of Christ, to stop the proclamation of the gospel, and to hold people in the darkness of sin’s bondage.*

2Co 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

“I, like many who were blessed to have grown up in a loving home, have had a very difficult time accepting the reality of abuse [evil], particularly in Christian homes. Years ago when I was a young pastor in a vibrant church, I was deeply offended when the women’s ministry invited a special speaker to address the topic of domestic violence. Little did I (or anyone else) realize that one of our elders had been beating his wife for years, having put her in the hospital several times, and that at that very time one of our ministers was about to be arrested for felony child abuse. I’ve come to realize that abuse is not the odd exception but is rampant both in the church and in secular society. The evidence for this tragic assertion is overwhelming.”¹

Furthermore, I am proposing to you that as Christ’s people, in possession of God’s Word, we have no excuse for remaining naïve about the true nature of this evil among us. God’s word is a boldface, giant font loudspeaker warning us over and over again:

Act 20:28-31 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (29) I know that after my

¹ Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) location 164, Kindle Edition.

departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; (30) and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (31) Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Last month I wrote this short article for our ACFJ Facebook page and asked readers for their comments. I entitled it “Church Can be a Dangerous Place”-

Many of you met your abuser in church because he claimed to be a Christian and even put on a pretty good show of it. Today I was thinking about this some more. I have personally been targeted by abusers in the church more than any other place. And I have not always been a pastor so the fact that I am a pastor does not explain why I was treated with much more fairness and kindness when I was a police officer than when I began to pastor local churches (my present church where I have been pastor for 22 years now is a great place to be - now. It wasn't safe at all two decades ago).

Anyway, what do you all think about my observation that we meet more evil *in the "church"* than in the world? And what I mean

specifically is that the people who I have found to be the most dangerous, the most unsafe, the most abusive, are the "eminently holy saints" who are apparent pillars of their local church, busy greeting people each Sunday, being the "go to" guy or gal, having the "godliest" looking family, etc.?

On the other hand, I feel quite safe and at ease around my neighbor or some of the rough and tumble red-neck types here in our little town. (I don't mean to imply that ALL people who diligently serve the Lord in their local church are these kind of people. But simply that the ones I have been targeted by have ALL been of that genre).

And if this is true, does this not indicate that contemporary evangelical Christianity has in many cases (not all) become sheer Pharisaism, guilty of the very same things that Jesus pronounced woes to the Pharisees for? What, in other words, have we come to in so many churches today and in the lives of so many professing Christians, *that most of the pain in our lives comes from them?* And again, if this is true, does this not largely explain why we have such a hard time presenting the unsaved with the gospel of Christ?

Listen now to some of the responses to that article from Christians who learned about evil in the church *the hard way*:

- the church provides a very safe environment for the abuser. The world doesn't close their eyes as much to evil
- In his book *People of the Lie* M Scott Peck talks about evil people who know church is the best place to hide.
- I think a lack of real preaching of truth that's not easy to hear - doesn't tickle the ears - has led to a watered-down gospel and that alone has many implications, among which (1) providing a safe-for-abusers environment because the sheep aren't fed, (2) dumbing down those who attend, and (3) keeping those out of the church who might otherwise be drawn to truth.

I think your points are all true. It's a comfortable place for abusers to hide - in the church. Generally speaking, today's culture is far more interested in political correctness and being "nice." The church mirrors that

culture; She no longer seems to be 'called out' so much as she 'fits in.' Anything that either rocks the boat or can be accused of not being nice (ie, being a whistleblower on either one's husband or church leadership), well, tsk tsk and finger wag. That disrespectful wife shouldn't be welcomed here. What would they have done with Martin Luther and the reformers? They stood up against the church too.

Christ had things against the churches listed in Revelation. I strongly suspect He has a LOT against the contemporary (so-called) church today. He desires mercy and not sacrifice, but they're too busy counting their sacrifices to think about real mercy, which necessitates judgment at some point. But where is judgment in the church today?

- the church is the target of Ssatan so he does everything he can to make it as far from Christ's as possible, and the churches that insist on ignoring the wiles of the enemy and the enemy in its midst are foolish and being

used by the enemy to do his work- and those individuals will be held accountable.

- It seems to me, both from Scripture and from experience, that there are three kinds of people: 1) those who haven't yet come to Christ, 2) actual believers, 3) and then people who claim to be holy on the outside but are really evil on the inside and behind closed doors. Jesus is extraordinarily gentle, kind, and welcoming to plain old honest sinners in the world, but the guys who pretend to follow God while actually doing evil get the harshest treatment in all of Scripture. He calls them snakes and Christians are instructed not to keep company with them. I think there's certainly something to the idea that it's a special kind of wrong when an evil person poses as a Christian.

Also, sociopaths, narcissists, and other abusive types gravitate towards positions where they can gain power, respect, trust, authority, etc. and it's pretty easy to do that in the church. And maybe it's particularly fun for them to

target deeply empathetic, honorable, godly people-- more sport in tormenting those folks than people who don't care as much about doing right by everyone, loving their enemies, etc.

- Could I add to that, that because in our churches we still think we are only to love people and not call out or stop any sin in anyone else is why most churches are the way they are, safe places for evil to thrive. I know my abuser loved church because his sins were covered up there by numerous pastors.
- Personally, I believe the reason for it lies at the feet of overly naive and too often unwise Christians that make up the majority inside church buildings. They are very unschooled in the nature of evil, and mostly unwilling to see it when it presents itself, instead bending over backwards to give the benefit of the doubt where, really, often none is warranted.

Church people spend a great deal of time trying to hide from one another who they really are, and therefore aren't

paying much discerning attention to the rest of everybody else around them.

We also accept our expectations that "the world" will be the world outside of church doors, but we forget that just walking through the doors doesn't automatically and immediately absolve us of our sinful natures or overnight change us into spiritually mature Christ followers.

It has been my experience having grown up in Christendom from a young age that it sorely lacks in wisdom, and sorely lacks in humility.

- I am glad you've brought this up. My ex-husband (grandson of missionaries, Christian college prayer group leader when I met him) loved to point out the wolves in sheep's clothing, and he was such a convincing/big talker I failed to recognize for a decade that HE was the wolf in sheep's clothing. I've been a Christian for 26 years and have heard TWO sermons pointing out that not every professing Christian is a believer. This

needs to come from the pulpit much more often.

- I think many evangelical churches are extremely dangerous. I think they actually create abusers. They teach people that you can do anything and it will always be forgiven. They mistake a person's greed for power as leadership potential. They show abusers that if you hurt someone the victim will never be heard. They are more willingly to hear lies than the truth. Outside appearances mean everything. All they really have is delusion. It's all centered on feeling good about themselves and never ever about worshiping the God of the bible. They are far too proud to have ever recognized their own wickedness and need for Christ. They just think Jesus likes them better than everyone else because they are such good and deserving people. They think of themselves as saints and even angels, but get on the wrong side of them and they are like venomous snakes.
- met my ex-husband in church too... it makes me sad that

God's name gets tarnished with abusers... and I hope so strongly that we can find better ways to educate (especially women) about what to look out for, and what to never accept from a wolf

Please notice very carefully that these comments are not coming from people who hate Christ or His true church. These are Christians speaking. These are your sisters and brothers in Christ talking. And there are lots of them. LOTS of them with these very same true stories. These are people who found that their local church was a dangerous place and it was in their church that evil attacked them. And *it was in these churches that the existence of that evil was denied.*

And yet, mark this down very well, in NO seminary of the Christian church where the shepherds of Christ's church are largely trained, will you find any training provided on this subject that will in fact be the very weapon the enemy is going to surely use against any true church, any true pastor, any true Christian. None. *Evil is not on our radar.* Especially, evil in the church among the sheep. And we have no excuse for this ignorance. It is a willful blindness.

It is our purpose in this series of sermons, *Wise as Serpents*, to remind ourselves and to demonstrate to others

that the Word of God is packed full of truth and warnings on this subject of evil, and specifically how that evil will most certainly creep in among us unnoticed, in disguise, cloaked in darkness, intent on extinguishing the light of God's Word.

Christ commands and calls us to be as wise as serpents in regard to this evil and its tactics, yet to be as innocent as doves in respect to participating in it ourselves. We must see it for what it is, recognize it when it comes, know its tactics, and stand firm against it. This is the real practice of putting on the Armor of God and standing firm against the devil so that he flees.

Jud 1:3-4 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. (4) For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jud 1:12-13 These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; (13)

wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

And yet, as we heard recently from a woman who works with a secular agency which works with the police to advocate for victims of pedophiles:

"I have been in many court rooms in which a church member or leader is appearing, having been charged with molesting or assaulting someone, usually a child or a woman, in the church. And, especially if the person charged is some 'notable' figure in the church such as a pastor, the courtroom is consistently PACKED full with church members there to support the suspect. I have NEVER seen a courtroom packed full of people there to support the victim of such a crime. Never."

Now I ask you to consider these things very, very carefully. That is the testimony of a person from outside the church, from the secular world, honestly describing what really happens when evil is found in a local church. What message is that sounding loudly and clearly to everyone about the gospel, about Christ, and about what claims to be Christ's church? Here is God's Word and command to us in dealing with such people:

Pro 28:17 If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death; let no one help him.

Proverbs 28:17 (NASB) A man who is laden with the guilt of human blood Will be a fugitive until death; let no one support him.

Proverbs 28:17 (RSV) If a man is burdened with the blood of another, let him be a fugitive until death; let no one help him.

And yet in most cases today Christians ARE helping the wicked and in doing so flagrantly disobeying our Lord's command.

I do not want to be guilty of these things. I don't think you do either.

Psa 23:4-5 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

02

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 2 – Evil Comes to Eden)

December 13, 2015

Sermon Text: Gen 1-3

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor 11

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men..."

(Matthew 10:16-17a)

"An appeaser is someone who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."
(W. Churchill)

There is something in each of us, I suppose especially in people who consider themselves to be "good" people, that refuses to see evil for what it is. And it is quite probable that this

tendency, which is really a manifestation of self and our sinful flesh in action, is most widespread in Christian churches and organizations. This denial, which Margaret Heffernan calls *Willful Blindness*, permits evil to thrive among us, to deceive us, and to continue practicing oppression of its victims. In some cases, as Heffernan tells us, willful blindness reaches the level of a crime. Here she quotes from the jury instructions given by a judge in the Enron trial:

You may find that a defendant had knowledge of a fact if you find that the defendant deliberately closed his eyes to what would otherwise have been obvious to him. Knowledge can be inferred if the defendant deliberately blinded himself to the existence of a fact.

Judge Lake was applying the legal concept of willful blindness: You are responsible if you could have known, and should have known, something that instead you strove not to see. In this case, Skilling and Lay could have known, and had the opportunity to know, just how

rotten their company was. Their claim not to know was no excuse under the law. Since they could have known, they were responsible.¹

Willful blindness you see. It is not excusable. It is willfully committed. Heffernan continues:

We can't notice and know everything: the cognitive limits of our brain simply won't let us. That means we have to filter or edit what we take in. So what we choose to let through and to leave out is crucial. We mostly admit the information that makes us feel great about ourselves, while conveniently filtering whatever unsettles our fragile egos and most vital beliefs. It's a truism that love is blind; what's less obvious is just how much evidence it can ignore. Ideology powerfully masks what, to the uncaptivated mind, is obvious, dangerous, or absurd and there's much about how, and even where, we live that leaves us in the dark. Fear of conflict, fear of change keeps us that way. An unconscious (and much denied) impulse to obey and conform shields us from confrontation and crowds provide friendly alibis for our inertia. And

¹ Margaret Heffernan, *Willful Blindness* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022) page 1.

money has the power to blind us, even to our better selves.²

Therefore, when evil comes among us, especially when we are in a place such as the church where we have been taught that evil does not exist (it's only "out there" in the world), our fear kicks in, our selfishness demands that we hold on to our cherished prejudices, and we reject even plain facts and hard evidence because we want to keep feeling great about ourselves and about our little world.

This is willful blindness. It is willful sin. It is willfully failing to love one another and to obey our Lord's commandments. And evil loves it so. Listen once more to Heffernan:

There's a circle here: We like ourselves, not least because we are known and familiar to ourselves. So we like people similar to us—or that we just imagine might have some attributes in common with us. They feel familiar too, and safe. And those feelings of familiarity and security make us like ourselves more because we aren't anxious. We belong. Our self-esteem rises. We feel happy. Human beings want to feel good about themselves and to feel safe, and being surrounded by familiarity and similarity satisfies those needs very

² *Ibid*, page 3.

efficiently. The problem with this is that everything outside that warm, safe circle is our blind spot.³

In many ways, people who have been raised in Christian homes, have gone to church their whole life, whose very lives have been wrapped up in their church, are the most deceived about evil. It isn't on their radar. They have no experience with it – at least no experience that they have been aware of, though it has been all around them. And so, when evil is reported or exposed, well, widespread willful blindness and denial kick in. Or rather, the person reporting the evil gets kicked! “How dare you gossip! Don't ever tell me something like that again!”

I remember telling a man once some years ago that it was evident to me that the cause of so much widespread sin and rebellion in another man's family stemmed from the fact that the children in that family knew, down inside, that their father did not love them. And this fellow I was telling responded to me in anger: “Don't ever say anything like that to me again! It's not true! I don't want to hear it!” But it was true, and time has continued to prove that it was true.

Most Christians have been taught falsehoods about evil and particularly about evil in the local church. This has

enabled evil to flourish in the pews, disguised in wool, and for widespread oppression of Christ's flock to continue and even be assisted by people who are charged with shepherding that flock. The traditions of men have been embraced as God's Word, while God's Word has been largely rejected. It is one of the main purposes of this present sermon series to correct this perversion of truth by looking closely at the Holy Scriptures where we are going to find warning after warning about evil creeping in among us in the church.

This morning we begin at the beginning – the opening chapters of Genesis.

Gen 1:25-31 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (26) Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (28) And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be

³ Ibid, page 11.

fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (29) And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. (30) And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. (31) And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Here we have the account of creation. Genesis 2 will continue the story, including that of the creation of the woman from Adam's rib.

Gen 2:15-25 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. (16) And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, (17) but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (18) Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (19) Now out of the ground the LORD God

had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. (20) The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. (21) So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. (22) And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (23) Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (24) Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (25) And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Everything was pronounced "good" even, "very good." Every tree there was pleasant to the sight, including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Gen 2:8-9 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. (9) And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and

good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This was perfection. It was Eden – paradise. It was creation as the Lord intended it to be. This was the perfect church. God’s temple where the Lord Himself met man.

And yet, consider carefully God’s commandment given to Adam, and note the very name of the tree he was forbidden to eat from. We see that:

- The name of the tree includes something called “evil”
- There was some possibility that an evil thing could be done: Adam could eat from that tree
- Furthermore, there was a possibility that something evil, called death, could enter into the world.

And, as we know, so it was-

Rom 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

We also know that this evil showed up in Eden in the person of the devil, the serpent:

Gen 3:1-5 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (2) And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, (3) but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (4) But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. (5) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Where did this evil one come from? We don’t know. We do know that he is a creature, a created being, and that God is not the author of evil and had created everything very good. At some point, unknown to us, Satan turned from that goodness into the evil being he is. It is quite probable that the arrogant, high-minded personality described in Ezekiel 28 is Satan, perhaps even a description of the essence of his sin:

Eze 28:1-15 The word of the LORD came to me: (2) "Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD: "Because your heart is proud, and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,' yet you are but a man, and no

god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god— (3) you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you; (4) by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasuries; (5) by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth— (6) therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, (7) therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor. (8) They shall thrust you down into the pit, and you shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the seas. (9) Will you still say, 'I am a god,' in the presence of those who kill you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who slay you? (10) You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD." (11) Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me: (12) "Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. (13) You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl,

onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. (14) You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. (15) You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.

Notice the heart of his sin – pride and arrogance claiming to be a god, if not God. And you have it back in Isaiah 14 as well-

Isa 14:11-15 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, the sound of your harps; maggots are laid as a bed beneath you, and worms are your covers. (12) "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! (13) You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' (15) But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.

All of this certainly coincides well with the serpent's words in Eden-

Gen 3:5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

There it is. The essence of evil and sin. *I will be God. I will be like the Most High. I will have total power and control and I am entitled to it.* Wherever you see these things, be sure that you are looking at evil. And this is the very thing that evil promises to us when temptation comes. It is at the root of all false religion which is idolatry. The creature will be Creator. The man will be God. Evil says we are entitled to it. The quest for deity. The lust for power and control. These are the inevitable, certain characteristics of evil which we must learn well and be on guard against at all times. *You owe me worship!*

Rom 1:18-23 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to

him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Now, let's consider two things in light of all of this.

1. Evil came into a perfect paradise,
2. There is a right way and a wrong way to have knowledge of evil.

If pure evil, Satan himself, came into a perfect paradise where there was no evil thing, do you not think that evil will most surely come among us in our churches in this fallen world?

Evil came, as it always does, in a deceptive, "subtle" form. In "craftiness." I don't think that the serpent in Eden was ugly or fearful in appearance, as we perceive serpents to be today. No, he was incredibly believable. He was smart when it came to evil and temptation and he knew right where to strike and what doubts about God to plant in their minds.

Now, does the Bible not warn us repeatedly that Satan will surely and definitely continue to come among us in the very same way today in the

church? Yet somehow Christians simply choose to live in denial of this.

2Co 11:3-4 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

2Co 11:12-15 And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. (13) For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

Expect it. Look for it dressed in wool, shining as bright as a most eminent, holy person. Where do such people operate? *In the church.* What is the spirit that empowers them? *The spirit of antichrist.* Where is the antichrist obviously going to operate? *In the church.*

Second, there is a right way and a wrong way to obtain this knowledge of evil yet remain innocent. Everything in Eden was “very good.” Under the umbrella of that “good” was included the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the commandment that if Adam disobeyed the command, he would die. That kind of knowledge about evil was good. Perhaps this was even the very reason that tree was in the garden at all? BUT, the knowledge of evil, being wise about evil, *needed to come by obeying the Lord, not by DOING evil.* The devil spoke a “truth” when he said that Adam and Eve would know good and evil, but he made even that truth into a lie because they ended up “knowing” evil in a very different way than God knows evil – they knew it and they were *guilty of it.* Wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove in regard to evil I believe means that we are to have the knowledge of evil, as the devil knew of its existence, but unlike the serpent to have no sin in respect to that evil.

The Lord Jesus Christ *knew* evil in the sense that He was wise as a serpent about it, yet innocent as a dove. Yet you will never, ever find him practicing *willful blindness* in regard to evil:

Joh 8:42-46 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am

here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. (43) Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. (44) You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (45) But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (46) Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?

Jesus said these things and knew these things, *yet without sin*. He was never deceived by evil. *Being like Christ includes being wise about evil and not being deceived by it, by not enabling it in any way, by speaking for those who are oppressed by it, and even doing hands on battle with it to protect the innocent.*

A Christian is never more UNLIKE Christ than when he or she lays heavy loads on victims of evil, telling them things like:

- You must forgive and reconcile
- You must love them no matter what
- You must say nothing negative about them

- Well then, have you considered what YOU did to make them do that to you?

That is the antichrist. That is the spirit of evil.

What should Adam and Eve have done? When evil came, started talking to them, making those lying claims about God's motivation? What should they have done? Listened to him? Told themselves, "well, he is one of God's creatures just like us"?

No, I can tell you what they should have done. They should have *killed this serpent, put him out of the garden forever, and thereby obeyed the Lord*. They should have immediately recognized that here was a creature craving God's glory for himself and thereby they should have known he was evil.

Let me ask each of us a question as we end:

Are you wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove in regard to evil? Do you WANT to be wise when it comes to evil? Do you want to see it when it shows up? Do you want to know its wicked tactics? Do you want to rescue its victims? Or, do you prefer willful blindness? The former are marks of Christ and fruits of His Spirit in us. The last, willful blindness, is the self-

serving flesh that we are no longer characterized by.

I opened with a quote by Winston Churchill and I close with one as well, only this time it is to disagree with him. The quote actually does show the far too common reality of a lack of serpent wisdom in the church however:

“The high belief in the perfection of man is appropriate in a man of the cloth but not in a prime minister.”

No, this naivete about the nature of man is not appropriate in a pastor, a Christian, or a prime minister. All must be wise as serpents in these things.

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Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 3 – Light Comes into the
World – and Evil Attacks)**

December 20, 2015

Sermon Text: Matthew 2

Scripture Reading: Matthew 2

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as
sheep in the midst of wolves, so
be wise as serpents and innocent
as doves. Beware of men..."
(Matthew 10:16-17a)

Joh 1:1-5 In the beginning was the
Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God. (2) He was in
the beginning with God. (3) All
things were made through him, and
without him was not any thing made
that was made. (4) In him was life,
and the life was the light of men. (5)

The light shines in the darkness, and
the darkness has not overcome it.

I like the Christmas story as given here
in John's Gospel best of all. The Word
made flesh dwelling among us. Light
and Life coming into the world. It is a
Creation story, you see. A New
Creation story with a new Adam as our
Savior.

Joh 1:14 And the Word became flesh
and dwelt among us, and we have seen
his glory, glory as of the only Son
from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is Christmas, you see. John gives
us the theological interpretation of
what was really happening in
Bethlehem's manger. The Light, the
Glory of God, had entered the world in
flesh. The Creator had come to His
creation, but His creatures did not
know Him.

Now, what I would like to draw our
attention to this morning is John's
statement in verses 4-5:

(4) In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Darkness. Always keep Genesis 1 in mind as you read John 1.

Gen 1:1-3 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (2) The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (3) And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

You have the very same thing in John 1, only the darkness there is spiritual darkness in a fallen world. Mankind was fallen and therefore dead to God. Light and life were absent. And then the Light comes, shining, ready to give life to men.

Darkness. Notice that darkness and light here are both represented as being *active and opposed to one another*. The darkness would overcome the light if it could.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The *moment* Christ comes, evil springs up, striving to overcome and extinguish His Light. Christmas arrives, and the enemy goes to work. It

has been that way since Eden, as we saw last week, and it remains that way to this day. When Christ comes, evil comes. Where the light of the gospel goes, the darkness of Satan will most certainly rise up to extinguish it:

2Co 4:3-4 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

What is a very large part of the New Testament (if not the whole Bible) but an account of how the kingdom of darkness works to overcome the kingdom of Christ? It cannot. It will never succeed in the end. No more than darkness can prevail in a dark room when you flip the light switch.

Joh 3:16-21 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (19) And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved

the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (20) For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (21) But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

Matthew's account of the birth of Christ is a perfect example of these things. The Babe comes into the world, and immediately the enemy opposes with murderous intent. Follow as I read:

Mat 2:1-23 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, (2) saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (3) When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; (4) and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. (5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: (6) "'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" (7) Then Herod summoned the wise men

secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

(9) After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

(11) And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (12) And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

(13) Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." (14) And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt (15) and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the

prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

(16) Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

(17) Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: (18) "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

(19) But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, (20) saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."

(21) And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. (22) But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. (23) And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Herod here, of course is the prime agent of Satan working with the intent of extinguishing the Light by killing this child. This shows us the depths of Satan's hatred of Christ, and of his fear of Him as well. *The Lord Jesus Christ was hated with a murderous hatred from the very time He was born.* When Christ comes, and where Christ comes, *evil will most surely show up.* Think about it. The MOMENT Christ was born, evil was already moving to kill him. I suppose you could even find statements in Scripture that would indicate evil was working BEFORE His birth to extinguish this Light.

In fact, this is true. Think back through the Old Testament, right from the beginning. What do you have? You have two seeds, the one trying to destroy the other. Two kingdoms at war. If the Jews knew this:

Mat 2:3-5 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; (4) and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. (5) They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

...then you can be sure that the devil knew it. The entire Old Testament is an account of the seed and line of Abraham being subject to attacks of all kinds. Satan knew this promise well:

Gen 3:14-15 The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. (15) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

So the enemy knew these promises. He knew of this Seed of the woman, and as we go down through the Old Testament you have this very broad description of this Promised One progressively narrowed:

- He would come from Seth, not Cain
- He would be a descendant of Shem, Noah's son (see Gen 9 and 11)

Gen 9:26-27 He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. (27) May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant."

- Then Abraham is identified –

Gen 15:1-6 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." (2) But Abram said, "O Lord

GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (3) And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." (4) And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." (5) And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." (6) And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

And on it goes. Isaac, the son of promise. Jacob, not Esau. From Judah, not from the other sons of Jacob, Messiah would come. A son of David. And so He did:

Luk 2:21-32 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. (22) And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (23) (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") (24) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

(25) Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. (26) And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. (27) And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, (28) he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, (29) "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; (30) for my eyes have seen your salvation (31) that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32) a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

There it is then. At the same time we have this wonderful announcement of the birth of Christ, we must also understand that the battle was raging that very moment and that it is still raging. Wherever Christ is, wherever His people are, wherever His Word is announced, evil is going to show up and work to murder and lie:

Listen to this summation of exactly what we have been saying this morning. All of Jesus' earthly pilgrimage was a battle. Evil

continually tried to extinguish Light and Life:

Joh 8:31-59 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (33) They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

(34) Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. (35) The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. (36) So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (37) I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. (38) I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."

(39) They answered him, "Abraham is our father."

Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, (40) but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. (41) You are doing the works your father did." They said to him,

"We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."

(42) Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.

(43) Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. (44) You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (45) But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (46) Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? (47) Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

(48) The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (49) Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. (50) Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. (51) Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

(52) The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon!

Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' (53) Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?"

(54) Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' (55) But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. (56) Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." (57) So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" (58) Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (59) So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Don't miss this. This was the "clergy" of the day in the "church" (temple) building of the day. Evil had established itself in the very leadership positions of what was supposed to be God's covenant nation.

Conclusion

The darkness did not and could not overcome the Light. Evil came, evil tried its best, evil even appeared to

have been victorious when Christ was crucified. But it wasn't. Christ was the Victor.

We must remember these things. This world hates Christ. You see it all around us and this hatred even seems to be increasing. It is CHRISTmas that is banned. It is the name of JESUS that is forbidden. Evil will come. It will appear. Jesus is the great divider of men and if you really belong to Him, you will experience this division and this hatred against you, for Jesus' sake. The division comes at the most intimate levels of life:

Mat 10:32-39 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, (33) but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (34) "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (37) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his

life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Mat 10:19-22 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. (20) For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. (21) Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, (22) and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Luk 12:51-53 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. (52) For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. (53) They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

These are the expected fruits of evil as it wars against Christ. These are the very faces of its agents you will most surely meet:

- Father
- Mother
- Daughter

- Daughter-in-law
- Members of your own household
- Brother
- A child

Christ brings this great sword of division, you see.

Let me close with this example. It is an example of how badly Christians, pastors, and all of us need to come to terms with the fact that just as evil showed up in Bethlehem that night, so it always comes among us as we follow Him. This past week one of the ladies who has experienced great evil in her life shared these comments with us. She is a strong, genuine Christian, and she suffered greatly at the hands of her church and church leaders who should have helped her:

In not speaking up against evil, the church stands with it. I found greater understanding and comfort in four days of a self-defense class with non-church folk than I did in nearly a decade of assembling and serving alongside congregants and church leaders. In this class I was taught how to draw a line in the sand and keep it there. In church I was instructed to keep a gate over my lips and tolerate real evil.

I didn't even tell them [at the self-defense class]93393 my testimony. It

was the police captain (a man) who lead the class, the curriculum, and the supportive trainers (who were all women, except for one man who was there last night as one of the 'attackers' during our final night's review/testing scenarios) who made me aware of the fact that they understood evil without my saying one word. We students were instructed to tell no men what we learned - even if asked - because, as the captain told us, "Husbands become ex-husbands, and men are competitive. You tell them what you know, and they'll want to show you how they can beat it. Then your confidence is deflated and then they also know what to expect from you when you fight back." I wish every female could take this course. I'm going to try to get it in our local public school because if they teach sex education, they need to teach this too. I plan to take flyers around to the local medical centers also.

This is wisdom. Wise as serpents, innocent as doves in regard to evil. And as we are, as we stand for Christ no matter what the cost, we are victorious. Always.

Rev 12:11-12 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (12) Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and

sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

1Jn 5:4-5 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (5) Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 4 – Christ Our Healer)

January 3, 2016

Sermon Text: John 5:1-18

Scripture Reading: John 5:1-18

Introduction-

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him,

"Do you want to be healed?"

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." This was why the Jews were seeking

all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (Joh 5:1-18)

This is the first Lord's Day of a new year and we are all one year closer to seeing Christ face to face than we were at this time last New Year's. Each one of our earthly lives are one year shorter than they were then. It is fitting that we put some questions to ourselves in regard to how we spent these last 365 days the Lord granted us, and more importantly, how we intend to spend the coming 365 which lie ahead of us. When it comes to the stewardship of the time entrusted to us by the Lord, we are much like those servants of that master so long ago who went away, but first entrusted his servants with money to invest-

He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first

came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'" (Luk 19:12-27)

The Lord has entrusted us with many things, all of which are to be faithfully used for His glory.

We would do well this morning to heed these words, and take them to heart:

"Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Luk 12:35-40)

It is our purpose then this morning to think on these things, and I specifically want to call our attention to the words that Jesus spoke to the lame man there at the pool of Bethesda:

"Do you want to be healed?"

I want to challenge each of us to put this question to ourselves, and I want to do so for the primary purpose of *encouraging* us to see that Jesus Christ is our Healer, that He is able and He is willing to set us free from enslavement to the bondage that comes with being deceived by lies of the enemy. If these words convict you genuinely, and you realize that you need to repent of some sin of your own, then please do so. But primarily our purpose today is to confidently assert that Christ most certainly sets all who call on Him free of all falsehoods we might be clinging to this morning. All we need do is ask.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal 5:1)

And so we ask ourselves this question: How badly do we really want Christ to heal us? To change us? Did we want this for ourselves in 2015, and do we really want His healing in the year to come? As we learn more and more about the nature and tactics of evil, it is vital that we understand that Christ is King and that no evil exists that is beyond His ability to conquer. We also need to be very clear-sighted about the fact that wickedness and its representatives will do all they can to prevent us from being free.

The question again:

“Do you want to be healed?”

The question *seems* like a no-brainer, right? Of course the man lame for 38 long years wanted to be healed, didn't he? And yet Jesus put the question to him. For 38 years, almost 4 decades, this man had lived lame. He had grown accustomed. He had made adjustments. He had a routine. Maybe his infirmity paid him some benefits? Pity. Alms. Or maybe he just figured – “this is it. This is my life. Nothing's going to change.”

I want to tell you this morning that *change and freedom are the very nature of life in Christ.*

I. The Bondage of Sin

All through the Bible, sin is presented to us as the great enslaver. We see it in the person of Pharaoh, for example, in Exodus:

So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. (Exo 1:13-14)

Every attempt at freedom was met with even more severe oppression.

Throughout its history, enemies worked to enslave and oppress the Jewish nation – Moabites, Ammonites, Hittites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes and Persians and then the Roman Empire. All of these oppressors are images of sin. Sin is the greatest slave master:

They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. (Joh 8:33-34)

As human beings living out our earthly lives in this sinful, fallen creation, we not only have our own sin to deal with, *but we have the effects of the sins of others upon us.* Sanctification in the Christian, this growth into more of the image of Christ and His holiness, is largely a matter of being set free from sin and its effects. Redemption is a redeeming from the power and effects of sin. But growth in Christ involves being made to see truth more and more clearly. Coming to know God's will for us more accurately. Learning more perfectly what is pleasing to Him. All of this is freeing. It sets us free. This means, once more, being set free from not only our own sin, but from the effects of the sin of *others* upon us. Think on this. The Bible does tell us to put to death our own sin, by the Spirit

in us. But it also just a frequently tells us to do things like:

- Test the spirits to see if they are from God
- Do not even eat with such a person who claims to be a Christian but walks habitually in wickedness
- Do not permit anyone to bring you into bondage by deceiving you with a false gospel
- Do not permit a Diotrefes to lord it over you, especially in the church

Why? So that we are not brought into bondage by their lies.

But the question I put to you this morning, to repeat it still another time, is - *“Do you want to be healed?”* Do you *want* Christ to set you free?

The Kinds of Bondage We Face

As we have pointed out, sin enslaves and it is vital that we understand all the ways that it does. Hear this again: it is not just our own sin which every Christian battles that works to hold us in bondage, but it is the effects of the sin of others that so often keeps us in its power. We can be free of it. For example:

- Many people suffer from trauma, the effects of it, often called

PTSD. This is not due to their own sin (in spite of the claims of some schools of so-called Christian counseling that our problems are ultimately due to our own sin). A soldier returning home from the war, for example, and suffering the paralyzing effects of that trauma, suffers from the sin and evil of others. So do many of the people who come to our ACFJ website seeking help.

- People who were abused as children suffer many kinds of enslaving effects because of this evil at the hands of others
- False teaching, false religious leaders, and other lies enslave us.
- The narcissist, the sociopathic wicked person – these are people who enslave others through their evil behavior and words

Remember, and think on this very, very carefully – *the primary enemies and the fundamental sources of enslaving evil in the Bible and thus today have always been the counterfeits in the visible church. Always. Professing Christians. The false prophets in Israel. The serpent in the garden. Judas. Scribes and Pharisees. The anti-Christ.*

Listen to these real examples of the very kinds of slavery we need to get free of, *and which Christ is able and willing to free us from*. As you listen, think about:

- Where did the enslaving lies come from that held these people in bondage?
- How were these people ultimately healed and set free?

I was friends with a Christian guy who I eventually learned was heavily influenced by Doug Wilson and John Piper. He told me that my Converse tennis shoes and jeans were "worldly" I have always dressed modestly so that kind of shocked me at the time. My version of modest and his were two different things apparently. I know so many people who are married to these kinds of individuals and they twist the legalism and bondage they live under into some kind of godliness and condemn anyone, especially women who disagree with them as disobedient Christians or worse. They have been brainwashed. Makes me very angry.

This one exemplifies what we are trying to be encouraged to do ourselves this morning:

My prayer for 2016. Open my eyes, omniscient God, to see truth, to see counterfeit, and to know the

difference. Encourage my heart toward boldness to stand for truth and to boldly stand up to the counterfeit. Thank you, God, for all that I have learned, the last couple of years, through the diligent work of ACFJ. May your blessing and favor continue to rest on this, your, vital ministry.

NOTE: In this following illustration, think of the abuser as any evil person, a child of the devil, who will try to come into your life and enslave you -

Thank you for such concise, clear words about something that sounds so spiritual but is a diabolical trap. The sin inspectors—I know them so well! Beware of them, I realize I have a “friend” in my life that is a sin inspector. They are steeped in darkness because their pride of putting themselves in the place of God they project their sin on their victims. They swallow the camel of their sin of abuse while straining at the gnat in their victims.

It doesn't matter what corner of the world you are from, abusers all have the same pattern, they seek to enslave their victims! I had a sin corrector husband that spent 20 years daily looking for things I needed to repent of. Taught that he was the voice of God in my life from the patriarchal church and my narcissistic

scapegoating family of origin; I was steeped in deep shame. *He'd tell me what my motives were and why they were wrong until I didn't know what I thought anymore.*

Love, pain and servitude all seemed tightly bound to each other and life was nothing but burdensome. Seeking for meaning outside of my marriage by helping other women in a ministry that spontaneously found me brought the church down on my head. They rebuked me and told me I needed to be a keeper at home.

They told my then husband/god if I didn't stay at home we'd be thrown out of the church. I think in retrospect that the other wives were jealous that community women were calling on me for assistance. It disturbed our slavery to our husbands and living for their whims if I had anything outside of my house happening. It wasn't until after 20 years of spirit breaking and a nervous breakdown from the shame of being the family sin "eater" that the thought "I'm a slave" came to my mind.

The truth sets you free. The good news about this is that my sensitivity is raised when I hear, see, sense, taste or get within 50 feet of slavemakers I know it.

Here is still another. While these examples are set in the arena of marriage, notice that these same kinds of evil dynamics could play themselves out in some other relationship in our lives – at work, with another family member, and particularly common is in regard to some professing "Christian" -

I only had one example of a "Christian" marriage growing up. I was TOLD this was a good marriage, but what I saw was a woman who exemplified "perfection" but was obviously hopeless and depressed. She was musically gifted and played a variety of instruments, was active in all church activities, played guitar on the church bus every Sunday, held Good News Clubs meetings monthly in the local projects (this is how I came to the Lord), got her education (against her husband's wishes) and became a teacher, cared for her selfish mother until her death and entertained all her family members. She happened to be a relative of mine.

Her husband lied to her, called her names, tried to keep her poor, used her gifts to glorify himself, constantly incited fear within her by pointing out all her flaws and how others would perceive her to be selfish etc. The abuse she endured actually turned me off to a "Christian" marriage because I knew I could never be "good" enough

if this was the standard that needed to be achieved in order to be in a Christian marriage. So instead, I married what I thought was a “good” man.

I have since read countless books on marriage, taken classes etc., etc., but NONE of them provided me with truth. *It was only after God tore down all the lies in my life was it revealed that everything I had been taught about a Biblical marriage was actually a gross pervasion of what the Bible said.* This evil deception was concocted in the brains of *those who feel no love towards others* but who secretly desire to manipulate those who they believe they “own” and to also be worshiped by them. People like me who have a sincere desire to serve the Lord and desire to give genuine love to others, are the ones who are so deeply destroyed by this evil. ***This is right up Satan’s alley. To have God’s genuine people serving HIS evil children.***

NOTE: She continues on here and I want to emphasize that his is not a woman who is rebelling against the Lord and simply does not want to “work” at her marriage. On the contrary, she is zealous to serve Him no matter the cost. She is simply sharing with us here how she came to real freedom.

I know that Proverbs 31 is a trigger for many women because the church has used it to control them, but for me this passage shows how evil my husband is and also all men who employ control over their wives are. When I read it I see a woman who loves the Lord and is free to do this because her husband is also a man of God and is wise enough to love and admire her and her heart and so leaves her alone yet supports her so she can serve God in the way she was created to do. He is proud of her success and counts himself blessed and realizes that part of the reason he is admired at the city gate is because he has such a kickin’ wife! There’s no talk of him trying to implement control, him telling her that she should be this or do that but instead he actively loves her by telling her how grateful he is and beautiful she is in the Lord! Not one derogatory comment; just rapt admiration and gratefulness. No getting in the way of the many gifts God has given her that are clearly meant to glorify the Lord and also be blessings to all who are in her care.

It [Proverbs 31] is a measuring stick that can be used to assess THE HUSBAND as a man of God, not the wife. Is he such a man of God that he knows that the Lord is actively working in his wife’s live as He is working in his own and that God has a unique walk for each of His children

and that we are to be helpmates for each other not owners? Is her energy sapped because Mr. Husband MUST be worshiped or is her energy being enlivened by a helping, LOVING husband who knows they are co-heirs in the Lord? Can he compile such a thoughtful list? Meaning, can he SEE the many things his wife has done or can he only think of the negative things? Or does he need to have a list of equal amounts negative in order to allow her to get credit for any positive thing? Does he need to include himself in her successes or can he do as the author in Proverbs 31 has done and solely list his wife's successes?

Thank you for yet another topic to help us see where evil lurks and how it destroys God's children. I'm grateful!

Is your head spinning yet? Here is another:

The thing is that there are oftentimes decades of abuse that have been heaped on people with a heart to love and *they have no idea about the truth of scripture and as a result believe they are doing "right" by taking direction from their "Christian" spouse or church.* It is rarely as cut and dried a "we must all take responsibility for our own actions."

I was raised around people who attended AA-type meetings. If you're familiar with this type of cult, they are always teaching that you are responsible for your own actions. *So I was raised to never blame others and always blame myself.* The problem is that the people around me were actually abusers and they found covert ways to abuse me and they never saw themselves as abusers. *I was so brain-washed to NEVER blame others and as a result, I couldn't see that I was being abused. Can you see how it's all intertwined?*

We must first acknowledge that some people are abusers [ie, that some people are simply, EVIL] (even if they never hit or physically harm someone) and educate people. (A person with an abusive mindset is different than someone who has been abused and is acting out.) Then we must help their victims through education about abusers, [about EVIL] *help them to see how they may have been raised to become victims of abusers, and then how to learn to live as a child of God without catering to evil.* George Simon's books are a good place to start to see how these evil ones operate. Dr. Robert Hare also has a good book and some videos on Youtube. *Once you see how these evil people must always control and manipulate others, with no truth and constant hatred, on top of a church and society that denies that*

some people are evil, you can see how we end up in situations like this.

Before we demand that people MUST take responsibility for their own actions, we must first ensure that they know the truth about evil and how abusers operate, Then we can start to sort out how abuse has affected the victims, *so that they can start to hear and feel the Word of God in their hearts and minds instead of the rules created by men that they've been following.* It's often a slow process but worth every second spent on helping God's little ones heal.

See it? False religion. Twisting of God's Word. Enslavement. These people tell how it was ultimately Christ's truth that set them free. And I am asking each one of us this morning

—

“Do you want to be healed?”

Of all the junk in your thoughts? Of all the false notions that you have embraced? Of all the things you have been blinded to? Of the false Christians in your life who keep whispering the lies of the enemy in your ear? Do you want it? Do you want your life to be radically changed?

Because, and here is the vital thing, *Christ is able and Christ is willing to free you.* The question is, do you want

Him to do so? Do you want to be delivered from that comfy mat you have sat on by the pool for 38 years? Really? Do you really want Him to do this by showing you what it really is? Do you want to know the truth about the people around you in your life who are holding you in slavery no matter who they are? Do you want to know what lies have come into your life over the years even if it means coming to see that someone you thought was a great saint of the church, isn't?

You see, if we really don't want to be free, then Christ isn't going to set us free. And I have known more than one professing Christian who simply was not ready for freedom, did not want it, and ran from it as something just too threatening to deal with.

They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." (Exo 14:11-12)

II. Christ is Able and Christ is Willing

Consider now very carefully the following accounts of Jesus healing people. Think on this. Listen to what He says. The message is plain. Christ is able and Christ is willing to set YOU free from all the things that evil is oppressing you through. Christ, the Light of the world, is able to shine through the darkness so that we can see and hear. The question is, do you want to? Do you want to be set free in 2016? He came for this very purpose:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, (Luk 4:18)

When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "**I will; be clean.**" And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. (Mat 8:1-3)

And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples. And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, "If I

only touch his garment, I will be made well."

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

And when Jesus came to the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went through all that district.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." When he entered the house, the blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, "See that no one knows about it." But they went away and spread his fame through all that district.

As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled,

saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel."

But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Mat 9:19-36)

Christ did all this. Christ is able, Christ is willing. There is NOTHING in your life and mind and heart that Christ cannot heal and set right. Nothing. Many people have gone to counselors and therapists for a long, long while. In some cases this has provided some help, but ultimately, I can tell you this,

It is Jesus Christ alone who turns on the lights in your mind, shows you the lies you have embraced, shows you the reality that you have been blind to, and replaces all that mess with His truth, setting you free.

You heard that theme in these first hand accounts, didn't you? Over and over again we hear it. "One day, I saw for the first time....".

That is how this ministry of A Cry for Justice began. The lights came on about the nature and tactics of evil. Christ did it. He showed us and He delivered us from bondage to lies and wickedness that had deceived us for a long, long time.

Now, finally -

III. Evil Will Scream and Fight and Protest our Freedom

Evil hates freedom. Evil always works to enslave. Evil lusts for power and control, and therefore evil and its minions hate Jesus Christ, the one who sets men free. Expect it. When the captives are set free, Pharaoh inevitably sets his armies to chase after them and bring them back to slavery. See it:

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. The Egyptians pursued

them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. (Exo 14:5-9)

Matt 9 - But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. (Joh 5:15-16)

Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. (Joh 9:14-16)

See? Evil lays rather dormant when it has victims in its power. But when light comes and its power is threatened, wickedness springs into action. We must be wise to this tactic and we must expect this final "Battle

of the Bulge" final desperate attempt by the enemy to renew its grasp on us.

Here is a clear example:

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Rev 12:12)

So there it is. Christ is able and Christ is willing to set you free, to heal you, to open your eyes and ears to His truth, to expose all and any lies you have been taught to believe. In fact, He is the ONLY one who can do this.

Do you want Him to? There is the question you see. If you do, if you will believe that He can, and you begin to call out to Him to change you and free you no matter what the cost, be assured that He will. And by the time 2017 rolls around as a new year, you will be able to look back and see what great things He has done for you.

05

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 5 – Cain is Still With us
Today)**

January 10, 2016

Sermon Text: 1 John 3:11-15

Scripture Reading: Genesis 4

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak,

but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

"So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot

kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (Mat 10:16-36)

Are you wise as a serpent, yet innocent as a dove when it comes to *evil*? This is an indispensable pre-requisite for serving the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you understand that you must *beware of people* in this world, that you will be hated by them, and that the gospel you are called to live and proclaim does not make peace, but divides like a sword?

While we are to be innocent of evil, we are commanded by our Lord to be wise

about evil. Largely, professing Christians today do not have nor do they even want this wisdom. As a result, evil lurks in the pews. It deceives unmolested, bringing people into bondage, and keeping them from enjoying the freedom Christ has given us.

The vast majority of that which claims today to be "Christianity" does not want to hear about evil. Until it touches YOU. Until YOU have been its victim, your tendency is to deny it, to remain blind to it, and tell yourself things just aren't that bad. That is not being wise as serpents.

We have seen in this study of evil that wherever Christ's light shines, evil most certainly will come on the scene very quickly. We saw it right at the outset in Eden when the serpent showed up, and we see this pattern continuing right on down through biblical history. This morning we look at a second early example of evil opposing righteousness and we don't have to leave the first family to find it. We are going to consider Cain and Abel. One would think that after their mom and dad's experience being duped by evil, these boys would both be wise as serpents about it. Only one was. The other was a child of that serpent it turns out.

Remember, we are looking at this pattern of evil at work because *the very same evil is constantly at work among us today. Evil always, always, always works to creep in among Christ's people.*

Listen then to the inspired record of the first murder in the first family:

(Gen 4) Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.

In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And

Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold." And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD. (Gen 4:1-26)

Let's make a few observations about Cain from this passage, then turn to some other texts in Scripture that tell us more about him:

- This was a religious family. A family that worshipped God in the now fallen world. Both of these brothers are seen here offering worship to God. Adam

and Eve's firstborn was a child of the devil, their second born was murdered by his brother.

- Evil showed up in this family once again, and once again *it came in connection with the worship of God*. Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord.
- Cain devised his own religion, though he would, in today's language, have professed to be "a Christian." We don't know with certainty exactly how Cain's offering was defective – whether it was because it was a bloodless offering, or because he did not offer it for the glory of God but for his own praise – but we do know that it was of his own devising, not according to God's instruction.
- After murdering Abel, Cain exemplifies classic and typical denial, blame-shifting, and self-pity. His subsequent life evidenced the true state of his wicked heart as he continue to pursue self-glory.
- The Lord faithfully preserved His elect by giving Adam and Eve another son, Seth. Cain's seed is still with us today, hating and trying to murder Seth's seed.

- Notice VERY carefully! Cain had the benefit of the very best Counselor to be found! The Lord Himself encouraged Cain to do right, but he would not. If we are going to be wise about evil today, we must cease thinking that we can always “love” evil into repentance. God Himself “failed” as a counselor in Cain’s case.

Let’s continue now and look at the inspired commentary on Cain and his evil:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1Jn 3:11-15)

Mark down these observations carefully:

- Cain, though born to Adam and Eve, was “of the evil one.” Cain

was a child of the devil. He shared the serpent’s characteristics and thus was a murderer

- Cain’s motivation is given here. This is the motive of all the descendants of Cain today – *his own deeds were evil and Abel’s deeds were righteous.*

I am convinced that a very typical (if not the most common) reason wicked men who claim to be Christians persecute and abuse their Christian wives is that, like Cain, they are evil and their wife is righteous. They are darkness and she is light. This is one of the most common ways that Christ’s people are persecuted for their faith today.

Abel was the very first victim of domestic violence in the history of the human race. He was the first Christian martyr, killed simply because Cain was evil and hated Abel for his righteousness.

How do you suppose many people would have explained Cain’s motive in killing Abel? I think I can tell you:

- Abel should have been more sensitive to Cain’s religion
- Abel was “holier than thou” and incited Cain to hatred

- Abel looked down on Cain because he raised flocks and Cain dug in the dirt

God's Word will have none of this blame-shifting business that is soooo common today and which we must be wise to. No, Cain killed Abel for one reason only. No other. Cain was evil. Abel was righteous. Cain was a child of darkness. He loved the darkness. He hated the light of truth-

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." (Joh 3:19-21)

This is an absolutely vital truth that you **MUST** get a firm hold on. As we follow Christ in His light and truth, we are going to be hated with a raging hatred by those who love evil and darkness. This is the fundamental and ongoing war that has raged all through human history. Cain is still with us. Cain is still murdering Abel. And Cain's motive in doing so is the same as always. It is this simple:

And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

And yet today we see many Christians who ARE surprised when they are hated. They are told that it is their fault, and they believe it. Their pastors tell them it is their fault. Their fellow church members tell them that it is their fault. They are told that they are too judgmental, too harsh, too narrow. They are blamed for dividing the family.

But what is the reality? Who is the real culprit? Cain. Cain and his seed. Hatred of the world for the true people of Christ. *Simply because they are righteous.* Think of it. Why did the world hate and kill Christ? He couldn't be convicted of ANY sin, yet the world hated Him:

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own

character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." (Joh 8:42-47)

There it is. Why do you suppose that Jesus spent so much time telling His disciples, and us, these things? *Because he was educating us about evil, so we could be wise about evil and not duped by it.* Here is an example. I put a short post up yesterday on these very things, calling on Christians to stop thinking they can do better than God at "counseling" Cains into repentance. One lady who obviously knows firsthand what it is like to be hated by evil simply for being righteous said:

And the "church" needs to STOP making it women's, and especially wives responsibility that the well being, or lack thereof of a relationship/marriage/spouse is dependent upon their/her commitment; to prayer, to submission, to being "nice", to keeping silent, to ..., to ..., to ..., etc...

Insert "victim" there for "women" and you can apply her words more broadly to any situation in which wickedness is

persecuting the righteous. Stop making it *Abel's responsibility* to have a healthy, friendly relationship with Cain. Stop telling Abel that he needs to pray more, be more patient with his brother, to communicate more clearly, to be nicer.....etc., etc. That is NOT wisdom regarding evil. It is foolishness and it is to allow evil to deceive us and bring us into its bondage through lies like this.

Listen to these absolute truths from the Lord Jesus again:

- And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.
- people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light
- You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.
- The reason why you do not hear [My words] is that you are not of God.

And yet today, in this vacuum of wisdom about evil that exists in the visible church, these truths are typically and regularly rejected in

practice. There are entire schools of counseling, calling themselves “biblical,” for instance, that focus on efforts to change Cain into Abel, usually at the expense of Abel. Underneath it all is this *refusal to acknowledge the true nature of Cain. Cain is evil. Cain is of his father the devil. And Cain and his descendants are in most every single local church today, offering their self-worship offerings devised by their own hands, offered to a god whom they have invented. And if you are not wise to these things, they will bring you into miserable bondage.*

Why did Cain kill Abel? Because Cain was _____ and Abel was _____.

There are even more Scriptures about Cain:

But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;

wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever. (Jud 1:10-13)

Notice the context here:

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. (Jud 1:3-4)

Hidden reefs among us at the communion table, you see. That is wisdom about evil. It came into Eden, it crept into the first family in the person of Cain, and it has continued to creep in as it still does today. Jude is calling on us to “contend for the faith” and in order to do this we must be wise about these evil ones disguised as sheep. This is not some kind of irrational paranoia. It is not a religious witch hunt of some kind. It is wisdom about the existence and nature of our enemy and his tactics and those who serve him.

Here it is in the Old Testament:

I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin. But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty, and many are those who hate me **wrongfully**. Those who render me evil for good accuse me because I follow after good. Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation! (Psa 38:18-22)

This is wisdom. This is truth. A genuine child of God confesses his own sin. Cain refused to do this! But a genuine Christian is sorry for his own sin.

BUT...and mark this down very, very carefully....

A Christian has enemies, and a wise Christian knows it. Being wise about evil means knowing that these enemies hate us WRONGFULLY. Satan is an accuser, and if you believe the accusations he makes against you through his diabolical agents, you are going to be in trouble and misery.

Notice that the Psalmist gives the REASON these enemies hate him. It is the same reason Cain hated and murdered Abel – *Because I follow after good*. He realizes that this is what is really going on and he therefore is enabled to call out to God to help him. He is able to get past the “I confess my iniquity” part and clearly see the “my

enemies hate me wrongfully, they do me evil simply because I do good.”

If you do not grasp these things, then you are not wise about evil and evil will get you!

Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless and seek the life of the upright. (Pro 29:10)

I cannot tell you how many times the wicked have accused me, and how often I spent way too much time considering those accusations as perhaps being true. All of this is meant to discourage us, to dis-empower us, to have unwarranted self-doubt and guilt and shame...it is from the enemy.

Why did Cain kill Abel? Because Cain was _____ and Abel was _____.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. (Heb 11:4)

And so he does. Those who are wise, hear him.

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Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 6 – Broadway is Evil)

January 17, 2016

Sermon Text: Matthew 7:13-23

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men... (Matthew 10:16-17a)

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created

from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. (Gen 6:5-12)

One reason that evil flourishes unchallenged so often is because of another evil – *willful blindness*. Willful blindness *to evil*. You have heard it quite often I am sure. Someone is faced with undisputable facts about widespread evil, and their response?

Well, I choose to believe that this world has lots of good people in it. I think that people are fundamentally good.

I remember years ago reading some of Neil Anderson's books (The Bondage Breaker, Freedom in Christ ministries, etc) where he said "*I think that if I can really get to know anyone, I will like them. Really. I think I would.*" That kind of thing sounds so nice. So "Christian," yet it is anything but. Christ would never say such a thing. It is a willful blindness to evil.

Listen to Robert Hare describe the psychopath:

He will choose you, disarm you with his words, and control you with this presence. He will delight you with his wit and his plans. He will show you a good time, but you will always get the bill. He will smile and deceive you, and he will scare you with his eyes. And when he is through with you, and he will be through with you, he will desert you and take with him your innocence and your pride. You will be left much sadder but not a lot wiser, and for a long time you will wonder what happened and what you did wrong. And if another of his kind comes knocking at your door, will you open it? [Without Conscience, Kindle location 385]

The answer of course is, for most people, yes! They will open the door for the next evil person, as long as they

remain willfully blind to evil and insist that "most people are good."

Robert Hare deals specifically with psychopaths. But Scripture paints evil with a much broader brush, warning us that the majority of humanity, and indeed *the majority of people who profess religion*, and even more specifically, *the majority of people who claim to follow Christ*, are in fact of their father the devil.

Lest you think I am overstating the case, listen to the Lord Jesus Christ as He tells us what we can expect from the majority of the human race. Notice carefully that these words, taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) *are specifically addressed to the Jews, all of whom claimed to be the covenant people of God:*

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree

cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' (Mat 7:13-23)

See it? Many call Him "Lord," but few really belong to Him. Most choose the false prophets rather than the Word of God. Those who enter the way of destruction, Broadway, are *many*. FEW are those who find the Narrow way.

This morning I specifically want to call your attention to these two ways: Broadway and the Narrow Way. Two roads, two paths. Every human being who has ever lived, every person alive today, every person here at this moment, is on one of these two roads, headed for one of two destinations: Life or Destruction.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.(Pro 16:25)

I specifically want us to understand that *the road a person chooses to travel tells us about the heart and nature of that person*. That is to say, *Broadway is populated by evil people*. This is the nature of the majority, and specifically, the nature of the majority of *religious* people who claim to be followers of Christ.

Here then is one tell-tale sign that you will see if you find yourself talking to a Broadway traveler. *They refuse to see evil. They refuse to acknowledge evil*. Headed for destruction, they insist that Broadway and all who travel it are fine, upstanding, righteous folk who, unlike those judgmental, bigoted, religious nutcases over there on the Narrow way, truly love and accept one another. And remember, these people claim to be followers of Jesus.

Listen carefully once more to these words of Jesus that set these two ways in such shocking contrast:

Enter by the narrow gate.

For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

Broad	Narrow
Easy	Hard
Many	Few
Destruction	Life

“The time has come for every one of us to choose what is easy, or what is right.” How do we know what is right? By the Word and by the Spirit in us:

And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. (Isa 30:20-21)

The very nature of Broadway tells us that it will be populated by the majority – by the majority of people who claim to be Christians. Because it is *easy*. Likewise, the nature of the Narrow way tells us that few will find it and walk it. It is *narrow*. It is *hard*.

And so the insanity-

“I choose to believe that most people in this world are good. It’s all good. It will all work out in the end.”

The fact is that Broadway is an evil road, and those who choose to travel it are evil. They are led there by *false prophets*. They say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” they do things in Jesus’ name, and yet Jesus does not know them and will reject them on that Day.

And notice in particular how Jesus describes them:

“...you workers of lawlessness.”

Broadway is the law-less way. Specifically, it is set directly against the good and perfect law of God. These Broadway people who look soooo “Christian” as they do “mighty works” in Jesus’ name, in fact hate Christ and are of their father the devil who is the ultimate *man of lawlessness*.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. (1Jn 3:4)

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (2Th 2:3)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all

uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Mat 23:27-28)

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? (2Co 6:14)

Let's think this through again now very carefully. The people traveling Broadway are *workers of lawlessness*. Lawlessness is the essence of sin. Satan himself is called the man of lawlessness. The Pharisees are classic examples of this lawlessness disguised as righteousness. As Christians, we are commanded by Christ to separate from lawlessness and those traveling in its Way.

Broadway is the lawless way. Broadway is the way that hates God's law and therefore the way that hates God. The people who travel it, though so often disguised as "godly, good folk," are in fact lawless and evil.

If we are going to be wise as serpents about evil, then we are going to have to acknowledge the evil of Broadway and stop clinging to the notion that everyone who says they are a Christian, is. We are going to have to admit Christ's warnings and teachings about evil and its

prevalence in that which claims to be serving Him, are true.

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. (Psa 14:2-3)

If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah. (Isa 1:9)

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom 3:9-12)

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (1Jn 5:19)

Let me give you a typical, common, recurring example of Broadway in action.

Life in Broadway – A Typical “Christian” Organization/Church

Take careful note now:

The response to evil being exposed and called out reveals whether a person is of Broadway or the Narrow way.

Think of it. How do you suppose the hypocrites responded when Jesus told them they were whitewashed tombs and that, therefore, the very leadership of the “church” in that day was rotten to the core? They hated him!

How does a man after God’s own heart respond when evil is exposed, even if it is in himself? -

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. (Psa 32:3-5)

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you

teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. (Psa 51:2-10)

See it? *How a person responds when evil is pointed out reveals whether he is on Broadway or the Narrow way.*

First Church is a happening place. Their pastor, Pastor Jones, is a happening man. He has charisma and can hold the audience spellbound. There is a large pastoral staff at First Church and most every Sunday people are “saved” and the baptistery is always full, ready for use. Pastor Jones started the church from a small Bible study and since then it has grown amazingly. There is a beautiful new building, a campus actually. Pastor Jones is in demand as a speaker at some of the most well-known conferences and a leader in the denominational assemblies. First Church supports many missionaries all over the world. The youth ministry is vibrant. There is a counseling center. And the music ministry? Full orchestra and choir with every possible audio-visual gadget to be found.

Last Monday morning Teresa Johnson came to the counseling center asking for help. Teresa's husband, Mark, is one of the pastors at First Church. Mary Insley, the counseling center director, sensed trouble of an unusual magnitude in this case and nervously called Pastor Jones, asking him to come down to her office and sit in. He told the denominational chairman he had been speaking with that "something had come up" and went down to Mary's office.

Teresa had a huge knot in her gut, especially when Pastor Jones entered. Perhaps this was one big mistake, coming here. Maybe she was just over-reacting? Mark was very well thought of at First Church and in fact he did quite a lot of counseling and discipling himself. He sometimes had Teresa come and sit in while he did marriage counseling for church members.

But Teresa's world at home was radically different than her world at "church." The Mark people thought they knew was, a façade. In fact, noble Pastor Mark was, as Teresa had found out last year, a subscriber to online pornography. And there was more. Mark was a cruel husband and father. Mark was never wrong. Mark regularly put Teresa down and more than once had launched into a terrifying rage over some little, seemingly insignificant matter. Teresa

and the children had, while traveling with Mark in the car and thus were a captive audience, endured his raging rants coupled with threats to dump them off on the side of the road.

Some of these mobile rants took place on the way to church, where, upon arrival, Mark changed his mask and Teresa and the kids knew they had better do the same.

Teresa had come to First Church, to the counseling center, to Pastor Jones, for help.

She would receive none.

You see, First Church is Broadway. First Church is lawlessness. First Church is evil. How do we know? *By their response to a report of evil in their midst made by a genuine Christian who is a traveler of the Narrow way.* What was the response? Anger – not at the perpetrator, but at the victim. Denial. Willful blindness. A self-protecting posturing designed to protect First Church as an institution no matter what.

What would Teresa receive? Blame. Criticism. Ultimately a threat of ex-communication. And what would Mark receive? Pity. Hugs. Widespread acceptance.

Evil hates the light of truth. Unrighteousness hates righteousness. You can know if a person or a group of people are on Broadway or the Narrow way *according to how they respond to a report of evil in their midst.* The Narrow way is broken and repents. If necessary, it casts out the wicked one and embraces and sustains the victim of evil. But Broadway? Broadway hates the one who blows the whistle about evil.

You will see the very same thing is so-called "Christian" organizations and "ministries." Missions agencies. Christian orphanages. Christian medical agencies and hospitals. It is just as Jesus said:

'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Janet works as a nurse in St. Augustine hospital. That hospital was founded many years ago by church leaders in the community who saw a need to help sick and suffering people. Millions of dollars were raised, buildings put up, staff hired, and a motto embraced that was to guide the entire ministry:

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a

long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." (Joh 5:6-8)

Those verses are on a very prominent plaque in the hospital entryway and appear on all the printed materials put out by the organization. What St. Augustine's Hospital does, it does in the name of Jesus.

But Jesus departed that hospital long ago, if in fact, He was ever there at all. Christ is there in name only. But He does not know these people. They are, for all the façade of godliness, whitewashed tombs, workers of lawlessness. How can that be!?!? Just look at all the good that is being done there! I can't believe it!

Well, examine what happens when evil is uncovered at St. Augustine and you will see things as they really are. Compromise after compromise was made over time with the world in order to receive contributions and grants. Staff was hired but their Christian character and testimony gradually became a non-issue. Every day, 8AM sharp, the chaplain prays a prayer over the hospital audio system for all to hear. Scripture verses are posted

everywhere. And yet Jesus is nowhere present in those halls.

If you worked at St. Augustine, and if you were a true Christian, and if you were naïve about evil, you might think that some evils that you are seeing could be reported to the administration and they would thank you for it. You would be wrong. Because Broadway does not want to hear about evil in its midst.

Here is another real life true example of Broadway denying evil. This is exceedingly common and shows how Broadway is revealed by its response to evil uncovered in its midst:

We are trained to blindly forgive everyone of every wrong and to shut up about their past sins else WE are guilty This is so dangerous and so anti-Biblical! It's another one of those childish interpretations of the Bible that people without the capacity to empathize with others, ends up pontificating.

The more God shows me the more I see how this is what's kept those of us who belong to him from growing in Him, All these ways we've been forced to behave based on supposed "Biblical" principles. Blindly serve, blindly give, blindly forgive, blindly obey all men and authority. But the Bible tells us that we were once blind but that now, when he shows us the

truth, we can SEE!. We are NOT to do things BLINDLY but to look and see and test and taste and stay away from evil and those who endorse it and to be offended by it as well! We are not to pretend evil didn't happen or that an offense wasn't committed against us. Opposite. Part of the process of forgiveness is to first trot out the offense itself and then forgive (after one has shown true repentance). And our testimony is to be ALL of it. When we use our life stories to testify for Christ it is not supposed to be some watered down, church-ed-up version of reality but THE TRUTH of it. This would mean that we would have to disclose the offense committed against us, thus revealing evil.

Having others keep their secrets is one of the four hallmarks of a sociopath, according to Martha Stout. When we are told not to disclose the offense committed against us, we keep evil ones secrets. It's funny how once we all start sharing on this website, many secret tactics of the evil one are revealed. Just goes to show you just how EVIL it is to force God's genuine children to forgive evil ones and then to shut up about it. Evil indeed!

And if you are going to be wise as serpents in regard to evil, you must understand these things.

Thank you so much, Pastor. I'm married to a senior pastor. When we went for counseling last month, the counselor/pastor did not believe me because of my narcissist husband's lies. I was made to feel like the abuser and he the victim. The undertone of his advice was *not to jeopardize our ministry*. I feel stuck, but I'm praying.

Conclusion

The Narrow Way is Jesus Christ. Traveling that Way means to honor, follow, love and obey Christ. It is narrow, it is hard. But we have this certain promise given by Him to all who turn away from Broadway and come after Him:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psa 23:1-6)

The Narrow way leads, you see, to life.

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 7 – What Does Evil Look
Like?)**

January 24, 2016

Sermon Text: Galatians 6:2

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 13

Introduction-

I saw that my abuser has the same spirit as a murderer. But he is well able to hide his murderous intent. If anything bad was to happen, he wouldn't care less except about being caught, and no-one would suspect him. He fools most people with his appearance of being a good, responsible and reasonable person, but it is a complete facade. Most of the time he managed to keep the dark side of his nature invisible from me too, but occasionally the mask would slip.

Then just for a few seconds at a time I would see the evil grin, the look of pure selfishness and greed, the contemptuous hatred, the expression that seemed demonic. Even now I'm not sure what he's capable of, because his real self is so hidden.

He is all about control. Most of his methods are clever and covert. It's only when people stand up to him that he becomes aggressive and angry. Eventually I came to realise the whole problem could be summed up in that one word, control. In hindsight the signs of his true nature were present very early on, but I didn't know how to make sense of it all. They aren't necessarily the things that people warn you about. He didn't hit me and he didn't order me around, at least not in the beginning. He didn't have addictions or mental health problems. He wore a suit and tie and had a good job. He was a church elder and he gave elderly ladies a ride to church every Sunday. I met him through friends who are beyond reproach.

When I first met him I asked around to see what people thought of him. The

reports were glowing. There did seem to be one or two people who didn't like him. But I found I couldn't get to talk to those people, they kept their distance and they weren't willing to talk. So I thought any problems must not be that important. I realize now that the people with bad reports were afraid of retaliation for speaking out. It was a sign of ruthless and wide scale impression management.

At the start he was often pleasant, but just occasionally he would fly into a rage for no reason at all, and blame me. None of this ever happened in front of witnesses. An important sign I missed was that he never took responsibility for anything, he was never sorry for anything. Everything was always someone else's fault. Because of this behaviour early on, I tried to back off out of the relationship. But he seemed to see that coming and manipulated me into staying involved. After a while I realised that my circle of friends had got dramatically smaller. I was discouraged from meeting people and from following my own interests. It was all done by deceit and manipulation.

I felt confused and tired. I knew something was really wrong but I didn't have an explanation. If I ever raised these problems with other Christians, they reassured me that everything was alright. So I just got

wound up tighter and tighter in the abuser's web.

It was never a normal relationship. The abuser was not a normal person. He was never not controlling, he was never not telling lies, he was never not prepared to be physically violent if other methods failed. The only way to prevent this kind of abuse is for people to learn to identify controlling behaviour at the very first sign. And most importantly, to recognize the real evil behind that behavior.

Something good has come out of this. I've taught these lessons to the young people in my life, and they are spreading the message. They've already been able to help and rescue some of their friends. That's something very good. [KayE, ACFJ]

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men....(Mat 10:16-17a)

Jeremiah knew of these things all too well:

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and

you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. (Jer 23:1-2)

"Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their evil, declares the LORD. Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall, for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the LORD. In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavory thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah." Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: "Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall

come upon you.'" For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? (Jer 23:11-27)

What does evil look like? As we have seen these past few weeks, evil *always*

comes on the scene right on the heels of truth. We see it here in this account from Jeremiah. Chosen as God's prophet, Jeremiah faithfully announced the Lord's Word to the Jews, and very quickly he was plagued by these false prophets and lying priests. *Prophets and priests*. The "church" leaders of the day! Notice that their tactic to gain a hearing was to tell the people what they wanted to hear – *no disaster shall come upon you*. And so it is today. Evil flatters. Evil does not call the wicked to repentance, but pronounces them to be righteous. Evil denies the Lord's coming judgment of sin.

Notice also here the *energy* of these evil prophets. *I did not send the prophets, yet they RAN*. And they claim God's authorization for themselves. Most often the agents of evil in the church are the most zealous, the most "sacrificing," the apparently most energetic of anyone in the entire church. *In the church*. Remember, we are learning that evil most often shows up among God's people, working to deceive them.

How do you recognize evil? It is soooo deceptive. Listen to Robert Hare describe the psychopath, but I am going to insert "evil" for that term so that we make direct application of Hare's description to evil. Remember, *evil always comes to us in a person. Evil is not some disembodied non-*

personal "dark side of the force." It always comes in flesh and blood. What do its emissaries look like? -

"[Evil] is often witty and articulate. It can be an amusing and entertaining conversationalist, ready with a quick and clever comeback, and can tell unlikely but convincing stories that cast itself in a good light. [Evil] can be very effective in presenting itself well and is often very likeable and charming."¹

See it? This is vital to get hold of. *Evil is very often the most charming, "likeable" man in the room. The most "saintly" fellow in the church.*

In contrast, how do you suppose Jeremiah, God's true prophet, looked? What did his message sound like? I recommend to you that there are many, many, many of these flatterers in pulpits and pews today.

NOTE: We need to frequently remind ourselves as we are learning more about evil and its tactics, *that the Lord Jesus Christ is Victor over evil*. There is a danger here of forgetting that. Evil is everywhere in this world today and it is everywhere in local churches in its disguises. As I hear the true stories

¹ Robert Hare, *Without Conscience*, The Guilford Press, 1993, p. 34. I have altered Hare's pronouns here to apply his description of the psychopath to what I am called "evil" people.

every single week, and really most every single day, of how evil lurking in churches victimized and oppressed the innocent, and how its agents are enjoying fame and comfort and large followings, I know that we must guard against sliding in to hopelessness. And a real remedy for us is to remember regularly that *Christ sees it all, just as He saw it in the "church" when He was on this earth:*

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (Mat 6:2-5)

Understand? These hypocrites were and are in full view of the Lord's eyes. He knows and He sees and He is going to repay.

Love: What Does it Look Like?

We know that in His very essence and being, *God is love.*

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1Jn 4:7-8)

It is not surprising then that Scripture repeatedly identifies *love* as the Christian's badge.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1Jn 3:11-15)

Jesus said the same:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you

have love for one another." (Joh 13:34-35)

And again:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 22:36-40)

Now, here is the question that I want to spend the rest of our time this morning attempting to answer, at least in part.

What does love look like? And in contrast, what does a person look like who does not love others?

The answers to these questions, as you are about to see, is not as evident as we might think. And the answers will enable us to recognize evil through all of its disguises.

Love Has Empathy

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2)

Once more, it is one thing to speak of loving one another, or of not loving

one another, and still another to truly grasp *what love or its lack looks like*.

Let me draw your attention to a fundamental quality of love – *empathy*.

Evil is devoid of empathy.

Empathy is that emotion, that aspect of love, which enables us to do what Jesus says fulfills His Law – *bearing one another's burdens*. Let me call on Robert Hare and then Scott Allen Johnson for some assistance here in helping us learn what empathy *looks like*, and what its absence (*evil*) looks like. Hare deals in his work with *psychopaths*, but do not make the mistake of assuming that these type are mostly locked up in prisons. Nope. They are quite commonly around us and in churches as well, parading as "saints."

Psychopaths, says Hare, are egocentric, without remorse, have shallow emotions, and are deceitful, and these qualities, he says, are "closely associated with a profound lack of empathy (an ability to construct a mental and emotional 'facsimile' of another person). They seem unable to 'get into the skin' or to 'walk in the shoes' of others, except in a purely intellectual sense. The feelings of other people are of no concern to psychopaths."²

² Ibid, p 44

This lack of empathy is a very commonly noted quality in the accounts of victims of evil. Jesus made note of it in regard to the religious leaders of His day:

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mar 12:38-44)

No empathy for these widows, you see. Quite happy to exalt themselves and even take from the widows and not be bothered about it at all. This is evil. Now, you might be thinking something like this right now, "Ok, there it is. Evil is recognized by its lack of empathy. I can watch for that." But let

me warn you, *a lack of empathy and therefore, evil, is NOT easy to see. The thing is very, very deceptive.* No doubt the people thought these hypocrites in Jesus' day were pious, great, godly men! But they weren't. People missed it. They didn't see it for what it was – EVIL. No one dreamed these "holy ones" were the devil's children. But they were! So it is today with us.

Let me show you. First from personal experience, then from the second author I mentioned earlier, Scott Allen Johnson.

Over the years as a pastor I have had to deal with many wicked people. So have many of you. In the last few years, I came to a realization. The "lights came on" you might say, and I realized that I had been largely blind to evil, specifically, it's quality of an absence of empathy. We have had many very difficult situations dropped into our laps in this church over the years. Myself, the elders, and many of you experienced it and these situations *were nothing that any of us asked for.* Yet, there it was. And we had to deal with it and face it the best we could. The Lord sustained us and preserved us through much criticism, attacks, and accusations.

I remember some years ago after still another one of those very unpleasant meetings when we had to deal with people and their sin and we received

the typical, even hateful, accusations. “You did this. You didn’t do this. You never...” and so on. And I was sitting in my office afterwards after having to hear all of that sort of thing again, when it was as if a switch was thrown in my head – one of those “light bulb” moments – that allowed me to put things in proper perspective. And the realization was this: *in all of this turmoil and heartache, in all the grief of having to make decisions and tell people things they didn’t want to hear, and in having to call people out in regard to their sin, never once did we experience empathy from these accusers. Not ONCE.* And that really struck me, not because it enabled me to feel sorry for myself, but because it hit me that this was so incredibly wrong. *But I hadn’t seen it before.* It was right there all along, but I had been blind to it.

Evil, you see, and those who are its agents, are very deceptive. They accuse and guilt and shame in such a way that YOU think YOU are the problem. But I came to realize that something was seriously out of order in the evil ones we had to face. Namely, to state it once more, that never once were they ever heard to say anything like: *“Wow, this is an incredibly difficult and painful situation that you have been put in and it must be very, very hard for you. I*

can’t imagine having to go through the things that you have had to deal with.”

Sounds logical, right? Common sense? Empathy. But evil does not empathize. And when you realize that what you are facing is a *vacuum of empathy*, be assured that you are looking at the face of true evil.

Alright, enough then with the personal experience. Here are some excellent and wise observations about evil people and how an absence of empathy evidences them as such. Let’s keep this in biblical perspective. Scripture, you see, gives us statements like this:

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. (1Jn 3:14)

But what we are working to bring into more clarity is, *just what does this love look like? And what does an absence of this love look like?* These things are not as easy to see as we might think.

As Johnson mentions “abuse,” insert the word “evil.” And where he speaks of “empathy,” think of “love.”

“Abusive behavior as a rule demonstrates the lack of empathy. There are three characteristics of empathy that I believe are important to demonstrate genuine empathy. These

aspects are cognitive recognition, emotional connection, and behavioral demonstration...³

Johnson continues then:

“Cognitive recognition refers to the understanding of the definition and concept of empathy...understanding the concept of being a victim, that is, to appreciate what victims of abuse experience.” A basic ability to grasp a fundamental idea of empathy.

“Emotional Connection refers to experiencing and being able to identify with the guilt, shame, and fear that the abuser’s behavior has caused his victim...and understanding the possible consequences of behavior.”

“Behavioral Demonstration refers to practicing what you preach. This means that you will do what you say you will do and behave in ways that live up to and demonstrate your beliefs, morals, and values. Repentance, we would call this.

Johnson continues and lists a large number of behavioral indicators that demonstrate the presence of empathy (love). The absence of these indicators is a sign of an absence of love. Namely, of the presence of evil.

Notice as we look at just some of this list how deceptive evil is in regard to these things and *how very often in the church, professing Christians distort Scripture to put the burden back on the shoulders of the innocent.*

1. Love (empathy) allows the victim to vent and to recount the evil that was done to them. A lack of empathy simply wants the victim to “quit talking about it and move on.” People who do the latter habitually over the course of their lives are, plainly, evil. If they are parading as Christians, they will use such “pious” statements such as “if you were really trusting the Lord with this you would stop dwelling on it.”
2. We have all failed to show empathy toward someone on occasion in our lives, but a person with empathy will ultimately acknowledge their sin, admit what they have done, and take full responsibility for it. Evil, however, evil *people* who do not love, blame the victim, make excuses, rationalize their behavior, and choose to repeat it all over again. That is what not loving looks like.
3. A person who lacks empathy and thus evidences an evil heart,

³ Scott Allen Johnson, *Physical Abusers and Sexual Offenders*, (Taylor and Francis, 2007) chapter 10.

apologizes quickly. Do you see the deceit in this? The evil person, the one whose heart is devoid of empathy, expects (after this quick and glib apology) the victim to forgive and forget, and the evil one then rushes the victim's recovery process with a "get it done now" attitude.

How many times has such wickedness hidden itself behind a "Jesus commands us to forgive" distortion of Scripture?

4. Evil, an absence of empathy, becomes irritated when confronted and held accountable for its actions.
5. An evil heart devoid of empathy frequently gives ultimatums to the oppressed. "If you don't do...I will...".
6. Where there is a heart empty of empathy, you will often find the tactics of working to turn the victim's support network against the victim.
7. Evil habitually engages in double standards, expecting one thing from their victim while not holding themselves to the same standards.

Johnson actually provides a much longer list than this, but this sample gives you a clearer picture of what genuine love and a lack of it look like. The deception can be remarkable.

If we are going to be wise as serpents in regard to evil, then these are the kinds of things we must know and be able to see when they come our way. Otherwise you will be duped and end up enabling evil and being put into bondage by it.

Is this person demonstrating the love of Christ as evidenced by the presence of genuine empathy for others?

If the answer is no, and if the answer remains "no," and this absence is characteristic of a person you are dealing with, then you are most certainly in the presence of evil, no matter how "righteous" its disguise.

The Beauty of Christ's Empathy for Us

Here is a hands-on real-life example of true empathy in action:

My light bulb moment came six months after the new minister (who loved God more than people playing politics) became visibly angry as I told him what had been going on for the past decade and what the responses of

the “establishment” ministers had been throughout my ordeal. A teacher at my kids’ school had been noticing me every morning as I brought my daughter to her kindergarten class. She actually left her class in the care of her assistant so she could come to my home. She rang the doorbell and, when I came to the door, asked that I forgive her if she was minding my business but she was very, very concerned about me.

I was completely surprised; I wasn’t able to recognize in myself what was obvious to someone else (not having received validation in my family of origin after a circle of boys sexually assaulted me when I was around 7 yrs old. The invalidation and abuse continued in my dating relationships, then in my marriage and in the church. It doesn’t end until you can see it for what it is and name it and end its presence in and interference with your life.)

She asked if she could arrange for a social worker to come and visit me. I said OK. I could tell she cared for me, so I trusted her, even though I was oblivious to the politics and dangers in the world. (I learned years later that our church was classified by some as a cult.) The social worker came within the hour, sat down at my kitchen table and asked me a lot of questions and wrote things down on her forms and notepad. She then told me I needed to

go to an office with the city right away and speak with a social worker named _____.

I did – and this woman was so gentle and kind. She asked me a number of questions as we talked briefly in her office, then she said, straightforward but very gently, adding that she wanted to make sure I understood what she was going to say: she did not believe I would survive if I stayed in this relationship.

It was like her words had somehow made these heavy steel clockwork parts grind open (that I didn’t even realize were locked around my mind/awareness) just enough that I could sense the truth and gravity of my situation for the first time. I was in very deep water and would soon drown. My vision was like that of the blind man after Jesus touched his eyes and asked him what he saw and he said men walking around like trees – though it wasn’t yet clear, it was nevertheless a degree of sight.

I left that night for the women’s shelter with our three children and one garbage bag with whatever they thought was precious and with what I thought we would need.

All those years, this lady had been in a *church*. But before that new minister came, the place was devoid of the love of Christ and that was evidenced by their lack of *empathy*.

The Lord Jesus Christ is characterized by *empathy*, and if we want to know if our thoughts about who God is are accurate or false, then this is a very good place to begin. How did Christ respond to people who were downtrodden and suffering? What was His reaction to the arrogant religious leaders who oppressed such people? As we answer those questions from Scripture, we find that we are seeing God truly:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature**, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb 1:1-3)

Don't be fooled by evil. Don't let the evil one's emissaries deceive you.

I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—

just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. (1Jn 2:26-29)

08

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 8 – What Does the Holy Spirit Look Like?)

January 31, 2016

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:16ff

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 17

Introduction-

And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." Then David

said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand." (1Sa 17:41-47)

My thesis this morning is that we do not recognize the leading and working of the Holy Spirit in us as clearly as we might think and in fact most Christians are confused about recognizing the Spirit in them because they have been falsely instructed about His nature and character. As a result, evil remains disguised, Christians wear false guilt, and the Spirit of God in us is quenched.

How did the Spirit of God in David react to evil? That is to say, how did David, led by and filled with the Spirit of God act as he faced Goliath, this taunting enemy of the Lord?

This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth...

I want us all to consider this very carefully and compare David's words with the typical claims of so many pillars of the church today. *I will strike you down and cut off your head. Do you see? That is nothing less than the Spirit of God speaking in David.* That is how the Spirit reacts to evil. And yet,

- David should have shown love for Goliath and tried to lead him to Christ,
- David should not have been carrying any weapons of any kind,
- David should have chosen to suffer, knelt down, and passively let Goliath cut off *his* head.

But David killed him. The Spirit of God enabled David, guided that stone, and killed the evil one. And then he cut off his head.

One of the tactics of evil by which its emissaries work to remain hidden under a cloak of "holy light," is to quench the working of the Spirit in us so that we do not recognize it and act by it. The Spirit is quenched by the lies of the evil one.

- It is always sinful to show anger
- We must never speak negatively of anyone
- Passivity and pacifism is what we are called to

And so, Goliath is left to oppress and to kill and destroy because Christians are duped and do not follow the leading of the Spirit in them.

How does the Spirit of God react when evil comes into its presence? Here are some answers:

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1Th 5:19-22)

The Holy Spirit is at work in us, leading and directing us in righteousness. He directs us to abstain from every form of evil. EVERY form. That means that we must:

- Be wise about what evil is, what it looks like, and
- Be innocent of it ourselves

To fail to heed the Spirit's leading in this is to ally oneself with evil. We are to TEST things. We are to hold fast to what is good, but we must necessarily judge and say "this is evil, this is good," or we will inevitably quench the leading of the Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit will immediately sound off warnings to us when evil comes into our presence.

Gal 5:16-23 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (17) **For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other,** to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (19) Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, (20) idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, (21) envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Do you see this? *The desires of the Spirit are AGAINST the flesh.*

Powerfully. When sin and unrighteousness and evil rise up in His presence, He opposes it. Paul is here dealing with the flesh, but we must also understand that this is not our own flesh and sin, but includes the wickedness in others. The Spirit actively opposes evil. The Spirit is against evil.

Listen again-

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

Now let me ask you. Did David exercise these fruits of the Spirit when he opposed Goliath? Was he at peace with Goliath? Was he patient with and kind to Goliath? He killed him and cut off his head!

Many supposed Christian teachers and preachers today would have David quench the Spirit. They would have told him that he was wrong to do what he did, that he should have been more patient, more kind, and should have tried to get Goliath to see the error of his ways and repent!

We have been taught wrongly and at best this wrong teaching is rank naivete, but more often I believe that it is evil that is working to cloak itself in righteousness.

I can give you a personal example and I hope that some examples from your own experience will be coming to your mind right now as well.

Once many years ago I took a phone call from a man who had attended this church occasionally. He had a reputation in the community of being a braggart and a bully but I didn't know that. He phoned and he was drunk and he was angry and threatening and he was blaspheming God and threatening this church with violence because he did not like it that we found out a relative of his was a criminal and a danger to our young people and we had warned the parents of those young people about him. So this guy is blaspheming the Lord's name to me and threatening to come over and assault me and all that sort of wickedness. I was angry and I told him he was a wicked, evil man and we were not going to be intimidated by him, and that if he wanted to come over and attack us come right ahead and I will be there waiting for him. He shut up right away and I told him we would not permit that kind of threat against us nor listen to his evil blasphemy of the Lord. I never heard from him again.

Now, not long after that when I recounted to the church board what had happened, one man in particular became very critical, accusing me of

doing wrong, telling me I should have been patient and kind to the fellow, and on and on it went. Over the years he brought this accusation up in my face repeatedly. Eventually I realized that he was a wicked man himself and he was using those false claims to pervert Scripture, to quench the Holy Spirit's leading of us, and to exalt and glorify himself.

What does the leading of the Holy Spirit look like, you see? And what I am cautioning you about this morning is that we have been so often wrongly taught so that we do not recognize the Spirit's leading in us, we are told that it is the flesh, and we quench the Spirit. And evil remains unmolested among us!

Let me give you some more examples of the Spirit's leading when evil shows up:

Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Yes, what they are

building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night. In Judah it was said, "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work." At that time the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said to us ten times,

"You must return to us." So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people by their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears

from the break of dawn until the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day." So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand. (Neh 4:1-23)

Now, I ask you – was Nehemiah led by the Spirit of God in this? Of course he was! And if those wicked men had attacked, the Jews would have fought. With God's blessing. Nehemiah, led by the Spirit, even prayed God's judgment upon these enemies.

And I ask you once more, is all of this consistent with what we have so often been taught about being a Christian and walking in the Spirit?

Let's consider still another example:

And Samson said to the young man who held him by the hand, "Let me feel the pillars on which the house rests, that I may lean against them." Now the house was full of men and women. All the lords of the Philistines were there, and on the roof there were about 3,000 men and women, who looked on while Samson entertained. Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember

me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life. (Jdg 16:26-30)

I ask again, was this the Spirit of God? Yes it was!

He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking

people to lead him by the hand. (Act 13:7-11)

Do you see that if you have been taught a distorted, milk toast version of God and specifically of the Holy Spirit's leading in the believer, then you are going to quench that leading when evil comes into your presence and is revealed and opposed by the Spirit. Which means you will be left to act in a fleshly manner of cowardice or denial, enabling the evil. You will confuse the leading of the Spirit with the flesh and the other way round as well.

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (Joh 8:43-45)

Was Jesus led by the Spirit? And yet today a response like this to the wicked is branded as being "un-Christian, unkind, un-spiritual."

Where the Spirit of God is quenched, there is no fear of the Lord.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and 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 for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much." And she said, "Yes, for so much." But Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon

all who heard of these things. (Act 5:1-11)

Ananias and Sapphira lied *to the Holy Spirit* and the Holy Spirit killed them. Was Peter unspiritual and unkind and unloving to them?

Where the Spirit of God is quenched, there is no fear of the Lord, evil flourishes unchecked and unexposed.

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Mat 15:12-14)

Was the Lord Jesus speaking by the Spirit when He offended the Pharisees? What about when He told the disciples "tough. Don't worry about them."

When evil comes into our presence, the Spirit of Christ in us *mightily opposes it and exposes it*. We must understand that this is indeed the Spirit in us or we will be duped. Do not be so quick to condemn your reaction as "sinful".

Let me give you an example that I saw just this last week. I was driving

through the little town I live in and I saw a person alongside the highway hitchhiking. They had a walker and as I went by they lifted the walker up and kind of shook it to call my attention to their disability so I would give them a ride. I knew that is what the person was doing (I wasn't able to tell if the person was male or female), and I just kept driving.

The next day I was in a local business and I asked the owner about the hitchhiker with the walker. He told me, "oh yeah, that guy has been around here for months sponging off people. And I just found out that he stole that walker from someone's yard. The churches here have been helping him and paying his bills and I don't understand it because he is obviously a charlatan."

So what does the Holy Spirit say about sluggards and con artists? If they won't work, then they don't eat. We are not supposed to support such a person. And yet here, as a very poor example to the non-Christians in town, it is the professing Christians who claim they are showing this guy the love of Christ!! In fact they are participating in his sin.

The Holy Spirit is not a wimp. The Son of God is not a wimp. But we have been taught that he is. So evil flourishes among us. God is not feared.

The Day of the Lord is presented as some fun-filled Day when most everyone is going to happily walk into heaven.

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2Th 1:5-10)

Are those the words of the Spirit of God? I hope that we all understand that they are indeed, and the we each one carefully give thought to what the leading of the Spirit in us really looks like. We must be wise as serpents in regard to the nature and tactics of evil while remaining innocent as doves as to participation in it.

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 9 – Evil is Among Us, Why
are We Surprised?)**

February 7, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 23

Introduction-

We continue this morning with our series Wise as Serpents, with the intent of becoming wise regarding the nature and tactics of evil which God's Word repeatedly warns us will most surely try to creep in among Christ's people to deceive us, to introduce a false gospel, to bring us into religious bondage, and to use us for the selfish lusts of these emissaries of the devil.

As you all know well, we work daily with evil, particularly in the form of its oppression of Christians by

conscienceless abusers in a domestic and church setting. Most often these wicked ones disguise themselves as Christians, as pastors, as missionaries, as pillars of the local church. They are wolves in wool.

Why? What are the warning signs we should be seeing? *Why are Christians so stubbornly reluctant to call evil what it is, evil?*

This past week I had a conversation with a Christian lady who is truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness, but is not finding it in her local church. That church leadership has regularly and repeatedly welcomed wicked, deceptive narcissists not only into its midst but even ordaining them as leaders. Men with a history of felony convictions. Men with a history of violence toward women. And this is no "out there" radical, unusual church you must understand. It is a Reformed church holding to the Westminster Confession, the membership of which embraces conservative Christianity. In the name of "grace and mercy," the leaders are welcoming evil into the

fold, and boasting about it. Anyone who raises a warning is labeled a troublemaker and invited to shut up or leave.

Why are Christians so stubbornly reluctant to call evil what it is? EVIL!

One answer to this question is this: Many times the children of the devil establish themselves in the church as leaders. As pastors. As elders. As prominent church members who are the “go-to” pillars of holiness who the church, it seems, could never survive without. You may have read just this week that a former Tillamook police officer who was also a pastor in the Portland area was arrested, tried and convicted of molesting minors in both Deschutes and Tillamook counties. His congregation backed him up in court.

Why are Christians so blind to evil? Especially when it is in their midst and even disguised as a minister of the gospel or some “holiest of holy saint” member of the church? Why?

Here is another ongoing current example of this willful blindness among us:

Libby Anne, Patheos.com wrote an article about the highly publicized case of Saeed Abedini and his wife Naghmeh. You remember that Saeed is a pastor who went out from a church in

Idaho to establish an orphanage, I believe, in Iran and was imprisoned for several years. Recently his wife confided in friends that Saeed had abused her for a long time and had even been arrested for assaulting her (and convicted) in 2007. That information became public and the firestorm has begun with many professing Christians siding with Saeed and pounding Naghmeh for revealing the abuse. Here is an excerpt from Libby Anne’s article:

On January 28, 2016 Franklin Graham posted this on his Facebook page:

“I was one of millions of people around the world praying for the release of Saeed Abedini, the American pastor imprisoned in Iran for his Christian faith. It was an honor to finally be able to meet him last week. This young man has spent 3 1/2 years of his life in jail for his faith, where he was beaten and tortured.

“While we rejoice at his new freedom, we now lift him and his wife Naghmeh to the Lord for healing in their marriage. Other than God, no one knows the details and the truth of what has happened between Saeed and Naghmeh except them. There’s an old saying that there are at least two sides to

every story. I can tell one thing for sure—not everything that has been reported in the media is true.

“As a minister of the Gospel, I have tried to be a friend to both and to assist them in getting Saeed home and in getting access to any help that they may need. Clearly, there is a great need for prayer for their relationship and their family. God has answered prayer by bringing about Saeed’s release from prison, and now, Satan would like nothing more than to continue to destroy their lives. It is my prayer that this will not happen.”

Libby Anne continues:

Franklin says that there are “at least two sides to every story,” that he knows for a fact that not everything that has been reported is true (despite the fact that he only just met Saeed for the first time), and that “other than God, no one knows the details or the truth of what has happened between Saeed and Naghmeh except them.” In other words, Franklin goes to great lengths to undercut Naghmeh’s narrative.

But Naghmeh has something other women in her position generally don’t have:

In 2007, Saeed pleaded guilty to misdemeanor domestic assault in Ada County Magistrate Court. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail, which was suspended, and placed on probation for a year, according to online Idaho court records. The case file was not immediately available for review.

When a woman accuses a man who has pled guilty to domestic violence in the past of abuse, you would think people would listen. I mean gracious, people should listen even without this, but the man pled guilty to either attempting to violently injure Naghmeh or threatening to violently injure Naghmeh, while creating reasonable fear that he would follow through. How do you look at that and then jump to talking about how there are “two sides to every story” and “no one knows the details or the truth of what has happened?” *It’s becoming quite clear that evangelicals’ problems with dealing with abuse are even worse than I had thought.*

[And I would broaden that very good statement by stating it like this: “It’s becoming quite clear that evangelicals’ problems with dealing with EVIL are even worse than I had thought]

But what about Saeed? How has he responded to Naghmeh's statements? Like this:

"1. Our marriage is under great stress and I am hoping and praying for healing and restoration.

2. I love my wife and want God's will for both of our lives.

3. I am a sinner, saved only by the wonderful grace of God. While I am far from perfect—as a man or as a husband, I am seeking every day to submit to God as He molds me into what He wants me to be.

4. Much of what I have read in Naghmeh's posts and subsequent media reports is not true. But I believe we should work on our relationship in private and not on social media or other media. Naghmeh wrote this week, "We are taking personal time to work on very serious personal issues." I intend to do this hard work in private.

5. The God I serve today is the same God I served while being interrogated and beaten in some of the harshest prison conditions in the world and He is capable of restoring a marriage that has withstood unbelievable pressure. I ask for prayer for another victory."

Make no mistake. That is the language and tactics of an evil man, a wolf in sheep's clothing. If you cannot identify

it as such, noting the motives and tactics evidenced there that are typical of these emissaries of the devil, then you need to become wise as a serpent in regard to evil. Libby Anne goes on:

I grieve for the position in which Naghmeh now finds herself. Franklin Graham, perhaps the most prominent public evangelical figure of our era, has stated publicly that there are "two sides" to the story, and her husband, Saeed, has publicly accused her of lying. Meanwhile, both of them have positioned the restoration of the couple's marriage as a victory from God and the destruction of their marriage as a victory for Satan. In other words, if Naghmeh decides to make the separation permanent, she will have allowed Satan to win. Think, for a moment, about the impossible position in which that puts Naghmeh.

There's something else to note in Saeed's positioning as well.

Evangelical women typically lose any hope they might have for their community's support in leaving an abusive husband when that husband professes to be actively working to listen to and submit to God.

As long as her husband says he is working on his relationship with God and that he wants to fix the marriage, an evangelical woman will typically be seen as the one destroying a marriage if she leaves, even if her husband is actively abusing her. Saeed has positioned himself as the reasonable one, the one listening to God and dedicated to restoring his marriage. This perfectly positions Naghmeh as the unreasonable one, the one willing to flee in the face of God's efforts at restoration and destroy a marriage.

On a related note, I keep seeing people talking about the Naghmeh and Saeed's "marriage troubles." That's a rather fancy way of saying "Saeed is abusive and Naghmeh is trying to decide whether to stay and hope against all history that things will change or whether to leave and create a new life with her children." By discussing it as "marriage troubles," the responsibility for fixing their marriage is placed on both Naghmeh and Saeed. Oh, and can we talk about that term, "fixing their marriage"? Their marriage doesn't need fixing, Saeed needs fixing. And given how long his abuse of Naghmeh has been going on, and the fact that he has apparently

shown enough red flags right out of prison that Naghmeh felt the need to file an order to prevent him from taking the children out of the state, it looks like that's not happening.

Finally, I made the mistake of reading comments on Facebook and you know what? A whole bunch of people are upset with Naghmeh for making her husband look bad. That's just lovely—and it's something I imagine pastors' wives feel more keenly than other evangelical women. Coming forward about your abuse will damage your husband's ministry. Why can't you just keep quiet and let the Lord do his work? I can't even imagine the pressure these women must feel. Frankly, the wonder is not that Naghmeh kept quiet for so long but rather that she had the courage to come forward about her abuse at all—and we should all be asking what that means for other evangelical women in abusive marriages.

-See more at:
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/lovejoyfeminism/2016/02/nagmeh-abedini-franklin-graham-and-the-silencing-of-evangelical-abuse-victims.html#sthash.185T0KvZ.dpuf>

No Excuse for Being Duped

I want to spend the rest of our time looking at several Scriptures which repeatedly tell us that we should expect the enemy to not only creep in among us as professing Christians, but in particular these wolves will seek out and obtain leadership positions in the church. That is where the power and control is to be had, you see. And they crave it. Church history is largely the history of these kinds of wicked ones working to distort the gospel, murder Christ's true people, and deceive. *It should not surprise or shock us that a man like Saeed, a pastor, is guilty of domestic violence against his wife.*

Let's go back first to Jeremiah, a place we have visited before:

And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.

(Jer 2:7-8)

"As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.' For they

have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble they say, 'Arise and save us!' (Jer 2:26-27)

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.

(Jer 23:1-2)

Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and because of his holy words. For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right. "Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their evil, declares the LORD. Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall, for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the LORD.

(Jer 23:9-12)

And then Ezekiel:

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their

hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. (Eze 34:1-10)

Her officials within her are roaring lions; her judges are evening wolves that leave nothing till the morning. Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men; her priests profane what is holy; they do violence to the law. (Zep 3:3-4)

These are just samples! Many more such texts could be cited from the Old Testament. But that is not all:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Mat 9:36)

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Mat 15:12-14)

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved

and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. (Joh 10:7-12)

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Mat 7:15)

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Act 20:28-30)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit

you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2Pe 2:1-3)

Who are these wolves? They are priests, prophets, teachers, Pharisees. They are *people who lust for and obtain leadership in Christ's church*. They are clergy, pastors, missionaries, teachers, elders, and pillar-of-the-church members. Think carefully on this. *These are the expected positions where you will find just such evil ones*. This is where Paul told the Ephesian elders, and US that we have to be particularly careful and watchful. *Pay careful attention to yourselves...fierce wolves will come in among you...from among your own selves will arise men...* From among the elders. From among the pastors. From among the leaders of the flock.

Why are Christians so reluctant to call evil, evil? Especially when it comes in the form of a pastor or other church leader? This is the very venue we are warned to expect it in.

I will go further. Not only is there this reluctance to name evil for what it is, there is PRESSURE in the assembly to close our mouths about it. People who expose evil are regularly accused of:

- Gossip/Slander
- Exaggeration

- Unforgiveness
- Lack of mercy

And a host of other charges. This is how Rome came to be. It is how Hitlers come to power. Evil is denied. Evildoers are protected and enabled and covered for.

But Christ calls us to expose it. To shine His truth on it. To do as He did and openly call it for what it is – EVIL, children of the devil, murderers, liars, a false shepherd.

Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus by night? Because he was under pressure from the church leaders of the day to persecute Christ.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1Pe 5:8-9)

But we must SEE and know evil if we are going to resist it! Evil always comes to us in the form of a person, and usually such a person is parading as a Christian.

Conclusion

Let's close with an encouraging section from God's Word. It is easy to become discouraged when we see just how much evil is in the visible church today. So it is vital that we remember the certain promises of the Lord such as these:

"For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will

feed them in justice. "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet?

"Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.

And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season;

they shall be showers of blessing. And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land.

And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD." (Eze 34:11-31)

And evil will never, ever, ever come to us again.

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 10 – Innocent as Doves
Does not Mean Ignorance of
Evil)**

February 14, 2016

Sermon Text: Proverbs 1

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 1

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men...(Mat 10:16-17)

I want to propose to you this morning that Christians often equate being innocent of evil with being ignorant of evil. That our desire to come out from among evil and be separate from it gets confused with being blind to that evil. And that ignorance of evil and its

tactics are wrongly equated with achieving holiness. So that when emissaries of the evil one come among us, we have no paradigm for seeing them for what they are. We fail to "beware of men."

Christ tells us that this is not the way to do His warfare in this world. We are to be wise as serpents when it comes to knowing what evil looks like, how it operates, how it creeps into even the church, and not be deceived by it. More than once I have been told by people who spent years being deceived and victimized by evil in disguise say something to this effect:

"My Christian upbringing set me up to be a target and victim of evil."

Of course this was not due to some deficiency in Christ or in His Word. Rather, it was due to failure of the church and of Christian parents to do what Scripture does – train and teach the children about the existence, nature, and tactics of evil.

To be innocent as doves in regard to evil does not mean being ignorant of evil.

Let me give you an example of an unbiblical mindset about evil. One time many years ago I was driving a group of teens on an outing over in the Portland area and we went by a park. There was a car with a lone man in it parked in a rather unusual place, somewhat off by himself. I pointed the car out to the young people and asked them if they saw anything odd about it. After some silence, I told them that such circumstances are the very thing they need to learn to be aware of. I then told them the guy could well be a pervert waiting to prey upon an unsuspecting child.

At that point, one of the mothers who was along said, “Now pastor, you have to be careful to guard the purity of these young “maidens” minds.”

And there it is. THAT. That is not truth. It is not wisdom. That is foolishness that is not to be found in God’s Word. And by the way, that woman’s children did not turn out well as they grew up and entered out into the world. Evil got them.

We don’t like to have to think about evil, do we? But we must. How many of you take note of your surroundings when you walk up to an ATM machine

to get some cash out? If you don’t, you need to.

And so it is in the church. We want to assume that everyone who claims to be a Christian is, and can be trusted. But that is not true. It is foolishness. It is not God’s wisdom as revealed to us in Scripture.

Remaining “pure” in regard to evil does not mean being ignorant of evil.

Let me prove it to you. Look once more with me at the very first chapter of Proverbs:

A Call to Wisdom-

Pro 1:1-33 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: (2) To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, (3) to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; (4) to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— (5) Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, (6) to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. (7) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (8) Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, (9) for

they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

It is assumed then that fathers and mothers will instruct their children in the wisdom of the Lord. They will do this diligently. But in order to do so, they themselves must fear the Lord and be wise in His wisdom. They must be wise *“in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity.”*

Notice that to have wisdom in righteousness, a person must be wise about UN-righteousness. To have wisdom about justice, a person must know what IN-justice is. And so also with equity. IN-equity must be known. This is why, as we are about to see here, Scripture also includes much instruction about *evil and wickedness*. How it hides. How it is hated by the Lord. How it tries to entice us. Anyone who despises such instruction is said here to be *a fool*.

Hear then God’s Word as Solomon gets to the specifics of wisdom. Notice carefully! *He begins with instruction about evil!*

Wisdom is Wise as a Serpent-

(10) My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. (11) If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; (12) like Sheol let us swallow

them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; (13) we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; (14) throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"— (15) my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, (16) for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. (17) For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, (18) but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. (19) Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

Who are these sinners who entice? Solomon is speaking to his son. I seriously doubt that his children mixed it up with Philistine criminals. No, these sinners he is warning about *come from his own countrymen. They are members of the Old Covenant community. Today we would say they are wolves who are pretending to be Christians*, although in our day young people will certainly be approached by wicked people who make no claim of Christ at all. Such conspirators try, often with success, to lure a foolish youth by using online social media forms. The threat today is even greater than in Solomon’s era and it is even more vital that our children (and we ourselves) are instructed in wisdom about evil.

Notice how *specifically* Solomon describes the methods and strategy of evil ones to his son. He does not leave the young man in naivete. There is no place for this father to yield to some fool who says “Oh, Solomon! Do you really think you should be telling these things to your son?” In fact, Solomon will even step up the instruction about evil and its plots. Listen to the next chapter:

Pro 2:1-22 My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, (2) making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; (3) yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, (4) if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, (5) then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. (6) For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; (7) he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, (8) guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. (9) **Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; (10) for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; (11) discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, (12) delivering you from the way of**

evil, from men of perverted speech, (13) who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, (14) who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, (15) men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. (16) **So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words,** (17) who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; (18) for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; (19) none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. (20) So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. (21) For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, (22) but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.

See it? Innocent as doves in regard to the practice and guilt of evil, but wise as serpents in respect to knowing that it exists and how it operates among us. Now start to think – how much of the rest of this book of Proverbs and in fact how much of the ENTIRE Bible, contains instruction about the nature, existence, and tactics of evil? *Much!* THIS is how we are delivered from evil. How we are guarded from it.

And yet today the average professing Christian embraces and is taught an unbiblical ignorance of evil which in many aspects even denies its existence, at least in the visible church. How do we know this is the case? *Because people who have been victimized by evil that hides in the church behind a façade of wool are telling their stories every single day.* Their church, their pastors, their fellow Christians, refused to believe them when they called for help. Here is one such story received by us very recently:

I think I understand how my abusive narcissistic husband never was who he said he was. Our whole relationship was a lie. I have grieved for the loss of who I thought he was.

But losing my church and my friends is a different story. I expected them to stand with me, to support me and my children. My best friend's husband became my anti-husband's buddy, so I lost her. One of my other dear friends of over a decade pretty much said, "you never said anything." All the questions made me feel like I was on trial. For my sanity I have had to walk away from unsafe people. Losing the people I expected to support me has been the hardest part of this journey. Having people who I thought loved and cared for

my family for over a decade not even inquire of our well being, has been devastating. A lot of them don't know what's going on and like it that way. I don't have the energy or care to risk putting myself out there to be injured by people who don't get abuse. [Insert "evil"]

To my well meaning holier than thou friends : Going to War Room won't save my marriage...God is NOT a genie!!! It distresses me that you are more upset about "a good family being broken apart" than the brokenness in my children and me caused by my abusive husband. No thank you, I do not want to go to the bible study on anger because I am angry with my pastors for the unjust way my children and I have been treated. End rant!

Most of them are just too busy with their own lives to notice us being gone. My depression over the last decade has resulted in very few activities with our homeschool group as well. I don't want to think they never cared or that they still don't care enough to be moved to compassion.

I have PTSD. Thankfully, with God's help and a great therapist whose specialty is trauma, I am making excellent progress. My focus has to be on my healing and helping my children with theirs.

God continues to put people in my path who are helping us and loving us.

I think it is my expectation for my husband now is low...I expect abuse from him, now that I know that is who he is and always has been.

But, I expected my church and my friends, especially, to care enough to do something. I expected them not to be in a fog as I was for so many years. To some extent I was like them. I was an evangelical, conservative christian home schooler. I was judgmental and critical of divorced people. I thought they just didn't try hard enough. I am so sorry.

[She has now found a solid church where there is wisdom about evil and where she is believed]

I look back to a year ago. I was a person entrenched in emotional anesthesia. I felt no pain and no joy, either. I was disconnected from everyone, barely holding on to hope.

The thought, "I just want to die" would go over in my head throughout the day. GOD in his infinite mercy, pulled me up out of that pit of despair and brought me to the light. He literally opened my

eyes to show me the truth of my situation.

When I look back, I realize, I was more alone then. I am able to connect with my children now and be present with them. I am able to laugh and feel joy. I love being alive, even if it means it is painful and I feel all the emotions. It gives me hope that in another year's time, my life will be less lonely.

We have spent several weeks at home listening to your sermons, Pastor Jeff and they are like a soothing balm to our weary souls. To be understood and stood up for, especially by a man and a man of the cloth is incredibly healing. I have found that, as much as my kids would like to remain in our little bubble, I NEED PEOPLE!!!! I need to be with my brothers and sisters in Christ. As scary as it is, I have to risk it. If I find this is not a safe place, (and thanks to you, Pastor, and my own experience, I now can recognize evil) we can choose to go somewhere else.

Do you see what devastation ignorance of evil causes? It literally kills people – physically and spiritually. It is a shame to the name of Jesus Christ when people who claim to belong to Him remain fools about evil.

What does the Lord say about people who refuse this kind of instruction and choose to remain willfully blind to evil? Here is the answer as chapter one concludes:

Fools Turn Away from Wisdom -

(20) Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; (21) at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: (22) "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? (23) If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. (24) Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, (25) because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, (26) I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, (27) when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. (28) Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. (29) Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, (30) would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, (31) therefore they shall eat the fruit of their

way, and have their fill of their own devices. (32) For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; (33) but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."

"Remaining pure does not mean being ignorant of evil." The Lord Jesus Christ knew all about evil and He was able to recognize it, expose it, and confront it. As we see in the following Scriptures, Christ had none of the naïve notion in his head which refused to acknowledge evil in the church:

Mat 6:1-8 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (2) "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (5) "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their

reward. (6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (7) "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

And again:

Mat 23:23-33 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. (24) You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! (25) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. (26) You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (27) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. (28) So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy

and lawlessness. (29) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, (30) saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' (31) Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. (32) Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. (33) You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

Woe! Indeed! Jesus Christ, whom we are striving to be like, knew all about evil, saw it for what it was, called it out and was not duped by it.

The Lord did not hide evil from His people, but exposed it. Here is an example from the Old Testament:

Eze 8:12-18 Then he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'" (13) He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations that they commit." (14) Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. (15) Then he said to me, "Have you seen

this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these."

(16) And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. (17) Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose. (18) Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."

What was so much of the preaching of the prophets? Promise of forgiveness for those who would repent? Yes. But also much was intended for the exposure of wickedness and sin among God's covenant people. This exposure, this description of evil, was given in detail for all to hear.

Conclusion

2Co 2:11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

The Apostle Paul here *assumes* that Christ's people are not ignorant of Satan, of his strategies, of all the evil devices he brings against us and into our midst. In large part today the visible professing church cannot say "we are not ignorant of his devices." And there is no excuse for this ignorance of evil. God's Word exposes it for us, God's Word gives those who will listen wisdom about evil so that we and others might be delivered from the evil one when his emissaries come along with all their alluring enticements.

Only a fool will keep his eyes closed to these things.

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 11 – The Seductive Beauty
of Evil)**

February 21, 2016

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 11

Scripture Reading: Revelation 21

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men...(Mat 10:16-17)

As we continue to consider the nature and tactics of evil and those who are its emissaries, we must once again remind ourselves that this darkness cannot overcome the Light of Christ.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no

evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psa 23:4)

Let's always remember as we walk through this life in the presence of evil and do battle with it that a Day is coming when we will never see evil again:

But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Rev 21:27)

Evil often appears in seductive beauty, and this is the aspect of it that we are going to consider this morning.

My name is Janice and I've been free from my abuser for almost 2 years now. I want to share my story because the attempted public shaming of Naghmeh Abedini is a trigger for what my husband did when I tried to leave. My ex husband is a well-known "Christian" musician. His worship songs are sung by quite a few churches, he's played at most of the Christian music festivals around the

world. When I met him, I already knew his worship songs, just not his name. When I met him he was the most incredible person. When I left him years later I had finally unraveled his outside appearance and found what was really underneath.

I was in my 20's when I met my husband and he was in his late 30's. I had no family in the new place I was living, and had found it hard to make many meaningful friendships. I met him in another state while I was home for a weekend. He was on tour.

We spent the evening talking and I was amazed at how incredible this man was. I had always felt out of place in the church. A little too wild, too independent, too weird. I'd returned home from missions in Europe the year before but I missed the country I had served in terribly and I wanted to move back. He wanted to move to Europe, within the next couple years! He considered music his ministry and had a burden on his heart to reach atheist Europe. He loved all the same bands that I'd grown up on and liked to go out dancing once in awhile at clubs that catered to that music.

He loved some well-known Christian theologians and claimed to have read every book by one of my favorites. . He had tattoos (like me), piercings (like me), and we enjoyed a couple

glasses of wine over the course of the evening. He told me he wanted me to sing on an album, he couldn't wait to get home to take me out dancing, and we made plans to see each other in a month.

I couldn't believe how lucky I was. It seemed so incredible it must be God ordained. How could it not be, with so much in common, meeting on the other side of the country, and *I really believed I heard God speak to me that night and tell me he was The One.*

But Janice had not heard the Lord that evening. The voice she heard was, in fact, the voice of the evil one disguised in seductive beauty, as she would soon find out. It would be over a decade before she was able to get free of this wicked man and she would suffer much at his hands. He continues to this day, incidentally, to be a leader in a church, adored by many. His abuse tactics and perversions are so hellish that most of them I could not even describe for you here.

This is the second lady *this week* (and there have been many others in the past) who has written these very kinds of words:

"I just know this is the Lord directing me. Look at all of the details and how they came into place. And this man, this man is so godly, so charming, so

kind and loving toward me! I have never met anyone like him before. Thank you Lord.”

The seductive beauty of evil, you see.

Read about sociopaths, psychopaths, and narcissists and you will find consistently that their victims found them “unusually charming” at first. Being wise about evil means knowing these things. It means listening carefully, perhaps more carefully than ever before, to the warnings of God’s Word:

My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it. (Pro 5:1-6)

Think again about these verses. Ask some searching questions.

- What does it mean that her lips drip honey and her speech is smoother than oil?

It means far more than physical attractiveness and seductive behavior.

It means that this evil comes speaking charming, flattering words *that make you feel more than good – exhilarated.* Here is someone whose words are saying that they believe in you, that they love you, that you have value to them. They are words and behaviors that are extremely potent and powerful like a soothing, energizing drug. *And it seems so beautiful. So right. So...of the Lord.*

But it is not. The reality is:

- Bitterness
- The piercing of a sword
- Death

Now, here in these verses from Proverbs, in these warnings of a father to his son, the evil is depicted in a very common form that it comes to a young man in – the wicked, evil woman. But the principle and application is much wider than that:

- A charming, evil man speaking such words to a young woman
- An evil charlatan selling his fraudulent “investment” package
- A candidate for a pastoral position in a church with a knack for charming his way into such positions of trust
- A pastor or church leader who is considered the most charming person you have ever met

We must be wise. Wise as serpents. Evil loves to show up in seductive beauty.

Jane Austen had a handle on such evil as is seen in some of the characters in her novels:

Pride and Prejudice - Wickham is handsome, cheerful, always ready to talk, and **very charming**. It's small wonder that Elizabeth almost fell for him. But he has a rotten side to him as his elopement with Lydia and his near-elopement with Georgiana shows.

Sense and Sensibility - John Willoughby is everything Marianne ever dreamed of. Handsome, **witty**, and romantic. But he lets Marianne think he will still marry her while he courts Miss King. She almost dies because of his treachery.

Mansfield Park - Henry Crawford is **charming**, kind, and attentive. He is devoted to Fanny. But she sees through him and remembers his treatment of her cousins, Julia and Maria. Even when he is kind to her and her uncle pressures her, she still holds fast to her refusal of his proposal. Her instincts prove right when he scandalously elopes with the now married Maria.

[Elinor and Emma,
elinorandemma.wordpress.com]

Consider Eden once again.

Now the serpent was **more crafty** than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3:1)

Crafty. What does that mean? It is variously translated in English Bibles as:

- Crafty
- Subtle
- Intelligent
- Sneakier
- Clever
- Cunning
- Astute
- Shrewd
- More able to fool

Think this through carefully then. Would such a being come in a repulsive, fearsome form – like we think of when we imagine “serpent”? I doubt it. I suspect that whatever the serpent looked like *before the fall* it would have been attractive. Strikingly beautiful. The seductive beauty of evil, you see. Eve, then Adam, was seduced by evil.

Here is the Lord Jesus’ describing the serpent in truth:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (Joh 8:44)

THAT is who that “beautiful” creature really was in Eden.

Many times I have had women write to me and tell their sad story of how they had met the most wonderful man they ever knew, married him, and literally *on the honeymoon* that man went away and another man, an evil man they had never seen before, took his place.

Here is a sobering warning:

Once you allow yourself to be charmed by the seductive beauty of evil, you will not listen to any words of warning your parents or your friends might say. You will be blinded and deafened to reason. And you will only awaken from this seduction after experiencing the sad outcome.

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3:19)

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. (Gen 3:24)

Psa 55:20-21 My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. (21) His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life. (Pro 7:21-23)

Listen to these examples from Robert Hare's book, Without Conscience -

“A woman in Florida bought him a new car. A woman in California bought him a motor home. As a newspaper article describing Leslie Gall's cross country exploits aptly pointed out, it's all in the name: Gall says it all.

The 'sweetheart swindler' as one of his victims referred to him, made his way from widow to widow, bilking them out of all he needed and farm more. They

opened their hearts and checkbooks to him. With never, charm, and a suitcase full of false ID's, he allegedly stole thousands of dollars from elderly women he met at senior citizens dances and social clubs.” (chap 4)

And another-

“Elyse met Jeffrey in the summer of 1984, and she was never to forget that day. She was at the beach with some friends when she spied him and was completely charmed by his huge, bright smiles. He walked right up to her and asked for her phone number, and his effrontery somehow disarmed her – she just gave in to his smile and utter lack of self-consciousness. He called her the next day and then somehow showed up at her job. So it began...with a smile.” (chap 5)

“It” was a nightmare of evil that would affect Elyse the rest of her life. The seductive charm of evil had buried its fangs in her.

Paul Warns Us

Christians are warned over and over again about the ability of evil to appear beautiful and charming. In fact, that is the very form of choice when Satan's ambassadors work to gain acceptance and power in Christ's church. Listen to it-

2Co 11:1-20 I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! (2) For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (3) But I am afraid that **as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning**, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough...

(12) And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. (13) For such men are **false** apostles, **deceitful** workmen, **disguising themselves** as apostles of Christ.

(14) And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

(15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, **disguise themselves** as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (16) I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. (17)

What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. (18) Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. (19) **For you gladly bear with fools,** being wise yourselves! (20) **For you bear it** if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

Paul is teaching us and warning us as follows:

- Satan is that beguiling serpent who deceived Eve and he is at work trying to deceive us as well
- His goal as he creeps in among us in the church is to lure us away from Christ, from our freedom, and put us into bondage to HIM.
- Satan can disguise himself *as an angel of light!* Think carefully about that! That is a pretty good disguise!
- Evil, in its seductive beauty, puts on the disguise of an apostle of Christ, of a servant of righteousness. By these tactics evil people deceive many.
- Christians who fall for these tactics receive such evil ones gladly, even when such a wolf mistreats them! And then just TRY to tell them “he’s a wolf!” They won’t listen.

Listen to one more example of evil in its seductive beauty-

The Woman on the Beast:

Rev 17:1-6 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." (3) And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. (4) **The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls,** holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. (5) And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." (6) And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.

You see it? Here is this filthy, vile, evil power, the source of all idolatries, murderer of Christ’s people, and yet

she is seductively beautiful. With this false beauty she has seduced many. Perhaps this is why John is marveling “greatly”? Babylon here is the world economic and religious system which, with false beauty, seduces myriads of people to embrace her rather than Christ.

No doubt this is why the Apostle John warns us:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. (1Jn 2:15-18)

Evil appears in seductive beauty, just as the serpent appeared in Eden. Lips dripping with honey, words smoother than silk. Do not be deceived or charmed. It's way is the way of eternal death.

12

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 12 – Evil and the Road to
Rome)

February 28, 2016

Sermon Text: Revelation 2-3

Scripture Reading: Revelation 2-3

Introduction-

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men...(Mat 10:16-17)

I have been reading G.K. Beale's commentary on Revelation. I have benefitted much from Beale's writings because he consistently and carefully interprets Scripture against the "big picture" context of the history of redemption in Christ from Genesis to Revelation. This study of Scripture that steps back and relates a text to

God's overall plan of redemption and seeing how that particular Scripture fits into and contributes to that plan is called *biblical theology*. Biblical theology for example does things like looking for images of Eden in Revelation and then relating them to the original Eden to see just what message it is that comes from these very first images in Genesis recurring in Revelation. The message of course is that God is making all things right, creating a new creation like Eden and better than Eden and that everything in Scripture between Genesis and Revelation is a record of that plan being carried out.

I also like Beale because though he is a very precise and detailed theologian, he is careful to make practical application of his conclusions. Here is one about the church and it comes from his commentary on the second and third chapters of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches of Asia:

"The significance...here [in Rev 2-3] is to emphasize that the churches in Asia Minor are in serious trouble...in poor health. If the seven churches

represent the church universal of the first century and throughout the church age, then the significance...is to underscore that the church in any generation is typically not a healthy, witnessing church. Nevertheless *there is always a small part of the church which faithfully maintains its witness like Smyrna and Philadelphia.* This sober assessment of the church's overall condition matches what is said in 2 Timothy 1:15, though the evaluation there is even more negative. *Ministers of the gospel must be aware of such realistic evaluations of the church so that their calling is not destroyed when the triumphalist expectations of modern Christendom are not fulfilled.*" [NIGTC, The Book of Revelation, G.K. Beale, p 33]

Think very carefully on this. It is wisdom. What is the teaching and assumption of what Beale here calls "triumphalist expectations of modern Christendom"? I can tell you and you already know:

- A healthy church regularly sees conversions and baptisms
- A healthy church is a numerically growing church
- A healthy church is well thought of by the community
- A healthy church is a materially prospering church

- A healthy church is a non-judgmental church, accepting even the vilest sinner (even if unrepentant)
- A healthy church has a pastor who has advanced theological degrees, operates out of an impressive office surrounded with fine wood trim, impressive paintings, and an array of books behind his desk
- A healthy church's pastor is a popular figure in the denominational circles, preferably holding office there

Ministers of the gospel [and every Christian] must carefully compare Scripture's descriptions of a healthy church of Jesus Christ with all of these popular and completely unbiblical notions.

You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. (2Ti 1:15)

I have been in contact with an abuse victim recently who sought help from her church. All she has received is further abuse. When she appealed her case to a denominational official, he responded to her in anger, accusing her of being the real problem, and generally berating her. She has

witnesses to his actions, so this is no mere unsubstantiated gossip.

What she is facing is a huge virtual antichrist fortress that reminds me of some kind of religious mafia family. The big cheese head man of the denomination is a member of this official's own church (he is a pastor as well) and all their allies just keep voting them into office.

But when an oppressed woman comes to them for help – you see it's true nature. Always remember this truth about evil:

Evil craves power and control. Evil sees itself to be absolutely entitled to these things and parades as a sheep or even an angelic "son of righteousness" to get power and control. When you see these characteristics evidenced, be very sure that you are in the presence of evil.

Christ's true shepherds on the other hand, obey Christ's words:

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your

slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mat 20:25-28)

Precisely what then does evil look like as it operates in the local church, striving for power and control and self-glory? I think we can answer that question by looking at evil in the churches of Asia. As we do, keep this in mind:

Church history evidences a default movement of evil operating in the church toward a system very much like we see evidenced in the Roman Catholic "church." That is to say, evil is always moving toward the establishment of a papacy, the installation of a "pope" figure, possessing virtually absolute power and control (even to the forgiveness or withholding of forgiveness for sins) over Christ's people. By "default" I mean that left to its own, left unopposed, EVERY church and denomination will certainly move to a sharing of the evil traits of Rome in which wicked people will certainly rise to power and adoration.

There really are two roads that the wicked follow to gain power. They appear to be different, but they head toward the very same destination of exaltation and glory for the wicked power brokers:

- The Pharisee road – rigid, legalistic, hypocritical, embracing a very wooden and unbending minute interpretation of Scripture, replacing Scripture with man’s traditions
- The Liberal road which denies the inerrancy of Scripture, denies the fundamental doctrines of the gospel and seemingly appears to be very non-judgmental and accepting.

Both of these routes however are quite the same. Their adherents travel them to arrive at power and control and self-worship at the expense of Christ’s flock. That is to say, you can visit either a very liberal or a very conservative assembly of people claiming the name “Christian,” and very often find power figures maneuvering for offices of power in the structure. And if you doubt it, just see how they respond to the plight of an oppressed person asking for help or to someone who is bold enough to ask questions about what they see happening.

Let’s look briefly then at the seven churches and what Christ, through the Apostle John, had to say to them:

1. The Church at Ephesus.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'" (Rev 2:1-7)

What do we see here in Ephesus? First, notice an evil had come among them in the form of false apostles. To their credit and at the commendation of the Lord, the Ephesian believers had called these wolves out. To do so was costly in some way. It required “endurance” and a temptation to grow weary, but they had not. They had also

stood against another false group, the Nicolaitans, and hated their works. This also is to their commendation.

But when it came to evil arising within themselves, the Ephesians had not done so well. They had abandoned the love they had at first, they had fallen, and they were in need of repentance. There are different views on what this “first love” is.

- Many maintain that it is their love for one another and their love for Christ
- Others, like Beale, conclude that the Ephesians had failed to maintain a diligent witness of the gospel to the outside world.

If Beale is correct, then apart from repenting of their loss of first love, the Ephesian church would see Christ’s departure and it would become fertile ground for false apostles to creep in and establish themselves in power.

[You can see these themes connected in the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24]-

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And

because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Mat 24:9-14)

2. The Church at Smyrna

As Beale admonishes us, we must be certain that we are not drawn in to contemporary Christianity’s common “triumphalism” view of what a real, healthy church looks like. Ephesus looked very healthy in that church’s zealous guarding of the doctrine of the gospel. And yet even that church was in trouble.

So what does a healthy, genuine, Christ-honoring church look like? Smyrna is the real thing:

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you

the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.' (Rev 2:8-11)

What was happening at Smyrna? What did the community of the unsaved think of this church? What did their meeting place look like? Here are the answers:

- Tribulation (persecution for faithfulness to Christ)
- Poverty (probably one form of the persecution)
- Hatred from the local synagogue of Jews
- Imminent suffering, perhaps even of martyrdom

Listen to this description of the cost following Christ in such a place was:

The imperial cult [emperor worship] permeated virtually every aspect of city and often even village life in Asia Minor, so that individuals could aspire to economic prosperity and greater social standing only by participating to some degree in the Roman cult. Citizens of both upper and lower classes were required by local law to sacrifice to the emperor on various special occasions, and sometimes even visitors and foreigners were invited to

do so. City officials were so dedicated to the cult that they even distributed money to citizens from public funds to pay for sacrifices to the emperor. It was almost impossible to have a share in a city's public life without also having a part in some aspect of the imperial cult. Pressure on Christians to conform to such participation would have increased during Domitian's reign. Those refusing to participate were seen as politically disloyal and unpatriotic and would be arrested and punished according to Roman law (exiled, put to death). But genuine Christians could never call anyone Lord except Christ. [Beale, p 240-41]

And here then we have a true church. A healthy church pronounced blessed by the Lord, led by genuine shepherds. Poor. Persecuted. Hated. Probably with a very small congregation. As time went along, other "churches" that compromised with the world would arise and appear to be "blessed." They too would persecute and slander such a church as Smyrna.

3. The Church at Pergamum

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith

even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.' (Rev 2:12-17)

In some ways I would suggest that this church at Pergamum is typical of what we find in conservative churches today that are at least on the road to Rome. Even in a church that so faithfully clung to Christ in times of terrible suffering and martyrdom there was an evil element that had been allowed to creep in and was still there. It is these Nicolaitans once again.

The city of Pergamum was a seat of numbers of pagan deity worship, one of which was symbolized by a serpent and became the official emblem of the

city. Even such a faithful church as this had allowed evil to creep in and be tolerated.

"The church is nevertheless indicted for harboring a group of compromisers, and the image of the sword is in this context primarily a symbol of threat to the church for not disciplining that group. The problem is the opposite of Ephesus. An overemphasis on internal doctrinal purity can lead to a lack of concern for the outside world. The Christians at Pergamum staunchly withstood external pressures to compromise from pagan governmental and religious authorities, but had permitted an apparently subtle form of compromise to develop internally.

...The episode from Numbers [Balaam and Balak] is applied to a group of false teachers in the church at Pergamum because a principle of theological continuity was discerned between the two situations. The false teachers were arguing that believers could have closer relationship with pagan culture, institutions, and religion than John thought proper....The focus here is on eating such food in the context of idolatrous worship....In particular what may be included are trade guild festivals involving celebration of patron deities through feasts and sometimes immoral

activities. Refusal to participate in such activities could result in economic and social ostracism. Therefore there was much pressure to compromise. And just as Israel was influenced to fornicate both sexually and spiritually, the same was true of Christians in Pergamum."[Beale, p 248-49]

In every church I have pastored, in four different towns, I have experienced this identical kind of pressure from these very kinds of wicked people who promote compromise with the world in order to gain popularity and economic gain and yet still claim to be Christians. "Come on, you need to join this or that civic club" even though those civic clubs were characterized by some distorted form of Christianity or were just plain rankly immoral, driven by greed for gain. The idea is to participate in those activities so that the reputation of the church would be favorable in the eyes of the world. Lodges are included here – secret societies that claim to be "of the Bible" and so on.

If the Nicolaitans are allowed to continue in that church, they will gain the power and control they desire and that church will become no church at all.

Just think carefully of all the many things that we are being pressured to participate in today so that people will like us and start coming to this church and we won't have to keep suffering. You can just imagine the many slanderings, innuendos, and the gossip in the town about that "stubborn, judgmental, foolish church at Pergamum" which may have contributed to their temptation to allow these wicked ones to continue in their midst.

We can go on now and see very similar avenues that evil was in these other churches of Asia, with just one exception, that of Philadelphia.

4. The Church at Thyatira

"I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. **But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.** I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will

strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. **But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan,** to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Rev 2:18-29)

Toleration of Jezebel. Sooo common today. Let me give you a very recent example of this from a person who claims to be a Christian. We posted it in a recent blog post and it appears here in the context of a godly person making true statements about evildoers. Then the ungodly "Christian" who like Jezebel would lead Christ's people astray comments:

Friend of the Victim: Just let me say one thing. A man of God will not abuse his wife. They are one if they are married. He would not abuse his wife

because she is part of him. If the abuse doesn't stop I would have to say good-bye. God doesn't want anyone to be abused.

Ally of the Abuser: You would be amazed at how many pastors in thriving ministries abuse their wives, are involved in pornography or other sexual sins. Men of God are not perfect. Attitudes such as yours make it all but impossible for these hurting men (and their wives) to openly get help. Been there, done that.

Friend of the Victim: A man who calls himself by the name of Christ and who is unrepentant of his sins against his wife, himself, and God, is not "a man of God."

And then our friend Pastor Sam Powell in California commented:

I continue to be astounded at these kinds of things. A "godly pastor who abuses his wife" is a lot like saying "a reprobate Christian" a "square circle", or "waterless water". It makes no sense.

Since Christians are the salt of the earth, it is no wonder that words have become meaningless in our society. Postmodernism isn't just something that "others" believe. *It started right in the church!*

If this statement is true: “a godly minister who abuses his wife,” then words have no meaning. If a man can self-identify as a Christian even though he has all the marks of the devil, then how can we protest if a man wants to self-identify as a woman? Isn't it the same thing?

But if we want to uphold reality, we have to say, “No; you are a man. You have all the parts of a man, and your self-identity is false.”

Don't we then also have to say, “No. You are not a godly man. You are not a Christian. You have all the parts of a son of Belial. Your self-identity is false”

The bible says that a reviler and a drunkard will not inherit eternal life. It can't say it any clearer. You can be one or the other. Christians inherit eternal life. Revilers do not. Therefore, revilers are not Christians. Pretty simple syllogism.

The same evil exists in these statements:

**He's working on his marriage
**He's trying to change

Ugh. Why are these statements acceptable? Would we use them with a murderer? “He's working on not

killing people.” He's working on not raping and pillaging. He's working on not robbing liquor stores and gunpoint. I once knew of a man who was confronted by his church for his adulterous relationship and he said, “Can I taper off?”

Why is this any different. You don't “work on not abusing your wife!” I can't believe I have to even write that!!!!

The fact is this: You are either a Christian or you are not. You are either a child of the devil or a child of God. You don't “work on it.” You either are or not!

In the words of Yoda, “There is no try. Do. Or do not.”

(I can't believe I just quoted Yoda. How sad is it that Yoda is wiser than so many church leaders!) I'm going to put this on my blog. Where's the Tylenol? I got myself right worked up!

5. The Church at Sardis

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. **“I know your works. You have the reputation of being**

alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. **Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.** The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Rev 3:1-6)

6. The Church at Philadelphia

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. **I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.** Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—

behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. **Because you have kept my word about patient endurance,** I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. **Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.** The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' (Rev 3:7-13)

And then we come to this final church that is very nearly no church at all, Laodicea. I would have had to bold face every word here! There is no commendation from Christ for these people:

7. The Church at Laodicea

"And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are

lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Rev 3:14-22)

Conclusion

I want to conclude by simply comparing the two faithful churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) with the most unfaithful, Laodicea. Specifically I want to compare them in regard to their outer appearance and how the world and much of the professing Christian church today would evaluate them.

Smyrna – persecuted, impoverished materially, slandered by false churches, facing increased persecution.

Philadelphia – “little power,” faithful to Christ’s Word, slandered by false churches

Laodicea – fence-sitting lukewarm compromisers, wealthy materially, self-sufficient, comfortable, popular

Consider these pictures very, very carefully and compare them with what we see happening currently in so many local churches and other Christian organizations. Christ blesses what appears foolish to the world and repugnant to antichrist religion. He curses and threatens that which appears as wisdom and beauty to the world. The one that has power now is wretched and powerless in reality. The churches that are apparently powerless, yet faithful to Christ, are conquerors.

Evil will not be comfortable in the churches of Smyrna or Philadelphia. Laodicea on the other hand will be fertile, friendly soil to the wicked in their quest for power and control.

13

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 13 – The Consistent
Motive of Evil is to Enslave)**

March 6, 2016

Sermon Text: Galatians 5:1

Scripture Reading: Mark 10:35-45

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

I wanted to mention an observation related to last week's message on evil's inevitable path to Rome in which we examined the letters to the seven churches of Asia in chapters 2-3 of Revelation. You will remember that just two of the seven churches received full commendation from Christ,

Smyrna and Philadelphia. We also noticed that these two were apparently the "least" of the churches, Philadelphia being described as "having but little power" and Smyrna as "poor and suffering" – at least in human estimation. And we took encouragement from this. We are a very small church and we have experienced suffering for Christ and there are many enemies or people who are simply ignorant of the Lord's ways who tell us we are unsuccessful, and that the Lord is not blessing us. We know these accusations to be false and we know because of the authority of the Word of God and the example of churches like these two small churches of the first century. But here is another example from Scripture which I hope will encourage you.

I was listening last week to a sermon series preached 40 years ago by a pastor named Harold Sonnerma at the Mount Hermon Bible Conference Center. He made the following statement and I found it very accurate and encouraging. I have paraphrased his words here to condense them, but they are accurately represented here:

“Noah preached the gospel for 120 years without one single convert. Now, Scripture tells us this-

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. (Luk 17:26-30)

Not ONE convert, so hardened and evil were the hearts of men in that day. So it will be again, and so it seems to be in our day. So do not let anyone discourage you in this regard. If a righteous man like Noah, chosen and blessed by the Lord, preached and preached FOR OVER A CENTURY with not one convert, we must not be discouraged if we find ourselves living in the very same circumstances. Lot did not find Sodom and Gomorrah ‘a fruitful mission field’ either.”

We know by now that the fundamental nature of evil, on its quest to be God instead of God, is it’s profound mentality of entitlement to unjust

power and control over all creation. Therefore you can be sure that:

Evil always is at work to enslave us. To imprison us and make us serve the evil doer as his slave.

In the kingdom of God, there is no place for evil and thus no place for any demand that others serve us:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mar 10:42-44)

It is all entirely counter to evil, you see. Evil imprisons. Evil enslaves. Because evil demands to be worshipped and served as God:

Between 2002 and 2004, three young women, Michelle Knight, Amanda Berry and Georgina "Gina" DeJesus, were kidnapped by Ariel Castro in his home in the Tremont neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. They were subsequently imprisoned in his house on Seymour Avenue until May 6, 2013, when Berry escaped with her six-year-old daughter and contacted the police. Knight and DeJesus were

rescued by responding officers and Castro was arrested within hours.

On May 8, 2013, Castro was charged with four counts of kidnapping and three counts of rape. Castro pled guilty to 937 criminal counts of rape, kidnapping, and aggravated murder as part of a plea bargain. He was sentenced to life plus 1,000 years in prison without the chance of parole. One month into his sentence, Castro committed suicide by hanging himself with bedsheets in his prison cell. [Wikipedia]

This VERY SAME evil creeps in among us in our churches! Not rarely, but *typically*. And while the world applauds the escape of these three young women, many, many times when such victims of evil cry out for deliverance, they are disbelieved, disregarded, and sent back to their prison. Why? At best it is because Christians are foolishly and dangerously naïve about evil. At worst it is because the very people the victims seek help from share the same DNA as the evildoer.

Think it through. Here is a blog post that I wrote to be published later this month, only for our purposes in this present series I have substituted “evil” for “abuser” -

"Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death. (Exo 21:16)

"If a man is found stealing one of his brothers of the people of Israel, and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (Deu 24:7)

...understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, **enslavers**, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, (1Ti 1:9-10)

I hope that the impact of these verses soaks into our minds deeply. And in particular, I hope that those churches and church leaders and church members who enable and protect evildoers will get a spiritual whack that will wake them up to the nature and gravity of their crime.

Evildoers are man-stealers. Evildoers enslave people. Kidnappers and slave masters are to be put out of our midst. God's Law pronounces their crime to be of a capital nature and all who do not repent of this evil will most certainly perish in hell for all eternity.

Evildoers are kidnappers and enslavers. Talk to any abuse victim. Most all of our blog readers know this quite well, having lived (or are still living) in these bonds. Evildoers kidnap their victim by deception, then keep them enslaved with all kinds of evil tactics. Financial abuse and bondage are a very, very common chain used to imprison the victim. Where can she go? She has no access to the money. He watches her use of every penny. She can't afford an attorney. The possibility of leaving and getting her own housing and car is simply impossible. She is a slave. She has been kidnapped and imprisoned.

The Lord pronounces the wicked man-stealer's punishment to be carried out with extreme prejudice. That is His Law. His people are to purge such a wicked one from their midst and will have the blood of the innocent on their hands if they do not.

Think on this further. Evil is about what? It is about unjustified power and control. Power and control = ownership. Enslavement. Kidnapping. Evil puts people in prison unjustly and torments them. Evildoers, in other words, are driven by the same spirit as their diabolic father, the devil. All of them.

But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD,

and moreover, I will not let Israel go." (Exo 5:2)

Now, think this through quite carefully. The Lord Jesus Christ is REDEEMER. The Son of God came to set His people FREE. Therefore, His church is to be a community of freemen where the very atmosphere exudes liberty. And yet, here we find this plague of bondage called abuse/evil growing like a corroding fungus in our midst. What will such "christians" do on that Day? What will such churches do who not only fail to purge this evil from amongst themselves and render aid and rescue to the victims, but who add to her chains? What will you do when the Son of Man comes, you who have so sorely treated His bride? You have told His Bride she must remain in prison, abused by her kidnapper and enslaver? For example, all who deny divorce for reason of abuse and all who refuse to help her get free...all stand guilty before Him. All who refuse justice to victims of evil in the twisted name of "grace" or "mercy" or a distorted and mangled form of "forgiveness".

Evildoers are kidnappers. Evildoers are enslavers. Purge this evil from among yourselves. That is the Lord Jesus Christ's command.

I was reminded of these things this past week when a very kind, godly

woman whom I have personally met sent the following article for us to publish at A Cry for Justice. Remember now, do not fall prey to the idea that these victims we deal with are merely “unhappy wives who just want to dump their husbands.” No! These are victims of pure evil, people who have known what its prison is like. Victims of death threats and prolonged psychological and emotional terrorism, so often at the hands of an evildoer cloaked as a “fine upstanding Christian” -

God used coupons to set me free!

One of the main reasons women stay in abusive marriages is because they cannot afford to leave. I faced this same problem myself. I desperately wanted to get out and away from my abuser. I had left once before, but made the mistake of believing the lie that he had changed and it was safe to return. The worst part about returning was the fact that now he knew I had the physical and emotional strength to leave, but he still had a way to keep me. He knew I couldn't leave if I couldn't afford to go, especially with five children in tow!

God always makes a way though. Through time, prayer and patience He revealed that way to me.

Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he

exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him. –Isaiah 30:18

I went to the grocery store one day, as I do most days, to pick up a few things we needed. Since I had a large family to feed and a husband that was not working, I had cut out some coupons to help keep the cost down. I was distracted at the store by kids, that were very much in need of a nap, and I forgot to hand the cashier my coupons. She told me that if I took my receipt and coupons to the customer service desk they would take care of it. I did as she suggested and they gave me cash back. It was a small trip, so I only had \$12 in coupons, but that \$12 was a gift from the Lord and He opened my eyes to my way out.

I continued to shop as I always did, but I would take my coupons to the customer service desk and get cash back. I was always very honest with the coupons (never take advantage of a gift from God! Be patient and He will provide). I took time to plan my meals and such around the coupons I had so I could use the most coupons (and get the most money back). I hid the cash and saved it up. My abuser never knew I was using coupons. To him, I was spending the money on groceries. He could look at the receipt and it all matched up (plus he was enjoying all

the new recipes I was coming up with to make the most of the coupons), but I was slowly but steadily saving up to be able to leave.

It did take time, but God worked it all out in His timing. I actually left sooner than I had planned, but God made it all work; not that there weren't struggles, but He saw me through each one.

I hope that maybe this will be an idea that can help other women make a plan to leave, or maybe just open eyes to see how God does care and will provide a way.

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble. The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him. – Psalm 37:39-40

Now, this lady's story of God's faithfulness to her is encouraging, but I also find it incredibly infuriating. Because here we have the story of a sister in Christ suffering at the hands of intense evil that was and continues to parade as "a fine Christian man" who was left on her own to fend for herself in order to get out of that terrible imprisonment. Where was her church back then? She and her children could have been set free much, much earlier.

Spiritual Bondage

Over and over again, the Word of God warns us of this enslaving aspect of evil. The thing is *absolutely* present wherever evil is. Evil kidnaps, imprisons, and presses people into slavery. Jesus Christ sets us free.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, (Luk 4:18)

Very early in the history of the New Testament church, we know that evil came prowling around, working to enslave the ones Christ had set free, setting themselves up as antichrists:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (Gal 5:1-4)

These wicked ones came to the churches of Galatia preaching a false gospel, and here was their motive as always:

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. (Gal 4:17)

Do you see what Paul is saying? The evildoers, these false teachers who had crept into the churches with their faith plus works “gospel” were using flattering, but not for a good reason. Their goal in it was to lead the Galatians into worshipping *them*, or as Paul puts it, “...*that you may make much of them.*”

Evil always, always, always betrays its presence by its goal of enslaving, of kidnapping a freeman and making him a slave. Always. Watch for it and you will be wise.

Here it was at Corinth:

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you

put up with it readily enough. (2Co 11:3-4)

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2Co 11:13-15)

For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. (2Co 11:19-20)

Evil is *abusive* and its goal in this abuse is *to enslave. To rob your freedom.* So let's put this right down where we live.

Whenever you are in the presence of a person or a community of persons where the freedom Christ has given you as His own child and as a human being created in His image is being threatened, you can be certain that you are in the presence of evil. Evil is a kidnapper and an enslaver. The wicked one is the keeper of his dungeon and he is always looking for new prisoners. He charms, he flatters, and then he enslaves. Beware.

This evil can be in the guise of a “marriage,” as we well know by now. It can come in the form of a supposedly “Christian” church or individual. Sometimes evil manifests its lust for power and control on the political scene, and thus the rise of the evil dictators the path of history is so littered with. Or more commonly it might be some family member or a fellow worker at the office. The consistent element to always watch for in all of these cases is this lust for power and control, this quality of evil that works to erode our freedom and enslave us.

This is how we watch and stand against the devil who is always prowling, always looking for an opening to strike. Be wise. Beware of men.

14

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 14 – Evil Always Distorts
God’s Word)**

March 13, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:1-21

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

This morning we turn to still another inevitable trait and tactic of evil – it’s consistent twisting and distorting of Scripture in order to deceive and enslave its victims.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the

LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:1-5)

It has been so from the very beginning. Satan is, after all, a murderer and a liar. Whenever he speaks, *whenever* he speaks, he is lying with the intent to destroy and murder. So it is with each of his own servants who, by their very appearance, seem to be what they are not, sons of righteousness (2 Cor 11).

When we are in the presence of evil, we can be sure that it will evidence itself by distorting God’s Word with the intent to claim divine authority for itself.

A large part of the Spirit's work in us in sanctification is the revealing of these deceptions to us so that we might embrace His truth and be set free from the enemy's bondage. While evil certainly will often come right out and flatly *deny* God's Word (ie, denying the resurrection of Christ, the deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, the serpent's outright "you shall not surely die" in Eden, etc), it also is constantly at work *claiming to believe Scripture as the Word of God, but twisting and perverting its true meaning*. We see it here for example:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Mat 4:5-7)

See it? Satan actually quotes Scripture, with no denial that it is the Word of God, but perverting it by doing violence to the context and twisting its meaning to his own evil purpose. His goal? To destroy. To condemn. To enslave. Jesus was wise concerning evil and knew precisely what Satan was up to. It is long past time for the church to wise up to evil too.

Here is a very good comment we received this last week from a lady who IS wise when it comes to evil, having been targeted by a emissary of darkness for many years and her experience happened *in her local church*. Think it through. If evil is going to parade as righteousness, if wolves are going to wear "wool," that disguise necessarily means that they are parading as a Christian and thus we *expect* to find them hiding in the church. THEREFORE, we also must expect that, in fitting with this "saintly" disguise of choice, the servants of evil *are going to quote Scripture, distorting it to their own wicked purpose*.

And when the wool costume slips from time to time, random individuals in ministries, churches, or the community who have just witnessed the "wardrobe malfunction" (an angry outburst, a cruel act) *question themselves* instead of the wolf. They can't believe what they just saw. They question their own eyes, their own ears. They don't want it to be true. They don't want their idols to be stone-hearted – with smooth, slick, sheep-like masks. So they sit in bewilderment and say nothing, which the wolf counts on. Bewildered silence.

Or they try to appease this wolf-idol, so they won't see this "bad side" of

someone who is otherwise “normally so great and nice.”

That’s how these wolves who want to be idolized make it to their finish lines or the obit column without ever being challenged – with hallelujahs ringing in their ears. Only those closest to them see the wool slip and the tooth and claw come out consistently enough to know their true form. But those closest are now caught in the wolf’s temple/lair. They must either continue to sacrifice themselves and their families to keep peace with this wolf-idol, or eventually – hopefully – they escape the altar and run from the temple.

When I’ve explained to people familiar with us why we left X, more than one person has said, “Oh, I wondered about...” and relate some story where they saw some tooth or claw come out. Their story always ends with, “But X always seemed so nice! So I didn’t say anything more about it. But it always bothered me...” Boy oh boy, what would happen if all of these people compared notes!

But then most still chastise me for “breaking up the family” because THEY’VE only seen one incident at random, they assume there’s only been one incident here and there with someone “who’s basically a nice guy”; so that can’t be worth leaving home. I

should stop being so over-reactive to X’s slip here, X’s bad day there and go home with the kids. Or I should just get over it and move on. They don’t see the panic attacks, the triggered nausea, the sleeplessness, the confusion and crying, the scanning of all parking lots checking for X’s vehicle, the scanning of church sanctuaries to see if X showed up, the jumping at every car door slam at home, the careful seating in restaurants to be able to watch the door. They don’t walk around all the dead animals’ graves in the back yard, courtesy of X. They don’t hold my bigger-than-me children as they swing between being scared for their safety if they are in contact with their father, and feelings of worthlessness and rejection when he wants no contact with them.

They are not wise in the ways of evil.

And you can be sure that Mr. X would have professed to believe the Bible as the Word of God and quoted it often to his own evil ends.

The emissaries of evil who parade as Christ’s sheep, ALWAYS twist and pervert the Scriptures in order to deceive us, to enslave us, to lure us away from our freedom in Jesus Christ and exalt them instead.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)

Jesus rebuked the same wicked tactic in the body of man-made traditions that had been substituted for God's Word by evil men *in the church-*

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did

Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Mat 15:1-9)

And again:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." (Mat 12:1-2)

And you will recall from last week that evil *always works to enslave, to bring into bondage*. It's goal is to obtain power and control and thus replace God Himself. This is how, then, evil *interprets and applies God's Word*. Just like these Pharisees. But Jesus said:

And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. (Mat 12:7)

This is a vital verse to help us discern if evil is perverting Scripture. Mercy, not sacrifice. Interpretations and applications of Scripture that end up demanding more sacrifice, laying more laws on us, piling up a huge burden on

us, are not mercy. They are not consistent then with God's character. Here it is once more:

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (Mar 2:23-28)

The kind, loving, mercy of God who gives His people every good gift, delighting in pouring out the blessings of heaven on them. Every application of the Sabbath then that added prescriptions to man's burdens was a distortion of Scripture. Scripture must be interpreted and applied, in this case for example, with the fundamental truth that God's purpose in giving the Sabbath day *was for man's benefit, not to add to his load*. Evil was at work

twisting the Scriptures then in these religious leaders.

Some Current Examples

In our ministry over the years, dealing directly with evil and its victims, we have regularly seen evil at work through its disguised agents who claim to be Christians and who have spread their poisonous twisting of Scripture in the church. We have also seen how these perversions of truth are so readily picked up by naïve Christians and pastors and others and *taught for decades as if they were true*. The result is bondage and devastation for the innocent and an increase in the power of the wicked.

Let's consider some typical examples. The first is one we talked about last Wednesday in the women's study class:

Ephesians 5

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of

water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:22-33)

Let me share with you an evil distortion of this Scripture that a power and control hungry man tried to lay on me years ago –

“My marriage has never been better. My wife and I used to have conflict all the time. And then one day not long ago I sat her down and said to her, ‘you must obey me. The Bible says so.’ Now everything is great.”

Of course it was not great, but a man like this will take this kind of perversion of God’s Word and spread it like poison in the church and pretty

soon everyone is drinking that kool-aid.

Here is a short article I wrote this last week on this subject:

Awhile back I was talking to a pastor I had never met before. He started asking me about my theological position, but this is how he did it. First thing, right off, he says, "So Jeff, are you a complementarian or an egalitarian?" He didn't ask me if I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture as the Word of God. He didn't ask if I believed in the deity and resurrection and atoning work of Christ. Nope. He wanted to know which label to put on me.

I knew if I said "complementarian" he would pronounce me "orthodox." And if I said "egalitarian" he would reject me as a pagan unbeliever if not as a false teacher.

So I have been thinking more about this "complementarian/egalitarian" labeling when it comes to our interpretation of Scripture's teaching about marriage. I think we should dump these two labels, which are *artificial* in the first place. Here is what has been rolling around in my head. I wrote this out the other day:

"I am growing to HATE this complementarian/egalitarian labeling

stuff. If a person denies *authoritarian* head/submit doctrine [ie, wife is to obey emphasis], then suddenly they are categorized as some unbelieving, hell-bound denier of Scripture. If they embrace it, then they are blasted for being a misogynistic [woman-hating] oppressor of women.

I propose a better way, though I don't claim to have every answer for every question, so don't expect me to:

I believe the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church (the Bible says so). But I also believe many Christians have it wrong and have been taught these Scriptures wrongly, *at least with the wrong emphasis*, and so here we are at the present time having to try to pick up the people devastated by it, and expose those wicked despots who want to use Scripture to justify abuse.

All the intricate word studies done, all the Greek words parsed.... have not solved the issue. For now, I say forget that stuff or at least set it aside for a moment. The bottom line here is what I think the big picture of Scripture on this issue is-

...the head watches out for, cares for, and serves the body. That is the emphasis of Ephesians five. As soon as concepts like authority, obedience, leader, and so on *become the*

EMPHASIS, the whole thing goes rotten and becomes fodder for the abuser. Husbands, watch out for, care for, and serve your wife. Wives, let that happen.

Do you see here how subtle the enemy is? He *distorts and perverts God's Word, not by a plain all-out denial of what Scripture says, but by changing the emphasis, the main point, of the Scripture.*

That is exactly what this power-crazed man was doing when he told his wife she had to obey him. In fact, what is the large majority of the content of Ephesians 5? *It is about husbands loving their wives!*

Evil Distorts the Scripture's Teaching on Forgiveness

How MANY examples we could give on this subject! Here are some of the Scriptures so commonly twisted by evildoers in this regard:

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (Heb 12:15)

Here is Barbara Roberts' comment on this verse, taken from her article on the ACFJ Scripture page that lists many Scriptures commonly twisted by evil

and then used to oppress the righteous and justify the wicked:

“The ‘root of bitterness’ is in the hearts of the abusers, not the hearts of the victims!

What so many people label ‘bitterness’ in the victim is simply the victim’s longing for justice and vindication. Christians: don’t palm victims off by telling them to just put their longing for justice on hold and defer everything to the perfect justice of God which will be delivered in the end. It will. But the church needs to do its part in delivering some justice to victims now —before the second coming!....

The ‘root of bitterness’ is in the hearts of the abusers. Seek it there. The abuser [the evildoer] deeply believes in his own entitlement. He believes that because he is the man, his woman [or other victim] should do what he wants. When you challenge his entitlement, when you set boundaries, when you impose consequences for this immoral mindset and behavior, when you withstand him to his face, you will see this mindset exposed: he retaliates (*overtly* or *covertly*) in bitterness because he truly believes his thinking is RIGHT. Scrutinize the abuser’s heart, resist and cut through his fog, his red herrings, his blame-shifting, his

insinuations that his wife is crazy, unstable, untrustworthy, hysterical, a fruit cake, a nut case. Repel and denounce his claims that she should submit to him better, and if she did, all this problem would go away.”

How enslaving! How evil! To take God’s Word and use it to convince and accuse the innocent that THEY are guilty of bitterness and unforgiveness when in fact what they are truly sensing is the groaning of the Holy Spirit in them for God’s true justice.

Count on it: *Evil always works to distort and pervert Scripture, interpreting and applying it in a manner that will bring us into bondage and exalt the wicked man into the position of power and control that he so craves.*

Here is another example of this Scripture-twisting that is so common. This involves the Bible’s teaching on subjects like grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy, and so on-

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself

and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2Co 5:16-21)

Once again, here are the comments Barbara Roberts has made on the ACFJ blog Scripture page, setting the interpretation and application of this passage straight-

This passage is about being reconciled to God. Paul the evangelist is coaching other believers in how to do evangelism – how to preach the gospel to the unregenerate so that they receive Christ and become reborn, become new creations.

In verse 16, Paul says ‘we once regarded Christ according to the flesh’, which must mean he (and us as his fellow believers) once thought of Christ as just a man, or just a good teacher, or a nuisance and a political rabble rouser, or an enemy of the Mosaic Law, or a madman who thought he was God, or a liar who

convinced a lot of people to join his cult.

Those are all views of Christ that the unregenerate have of him. In each of those views, people are regarding Christ according to the flesh. Paul is saying “Before I was converted, I didn’t see Jesus as God. I saw him wrongly because I had not been reconciled to God. But now I have been reconciled to God – now I have been reborn – I no longer see Jesus through those fleshly eyes. I see him as the God-man, fully God and fully man: my Saviour, my Lord and my Redeemer. All is new. My view of Jesus is new. And my view of other people is new: I see everyone in a new light. I see them as either outside Christ (unregenerate) or in Christ (regenerate brothers and sisters).

This passage has nothing to do with reconciling in relationship with people who have wounded us, or overlooking people’s heinous unrepentant sins.

If we have been deeply wounded by a person and sometime later that person is born again, we will be clearly able to see it in the sweet, unfeigned fruits of repentance. We may be dubious at first, just like the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem were initially dubious about Paul’s conversion, but the doubt will lift naturally, as mist or fog lifts from a valley when the sun rises to

noonday. We will not have to force ourselves to trust, we will not have to squash our gut feelings to believe this person's conversion is real, it will become indubitably clear.

Similarly, it will be clear if the person is feigning conversion because their 'fruit' will have worms, or fall off the branch shriveled, misshapen or rotten. We regard no one according to the flesh means we don't look at people with our old eyes, the eyes that used to make judgments about people's worth on the basis of their social status, education, wealth, compliance with rules of religiosity (Pharisaism) etc., etc. We no longer evaluate people according to how many boxes they tick on our checklist, we regard them as either in God's kingdom or outside God's kingdom. And God's kingdom is not about social status, wealth, education, race, gender, adherence to a bunch of man-made sub-biblical doctrines, or whatever. God elects people from all backgrounds and all lifestyles.

We have not even gotten to the terrible twisting of Scripture that evil continues to do regarding marriage, divorce, remarriage and so on. Or those that concern the very character of God. Or the nature of the church and of the gospel. Evil leaves no Scripture unturned, it seems, in its diabolic work of perverting God's

freeing, cleansing truth so that people are defiled, cut off from Christ, and brought into even greater bondage.

No wonder Paul admonished Timothy, and all of us, with these words:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. (2Ti 2:15-18)

Today an increasing number of local churches and Christian ministries are becoming more and more infected with the perverse teachings of men who claim that they are teaching God's truth. As never before, we all must be on guard and very carefully compare what we read and what we are taught with Holy Scripture. We must be ready to jettison anything that does not square with God's Word, no matter what the cost and no matter how long we were held under its delusion. For freedom Christ has set us free. We must never permit evil to put us back into its bondage.

15

Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 15 – Why Do We Keep
Silent About Evil?)**

March 20, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: 2 Thes 2

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

Once again as we turn to this dark subject of evil, particularly as it works to creep into the church behind a cloak of the name of Christ, we must remember the promises and victory of Christ over this evil. This is the Easter season when we remember our Lord's triumph over evil at the cross and

especially in the empty tomb. One of the promises God's Word has announced to us is this:

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, **unless the rebellion comes first**, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2Th 2:3-4)

Rebellion. Falling away. Apostasy. This is not so much in the world as it is in what professes to be the Christian church. You cannot be an apostate (to fall away from) unless you once stood in a profession of the gospel. Apostates are not atheists. They are people who often still parade as Christians, but who have fallen away from the truth as it is in Christ. The Lord has told us that this apostasy is coming and will be on the increase before He returns, finally coming in full fruition in the appearance of this "son of destruction."

And again:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1Ti 4:1-3)

Still more-

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.** Avoid such people. (2Ti 3:1-5)

So as we consider this plague of evil in the visible Christian church today, we must not be surprised nor must we be disheartened. Christ has warned us repeatedly that as His return nears, these things will increase and surely we are seeing it play out right in our very lifetimes.

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. (2Th 2:15)

Fear and the Denial of Evil

Why do people, and in particular professing Christians including pastors and church leaders, deny the existence of evil even when it is staring them right in the face? Here is an incredibly typical example from a lady I spoke with recently, a victim of longtime wickedness:

Last year, when I first began to get out of the fog [i.e., the fog of confusion that evil creates in order to deceive] , our church forced us [she and her evil husband] into their counseling program (I had been on staff and they really left me no choice – though by that time my mind was made up that I was done with the marriage.)

Pretty much right away I sensed that the counseling was going to be empowering to my husband. I sat in a room full of men who joked with each other – man talk – while waiting for my husband to arrive. Once we began, after some preliminaries about why we were all there, my husband was forced to acknowledge his sin and ask forgiveness. (Never mind true repentance.) What followed was an admission of some generalities –

“I wasn’t there for her and the kids much of the time.”

“Sometimes I was a little short with my wife when I was under stress from work,” etc.

It seemed the word “abuse” wasn’t necessary at all. When I tried to bring it up, it was drastically downplayed – one elder acting like I was speaking out of turn.

Then I was “confronted” with the fact that my husband had just asked forgiveness, now what was my Biblical response to be to that? Of course. I was supposed to forgive him...Holding hands. Yes, they actually made me hold hands with someone who just faked his way through an apology while having to say, “I forgive you,” through gritted teeth. Inside I was dying; I was so sickened. I was so invalidated. Twenty-three years of abuse wrapped up in five minutes and now we could all go home happy.

After that day, I showed up maybe three more times. It became sin-leveling sessions [sin-leveling is the tactic of making out that the victim is just as much sinful as the abuser] and I stopped cooperating. During this time the emotional and financial abuse ramped up; they pooh-poohed that, too, when I reported it – making my

husband promise to move the tens of thousands of dollars back to our joint account. He did move it back, but then a week later took it once more, leaving me nothing. Their solution? Making him split the money with me so we could each have our own account.

Soon after, I was not only done with the counseling but the church also. I had already been asked to turn in my keys and my computer from my job at the church, so I just stopped going. Now here we are, almost a year later and my husband is still a member in good-standing, enjoying the support of his sympathizers, and I will be publicly ex-communicated in three weeks. So, my opinion of couples counseling for abuse situations? It’s possibly the worst thing for such situations and may actually result in the further victimization of the victim.

I ask again. Why do people who profess to know and follow Jesus Christ so regularly deny the existence and diabolical schemes of evil even when (perhaps especially when) it is staring them right in the face?

There is more than just one reason:

- Sometimes a church leader may be an emissary of the evil one himself. Ruth Tucker tells of being married to such an evil, counterfeit “pastor” in a

conservative Bible church for many years. He regularly beat her in a rage, even in front of their son. He had been expelled from more than one Bible college and seminary for cheating, yet another would enroll him and grant him a divinity degree. He was arrested for theft *while he was conducting a jail ministry*, yet still another church called him as their pastor. He sexually molested a foster daughter he and Ruth took into their home. Yet Ruth, as she confesses in her book, kept silent when she found out. Why?

- *Unbelief in the Word of God* is another reason evil is denied. When the truth of the Bible is eroded you can be sure that evil will find an open invitation to enter. And what I see over and over and increasingly today are ministers standing in pulpits who simply do not believe the Word of God. How else can an evil, wicked person be considered a child of God? How can wickedness be tolerated in the church and leaders refuse to deal with it according to God's command, except by rank unbelief? Where men do not believe God's word, in such a "church" the oppressed are not going to find help and mercy.

- *Fear* is often a reason for the denial of the presence of evil among us. To cite Ruth Tucker's experience once more, she confessed that she covered for and enabled this evil emissary of the devil for all those years simply because *she was afraid*. She was afraid he would kill her and/or her son. She was afraid of the public shame that would result. She was afraid of losing any means of supporting herself and her son.

Let's think further about this.

Fear. We have all felt it, though perhaps not to the degree as this lady I talked to last week:

"I am very frightened. Since leaving my abuser, his attempts to gain power over us have actually increased. He knows that I come from a background of severe trauma and he is doing all he can to traumatize me further. He is lying to the court about me. I am afraid. I am afraid of the court. I am afraid they will take my child from me. I am so terrified now. He has an army of allies and I have none."

Fear, you see. Instead of seeing the evil, turning to the might and power of Jesus Christ who is All-mighty and facing this wickedness as David faced

Goliath, so many professing Christians choose instead to close their eyes, to yield to the deceptions of evil, and abandon its victims. They leave the beaten, naked man lay even though they claim to serve the Lord.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14-15)

This *faith* given us as a gift by God in Christ, is surely the remedy to fear. It is not easy to trust and one of the things we must do as a church for one another is to *encourage one another to persevere in faith in Christ, in His Word, in His promises*. Because the enemy is always working to quench this faith and lead us back into fear and bondage:

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (Joh 14:1-3)

Let not your hearts be troubled is still another way of Jesus telling us, *do not fear. Rather, believe in God. Believe in Me. Believe in the certainty of My promises*.

And so for true Christians who are facing evil and suffering from fear, the remedy is *faith*. Reminding ourselves and being reminded by one another of the truth and unbreakable nature of all the Lord's promises to us.

You may not have one of these wicked abusers oppressing you right now, but evil always has a way of sending its emissaries our way to work to instill this fear in us. Every true Christian will be attacked in such a manner. Let me give you an example that many of you can identify with and eventually all of us will.

As we grow older in this present life, the notions we had when we were young start to dissolve. You know – the mentality for example that we pretty much are going to live forever, that we will be young forever, that those “old people” are in a category and era of their lives that we simply don't see ourselves ever being in. And then, here we are. You are the one with gray hair, with achy joints, with this ailment and that malady. Or perhaps we thought we would not only be young forever, but we would be healthy forever, and then along comes

the diagnosis of some disease. Or an accident and injury. Or just the relentless march of time which we are reminded of when we pull out that old photo album and remember when our children were children and we were young. Here is the Preacher of Ecclesiastes describing growing old, our teeth wearing out, our eyesight dimming and our hearing lessened:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—**they are afraid** also of what is high, and **terrors** are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the

earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecc 12:1-7)

Remember. Remember your Creator *now*. Live your life always remembering the Lord your Creator, Christ your Redeemer, and the certain promises of His Word He has given us. The author of Ecclesiastes saw these promises dimly, but we see them with clarity. This world is not all there is. In fact, this present life is NOT our real ultimate life:

For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3:3-4)

And do not fear. Don't let evil in any of its deceptive forms make you believe its lies. If you are in Christ, you have a new world, a new creation awaiting you. And it is real. And it is certain. And evil will be no more. Stand right up to Goliath-

And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the

name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. (1Sa 17:43-45)

The Righteous Anger of God

Even though this posed some risk to myself, I told local church people that I'd been enslaved and imprisoned. I warned them very clearly about the abuser's real character, his level of deceit and his potential for danger. They all responded by holding me responsible for failing to resolve the "issues in my marriage". They supported the abuser and they helped find him a new victim. It's disgusting.
[ACFJ Commenter]

Why is there an absence, a total and complete absence, of righteous anger among those who claim to serve Christ? We must consider this subject of *the anger of God* as we continue to grow wise as serpents in regard to evil, yet remaining innocent as doves in respect to any of evil's guilt. That is to say, we must *know* evil, but in the right way. That was Adam and Eve's downfall you remember –

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
(Gen 3:4-5)

When the church becomes apostate so that Christ's truth has been abandoned and Christ Himself has departed, you can be sure that there will be no zeal for God's truth, no sense of indignation against evildoers, and instead an accusing of the righteous. God's true people detest wickedness as He does. We hate evildoers:

The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. (Psa 5:5)

I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. (Psa 26:5)

Why then is there such a void of this holy hatred in the visible church today? Listen to this excellent summation of the state of the church today:

I, too, have been accused of being angry and bitter, when in reality I am longing for righteousness and justice and truth. I'm tired. I'm weary. I'm disgusted. I'm grieving. I have a knot in my stomach most of the time when going to church, & it feels like watching a B-movie with a lousy script that can't decide on comedy or drama. It's not that I think I'm better or more pious, but rather, that I am thirsty & I have to spit out the lukewarm water. That, or go make a whip.....

I am no longer content with the superficial platitudes of silly sheep who follow blind guides and belch “sunday school” prattle while they plan their predictable little parties and pretend to be holy. I’m sick of the charade. I’m sick of the pretense. I’m sick of the shallowness. I’m sick of watching them “practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them”. (Matthew 6). I’m sick of them ignoring the least of these, while making grand videos about their latest overseas mission while they can’t seem to pour a cup of cold water for their neighbor. And I am angry.

So, it got me to thinking: are there any books or articles about *the anger of Jesus*? Jesus was not a one-dimensional love machine. His emotions were vast and pure and sacred, but we primarily hear about His love, not His anger; the same with God the Father. And I wonder why? The OT especially speaks of God’s anger, yet in modern times we are all reduced to bowls full of mushy “love”. Jesus was not a “hippie” or a pot-smoking, peace-not-war prophet. He wasn’t Ghandi. Jesus had grit. Why do we not hear that from our pulpits? Why is the church so afraid of righteous anger?

Well, the answer is, no. There are hardly any books or articles about the anger of Jesus. Why? Because people

don’t want to hear about it, so Scriptures that deal with this truth are simply dismissed and ignored.

And yet God’s Word makes it plain that His true people are *angry* people.

I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked. (Psa 26:5)

And this hatred is particularly directed against the wicked *who pretend to belong to the people of God*. They come and sit as “an assembly.” As a church. Listen to this entire Psalm and see a person after God’s own heart express His plea. Here you have God’s own description of a true Christian. Notice how very different this picture is than what we see so typically today in so many people who claim to follow Christ:

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind. For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in your faithfulness.

****I do not sit** with men of falsehood, **nor do I consort** with hypocrites.

****I hate the assembly** of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.

****I wash my hands in innocence** and go around your altar, O LORD, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds.

****O LORD, I love the habitation of your house** and the place where your glory dwells.

Do not sweep my soul away with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men, in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD. (Psa 26:1-12)

This is why it is growing increasingly difficult and even impossible for real believers to find a church to worship in. Because a real Christian simply detests and will not be part of an assembly of hypocrites. He will not join himself to an apostate body.

Christ described His people this way:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Mat 5:6)

When we see the wicked, when we see evil creeping in with all its deceptions and abusive tactics, the people of God rise up against it in protest. We hunger and we thirst for what is right and we

hate what is evil and those who do it. Why? Because God does and we are His children. We share His nature. All of the pressure put upon us by apostate Christianity today, that tells us that we must not hate anyone, that we must love and accept everyone...is evil in itself.

It is the holy, righteous anger and wrath of God that is the true Christian's hope!

Psalm 98. Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psa 98:1-9)

16

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 16 – *Christ is Risen* and
Satan is Thrown out of Court)**

**March 27, 2016
Easter Sunday**

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:14

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:1-24

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to

lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb 2:14-18)

We have been regularly reminding ourselves as we have studied this dark subject of evil that Christ is victor, that evil is has not won and is not going to win and in fact has been defeated by Christ already. In particular, this Easter morning we remember these things. Christ is Risen! Christ has conquered that evil enemy and death, and we want to recall today how He has done this.

The Devil Keeps Showing Up

Right from the very beginning, in Eden, we have two kingdoms in conflict. The kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13-14)

There they are. The domain or kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of His Son. Each kingdom has a king. All who are outside of Christ, every person as they are born into this world, is a slave in the kingdom of darkness. Among many other blessings, when Christ saves us He delivers us, ransoms us, from the devil's kingdom and rule. There is a radical change in our citizenship. Paul speaks of it:

But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (Act 26:16-18)

The power and kingdom of Satan, you see.

Let's see if we can follow this thread through Scripture, at least part of it, in

order to see more clearly just how great a victory Christ won when He rose from the tomb that first Easter morning.

In Scripture, when Christ comes on the scene, inevitably the king of darkness makes an appearance, working to oppose the Light of Christ:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Gen 3:1)

Satan's motive? To be god. To be worshipped. To possess absolute power and control. This, as we know, is the essence of evil and it characterizes every henchman who serves the devil.

There are many other points in the Old Testament record which tell of Satan working to preserve his dark kingdom. We think, for instance, of how he led King David into the sin of numbering his army. Satan launched many attacks against Israel, knowing that it was from the seed of Abraham that the Messiah would come.

But it is at the point of Christ coming into this world that Satan really went to work to extinguish the kingdom of Light.

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. (Mat 2:16)

Then Jesus began His public ministry and the first thing we see:

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Mat 3:16-17)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning

you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. (Mat 4:1-11)

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was opposed by many evil people, and He always knew who they really were:

You are doing the works your father did." They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own

character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (Joh 8:41-44)

Jesus acknowledged and taught that the devil was always at work opposing the truth of the gospel, bringing people into bondage:

The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. (Mar 4:14-15)

And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed

from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (Luk 13:11-16)

Peter acknowledged the activity of the devil in his sermon:

As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Act 10:36-38)

Satan Steps it Up

Now, as the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus drew nearer, you see Satan mentioned with some frequency:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of

God, but on the things of man." (Mat 16:21-23)

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (Luk 22:31-34)

And the betrayal of Judas is particularly connected with the activity of the devil:

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him. (Joh 6:70-71)

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was

going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these

things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of

bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. (Joh 13:1-30)

And again:

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. (Luk 22:1-6)

Satan behind it all, you see. He had his "man" right in among the disciples in Christ's inner circle.

Satan's Defeat

Although Satan is still active today, after the cross, he is a defeated foe and he knows it. That is one of the reasons he rages so. Consider these Scriptures which speak of this:

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? (Act 5:3)

But we notice very carefully that Christ defeated Satan through His perfect obedience to the Law of God and by His atoning death on the cross, ALL as OUR perfect and victorius ADAM in whom we are.

Here is this defeat of the devil described in Revelation, along with his present, enraged activity because he knows his time is short and because his power over us has been broken:

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to

you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea. (Rev 12:7-17)

Jesus announced Satan's expulsion from heaven:

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. (Luk 10:17-19)

These things are not future. They have happened, and Christ's death and resurrection are how this has been won. Here it is in perfectly clarity:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14-15)

Christ's incarnation, perfect obedience to God's Law in His life, and His atoning death have effected destruction of the works of the devil and have delivered us from his bondage. This is the good news of Easter – Jesus is Risen. Satan has been expelled from God's courtroom. He no longer has any basis for accusing us, so the power of death he once had is broken. As we see evil on the increase in this world, we know that it is an indication that Christ's coming is drawing closer and closer because Satan knows it and is raging.

Because Christ is risen, His people need not fear death. We do not need to fear it. In Christ we are conquerors over the grave. All that the death of our bodies does is launch us into the presence of Christ and one day even our bodies will be raised, never to

suffer any kind of "work of the devil" again.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Joh 11:25-26)

No wonder Christ tells us we can encourage one another with these words, and we close this morning by doing so:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1Th 4:13-18)

17

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 17 – “Keep it Secret, Keep it Safe” – Darkness and Secrecy are Part of the Very Essence of Evil)

April 3, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Joshua 7

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

We continue this morning to grow wiser in regard to the mentality and tactics of evil, as Christ has commanded us to do. Evil is not a pleasurable topic, but bringing justice to bear upon it and effecting

deliverance from it for its victims is very rewarding.

Many of us, perhaps even most of us here, had the privilege of growing up in homes that insulated us from evil – at least largely so. We did not see or experience the depths of wickedness that so many other people have to live in every day. We had a mother and father, a family that was functional, a home to live in, people who loved us and so on. For people such as this, evil is a difficult topic to tackle. It is like traveling in a foreign country or even an alien planet. *That all changes, by the way, after you become the target of evil yourself.*

So why do we do this? Why must we spend all of this time talking about evil and the things of darkness? Why don't we move on to more pleasant topics? Why do we have to think so much about all of this abuse that is going on in the lives of others?

The answer is simply this: *Because Christ does. Because He came to set people free from evil, and He calls His people to expose evildoers and help*

victims get free. In fact, anyone professing to belong to Christ who does not engage in helping the oppressed needs to seriously question whether they know Christ at all.

This world is filled with evil and the Christian does not have the luxury of closing his or her eyes to it. We are to shine the light of Christ's truth on it, exposing it and helping victims of evil get free of it.

Where evil is, there is always suffering. Always. Evil brings destruction, death, and misery.

And so the Lord insists that we help the downtrodden. Listen to it over and over again in God's Word:

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."
(Mat 10:42)

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' (Mat 25:34-36)

"If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. (Deu 15:7-9)

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (Jas 2:14-16)

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (Jas 1:27)

Many, many, many pastors and churches and professing Christians today are practicing a false religion, an impure and defiled religion, because they are rendering hurt and injustice to

orphans and widows in their affliction. We must never be guilty of such things.

O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more. (Psa 10:17-18)

"How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah. Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." (Psa 82:2-4)

This is a large part of the reason why we must look at evil, see what it looks like, how it works its wickedness in darkness, and learn how to expose and oppose it. This is a required course of all of Christ's people. It is not an elective.

The Essence of Evil

The "essence" of something or someone is a quality that lies at the very being of that object or person, without which the thing would cease to be what it is. When we speak of the "essence" of a person, we are referring to the very core of who the person is. Qualities which are therefore *essential*

for the person to be the person he is. The same, as we have said, is true of objects or animals. Consider a *tree* for instance. What defines and makes a tree a tree? What are the qualities without which a tree is no longer a tree? There are many, many kinds of trees and yet we call all of them trees because *in their essence* they possess whatever "treeness" is.

And so when it comes to evil, if we are going to be wise in regard to it, we must come to know and recognize the *essential essences* of evil. What qualities define evil as evil? What traits are essential to the person of the devil? Jesus gave us some:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a **murderer** from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for **he is a liar** and the father of lies. (Joh 8:44)

Murder and lies. These are *essential qualities and thus essences of the devil's person*, without which he would no longer be the devil. Evil, which originates in the devil (notice he is the "father of lies"), thus has murder and lies in its essence. Whenever evil acts, it acts with murderous intent. Whenever evil speaks, it speaks lies.

Notice very carefully that there is a vast difference between a person who commits an evil act (sin) and a person who is evil in their very essence.

A Christian can commit a sin – an evil act – but a Christian is not *evil*. Lying and murdering, for example are not part of the Christian’s essence now that they are a new creation in Christ. And there are even different kinds of sinners (non-Christians). It is a great error (and sadly a very common one) to assume that all sinners are of the same category. In our ministry at ACFJ we see this error over and over again in churches. You may have an unsaved neighbor or friend who, being outside of Christ, is a slave to sin. But that friend may very well not be characterized by an mindset of entitlement to power and control over others, using evil tactics characteristic of say, a sociopath. Your non-Christian friend may use foul language. He may be boastful. He may get drunk. But he is still your friend because he is not the kind of evil person who habitually lies and destroys others. Do you see this? God’s Word tells us these things. You see it in Proverbs for instance where various kinds of sinners are described. But not all of them are called “fools” as Proverbs puts it. Sodom and Gomorrah will be better off than some of the people of Jesus’ day when the Day of judgment comes. They are all sinners, outside of Christ, but they are

not all the same kind or degree of sinner.

Alright then, this morning we want to consider this essential quality of evil that relates, I suggest, to its attribute of *lying*. That is to say, we want to think about the fact that *darkness and secrecy* are essential qualities of evil.

The Darkness and Secrecy of Evil

Diane Langberg has written a helpful book entitled *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* [New Growth Press, 2015]. I am going to quote from it several times this morning because it contains a lot of very good points. However, I want to also let you know that we at ACFJ do not recommend this book because of what we would call “sin-leveling” teachings in it. I won’t go into detail here, but basically the problems have to do with Langberg’s failure to distinguish degrees of evil and her placing of blame upon the victims of evil. I am sure she doesn’t do this intentionally, but in getting things like this wrong she empowers and enables the evildoer and causes further suffering to the victim.

But here is a very good quote she made in an interview about her book:

“It is striking how little the Christian counseling world speaks of evil. It is certainly not discussed in the realm of psychology, with few exceptions such as O. Hobart Mower, M. Scott Peck, Karl Menninger, and Erich Fromm. In Christian circles we speak more of individual sin but not so much about evil and even less about systems perpetrating evil on vulnerable people. However, underlying all trauma, violence, and abuse lies evil, and the result of evil is always some kind of suffering.” [Suffering and the Heart of God, Diane Langberg, p. 29]

We have already considered how churches and pastors and corporations and government officials so commonly cover up evil, or perhaps we might say, “permit” evil to remain secret, when it occurs in their ranks. This morning however, I want us to consider the fact that the very DNA of evil has “secrecy genes” so that wherever evil is, you can count on the fact that it will be working in darkness, promoting ignorance, promoting confusion and “fog,” actively deceiving, and pressuring human beings to “keep it secret, keep it safe.”

That phrase of course comes from the Lord of the Rings where Gandalf used it in a positive sense to warn Frodo to keep the one ring hidden from Mordor. But this term certainly accurately

describes what evil does through its tactics and ambassadors. It works its evil and then insists that we keep it secret so that we keep it safe from being exposed for what it really is.

Let me give you an example we are currently dealing with at the ACFJ blog. We called out a professing Christian, a member of a church back on the East Coast, for wickedly libeling us and our books and our ministering in the public forum of Amazon book reviews. From things he said there and from information that other readers of our blog provided to us, we learned that he was and to our knowledge still is, a member of that particular church. I might also add that this is by no means the first report of mishandling of abusers and abuse victims by that church that we have had in the past few years. And yet this church is a kind of “flagship” church in its denomination.

I notified the pastor of that church, including documentation that proved what their member had done – and what he had done publicly mind you – and asked that the church take action against their member, calling him to repent.

Nothing.

Over one month goes by. Nothing. No response. So last week we called them

out and published the matter on our blog. Why? Because we know how evil works. Because we know that evil hides, that it craves to work in darkness and demand secrecy. Well, suddenly, we hear from that pastor. Listen carefully to what he said to Barbara Roberts:

“The email Mr. Crippen sent to me was confidential. We are working pastorally on the issue Mr. Crippen asked me about. I have referred the matter to our pastors and officers involved with this issue. I am not bound by any code of conduct or even etiquette to respond to every email I receive, and especially not in a climate *where a pastoral matter becomes a breach of privacy*. Tweet what you will. *You should have checked with me before you informed the internet world about a private correspondence (email) between two men*. In the future, *please honor both other people’s privacy and their reputation*. We are handling this as best we know how.”

Do you see those secrecy words?

- A pastoral matter
- A breach of privacy
- A private correspondence
- Honor other people’s privacy and their reputation

Do you see this for what it is? This is the characteristic, an essential quality of evil. *Keep it secret, keep it safe*. And yet this was a sin committed publicly.

[In a moment we are going to shine the light of Scripture on this and compare how Christ commands us to deal with evil and its secrecy and darkness in the church].

Is this statement about how evil has crept in, unseen, in secret among us not absolutely true? -

"I fear Christendom today has become less interested in truth and more interested in power and protecting that power. Many have acquired fame, money, status, reputation, and kingdoms. At the same time we are steeped in pornography, marriages are failing in large numbers, the next generation is turning away, and we tolerate leaders in our organizations and pulpits who feed off the sheep."
[Diane Langberg]

There it is! Langberg will be maligned by the Pharisees for saying that publicly, but she is absolutely right. Many, many churches have been commandeered by Pharisees, and if we are wise about evil we will see that this is so.

Why do seminaries and churches and other Christian organizations that started out holding to Christ's truth and sound doctrine end up corrupt and apostate? I can tell you. Because evil goes to work among Christ's people and to the degree the sheep not wise about it, evil casts its darkness and fog and secrecy – wolves in sheep's clothing, remember? – and no one takes action to stop it. Eventually the leaven has infected the entire body.

How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Mat 16:11-12)

Evil promotes secrecy and darkness. Keep it secret, keep it safe. And over and over and over again Christians today are falling for it. They are keeping evil and evildoers secret and safe.

Recently I spoke with a lady who asked what she should do. She found out that a seminary student who as aspirations to be a pastor has a history of sexual addiction and sin. Now, of course as we see in Scripture:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the

kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:9-11)

...great sinners can be washed by Christ and made holy. However, is it really wise to permit someone to be a pastor when in their not too distant past they have such a history of sexual sin? I doubt it, and yet what is the tendency when something like this comes to our attention? *Keep it secret. Say nothing. Keep him safe. We are all sinners. Consider his reputation.*

If we are going to be wise about evil, then we MUST get a firm hold on these things. Evil will always exert pressure on us to keep silent, to cover up, to deny, rather than to expose. Listen to this example from a mother married to an evil man. She is responding to an article we linked on our Facebook page about some ways that evil creeps in among Christians who homeschool and which then we must be wise about: (We certainly do not teach here that there is anything wrong with homeschooling itself):

This was incredibly important to read. I had never considered homeschooling until my child began exhibiting difficulties with public school, in preschool. Very withdrawn, severe separation anxiety, etc. I thought it was, perhaps, a phase, and I took her out for a year and began to homeschool.

Then, another year came and nothing had changed and another. I just figured homeschooling was the only way as she was a highly sensitive child. Hindsight is 20/20 in that her progressing symptoms were not just that of a sensitive soul, but of the effects of living in our home with her other parent.. our abuser. Of course, at that point, I couldn't SEE.

She and I continued to homeschool, and interestingly, her father while outwardly supportive was not involved in any intimate way and would often resent and shriek at me for the cost of supplies or when I'd want to tell him how she was doing or how God was working through my ministry of homeschooling.

I realize now, he only supported it because it gave him more control and less people to look into our lives.

Ironically, he forced us to stay in a rural town, apart from homeschool support, and even after begging him to

work on moving to be closer to support, he refused and got more controlling and abusive.

Homeschooling was used by our abuser to isolate us in many ways, but God truly, truly turned so much for good. My ultimate goal was to glorify Him through serving Him in this way, for however long He called me to school her and tend to her needs and nurturing.

I did everything I could to stave off the isolation and loneliness.. I set up play dates, drove us out many miles for field trips, signed her up for dance class and paid for it with the little separate account I had, etc.

Most of all, my daughter and I grew more and more dependent on The Lord.. singing to Him, she'd dance to bible songs for kids, we'd read scripture. Even when I became bedridden from the abuse destroying my health, I schooled her from the couch and crawled out to the front lawn to play barbies with her. God truly held us up.

Now, I've escaped. We are in our own apartment. We will finish out this season of homeschooling, as I ask the Lord to prepare me to change her educational path and help me get back into the world, a different person

What was happening? Among other evil things, that abusive man worked *to keep a cloud of secrecy around his family*. Isolation, you see. Keep it secret, keep it safe.

Have you ever known anyone who, though you had an acquaintance with them for years, you never really knew? You realized one day that you only knew what you were permitted to see and know, but underneath there was much secrecy in that person and you actually did not know them at all. That is a sure mark of evil at work. It is intentional.

Did Jesus Keep it Secret, Keep it Safe?

You know the answer already, don't you? Consider:

1. The Lord's way is to call upon us to confess our sin, not to hide it:

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. (Psa 32:3-5)

Achan sinned and what did he do? He hid the banned items in the floor of his tent. Out of sight. He tried to keep his sin secret and himself safe. But the Lord exposed it for all to see.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen 3:8)

Adam and Eve tried to keep it secret, but the Lord exposed it.

Where there is true repentance, there is open confession of sin with no defense of reputation.

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psa 51:1-4)

How did the Lord Jesus deal with evil during His earthly ministry? Here are some examples:

Then the disciples came and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit." (Mat 15:12-14)

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. (Mat 23:13-15)

And then you see this same pattern in the Apostle Paul-

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over

to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1Ti 1:18-20)

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. (2Ti 4:13-15)

And of course, the wicked man at Corinth wearing the Christian disguise:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1Co 5:1-5)

And the same with the rest of the Apostles:

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. (3Jn 1:9-10)

And on and on we could go. Think of it. What did the Lord do over and over again in the Old Testament? He sent prophets to announce His Word to His people, calling them out for their sin when necessary (which was often) and doing it loudly and publicly.

Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" (2Sa 12:11-12)

The Lord is Light

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (1Jn 1:5)

As His people, WE are to walk in the light:

Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Eph 5:7-16)

The next time “keep it secret, keep it safe” comes your way in an effort to pressure you into letting evil work in secrecy and kept safe from exposure, don’t yield to that pressure. Recognize it for what it is – a sure sign that you are in the presence of evil – and shine the light of Christ’s truth on it loudly and clearly.

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Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 18 – Calling Evil Good, and
Good Evil)**

April 10, 2016

Sermon Text: Isaiah 5:20

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

There is something in us that can make us very reluctant to call evil for what it is – *evil*. I understand this to some extent and so do you. We do not delight in concluding that someone we know, someone perhaps that we have loved and who we *thought* loved us, is in fact a child of the devil with

malevolent intent toward us. No Christian delights in having to make such a conclusion. Here are two illustrations just from this past week's blog comments that illustrate the deceptiveness of evil, how it parades as righteousness or at least as "I didn't mean it" and how, as a result, we are so hesitant to grasp the true evil nature of what we are facing:

Cindy Burrell said:

The unspoken traditional church dogma too often infers that to exercise discernment (spiritual insight) is somehow cruel. The dogma says that, since none of us can claim perfection, there is no inherent moral standard we should anticipate or adhere to at all when dealing with any who identify themselves as 'believers.' [ie, "do not judge"]

"So what if he treats his wife like garbage; he's a good Bible teacher – and he tithes... Praise the Lord!"

To call out the wicked, to identify the destructive, ungodly fruit that falls

from his tree, is deemed gossip or slander or a failure to extend grace. So to accommodate the dogma, the truth must be compromised and the Spirit must be quenched so that wickedness can find a safe place in the body of Christ.

Dear God, what have we done?

Another reader wrote, in response to an article on the cruelty of the wicked man:

As I look back on three decades plus of marriage, this belief (that my husband really didn't know what he was doing) was what kept me in a horrible situation. Even now (post divorce) I ask myself if he is crazy or deceived by his sin (porn) or...whatever. One friend told me that it isn't important for me to figure out. I'm out of the marriage. But I AM dealing with the repercussions of my many children who saw me excuse his behavior over and over again. They are very "nice" children with no boundaries.

When I first went to my new pastor (before I separated for the third time) with the same sordid story I had gone to other pastors with, I excused my husband's behavior by saying, "He had a very detached, awful mother." My pastor replied, "Well, when my mother got pregnant with me out of wedlock

and my dad was forced to marry her, I was beaten over and over throughout my childhood and I didn't grow up to treat my family the way [your husband] has treated his family!" Hearing truth like that is like getting a good cold cup of water thrown over my head! I've stopped feeling a sense of false shame for being so deceived by the schmuck. He's a very intelligent man who knows how to deceive. Is it deliberate? Yes.

It's been very healing to be able to say that OUT LOUD but it's still hard to wrap my mind around!

It's important for us to be told, again and again, that God loves us and wants us to feel protected and safe. I encourage you to not beat yourself up over feeling anxiety. Don't call it a "lack of faith"...it's actually your gut telling you that, yes, things are bad. If you're feeling crazy it's probably because you're trying to remain calm and loving in an impossible situation. It is not wrong to be feeling anxious. That feeling is a God-given warning sign. **Sometimes it's hard for one's mind to comprehend** that one's own husband is the one who has put one in "danger."

Let me give you one more:

I have a knot in my stomach when he gets home or when I come home and he's there. He slams doors, walks loudly, sighs and shakes his head whenever I do or say something that he doesn't like, giggles and shakes his head at me if I get myself a diet drink. He communicates indirectly by leaving newspaper and magazine articles lying around (the last one was a Dear Abby column about a woman who didn't appreciate her husband). If he's obviously mad, he'll deny it if I ask him what's bothering him. He's told me that he's sick of my "princess" attitude; that as long as he doesn't cheat or beat me, that I have it better than most women; that other women have told him that they wish they had a husband like him; that I'm oversensitive, wrong in my perceptions.

My spirit cringes and pulls away when he comes near me. My youngest son says that he's evil and wishes he'd go away. Our dog avoids him. Yet everybody else is totally in awe of him.

For years, I thought it was me.

Learn these things carefully! Hear them! This is wisdom. Evil deceives. Evil hides. Evil parades as good and Evil calls good – evil. *If we fail to*

grow wise about evil we will be enslaved to it, often for decades.

It is this maligning of good by evil and this disguising of evil as good that we want to examine this morning. In large part it is this very dynamic that keeps the victims of evil in bondage:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isa 5:20)

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD. (Pro 17:15)

This is the diabolic dynamic that drives the deceptions of the wicked. It is what drives its craving of secrecy ("Keep it secret, keep it safe"). The devil does not come right out in the open as some terrible dragon serpent, but rather as an angel of light, a wolf in sheep's clothing, as a fine Christian and humble servant of the Lord in your church. He and his emissaries effect this deception by disguising evil as good, *and by maligning good so as to convince us that it is evil.*

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter

for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isa 5:20)

See it? This is a two-edged assault on truth. This is not merely some open, unhidden declaration that "homosexuality is good" or a denial of Paul's words to the Corinthians:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1Co 6:9-10)

No, evil goes much further in these lies. Evil *makes out that these wicked things are good AND that righteousness and good is what is evil!* Listen to Paul again:

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them **but give approval to those who practice them.** (Rom 1:29-32)

Evil actively maligns righteousness at the same time that it calls itself, *good*. Certainly this was the very reaction of evil to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world:

The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (Joh 8:48)

The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" (Joh 7:20)

Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" (Joh 10:20)

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Mat 10:25)

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." (Mat 11:18-19)

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." (Mat 12:24)

for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mar 3:30)

And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." (Mar 3:21-22)

Isn't that remarkable? Did you ever think about how often evil people called the Son of God Himself, *evil*? If we are going to be wise about evil, we must get a firm hold on this truth. Evil always portrays itself as the good, while it maligns the good as evil. Evil insists that it is right while the good is wrong. Expect it. Recognize it when it comes your way.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isa 5:20)

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD. (Pro 17:15)

This is one of the reasons that God hates the sin of slander so much. It is of the devil. It is an essential quality of evil.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. (Rev 12:10)

The abuser is an accuser. He is never wrong. But the one who is right, normally his victim, is wrong. Understand?

This wicked strategy was employed right at the start:

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:4-5)

This is behind the persecution of the righteous by the wicked. If you want to see it in action, just call out evil for what it is and the fangs will come out. YOU will be the evil one and IT will be "righteous." How many times we have seen this in our work of exposing evil abusers hiding in churches! Suddenly they are righteous and we are the evil ones. We have experienced this here in this church numbers of times over the years and many of you have been the targets of this wicked

strategy. You have been called evil by evil, all the while the evil ones call themselves righteous.

We have seen it when we have sought to expose sin in various organizations or denominational entities. Suddenly *we* are judgmental and guilty of slander for daring to malign these fine servants of the Lord, while the real evil ones make themselves out to be righteous and godly. Count on it. This is the nature of evil and this is how it always works its wickedness. And if you are not wise in this regard, you will find yourself falsely guilty and shamed and wearing a load of self-condemnation that is unjust.

This deception has been the experience of every prophet or apostle that the Lord has sent to preach truth. They are maligned and made out to be evil while the evil ones utter their lies, calling good evil and evil good. It happened to Ezekiel:

They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word. Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'Declares the LORD,' although I have not spoken?" Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore

behold, I am against you, declares the Lord GOD. My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. (Eze 13:6-9)

And it happened to Jeremiah:

Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words." Hear me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my adversaries. Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. May a cry be heard from their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from

your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger. (Jer 18:18-23)

Isaiah spoke of it:

As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil; he plans wicked schemes to ruin the poor with lying words, even when the plea of the needy is right. (Isa 32:7)

Did you notice Jeremiah's prayer regarding these wicked ones? He saw evil for what it truly is and his imprecatory prayer evidences that. "Let their wives become widows and their children fatherless." Destroy them in your wrath, O Lord! This is the just prayer of a righteous servant of God.

Finally, notice how evil calls itself good and maligns the righteous as evil in probably the most evident case to be found in the Bible – at the Cross:

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him

not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall

divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. (Isa 53:1-12)

Evil calls itself good, and evil makes good out to be evil. Every time. Expect it. Be wise to it. Because as you follow Christ in righteousness, this attack and deception is coming your way.

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Tillamook, Oregon

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 19 – The Church's Other
Mission Field)

April 24, 2016

Sermon Text: Matthew 18:10-14

Scripture Reading: Psalm 109

Introduction-

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles

himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. **So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.** (Mat 18:1-14)

[NOTE: There is another account of Jesus speaking of a shepherd who has 100 sheep and goes after one that is lost. The chapter (Luke 15) goes on recording Jesus' words about other lost things: a lost coin, and of course a lost son, the prodigal. We might be tempted to say that Matthew 18 and Luke 15 are parallels, but I do not believe they are. Notice the different settings in which Jesus taught:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."** **So he told them this parable:** "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home,

he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' **Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents** than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luk 15:1-7)

Little ones who believe in Christ in Matthew's account, and sinners who repent in Luke's account. It is the Lord's teaching and parable in Matthew that we focus on this morning. In both cases Christ is rebuking people: the disciples in Matthew who were looking for power and fame in His kingdom, and the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes in Luke. But it is a mistake to equate the two and apply every point of interpretation from one on the other simply because both speak of 100 sheep and one that goes astray].

Alright then, let's turn to our thesis for this morning and we state it this way:

While the Lord sends His people out into the world to preach the gospel and make disciples, calling upon people to repent and believe in Him for salvation, He also very often (perhaps as often) commands us to minister in His name to His people who are oppressed, downcast, persecuted, weak, and suffering. And in fact it is

this latter mission field that is more often pointed to as the real test of whether we are truly the Lord's people or not.

Today in the visible church, with shocking frequency, we have the same "I will be first" fame-seeking that Jesus rebuked in His disciples characterizing many who claim to be serving Christ. And Jesus said that such an attitude ends up despising the weak, the little ones, marginalizing the lowly who believe in Him, and even causing them to stumble, most likely stumbling in regard to their faith in Him.

Is this not what we are seeing so commonly today? The very opposite of what Jesus calls us to? Woe to the one by whom the temptation and stumbling comes! How many little ones who believe in Christ, who have humble hearts and want to follow Him, are being hindered today by these "great ones" who are using the name of Christ to advance their own personal quest for fame and fortune? *Many*.

And let's not miss the somber "woe" pronounced against any who cause these little ones to be hindered from following Christ. Woe!! Eternal fire for anyone who despises these children of the Lord with humble hearts who are genuinely desiring to follow Him.

An Unbalanced Emphasis on Our Mission

As a kid growing up in the Baptist church, I often felt guilty. The preacher emphasized that every Christian ought to be "leading people to the Lord" and that every church should be seeing people saved and baptized regularly. We were to memorize gospel presentations. We should go out on Wednesday evenings knocking on doors. We should be ashamed if we were too bashful or embarrassed to do these things.

This seemed to be the entire emphasis of the church and of being a Christian. Get people saved. Witness to them. Get them to pray and receive Jesus. Send out missionaries to do the same around the world. It is still very much the case in most churches today. The "mission field" is about telling people about Jesus, about His death for sinners, and calling them to repent and believe in Him for salvation.

And we were told stories. Accounts of missionaries and other hero saints who risked life and limb for the gospel. And more, we were told "testimonies" of how vile, rotten sinners were saved and their lives totally transformed, and WE were supposed to be seeing the same things happen in our experience

and in our church and ministry and if we weren't, well, something was very wrong with US.

As a result, for many years, I considered myself a failure in my service of Christ. Even as a pastor. Why? Because while other churches were "growing" in number and the "model" churches that everyone looked to as their example were large in number, I did not see hardly any people coming to faith in Christ. That is how it has always been in my experience. As I look back over three decades of pastoral ministry, alongside many faithful Christians like you who watch for opportunities to tell unsaved people about Christ and who pray for the lost to be saved, the fact is that we have not seen large numbers of people converted. And there are numerous "Christian" pillars who would not hesitate to tell us we are have failed.

But I want to show you this morning that this is only half of the mission field work which Christ has commissioned us for. And in fact, *if the other half is neglected, everything goes down in flames.* Flames. Literally. Let me show you what I mean.

1. We have already heard from Jesus in Matthew 18 regarding care for His little ones *who believe in Him.* They already

know Christ. See that? But they are downcast. They are oppressed by false shepherds. Their ability to follow Christ is being hindered. They are despised by the religious leaders. It is our task, our mission, to go after them, bring them out of their treacherous circumstances, and help them to follow Christ.

But there is more. Listen to Christ here at length as perhaps you haven't heard these words before:

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water **because he is a disciple**, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." (Mat 10:42)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

NOTE: And what is the King going to say? "Those of you who led 10 people to believe in me, come forward and get your bronze medal. Now those who led 50 people, come get your silver. And

now for the real honors – 100 or more, come on down!” NOPE!

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, **'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'**

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty

or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'

Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, **as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.**' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mat 25:31-46)

See it? What is the basis of separation of sheep and goats? Their true nature was shown in their love for or lack of love for the people of Christ and specifically in regard to the people of Christ who were the little ones, the ones of no reputation, the ones who were persecuted for Christ's name, imprisoned, naked, hungry and so on. There is in fact no mention at all here of "soul-winning."

Evil ministers to the evil ones and disregards the sufferings of the righteous.

The problem I've encountered, regardless the denomination, is the idea that the people who should receive mercy are the abusers, rapists, murderers, etc. Because when I go to a pastor and question his or her offering the right hand of fellowship to one of these in a sermon, or in their actions, they claim that they are being

merciful, then they tell me that I'm still too close to the pain of my own suffering and that is clouding my judgement. *sigh* Thanks for your continued work in this area. I keep praying that soon the church will listen. (A commenter at ACFJ blog)

Not long ago I heard of a pastor who molested several ladies over a few years and it all came out one day. Then I heard another pastor preach and referring to that particular 'pastor', explaining how the first thing he did when he heard of his sin was to call him and assure him he was praying for him. I was horrified! This is WRONG and DECEIVING! The message it sends to the audience listening to this mercy counterfeit is that we ought not to judge the "poor perpetrators". It would have made such a difference if he had said he'd called the VICTIMS and told THEM words of support! and quoted 1 Co 5.5 that he had delivered such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Where are the true men in the church.. ? (Commenter at ACFJ blog)

Very good, and right on. Jesus said that the commandment to love the

Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength was the greatest commandment, and the second was like it – Love your neighbor as yourself. But then he said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." If you meditate on that a bit, it is clear that everything in scripture – EVERYTHING – is for the purpose of increasing our love for God and our love for neighbor.

And one other – Jeremiah said this:

23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:
24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.
(Jer 9:23-24 KJV)

Jeff, what you are describing is what I have also seen in the conservative scholar world. We pride ourselves in our wisdom, but do not know the Lord. If we cannot be moved with compassion and cannot be grieved over injustice, then we do not know

the Lord, no matter how well we can parse Hebrew verbs.

PS – I absolutely love parsing Hebrew verbs, but that skill is useless if it doesn't stir me to worship and good works. (Pastor Sam Powell, First Reformed Church, RCUS, Yuba City, CA)

Do you begin to see the ramifications and implications of these things? *All the Law and the Prophets*. Listen again-

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Mat 22:35-40)

EVERYTHING in Scripture, in other words, hangs on and depends upon the application of Scripture in light of these two great commandments. ANY interpretation that forgets these principles *is necessarily errant*. Love for God. Love for our neighbor. This is

why the Pharisees' handling of Scripture was skewed. For example:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. (Mat 12:1-14)

Let's look at another one:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (Jas 1:27)

And another:

"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:6-8)

And still another:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,

learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isa 1:16-17)

Of King Josiah:

He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD. (Jer 22:16)

And then of course the parable of the Good Samaritan which is so often told with the assumption that everyone in the church would certainly be the one to stop and help the victim. Notice this is the very same message we have been seeing consistently this morning about his neglected, non-elective, and forgotten mission field of the church:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.**" And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, **he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luk 10:25-37)

These past few years of ministry here in this church have turned out to be the most fruitful I have ever experienced in all these years as a pastor, and I think that you all would agree that this has been your experience too. We are missionaries to the oppressed. We are

active in the work of Christ that is a non-elective for every Christian. And the results? Most days I can barely keep up with the response and answer the thank you's from people who have been rescued by Christ's truth.

Evil passes by Christ's little ones who are oppressed and suffering. Evil turns away. Evil will not be bothered. Evil seeks only things that will bring gain and glory to itself. But all who follow its path will end in hell. Love for the Lord and love for His people is not an option. And I have to say that the vast majority of local churches and supposed Christian ministries are failing miserably here. Unless they repent, unless they turn and cease making the little ones stumble, they will end in hell. They will be, it will turn out, the goats.

I think that for the first time I have begun to see the truth of the Lord's words to His disciples and to us (and I suspect you have as well) –

Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. (Joh 4:35)

They really are. But we must go into the right fields. We close with this excerpt from a blog post by Phil

Monroe, a professor at Biblical Theological Seminary in PA. It is an illustration of the very kind of ministry we have been speaking of:

Recently I travelled to Amman, Jordan to meet with Christians involved in bringing Scripture-engaged trauma healing curriculum to their communities. Participants represented the countries of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq. Nearly all are involved in serving both Christian and Muslim refugees. Remember too that while Jordan is a stable country, it is a place where believers number no more than 2 percent of the population.

Whenever I travel somewhere to teach, I always come home (re-) learning as much if not more than I teach. Here are a few of my recent lessons,

The heart of the Gospel is caring for the stranger among you. Believers are active in caring for the 4 million refugees in Jordan and many more outside of the country. Food, water, education, pastoral care, and medical care are being provided. And the care is not just given to other believers but also to those who are Muslim. I listened to believers describe how

they have earned respect from these refugees and how the character of Christ is being made known, in deed but also in word. In Syria, along the coast, churches are educating gypsies and providing food and water to the internally displaced.

Comparing to ME culture, I am not very generous. I had an extra day in the country after the training. Several participants wanted to be sure that I was well cared for. They sought to provide me with experiences in the country, food, kindness, and more. I saw generosity in action. May I exude the same here!

We don't know what it is like to be minority. Sometimes in the US, we Christian can feel we are really under attack. But, comparatively, we are not. Imagine having to stop and show ID to go into a neighborhood, a stop solely based on your faith. Imagine that via Islamic/government rule, rape victims must marry rapists. Imagine a system that provides national ID numbers to children born of rape that forever identifies them as such. How does the church choose to respond to care for victims when the system is set up to harm them further? And yet, I see the church there flourishing, even if ever

under pressure and small by comparison.

Christians question why the US does not seem to do more to help them. We met with 36 Iraqi refugees one evening. We shared a meal and some good conversation. But it was also serious in that these families told us of losing everything they had to ISIS and others who ran them out of their towns. They told of a community of 60,000 believers who had to leave good jobs, houses, cars, and churches behind to run for their lives. These that we talked to now live in shipping containers on the property of a Catholic church. They cannot work. They cannot move about. They are stuck and only surviving on the graces of this church community. They lament over the loss of their church community of 12,000. Why, they ask. Why wouldn't the USA, a predominantly Christian nation, not help them more? Of course this is a complex political question but do remember that the instability there is much the result of our military actions to remove the former president. These people just do not understand how we stand by and do nothing as a country (note: there are many NGOs actively working to care for this community).

Similarly, our new found Palestinian friends told of their common experiences in trying to move about the West Bank. They told of their struggles and their isolation. Though they did not say as much, they do wonder why their own brothers and sisters in other parts of the world seem to neglect their plight.

If you want to be on the forefront of a mission field that really is ripe for harvest, turn your eyes to taking the love and truth of Christ to the myriads of victims of evil who are all around us today. You will find a receptive and thankful audience:

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (Jas 2:15-18)

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Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

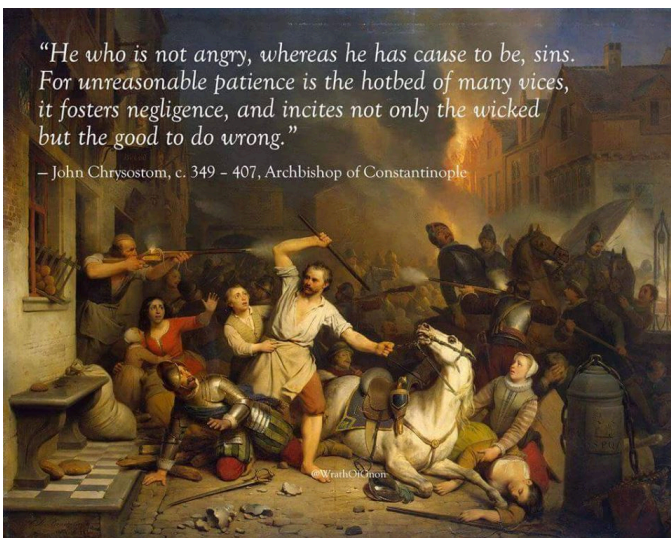
(Part 20 – Increasing in
the Wisdom and Knowledge of
the Lord)

May 8, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1

Introduction-



“He who is not angry, whereas he has cause to be, sins. For unreasonable patience is the hotbed of many vices, it fosters negligence, and incites not only he wicked but the good to do wrong.”
(John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, AD 349-407)

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

Notice that Christ did not say, FEAR men. He tells us to watch out and be on guard and vigilant because the devil is on the prowl, but He never tells us to be afraid of the devil. In fact, Christ’s words to us are “fear not!” Don’t be afraid. The Christian need not be motivated by fear. Wisdom, yes, Watchfulness, yes. But not fear.

This is ascension Sunday, as we have already noted. We remember the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ in this season of the church calendar. What does this mean? Listen to the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

A. First, he is our advocate in heaven in the presence of his Father. Second, we have our own flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that Christ our head will also take us, his members, up to himself. Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a corresponding pledge. By the Spirit's power we seek not earthly things but the things above, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand.

Q. Why the next words:

"and is seated at the right hand of God"?

A. Because Christ ascended to heaven to show there that he is head of his church, the one through whom the Father rules all things.

Q. How does this glory of Christ our head benefit us?

A. First, through his Holy Spirit he pours out gifts from heaven upon us his members.

Second, by his power he defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies.

Q. How does Christ's return "to judge the living and the dead" comfort you?

A. In all distress and persecution, with uplifted head, I confidently await the very judge who has already offered himself to the judgment of God in my place and removed the whole curse from me. Christ will cast all his enemies and mine into everlasting condemnation, but will take me and all his chosen ones to himself into the joy and glory of heaven.

In other words, "No Fear" is a slogan only properly used by the Christian. This is why David could march up to Goliath in complete confidence, you see. He knew the Lord.

As we grow in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord, we come to understand things like this:

"Christ is glorified when evil is exposed. Christ is glorified when we His people use the discernment that He has given us and act upon it with wisdom and sound understanding."
[ACFJ Facebook commenter in response to comments such as these] –

This is very sad.. the heart needs to be brought into God's presence to be cleaned and healed from all this. collateral damage to many hearts in the Christian community . How can we as Christians glorify Christ but by

example. Exhorting is important but please lift and focus on Christ.

Have you begun to be suspicious of these vague, “pious platitudes”? It is wisdom to do so. Just what, in the world, does it mean to “bring the heart into God’s presence to be cleaned and healed?” It is meaningless, and it is harmful. This person goes on to say “please lift and focus on Christ.” Again, what does that mean? I can tell you. These things mean “shut up, stop talking about evil and wicked wolves who have crept in among us and instead look at your own heart which is just as sinful as the wolf’s and confess your own sin to God.” Do you see the wickedness in telling the oppressed such things? We roundly rebuked this person and called her to repentance for harming the innocent.

Think of the Lord Jesus and how He dealt with the woman who was bleeding and a castaway and who had spent all her money trying to get well:

And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made

you well." And instantly the woman was made well. (Mat 9:20-22)

Did Jesus tell her, “you must examine yourself. You must look to your own heart and ask My Father to heal the sin and bitterness that is in it. You must thank Him for allowing you to suffer.” No! He set her free. He called her in a parallel account, a daughter of Abraham and He rebuked the self-righteous Jews when they complained about what He had done. To tell the weak and hurting and oppressed to “look to their own heart and see their own sin and stop complaining” is pure cruelty and not at all of Christ.

As Pastor Sam Powell put it so well”

“Evil always perverts Scripture by stripping it of the Spirit and love.”

We must, as we grow in the wisdom of the Lord, beware of these phrases and platitudes that are so commonly used and carry an air of “spiritual saintliness” but in fact are lies. Here is Pastor Sam Powell again:

“If you repeat something over and over again, it becomes canon. My dad has a sign on his study wall, ‘If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing....Keep saying it, and sound authoritative about it, and pretty soon it becomes canon law, inviolable truth.’”

And another:

“God loves your abuser as much as He loves you. You must repent of your sin of not loving your abuser and recognize that you are just a sinner too.”

My, how pious. How saintly. And how wicked! See it? Say something often enough and people will start accepting it as true. “God loves the wicked as much as He loves the righteous.” Oh, really:

The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face. (Psa 11:5-7)

See it? In most cases this “God loves your abuser too” means “the wicked man is really a Christian too. There is no difference between him and you.” Complete falsehood and a wicked, evil perversion of the Word of God.

Consider this today:

If we are not wise about evil, we necessarily will become its ally. Do you want to be a friend of the devil? I hope not. But you will be his helper if

you refuse to grow in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord. We can be wise as serpents in regard to evil, yet innocent of it, OR we will be ignorant and naïve about evil and be guilty of it. Wise as a serpent = innocent as a dove. Ignorant of evil = guilty of evil. There is no middle ground.

We must be wise about evil because the world and even the local churches are filled with people who are hurting and suffering from it. Many, many verses in God’s Word tell us that we must help the oppressed and oppose the wicked or the plain fact is, we are not Christians at all.

Let’s talk then a bit about this matter of “increasing in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord” and how it relates to growing wise in regard to evil.

Notice these prayers of the Apostle Paul. Notice particularly that he consistently prays for believers to grow in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord, and one of the results of that growth is that we will be *blameless* on the day we stand before Christ:

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the

Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:15-23)

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Php 1:9-11)

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to

walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col 1:9-10)

See it? To fail to grow in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord is to fail to grow in the knowledge of righteousness, of His will, and necessarily to fail to grow then in respect to evil, to fail to increase in bearing good fruit, to lack the ability to approve what is excellent, what is His will, and therefore to incur impurity and blame.

I suppose this might be called “the other, neglected half of sanctification.” That is, becoming wise in the Lord about evil, about what does not please Him, about what is wicked.

Let me give you another real life example. Listen to this lady’s story she is living right now:

I’m currently struggling with my pastors to get them to see that there is no way that my abusive husband is a Christian, since they insist it is possible (and apparently they must take him at his “confession,” although WHY they should do so, I don’t know) and therefore approach him that way and are shocked at how he slithers around in conversation and slithers

out of full responsibility for his actions.

But it's so clear. In addition to the amazing articles here on that topic, we don't even need to go further than the plain simple reading of 1 John. No PhDs in Biblical interpretation necessary.

"Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's see abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is EVIDENT who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother."

My pastors have also said that whether he is a Christian or not is something we should not focus on, but we take him at his confession on the surface in the dealings with him. But it is clear here AND ELSEWHERE that God WANTS us to be able to tell the difference between a Christian

and a non-Christian, and he instructs us in how to do so! If it wasn't important and useful to know if someone is a true Christian, why would God devote passages to it? With the phrase "little children, let no one deceive you..." beginning it! Clearly the fatherly and protective heart of God is the one who wants to make it known who is a Christian and who is not.

I think that some churches and pastors that may have good intentions and really love God but don't know anything about abuse [ie, evil] may have the same stumbling blocks for exposing the abuser that victims have. I know I personally stayed 3 years because of the "path of least resistance" principle... Although my marriage was painful and scary, leaving it was MORE painful and scary. Only when the scales tipped and it was finally more painful and scary to stay than leave was I able to contemplate leaving. And even then it wasn't enough. I also had to realize that I was telling a lie about God by staying, saying that it is ok in God's eyes. Only then, after truly seeing God's heart for justice for the oppressed, was I able to face the embarrassment, shame, difficulty, confusion, fear of the unknown, and fear of leaving, because I was doing it

for something bigger than me, for the sake of the Lord. Fear of God made me unable to continue telling that lie about God with my life.

In the same way, I'm sure pastors facing abuse in their midst would struggle with the feeling of it's just difficult, or it will be embarrassing/complicated, it's just easier to ignore it and do nothing, and fear of what will happen if you don't do it right 100% or what it will lead to in the end. Maybe they don't even understand what the Bible says about this subject, and they know it! It's easier to do nothing in the face of all that. But the fear of the Lord and zealously for his glory and for God's justice to be shown properly can overcome those other hindrances, for victims AND for churches who are struggling but truly love God and want to help his hurt sheep.

This is my hope, at least. My pastors don't in any way blame me and believe I have the right to divorce him, but it seems that they are struggling with how to handle HIM. I truly wish for him to be saved, regardless of the fate of the marriage, and so I want them to get a more realistic (and Biblical) view on his heart's condition and the Bible's commands for dealing with such a person. But it's not easy in

this day and age to follow the Bible's tough commands for excommunicating an unrepentant person claiming to be a Christian. Still, we have to strive to let the love of Christ compel us, not fear or embarrassment or the love of people or of money. Pastors are humans too, and I struggled with all of those fears as a victim, and it took time for me to get past that and to get courage to do the right thing.

She is kind to her pastors. But the fact is, as you can see, they have not grown in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord. They are not wise as serpents when it comes to evil and as a result *they have become its ally*. Wise as serpents = innocent as doves. Ignorant and unwise about evil = guilty of evil.

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 21 – Grace is Not for
Everyone)**

May 22, 2016

Sermon Text: Isaiah 26:10

Scripture Reading: Romans 6

Introduction-

This morning I want to show you that God's grace is not to be offered to everyone. I do not speak of his common grace, the kind of favor He exercises when He sends rain on the wicked and provides them with food. I am speaking of the gospel. The saving grace that comes to us in Christ through faith.

If we are to be wise about evil, then we must understand that there is a kind of person in this world who has so despised Christ, who has so long and

knowingly spit upon the cross, often all the while parading as a "Christian," that the Lord would have us be done with them. And to fail to do so, to continue to extend God's grace to them, is to enable evil and to further oppress victims. Many if not most people who profess to be Christians are ignorant of this fact.

Consider this verse for example which one of our blog readers sent to me this last week. Listen to it in both the ESV and NIV -

[ESV] If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the LORD. (Isa 26:10)

Isaiah 26:10 (NIV) 10 But when grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and do not regard the majesty of the Lord.

That is to say, there is a certain kind of wicked person (remember, all sinners are not the same) who only despises

God's grace and favor. No matter how much mercy and grace might be shown him, he remains in his evil ways. He does not regard the glory and majesty of God.

And I would also conclude from this Scripture that when we continue to extend grace to this kind of a person, it somehow only fuels and intensifies their wickedness. I suppose this is the kind of person Paul speaks of in Romans 1 –

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Rom 1:32)

And yet so many professing Christians around us today insist that God's grace is infinite and limitless and must always be offered to the wicked no matter how evil they might be. In fact, this kind of person seems to think themselves quite an example of godliness, and even more so the more evil the object of their affection might be.

This is all terribly skewed and I want to be certain we understand why it is.

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might

reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Rom 5:20-6:2)

"God can do anything, so that means God can save anyone. We should never give up on the abuser, on the evil person, no matter how wicked he is. The Jesus I know does miracles everyday. He saved Saul of Tarsus and Saul was an abuser."

These words about God having the ability to save anyone sound very pious, very full of faith, very noble. But I would like to show you that they are anything but that, and that they are in contradiction to God's Word, that they enable the wicked and further oppress abuse victims. These words are, in fact, the route to continued bondage and continue to do much harm to the innocent.

Paul wrote (as quoted above) that the grace of God shown us in the Lord Jesus Christ must not be used as a license for continued sin. In fact, he says, anyone who does so is at best living in a kind of insanity in complete contradiction to who they are in Christ, and more probably is demonstrating

that he does not know Christ at all and remains in an unregenerate condition. The Christian has died to sin in Christ. The Christian no longer lives in sin.

And yet so often we hear this cry, "We must not judge anyone. We are all sinners. Sure this fellow claims to be a Christian and yet walks in habitual, characteristic evil and has done so for decades. But God's grace is sufficient. We *must* keep praying for this fellow and we *must* believe that God is going to save him. In fact maybe he already is saved but is just a "carnal" Christian."

That's the sort of thing we hear.

But this is all absolutely contrary to Scripture. It enables the wicked. It oppresses the righteous.

Of David. To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary. Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts. Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; give to them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward. (Psa 28:1-4)

Do you suppose that the Lord rebuked David for praying such a prayer and told him, "David, you stop that. You need to keep praying that these people will be saved. After all, you never know when I might save them." Hardly. This is inspired Scripture. The Word of God Himself. This is a godly and righteous prayer. True truth.

There are many things that God *cannot* do. God cannot sin. God cannot act against His own being. God cannot ignore sin nor justify it. And in regard to our topic here, *God cannot save the unrepentant, unbelieving man*. Yes, faith and repentance are surely the gift of God and apart from God setting His saving love upon us even while we were dead in trespasses and sins we would never have turned to Christ. It is a mystery. Yet at the same time unless a person believes in Christ alone and repents, turning from his evil and to Christ, God will not and in fact cannot save him. What God does to a person who knows the truth in Christ, who rejects it over and over again, who lives as a hypocrite pretending to serve God, is to *turn them over to their sin*. Listen to it once more:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among

themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom 1:24-25)

Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. (Rom 1:32)

At some point, in fact, the sinner can even become reprobate, crossing that line from which there is no possibility of ever returning -

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. (Heb 6:4-8)

Esau is a case in point -

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (Heb 12:15-17)

When Christians misuse and presume upon God's grace in Christ, demanding that victims of evil and everyone else "never give up" on the abuser who has quite often been cruelly persecuting his victim for decades, all the while maintaining a wicked pretense of being quite a holy saint, *those Christians are in fact abusing grace*. They are really *promoting* what Paul says is ludicrous - the continuance in sin under the claim that "grace abounds and is greater than all sin." Their error goes further yet. These claims also even insist that "showing mercy" to the hardened, wicked, conscienceless man is good because it makes grace "abound" even more! See it?

People who promote this abuse of grace are at best ignorant and in fact

are more often just plain arrogant (they may not even know Christ at all as Paul indicates). What they are saying to us is that they are a cut above in holiness. After all, "their god" (small "g" is intentional here) never gives up on anyone, no matter how wicked they might be. Really? Have such people ever even read the Bible? God hands the wicked over to their sins at some point. There is in truth a "point of no return" and there are people like Esau who God Himself *cannot* save because to do so would violate His very person.

Yet how often do we hear it? "Well, yes, so and so did live a wicked life. He even blasphemed Christ and was a terribly abusive man. But God can save anyone and God's grace is so wonderful that how do we know this man won't greet us in heaven when we get there?" (They look up to heaven with a pious gaze at this point. Yuck). How do we know the wicked, unrepentant man or woman is not going to greet us in heaven? Because the Lord Himself has said so.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor

revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1Co 6:9-10)

Do not be deceived. But today many apparently are deceived. Many who claim to be Christians.

Rather than telling victims of evil that it is God's will that they continue to be bound to their abuser in some way (such as zealously praying for their salvation, telling them they are praying for them, hoping against hope that the big salvation day comes, etc), *God has given us quite different instructions* about how we relate to the wicked and specifically about how we are to relate to wicked people like abusers who claim to be Christians -

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1Co 5:11-13)

I encourage you to read all of 1 Corinthians chapter five very carefully. It is the scriptural pattern to follow in

dealing with an abuser who is wearing the disguise of Christianity. *Do not even eat with such a one.* And yet local churches often and even typically *are* embracing such wicked ones, keeping them in fellowship in their church, all in the name of "grace." Such churches are invoking God's anger against them, enabling evil, and adding to the oppression of the innocent. Just recently, as I do so often, I heard from a victim of terrible, ongoing, life-threatening abuse that was *fully known to the pastor of her church*, and yet her abuser is still allowed in that church and even "serving" in "ministry" there. Make no mistake. That is not grace. It is rank disobedience to the command of Christ. It is evil. *And it is inevitably going to encourage other evildoers in their wickedness.*

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be

separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." (2Co 6:14-18)

Victims of evil will find that the path to freedom from the bondage of abuse is not to be discovered in some kind of distortion regarding the grace of God ("grace on steroids" as one of our readers put it), but in handing the wicked one over to the Lord and walking away from him and moving on.

And to all who continue to insist that what I have said here is judgmental and cruel, that their "Jesus" is kind and compassionate and never, ever, ever "gives up" on anyone, I say to them that they are adding to the suffering of the righteous, that you are enabling the wicked, and that you are in great need of picking up your Bible and learning who God really is.

And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. (Mat 12:7)

Let me close with this note I received last week.

This morning I was reading John 13. Judas had intimate dinners with the Lord and the other disciples. He had witnessed miracles, signs and wonders. He remained unchanged, unsaved, unregenerate. Even when Jesus said someone would betray Him, the others had no clue it was Judas.

It is not a stretch to know the very same thing happens in churches today. The scary thing is, Psalm 41:9. He that has been my familiar companion, and has eaten my bread has lifted his heel against me. I was thinking how that heel kicking someone is so violent, so hateful, as if one would be kicking someone or something that they despised. He was doing this to Jesus. Judas just got some golden coins for identifying Him.

I've heard folks being sympathetic towards Judas, defending what He did. Yet we refuse to see the true violence of evil that is spiritually pictured for us in that act. Our Lord however, was greatly troubled. Violence and abuse, control, towards women and children [and any vulnerable people] is an assault against God. Evil is in the midst of their little group, and present day church groups as well. There are still unsaved, parading as disciples, betraying Him. (That is a "negativity", I've been told.)

I've heard preachers say how Judas

will be in heaven, even after Jesus said it would be better for him if he were never born, even after the Bible says, "Satan entered Judas."

The warning Jesus gave to them before going to His death, about washing one another's feet, is heart breaking. Many evangelical and charismatic teachers in the church today do not have this attitude. They are prideful, arrogant, self important, and refuse to see evil, being sympathetic only towards the Judases that are operating in secret betrayal, yet looking outwardly like a true disciple. They aren't touched or moved by the cries of the afflicted. It is neither easy nor pleasant to see evil, and speak against it.

You also seem "greatly troubled." Thank you for speaking out. I can see it is a fire in your bones. May God bless and encourage you in your ministry, ACFJ. .

Grace is not to be extended to everyone. This is something we must get right, else we will find ourselves enabling evil.

And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. "Behold,

I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, (Mat 10:14-17)

22

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 22 – Stop Being “Nice”)

May 29, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Matthew 16:1-12

Nice People are Not Often Wise People

We have a skewed idea of who is Christian is, of what a real Christian is like, and that means that we have a deficient view of who Jesus Christ is and what HE is like.

Here is an excellent observation that a lady sent to me this week –

“...the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” (Luke 16:8). I take this verse to mean – in

part – that the secular are often more wise in this regard (dealing with evil men) than the church or in Jesus’ day the covenant community. I also take – in part – His counsel to mean that this ought not be, and yet it is so. What I have learned in recent years is that many I thought to be the true church are likely not. The true church responds via the Holy Spirit to discern truth and provide comfort. Most I have met will not consider evil in their own ranks.”

There it is. *Nice people will not consider that evil is right in their midst, disguised, deceiving, and leading them away from the truth in Christ.* I have noticed, for example, that the people I worked with years ago as a police officer quite readily acknowledge evil all around us. They were forced to see it in all the years they dealt with lawbreakers. They heard the lies. They saw the schemes. When I became a pastor, I found just the opposite to be true of the people I worked with. They would not hear of evil. They were just too – nice. But that niceness is not only dangerous, it

is sinful disobedience to our Lord's commands.

Listen to Carla van Dam as she writes about The Socially Skilled Child Molester. I am going to broaden what she says here by inserting "evil" because wicked servants of the devil come in numbers of forms: *teachers of a false gospel, pedophiles, sociopaths, narcissists, domestic abusers* and so on. Evil doers, you see. I am marking my word changes in this quote with bold face –

*“Addicts primarily associate with people who can help them facilitate their goal, and [who] do not interfere with that goal [ie, getting heroin]. The **evil doers** described in this book similarly primarily associate with adults [**people**] who can provide them with access to **the object of their addiction**....everything about their behavior is ruled by their desire...every encounter with **people** facilitates that goal. Every activity is designed to get better access **to their goal** [power and control for example in the case of the abuser]. They are always on task, looking for opportunities to **abuse**. Their image management serves to give them access to **victims**. Their good deeds are meant to get them closer to **victims**. Their constant activities,*

leaving them almost no personal time, are geared toward accessing victims.

The reasons these **evil doers** so frequently succeed [is] *the people responsible for protecting **victims** are sometimes enchanted by the smooth talk, friendly action, and kind support these groomers provide.*

Van Dam goes on to describe the responses of the “nice people” we are looking at this morning:

*The people responsible for protecting **victims** also often find the topic shameful, embarrassing, and frightening. As a result, they frequently keep quiet and assume whatever happens to be their fault, a one-time error in judgment, or a misunderstanding. However, their very embarrassment and discomfort with the topic helps foster a willingness to accept lame excuses from the **evil doer**. Furthermore, because they cannot fathom that people they know and love could be **evil doers**...they incorrectly presume ‘it can’t happen here,’ thereby making themselves more vulnerable to attack.*

***Evil doers** also gravitate to those people who are most likely to be too polite to fend them off, too shy and anxious to tell them to leave, too dependent to be assertive, and too*

impressed by rank, power, status, or money to do the right thing. Evil doers deliberately associate with people who cannot [or will not] address these issues. They seek out adults who worry about hurting people's feelings. They charm people who do not believe it could happen.

[Caps are mine for emphasis] IN OTHER WORDS, THE **VICTIMS MOST AT RISK OF BEING ABUSED BY THESE GROOMERS ARE THE PEOPLE WHO ARE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHO CANNOT STOMACH LEARNING ABOUT EVIL.**

Van Dam continues to note that these “nice people” may therefore inadvertently “be more likely to welcome **evil doers** into their homes, organizations, or communities, ignore the evidence, overcome concerns, and talk themselves out of believing possible suspicions. Adults who are timid, shy, obedient, and polite and who ignore suspicious discrepancies for fear of hurting the feelings of child molesters, are unaware that these characteristics are more likely to make them lightning rods for **evil doers.**”

And yet these evil doers, these pedophiles, sociopaths, psychopaths, narcissists, domestic abusers who crave power and control and self-

glory, “are far more likely to appear wherever **vulnerable victims** congregate. They choose careers and hobbies that give them access to children [or other potential targets]. They become coaches, educators, therapists, child-care workers, babysitters, priests, ministers, hospice care providers, or pediatricians.”

And yet, if it weren't for the “nice people” who are supposed to be protecting these victims from evil, the wicked ones would not be able to gain access to them.

IS IT ANY WONDER THAT EVIL DOERS HAVE AS ONE OF THEIR FAVORITE ARENAS, *THE LOCAL CHURCH!* After all, Christians are sooooo forgiving, so indoctrinated to see only good in everyone, so enamored with things like grace and mercy and kindness and love..., so willing to admit that they are sinners too, no better than the worst evil person, right? In the church then, or in what claims to be a body of Christ's followers, in the church where all kinds of signals are sent out that no one is willing to monitor boundary violations where it is communicates to wicked people that “subtle cues of misconduct will be overlooked, ignored, or tolerated” (Van Dam)...in the church, the evil doer has one of his

favorite arenas to practice his wickedness.

Here is another piece of wisdom about this from one of our readers at A Cry for Justice. The particular evil she experienced was the domestic abuser, but what she says can be applied directly to any of these evil doers we are speaking of –

“I think people who have not been in abusive situations don’t really have a clue how desperate and dangerous it is. Abuse is not what the abuser does, it is who he is. It is foolish to think that ‘being nice’ to the abuser will create a safe and loving home environment. It is just another delay in the reality of the situation to try that. Get out while you can, while you still have life and claim the hope and future that are God’s plan for you,”

How Niceness Almost Destroyed the World

Listen to Winston Churchill writing about how the denial of the reality of evil forming right in front of their eyes almost destroyed the nation:

“Their (the English people) sincere love of peace actually played a part in leading to an infinitely more terrible war. Mussolini’s bluff (to invade

Ethiopia) succeeded, and an important spectator (Hitler) drew far-reaching conclusions from the fact. Hitler had long resolved on war for German aggrandizement. He now formed a view of Great Britain’s degeneracy, which was only to be changed too late for peace and too late for him. In Japan also there were pensive spectators.

“As the general election moved forward...this thinking was greatly to the advantage of Mr. Baldwin and his supporters. ‘The League of Nations would remain as heretofore the keystone of British foreign policy’: so ran the government’s election manifest. ‘The prevention of war and the establishment of peace in the world must always be the most vital interest of the British people....’”

See it? **As Britain played “nice” with Mussolini, Adolph Hitler and the powers in Japan were watching.** And what did they conclude from this “niceness”? That Britain was weak, unwilling to stand up to them, and therefore conquerable. And they were almost right.

Make no mistake, when we play “nice” with the wicked, with the abuser who has crept in among us in the church, with the divisive, power-hungry person who would pervert the gospel and

bring us into all kinds of bondage, not only will that wicked man see us as weak, *so will others who are then emboldened to come among us and carry out their evil as well. Evil begets evil. Evil acts like a magnet to attract more evil.* This is why many churches are so widely infected with it. Christ warned us –

How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Mat 16:11-12)

This of course, by the way, requires that we KNOW what that leaven is! Largely, it is the leaven of evil. We must know what evil is, what it teaches, how it hides as a hypocrite behind a most convincing disguise of "godliness."

...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2Ti 3:5)

Wicked ones are watching. Evil people parading as Christians are looking for a field of operations, and if you or your church makes nice with evil, you can be sure that an invasion is coming.

What is "Nice" and What does it Look Like?

Nice. Think about that word. We use it all the time. "Hey, that's a nice fish you caught." "This party is really nice." "She is a very nice person." "Now Timmy, be nice." And more -

Have a nice day!

It was nice talking to you.

That's a really nice restaurant.

She plans to start running more when the weather gets nicer.

You begin to see that this little word is

Nice. Here is a dictionary definition –

giving pleasure or joy

good and enjoyable

attractive or of good quality

kind, polite, and friendly

Now, do you begin to see the foolishness of all this? When we are facing evil, when a wicked one comes our way, our response must NOT be "nice." We are not to give evil pleasure or joy. We are not to see evil as "nice" and respond in that way. WE ARE NOT TO BE KIND, POLITE, AND FRIENDLY TO EVIL. And yet I would suggest to you that largely this is exactly what Christians are taught they must do, and if they do not, if they respond to evil with UN-

friendliness or any kind of “UN-kindness,” they are roundly and quickly condemned for being “UN-Christian.”

Evil should not have pleasure or joy in our presence. Evil must not be treated as if it were good or enjoyable to us. Evil must know that we are NOT friendly to it but are in fact its enemy.

Let me show you that this is true in even more Scriptures in addition to those we have already seen this morning –

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. (Joh 8:43-45)

But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit

and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. (Act 13:8-11)

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (2Ti 4:14)

holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1Ti 1:19-20)

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. (Gal 2:11-13)

And we could go on and on and on. Would it be difficult to find examples of God's servants like Moses and

Isaiah and Jeremiah *not being nice*? Of course not. Much of their calling was to confront evil and they were viewed as anything but “nice” by those they rebuked.

But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?" And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." (1Ki 22:7-8)

Think on this very carefully. *How much of the Bible would have to be cut out if only “niceness” were allowed?*

I remember some years ago now when we had to deal with some wicked people. When we confronted them and put them out from among us, one of their parting phrases was “*Now, please be nice when you tell the church about us.*”

You see, evil plays on this “nice card.” It uses the lie that Christians are required by God to be “pleasant, enjoyable, agreeable” at all times to all people, even to evil ones. But this is an obvious and great lie.

“Niceness” shown toward evil is actually more accurately called “cowardice.” Niceness in such circumstances is incredibly selfish, desiring to be popular with everyone, even with the enemy. Because then there is no trouble, no suffering.

EVIL LOVES TO PARADE AS THE NICEST PERSON IN THE ENTIRE CHURCH. IT ACCUSES THOSE WHO SPEAK TRUTH OF BEING UNKIND, UNMERCIFUL, AND HARSH. AND IT DOES THIS IN ORDER TO DECEIVE, TO DRAW PEOPLE AWAY FROM CHRIST AND CAUSE THEM TO FOLLOW EVIL INSTEAD.

Don’t fall for this trap. Stop being nice and sending out the message that evil will find a welcome home in your life or in your family or in your church.

Be strong. Be courageous, and the Lord will be with you.

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 23 – Take the Lord’s
Warnings About Evil Seriously)**

June 5, 2016

Sermon Text: Luke 22:31-34

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:39-62

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mat 16:22-23)

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Peter said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you

both to prison and to death." Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me." (Luk 22:31-34)

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and 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 for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? (Act 5:1-3)

As you can see from just these verses, Peter had numerous encounters with Satan, but like most of us he was a slow learner. In the first text, our Lord reveals that Peter was being used by Satan to hinder the Father's purpose of redemption in Christ.

In the book of Acts, we see Peter recognizing that it was Satan who had led Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit, working to infect the early church with hypocrisy.

And of course probably the most well-known encounter of Peter with Satan is seen in Peter's three denials of Christ. Consider this carefully. Here is Peter in the immediate presence of the Lord Jesus, the One who Peter had confessed to be the Messiah –

And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." (Mar 8:31-33)

Peter was pointedly rebuked by Christ for yielding to Satan's work in opposing God's plan for His Son to go to the cross. But again, Peter is specifically told by Christ that he had better be on high alert because Satan had his sights on him. He didn't listen. He didn't pray. And before the rooster crowed that morning, we all know what the outcome was.

Peter did not listen to Christ's warnings about impending evil worked by the enemy. He didn't listen. He

demonstrated overconfidence in himself, claiming he could handle anything that came his way, and he failed miserably. The only reason he repented afterward is that the Lord had prayed for him ahead of time.

As I considered these verses and events, I found it amazing that Peter did not take Christ's warnings seriously. And it would take some very hard, humbling lessons before Peter really "got it". We know that he did because later on he wrote this to US –

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1Pe 5:8-9)

Be serious, not careless. Be watchful – be on guard scanning the horizon. The adversary, the one who is *against* you IS on the prowl. Not maybe. He IS on the prowl and his purpose is to consume you. To destroy your faith.

I would suggest to you this morning that –

- Most churches and professing Christians are not serious about all this, are not watchful, and

- They do not *want to be*

Christians of all people should WANT to learn about evil, about the enemy, about his agents and tactics and disguises. That is what soldiers do. They train for battle, not for peace. Whoever heard of a soldier going to boot camp and being trained for peace? Yet somehow that seems to be what happens typically in the church. Yes, we are to desire peace, work for peace, do all that is possible to be at peace with one another, BUT...

We have an enemy who never, ever wants peace. He only desires war. He lusts to destroy all of God's creation and be god himself. So it is with his children. You cannot have peace with a person who only wants war. The only proper response to such a person is to put on your armor, pick up your weapons, and do battle.

Let's listen again to Peter's hard-learned wisdom –

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (1Pe 5:8-9)

And Paul tells us really the same thing

–

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (Eph 6:11-13)

Now, I do not know all the ways in which the devil communicates with us, or tempts us, or as Jesus put it with Peter – sifts us. But I do know what is probably his most common means of coming against us –

Through his emissaries, his children, who parade as sheep and creep in among us to do the evil will of their father.

And the fundamental methods of these wicked ones who come to us looking and sounding like “sons of righteousness” (as Paul puts it to the Corinthians) is *lying* and *destroying*. (See John 8 on this). The entire goal is always to tear down Christ's kingdom and build up the kingdom of darkness

because the god of this world wants to be *God*.

So Scripture, as we have seen, strongly and repeatedly instructs us, even commands us, to be serious. Don't clown around on guard duty. Don't sleep as Peter did. Don't be caught without your armor on. And most importantly, *acknowledge that you are in a battle and the enemy has his agents all around us*. Don't, therefore, be surprised when one of them is discovered and it turns out he or she has been parading as an eminent saint for years.

I will say it again. Most professing Christians today do not take the Lord's warnings about evil seriously. In fact, these kinds of warnings in Scripture are really quite foreign to their thinking and they easily just blow them off. Listen to Peter once more and think as you listen just how these words of sober warning and truth are received by the average church member today – 2Pe 2:1-22

But false prophets also arose among the people, **just as there will be false teachers among you**, who will **secretly** bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.

And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

For if God did not spare **angels** when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; if by turning the cities of **Sodom and Gomorrah** to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.

Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones,

whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing.

They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. **Accursed children!** Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray.

They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.

For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. **They promise**

them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." (2Pe 2:1-22)

Peter's opening statement is powerful for us.... "false prophets also arose among the people, **just as there will be false teachers among you.**" All the things he speaks of which are recorded for us in Scripture, *continue to happen all through the days of the church age and that includes now, our day, our time.* Evil. Especially evil as it hides behind a "Christian" disguise and comes among us to work its wickedness. **THIS** is why you have these severe warnings from the Lord –

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of

sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1Co 5:11-13)

Most Christians blow off these kinds of Scriptures. What do you suppose the Lord thinks of being “blown off” when He issues his commands?

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, **how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?** It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, (Heb 2:1-3)

Answer? We will not escape! We must not carelessly neglect hearing, believing, and obeying whenever the Lord speaks. But there is widespread resistance to the Lord’s words today, much like the Apostle experienced. Listen very carefully to these important words –

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Heb 5:11-14)

See it? What is the mark of a strong Christian growing in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord according to these verses? *DISTINGUISHING GOOD FROM EVIL!* Do you see that? We really are not making too much of evil in this series of studies. The Christian who is mature in Christ, who can digest the solid food of God’s deeper truths and wisdom, who has moved beyond the milk stage where only ABC’s and kindergarten basics are understood, THAT Christian is marked by having “power of discernment.” Discernment of what? Good and evil!

This is HUGE! People think and assume that telling good from evil is easy and basic. Not so! It takes “constant practice” in diligently seeking God’s wisdom, hearing His

Word very carefully, listening to Christians who are truly wise in order to recognize righteousness from unrighteousness. It takes *skill in handling the word of righteousness. Training. Constant practice!* But so many people today who claim the name of Christ are careless. They are dull of hearing. You can't even teach them because it is soooo hard to explain God's wisdom to them, specifically wisdom about evil vs good. Do you see how profound this is? And there is great danger here! Why?

Because those who have tasted....well, listen to it –

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (Heb 6:1-2)

Let us LEAVE the ABC's. Yes, these are wonderful truths. The doctrine of Christ, His deity, his entering into this world, the gospel call us to repent and turn to Christ in faith, baptism, the resurrection to come and eternal judgment to come – wonderful, foundational truths. BUT the Apostle

says these are the ABC's of Christ and we must not remain in kindergarten.

I suggest to you that this is precisely where most Christians are today and they are encouraged to stay in this babyhood by their teachers. Those teachers and churches ought to be admonishing them in practical wisdom, in applying Christ in their lives and specifically giving them admonishment to press on. Listen again –

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Let me ask you this. What do most Christians think that Christian maturity is? What is their concept of a strong, mature saint of God? I can tell you. Someone who is a great theologian, who can cite and recite this doctrine and that doctrine and write papers and books on theology. These are the kind of people we put in as teachers in our seminaries. They are the kind we fill out pulpits with.

But do you see here that this is NOT how the Apostle is defining Christian maturity? What is his definition? Listen again – “those who have their powers of discernment trained by

***constant practice to distinguish
GOOD from EVIL.***

And I recommend to you that this power of discernment is sorely lacking in the church today. Wisdom is lacking. People who can discern what is good and what is evil....WHO is good and WHO is evil!

How do we know? Well, I bring you back to the subject I always bring you back to. Christian churches, Christian counselors, Christian seminaries, individual Christians today...are failing this test of discernment not only miserably, but *regularly and typically*. It is not wisdom, it is not the mark of real maturity in Christ to know Greek and Hebrew and have tons of Bible verses memorized and to be able to argue if God has emotions or not! What maturity in Christ is, the state that the Lord calls us to grow into pronto! is the wisdom of the Lord given by His Spirit through His Word *to discern good from evil*.

No wonder the churches are in such trouble today. No wonder evil abounds among us. No wonder those who truly are growing in the wisdom of the Lord are regularly rejected by the powers that be in typical local, visible churches. And no wonder that the evil ones are embraced there.

Do you want to truly please the Lord? Do you want to press on into the maturity He calls you to? Do you want to work out your salvation and be assured that you will stand before God in the full righteousness of Christ on that Day?

Then become wise as serpents regarding evil, all the while remaining innocent as doves. Get into the fight. Stop holding back. Take the Lord's words seriously on these things.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Rom 16:20)

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Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 24 – Does the Christian
Still Have an Evil Heart?)**

June 12, 2016

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 17:7-10

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-40

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." (Jer 17:7-10)

This morning as we continue to become wise as serpents regarding evil, we want to identify and correct a very common unbiblical idea that is really quite rampant among professing Christians, taught in our pulpits, and put into practical application that wreaks havoc in people's lives. It concerns the very nature of who a Christian is as a new creation.

Listen to some excerpts from an article by Leslie Vernick which was sent to me by one of the ACFJ readers last week. It actually is a very good article in that Vernick is recognizing that not all sinners are the same and that in fact there are hearts that are just plain evil.

[www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/5-indicators-of-an-evil-and-wicked-heart.html]

"As Christian counselors, pastors and people helpers we often have a hard time discerning between an evil heart and an ordinary sinner"

who messes up, who isn't perfect, and full of weakness and sin.

I think one of the reasons we don't "see" evil is because we find it so difficult to believe that evil individuals actually exist. We can't imagine someone deceiving us with no conscience, hurting others with no remorse, spinning outrageous fabrications to ruin someone's reputation, or pretending he or she is spiritually committed yet has no fear of God before his or her eyes."

She goes on to list and describe from excellent insights into the traits that an evil person possesses –

1. Evil hearts are experts at creating confusion and contention.

2. Evil hearts are experts at fooling others with their smooth speech and flattering words.

3. Evil hearts crave and demand control, and their highest authority is their own self-reference.

4. Evil hearts play on the sympathies of good-willed people, often trumping the grace card.

5. Evil hearts have no conscience, no remorse.

And then Vernick notes two typical tenets that an evil heart holds to:

1. Their horrible actions should have no serious or painful consequences.

When they say "I'm sorry," they look to you as the pastor or Christian counselor to be their advocate for amnesty with the person he or she has harmed. They believe grace means they are immediately granted immunity from the relational fallout of their serious sin. They believe forgiveness entitles them to full reconciliation and will pressure you and their victim to comply.

2. That if I talk like a gospel-believing Christian I am one, even if my actions don't line up with my talk.

If week after week you hear the talk but there is no change in the walk, you have every reason to question someone's relationship with God. Part of our maturity as spiritual leaders is that we have been trained to discern between good and evil. Why is that so important?

It's important because evil usually pretends to be good, and without discernment we can be easily fooled (**Hebrews 5:14**).

When you confront evil, chances are good that the evil heart will stop counseling with you because the darkness hates the light (**John 3:20**) and the foolish and evil heart reject correction (**Proverbs 9:7,8**). But that outcome is far better than allowing the evil heart to believe you are on his or her side, or that "he's not that bad" or "that he's really sorry" or "that he's changing" when, in fact, he is not.

[Note: Here, Vernick really does get it right and her statement that we are about to critique regarding the Christian's heart being inclined to evil shows, in my opinion, that she has not yet quite sorted out some of the wrong teaching she has been taught, just as most of us were taught growing up in the church]

This is all very excellent and accurate wisdom which we wholeheartedly agree with.

But there is a portion of her article that is an example of wrong-thinking or at least foggy-thinking regarding *just who a Christian is*. This is the very

subject we want to examine this morning. Listen once more:

The **Bible** clearly tells us that among God's people there are wolves that wear sheep's clothing (**Jeremiah 23:14; Titus 1:10; Revelations 2:2**).

[Quite true]

It's true that every human heart is inclined toward sin (**Romans 3:23**), and that includes evil (**Genesis 8:21; James 1:4**). We all miss God' mark of moral perfection. However, most ordinary sinners do not happily indulge evil urges, nor do we feel good about having them. We feel ashamed and guilty, rightly so (**Romans 7:19-21**). These things are not true of the evil heart.

Vernick actually words these ideas more accurately than many, but do you see the imprecision and fogginess that leaves us wondering just exactly WHO we are in our very personhood in Christ?

- "It's true that every human heart is inclined towards sin." Then she applies Romans 3:23 to every human heart –

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, (Rom 3:21-24)

Does this passage teach that the Christian's heart is "inclined toward evil? No it does not. Paul is speaking about the unregenerate human heart, whether Jew or Gentile, which is in need of justification through the redemption in Christ Jesus.

Vernick underscores that she believes the Christian's heart is inclined toward evil by also quoting the following scripture -

And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. (Gen 8:21)

Is this verse teaching that the intention of the Christian's heart is evil from his youth? No. Clearly it is speaking of

man in general. Unregenerate man. Fallen man. The kind of humanity that the Lord had just wiped out in the Flood.

And so you see the problem. Jeremiah's statement, for example which we read earlier is taken by such teaching as being true of the Christian as well as the unregenerate –

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." (Jer 17:7-10)

Is this true? Is the regenerated heart of the Christian who is a new creation in Christ *deceitful above all things and desperately sick*? No. What the Lord is saying here through Jeremiah is His blessing upon the man who trusts in the Lord, and that even though the wicked man's heart is so deceitful that no human being can sort out its webs

of lies, *the Lord can and does!* And thus the righteous man can be encouraged because the Lord without error *gives to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.*

For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Mat 7:14-21)

We can indeed recognize the evil person. *There is a vast difference between the heart of the Christian and that of the unregenerate man.* And yes, we can even judge if a person is a Christian or not.

This is where the great error is among Christians and churches today. Over

and over again we hear it – that no one but the Lord can know the heart, no one but the Lord knows if a person is a Christian or not, *and therefore if a person claims to have faith in Christ we must take them at their word because after all, the inclination of even the Christian's heart is evil.*

Often at this point in this discussion the interpretation of Romans 7 arises:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
(Rom 7:24)

But consider the context:

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Rom 7:20-25)

WHO is the person of whom Paul speaks here? What is the nature of the

essence of his being? He is a person who:

- Does not want to sin but has sin dwelling in him, ultimately to be set free by Christ at the resurrection
- He is a person whose flesh (members) has a principle (law) of sin operative in it, warring against the true person he is in his inner being, that person “delighting in the law of God.”
- Evil then lies close at hand, but is not who he is in his very identity. It used to be. But now anymore.

See it? This is the whole thesis of the book we went through in the women’s study these past few months by David Needham, *Birthright: Christian, Do You Know Who You Are?*

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin,

which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:13-18)

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Rom 8:3-9)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1Jn 3:14-15)

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: (1Jn 2:3-5)

In a week or two we are going to publish a blog post that contains quite a number of responses that victims of evil have received from their pastors when they have asked for help. Notice the thread in these – *they assume that the wicked one is a Christian --*

Pastor #1 - *It is never right to give up on anyone. Jesus wants to save everyone and he can. It is wrong for us to put an abuser out of the church. He says he is a Christian and we must take him at his confession.*

Pastor #2 - *You are being disrespectful to your husband.*

The victim had told her pastor that she yells at her husband if he raises his hand to hit her. She yells: "You

BETTER not hit me!!!" It works. When she asked her pastor what she should do if her husband tries to hit her, his answer was, "*Well, the worst thing that can happen is that you would die. And then you would go to heaven.*" When she said, "Then he would go to hell," the pastor replied, "*Not if he repents.*"

And then in conclusion, listen to these real, actual stories from victims who suffered at the hands of wicked, evil domestic abusers who paraded as Christians *and who were accepted by their churches as Christians!*

I have spent two decades doing exactly what she [a self-proclaimed "Christian" blogger who enables evil] says. Affair after affair and unkindness after unkindness and deceit after deceit and I would tell myself I was a sinner too and try to love him more, be thankful I had a husband, and forgive and forget. Of course he didn't think I forgave enough because I just couldn't forget (esp. not when he continued to repeat his evil). He has left me shipwrecked now, but with the help of a Christian therapist I am seeing him for what he is and seeing God for the Father and husband and giver of justice He says He is. Thank God I am free.

I've been in my abusive marriage for twenty-four years, but the divorce will be final soon. Both of my children suffer depression and anxiety, as well as a deep sense of rejection since one of my husband's favorite tactics toward his family is abuse-by-extreme-neglect. And, like you said, my younger child is rejecting the faith because of not only what her "Christian" father has done, but also the church that ex-communicated me. ...Frankly, I can't say I blame her. It has made a very deep impression on her about the way "Christians" treat others and she wants no part of it.

Goodness, but I wish there were fewer well-intentioned Christian advice websites out there and more genuine Christians interested discerning what real evil (which God tells us about over and over and over in His Word) is and how abusers masquerade as sheep in the church. These wolves are all the more aided and abetted by that website's counsel. [website referred to is a very bad one maintained by one Michelle Lindsey]

I was taught that marriage should be for life. But what I really had wasn't marriage, it was captivity, a partnership of predator and unwilling

prey. Captivity that was sanctioned and enforced by the evangelical church. I didn't choose to be married to an abuser, I was entrapped by a very slick liar who fooled me and just about everyone else.

What I write here is the tip of the iceberg. My story is too graphic, vulgar, and disgusting. It is only by God's grace, and my hard work in therapy, and my continuous attitude to persevere through it all for the price of freedom. God has proven himself a million times over to me: this broken in mind and spirit girl, youth, and woman. I am amazed. I wrote all of this to encourage women to continue moving forward. I should not be alive by any account. How I survived childhood, or adulthood is nothing short of a miracle.

I have painted a rosy picture but it was anything but. It was grueling terror surviving. Anyhow what I originally wanted to say to the owners of this site was WOW. Finally, a Biblical sense of JUSTICE.

Deep in my heart , I knew my mother was no Christian. To survive , I have always just told myself there is a God and He is JUST. And when she dies she will face any and all justice measured out to her. I had no idea

where to put the concept of grace....I just could not entertain that idea. I don't mean to be spiteful. (I walked away from my mother nearly three decades ago, and never looked back)

My mother sat and still sits in church somewhere, where grace abounds. My abusers at church still sit in a grace filled environment and it is nice to be able to read your blog....I was blown away. They are old people now. Some have passed away, and some are nearing that doorway in life.

I was in utter shock, and applause for this blog post.....it kind of makes my stomach hurt because these are things that I don't let my mind wander to. For all of my therapy, and years of healing, I have never ever faced the evil my mother did to me, and let others do to me. I fear that will send me straight away to the psychiatric ward, I avoid this like the plague. I dealt with other abuse and avoided mother abuse. I am mentally healthy at this point and don't want to stir the waters. But, I want you to know, that reading your blog in regards to sin, and abuse in the church, I will be grateful for these words and the work you do providing a platform for people to learn and heal. Reading and learning about the violence, abuse, in the church today under such rampant evil doctrine.....is grotesque. The attitude in church , towards abuse, in all forms does nothing but to

eliminate any sort of validation of the abuse, thus minimizing the victim's pain into nothing...I hate it.

And the Lord hates it as well. These are things that we cannot get wrong. We must reject any teaching that a person walking in habitual, unrepentant, ongoing sin is a Christian. That person is not to be allowed refuge in our churches. We must forcefully reject the notion that a Christian's heart is inclined toward evil and that because we are all sinners, we must not and cannot judge anyone.

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in

you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. (1Jn 2:18-29)

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 25 – If the Word You are
Hearing Does not Set You Free,
it is not the Word of God)**

June 19, 2016

Sermon Text: Ps 19

Scripture Reading: Matthew 4:1-25

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." (Mar 1:27)

Evil distorts, perverts, twists and morphs the Word of God into an evil counterfeit that brings people into bondage, rather than into the freedom His truth delivers –

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and

you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (Joh 8:31-32)

Our subject this morning is this:

Evil loves to quote God's Word, but always does so with the method and intent of using it to deceive and enslave.

We are surrounded by phony religion today, just as was the case in Jesus' day when the religious establishment in Israel was corrupt. The temple was not the Temple, but had become a den of robbers. The righteous were put out of the temple while the wicked not only remained members in good standing but were exalted with trumpets. When the Lamb of God came to that "church" He was rejected, scorned, and ultimately executed.

And so it is today. We see it constantly. The very same dynamics being wickedly carried out in the name of "christianity." The thing is disgusting. The Lord sees it all.

However, in the face of all this evil we must not spurn the true church, the true people of God, or despair that they are to be found. Elijah thought he was the only one left, but he wasn't. Christ

always has His true remnant, His true Bride. Always.

Furthermore,

...we must never allow the wicked who parade as righteous eminent "saints" to cause us to distrust the Bible, God's Word.

Oh yes, they are constantly quoting Scripture to justify themselves and to condemn Jesus' true flock, but like the devil in the wilderness tempting Christ, their use of Scripture is perverted and twisted, turning it into a devilish tool by ripping texts out of context and through other diabolical methods.

God's Word is truth. Truth that sets us free. Truth that is light that exposes evil no matter how dark it is. God's Word is food for the soul and living water for our thirst. It is life-giving – even when it brings heavy conviction for actual sin it's goal is LIFE by leading the sinner to repentance and salvation.

IF WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT TO YOU IN YOUR CHURCH IS NOT SETTING YOUR SOUL FREE, IF IT IS BURDENING YOU WITH A HEAVY YOKE, IF IT IS DEMANDING THAT YOU REMAIN IN OPPRESSION, IF IT IS

INSISTING THAT YOU KEEP SILENT ABOUT EVIL, THEN IT IS NOT THE RELIGION OF CHRIST, IT IS NOT THE WORD OF GOD.

This....THIS....is the nature of God's Word which we hold in our hands....

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psa 19:7-11)

Listen carefully, let me say it again –

If the religion that you are being taught, the Bible that you are being instructed in, the understanding that you have of God's Word, is not leading you to wholeness, to life, to freedom, to joy and peace, then that religion is not of Christ, it is not faithful to His Word, and you are being robbed of the freedom Christ

has promised to all who follow Him in truth. His truth sets us free.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. (Psa 19:7-11)

Listen to this true account of a Christian lady who learned after more than 20 years of oppression and bondage that the “Christian” doctrine and the “bible” teachings she was taught in her local church were not the Word of God at all. Her comment was in reply to a post we ran on the blog quoting a lady called “GratefulBride” who quite arrogantly told abuse victims that their misery was due to not choosing a husband wisely, as she had done:

I have been out of a 2+ decade marriage for more than 10 years and remarks like GratefulBride’s

still can trigger me so much. I STILL have problems with giving myself credit for leaving a marriage that ultimately gave me a breakdown. How can I still be so lacking in strength so many years later? (Because of how subtle and powerful the minute daily abuses were, piled up day after day, year after year.) Many of us, with no broken bones or blackened eyes, have nothing to prove the abuse to those who WERE our friends in church and Christian groups.

I, like many, was SO controlled by what I heard from my husband, the pulpit, the Sunday School classes, the women’s meetings, the books, the seminars, etc. that I STILL have problems feeling justified in making the hard decision to walk away from it finally.

I wonder if I’ll ever recover from the damage that was done.

I long for the clearheadedness to stop questioning my past valiant attempts at submissiveness. I long for the time when I stop trying to justify my ex’s actions in my head. I long for people to finally “get it” and tell me that they are sorry for how I’ve been treated and effectively shunned. (That will never happen.) I want to be strong, but I think that by staying SO long the damage is SO deep that I won’t recover. (I

constantly pray that this is not the case.) It's bad enough to have suffered the church abuse while we were in abusive marriages and after we made hard decisions to leave, but to suffer the abuse from women is so sad.

The Word of God does NOT do this to people! God says so Himself repeatedly in the Scriptures. Yes, the Sword of the Spirit brings us into conviction, sometimes very painful conviction when we stray, but for the wonderful purpose of bringing us to repentance and life –

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (2Co 7:9-10)

See it? The “grief” or sorrow that false religion brings does not lead to true repentance and life and joy, but to bondage and death. And that is exactly what this lady is describing that happened to her, right within the walls of her “church” –

I, like many, was SO controlled by what I heard from my husband, the pulpit, the Sunday School classes,

the women's meetings, the books, the seminars, etc. that I STILL have problems feeling justified in making the hard decision to walk away from it finally.

I can tell you without any doubt that she is not exaggerating. What is being preached and taught and written about in books and Christian education literature is very, very commonly not the Word of God. It opposes freedom. It enslaves. It really is the law. “Do this and live.” It parades as God's Word, citing chapter and verse, but it has twisted His Word –

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Gal 3:1-3)

An Illustration

I took a photo last week of the kennel we keep our dogs in when we are gone.



Food, water, cushy beds, heat lamps when it is cold, out of the weather, with a view. As I closed the latch on the gate, the thought came to my mind that this fence is either like God's Word, OR it is a prison.

Like the Word of God, this kennel provides firm boundaries. Why? Because we want our pets to be safe. We don't want them taking an unauthorized excursion to the river or out on the road or through neighbor's yards. Those are dangerous areas for them. They could get hit by a car, poisoned, shot, or they might do damage to a neighbor's property in some way. The kennel locked gate is good. The motivation for it is good. Therefore, *it is not a prison*. Furthermore, they know that the gate is going to be opened before long. It is a place of refuge, the place where they get their food. And so when we say "kennel" to them, they go right in.

So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Joh 10:7-11)

BUT, if the motivation of the "gatekeeper" is evil, the fence does indeed become a prison, and its occupants become prisoners. Same kind of fence perhaps. But now it is evil because the gatekeeper is not a true shepherd, but a thief and a robber come only to oppress and use the sheep.

In the case of dogs, you might compare the evil gatekeeper to the owner of a puppy mill that only exists to make money with no regard to the health and welfare of the animals. Their kennel is not a life-giving refuge of safety. It is a prison.

And so it is with the Word of God. When the Lord speaks, His Word comes to give life, to effect justice, to speak truth that sets people free. Like the kennel we maintain, His Word sets very firm boundaries, but all motivated by His love for us. *God's Word always*

speaks life and justice. It sets His people free and it rightly condemns and exposes the wicked.

Not so when the wicked pervert and twist the Word.

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. (Gal 4:17)

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. (Gal 6:12-13)

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (Col 2:20-23)

False religion, you see, distorts and perverts God's Word. And you can

KNOW this perversion is happening by carefully considering the end to which it is leading. Joy and freedom? Or oppression and bondage? Judgement and condemnation? Or justification and full acceptance?

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (Rom 8:1-2)

Who then is the gatekeeper of your religion? Christ the Good Shepherd? Or the prince of darkness parading as a servant of righteousness? Many foolish Galatians today are in bondage to wicked ones who come in, claim to be servants of Christ, but who want to bring the people back under the law for their own selfish glory and flattery.

Let me give you some true examples of Scripture being perverted in order to keep people in bondage. These kinds of things happen very commonly in churches. In fact we can say they are typical, widespread traditions that have usurped God's truth –

I had Matthew 5:25-26 misquoted at me by a teacher I once deeply respected, in order to convince me

not to cooperate with the police against a young man, the son of popular church leaders, who sexually assaulted my daughter on multiple occasions while she was sleeping. When I challenged him that, "The scripture didn't apply to cases like ours." He responded, "Jesus didn't qualify it." He did admit though, that in the hypothetical case of his own granddaughter being raped and murdered, he would not be expected to settle with his adversary before going to court. I told him his arrogance and ignorance were dangerous. I haven't spoken to him since.

Here is the Scripture that was twisted:

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (Mat 5:25-26)

Consider what kind of bondage that twisting of Scripture will do. It prohibits justice. It enables evil and hides it. It tells the oppressed that God does not want them to be free of such evil but requires them to be "friends"

with the oppressor. It is not the Word of God.

I got "the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God (Jas 1:20)" as a prooftext that anger was wrong. This was after I complained in sabbath school that the speaker was wrongly equating anger with idolatry. I said that we have a right, as image-bearers of God to respect, and that anger is an appropriate response to disrespect. That is different from anger that is expressed when people don't treat us like royalty, which IS a form of idolatry.

Here is still another very widespread lie that is produced by the wicked who warp the Word of God to their own evil ends. The Spirit of God in the believer moves them to righteous anger, moves them to seek justice, but this lie forces them to admit a false guilt in themselves for allegedly sinning by being angry. Several evil people parading as Christians whom I have known over the years loved to misuse this very Scripture. It is a terrible bondage to be prohibited from expressing the very emotions God Himself expresses.

Here is another true account of how the evil misuse of Scripture (which evil constantly practices) causes great bondage and harm to the afflicted:

I agree completely about being careful regarding quoting scriptures, carelessly. I have been misquoted scriptures for quite a few years during my childhood and adolescence about learning from my father how to be a “good” wife. This means being completely submissive and compliant to whatever requests he asks of me to do or I will suffer the consequences of not obeying him by getting punished.

These verses included the ones that say a woman is to submit to her husband and a daughter is to honor her father, [my father would say this] any time I attempted to defend myself, even by pointing out that abuse was a sin in the bible... and [he said] that a woman was not to gossip or to slander her own family when I asked for help from others.

This was along with being lectured about lying or exaggerating just how badly my dad treated me, even though I was telling the truth the whole time.

When I described what I went through to other well-meaning but misguided Christians, I was asked how bad the abuse was and was told that being physically abused every once in a great while and

being emotionally abused for months on weekdays during the school year didn't qualify as severe enough abuse for anyone to assist me. After all, it wasn't like I was physically or sexually abused, there were people who went through much worse trauma than I did.

I was furthermore scolded by being quoted scriptures about waiting on the Lord for Him to come and save me and to rejoice at the persecution I suffered through, because my reward would be great in heaven, with the command to not complain about my trivial problems, as well as being told the same scriptures my dad told me, along with, “Oh but you love your father and your father loves you, he's just doing what's best for you, you won't understand until you are older. A wife is supposed to submit to her husband, your father is just teaching you how to be a good future wife. So stop being so stubbornly rebellious toward him, instead, honor your father like the bible says, by doing what he commands.”

I was also told, I might add, that I wasn't faithful enough, because God hasn't answered my prayers and told to pray harder, even

though I was praying as hard and as fervently as I could for God to get me out of there. When I was told this, I felt guilty for bringing up the subject to ask for help and support in the first place, angry and hurt at being disbelieved, guilty for not being a “good enough Christian”, humiliated at being quoted the same scriptures that my Dad used on me and finally, cynical that anyone but myself would get me out of the vicious cycle of abuse I found myself in.

Any time I talk about what I suffered from growing up to anyone now, I’m asked why I hold onto the past of my childhood so tightly and told to let it go; as if I’m still not suffering from the cycle of abuse I’m in from working under my dad. It’s either that or I’m completely ignored, like when I asked to tell my story on the childhood abuse page but didn’t get a response because my experience was never brought to a court of law, unlike everyone else, whose experiences had.

Wow! How MANY Scriptures were twisted and distorted to this young woman as she grew up. And people are still putting them on her today. You see that sometimes people don’t even cite a verse, but speak the same old lies that have become common currency so

widely in the churches that they are accepted without any thought that they might be false.

One more example:

Honor your father and mother was a good one quoted often. As a teen, [I knew my mother was being immoral with a man] whom she’d met in the bar the night before.... I told my mom how upset I was and how I felt disrespected. She responded by becoming threatening and snarky, telling me she was the adult and she paid the bills and it was HER house and she could do anything she liked and didn’t answer to me.

So I took off to the home of some christians I was associating with at the time and told them what had happened and how I had been treated. They listened with completely straight, almost disapproving faces and then told me that my mom was not saved and that I had to go home and submit to my mother....

On another occasion, we had some weirdo she was dating ringing our doorbell for over an hour at two am because she dumped him and he wouldn’t take no for an answer. My christian friends quoted the scriptures about honoring our

parents and about submission to authorities and shamed me as a gossip for telling them her personal business. This was pretty typical church fare if you told . I felt like a schmuck for telling on my mom and putting her in a bad light but it seemed unfair that I had to live with this.

She was a very broken woman who had been molested since early childhood and then married my dad, who also was abused and became an abuser. She herself could be abusive. It sounds right in line with Jay Adams belief that no matter how horrible your family is, you aren't allowed to disassociate from them because you are supposed to have kingdom priorities and be evangelizing them. If you take yourself out of the picture you have deprived them of the only witness they may have. He seems to think that if you are saved, then there should be no problem with having the strength to endure their evil and stay in contact. Arrrrrgggh. Sometimes I hate christians and church and don't want much more to do with it . Not going to go with that but it's a tempting feeling. Just so much heavy duty guilt trips that make it seem selfish if you want to be happy and not have to live with

miserly all the time. How do you tell the difference between actually being guilty of this and not being guilty?

Do you see the bondage these people have suffered from? This is not what the Word of God effects. Hear it again:

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much

fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. (Psa 19:1-14)

There! That is the Word of the Lord. That is the Word of God made flesh and come among us, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is His truth that sets us free. Reject anything that does the opposite and rebuke the one who is twisting God's truth into something that enslaves.

26

Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

(Part 26 – The End of All Evil)

June 26, 2016

Sermon Text: Genesis 11

Scripture Reading: Matthew 10

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men.... (Mat 10:16-17a)

This morning we come to the conclusion of our study of the nature and tactics of evil, though we could certainly continue for many more weeks. We will see the subject arising frequently in our future studies of Scripture because the warnings and teachings of God's Word concerning the kingdom of darkness are so prevalent. The Christian life in this present world is described by the Lord as sheep in the midst of wolves, and we have emphasized how He

commands and warns us to be wise as serpents yet innocent as doves to this truth. We must never again return to a mindset that willfully turns a blind, naïve eye to evil, resolving to only think about "the sunny side of life." A sunny, bright, beautiful life is coming in the New Heavens and New Earth, but this life in this world is not it. Beware of men, and expect the majority of human beings to hate Christ, oppose the gospel, and hate you when you stand for Christ. Do not be surprised.

This morning then as we conclude our current study, I want to speak to you about two subjects. We will spend most of our time today on the second point, but here is the first:

Wisdom about evil instructs us to be very cautious about revealing ourselves to people too quickly. Victims of evil often learn this truth the hard way after they open up to someone about the hidden evil that is oppressing them.

Here is Scripture that I conclude teaches us this very thing. First a bit of the background –

Now the main text we are considering:

In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses. And the LORD was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. (2Ki 18:1-7)

This king is a godly king. He held fast to the Lord and the Lord blessed him.

At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys **with letters and a present** to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

And Hezekiah welcomed them, and he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.

Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon."

He said, "What have they seen in your house?"

And Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them."

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: Behold, the days are coming, **when all that is in**

your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. And some of your own sons, who shall be born to you, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?" The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah and all his might and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and Manasseh his son reigned in his place. (2Ki 20:12-21)

Hezekiah had paid tribute to Assyria in the past, though the Lord subsequently effected a great victory for Judah-

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them. And Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me. Whatever you impose on me I will bear." And the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah

gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the LORD and from the doorposts that Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2Ki 18:13-16)

Perhaps this gives us insight into Hezekiah's motive for showing his treasures to the Babylonians? Did he think that if they saw that he could pay them tribute that they would leave Judah alone? We don't know, but it does seem that Hezekiah, godly king that he was, still had his moments of weakness. And Isaiah's words to him afterward would indicate this.

Isaiah zero's right in on this matter of showing the treasure to the Babylonians. "What have they seen in your house?" he asks. "I showed them everything," the king answers. Isaiah does not rebuke him directly, but his subsequent prophecy would indicate that Hezekiah was not wise in showing these foreigners his treasure.

And so it remains true today. If we are wise as serpents about evil, we will be wise to its use of *flattery* to deceive us –

At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent

envoys **with letters and a present** to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

Such deceit! “We traveled all this way to see how you are doing, Hezekiah, because we heard you were sick. Here are some get well cards from our kind and some presents for you to cheer you up. We are your friends.”

Yeah, right.

Hezekiah apparently buys it. Falls for it. Shows them his whole place, including his savings account.

I can identify with Hezekiah. Over the years one of my foolish ways has been to be too quick to trust people. In police work I learned not to make that mistake, but when I became a pastor I must have concluded that “things were to be different” in the Christian church. The missions organization we were with, Village Missions, emphasized “getting people to come to church.” Welcome them all. That kind of thing. And I did. Way up there in the mountains of Montana there were some Sundays eventually when we would have 100 people or so in attendance.

But what a mess it turned out to be.

There are MANY people that the Lord does NOT want us to invite to church! They are not welcome in His house. Wolves are not welcome among the sheep.

How many times have you, perhaps, done something very similar to Hezekiah only to be burned later? You found out someone professed to be a Christian, so you opened up to them and trusted them. You showed them your treasures, you might say, and what happened? They used it against you later. So we must be wise.

Often I have people write to us at ACFJ and they ask “should I go to my pastor and tell him what is really going on in my marriage, about the abuse and all the evil?” And we have a tough time answering that question because many, many times those who have done this find out that the information they shared goes right back to the enemy and is used against them.

Let me repeat the fact that these envoys who came to Hezekiah came with flattery to deceive. Watch out for flattery –

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose.... (Gal 4:17-18a)

A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet. (Pro 29:5)

There it is then. Wisdom dictates to us that if we are to be wise regarding evil, we must be cautious about sharing our lives with people too quickly, even if and perhaps especially if they “seem like” the most supportive, godly, wonderful Christian we have ever met.

Now to our second and final point, *the end of all evil*. We begin in what may seem a strange place, Genesis 11 and the account of the tower of Babel.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said,

"Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Gen 11:1-9)

The subject of unity among nations and a “new world order” has often been in the news, as it is right now in regard to Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union. That subject seems to be generating just about as much heat as the current presidential campaign.

The United States of course has been part of the United Nations since the days of Woodrow Wilson and what was originally called the League of Nations, formed with the supposed intent to end all wars once and for all. If an aggressor like Germany for example started to invade another country, the rest of the League

members would stand together against the guilty party and put an end to it. Supposedly. As we all know, this union did not end world war.

United Nations is a subject that comes up as we study the nature and tactics of

Evil always works to gain allies, and it does so in order to further its enlargement of the kingdom of darkness. This kingdom of evil has as its goal the destruction of God's kingdom. In a fallen world of sinful men, the unification of nations or of other individual entities is not necessarily a good thing nor can it be assumed that such unions are the will of God. In fact, the normal course of such unions will be to establish a kingdom that is opposed to the kingdom of God. Wisdom understands these things.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The

LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psa 2:1-12)

History certainly has proven this out.

Notice these points from our text:

- The Lord had commanded man to fill the earth, multiply, and subdue the creation. These Babelites were acting in full rebellion against the Lord's command. "*Let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed...* ".
- The purpose of Babel is "*to make a name for ourselves*" rather than to obey and give glory to God.
- "*Nothing that they propose to do will be impossible for them*" is not describing a good thing! Rather, the Lord announces that the union of evil men and nations

will give undue and horrible power to them. Therefore the Lord intervened, confused them by establishing different languages, and they were dispersed *into their own nations and language groups*.

You may not like Michael Savage (a real character!) but his motto “borders, language, and culture” is indeed a biblical one. *All have been established by the Lord and it began at Babel.*

As long as this fallen world remains, it is the Lord’s decree that nations remain dispersed into their own borders, languages, and cultures. This is a safeguard against the centralizing of evil. Those who are wise understand this.

Now, it is the purpose of God in Christ to bring man back into a creation without borders, a creation that has people of all nations and races living in perfect peace. We see this in the church here in this world –

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Rev 15:4)

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty

and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rev 21:22-26)

Remember Peter and the lesson he had to learn?

So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (Act 10:34-35)

So what we see in the gospel of Christ is a movement *to reverse Babel*. Largely that is what tongues at Pentecost was all about –

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? (Act 2:5-8)

One kingdom. One King. One citizenship. This is the body of Christ, the Church, the kingdom of God.

But the unification of nations NOW apart from Christ is a tactic of the kingdom of darkness. Just think how much evil has been caused down through history when conquerors went out to conquer and to establish themselves as world ruler. Alexander the Great. The Roman Empire. All of these and more were set completely against the kingdom of God. To even find ONE king or ruler of ONE nation who is godly is almost an impossibility, let alone a league of nations.

It has been our experience that the very same danger lies in church unions. Over time what perhaps was once the body of Christ morphs into the kingdom of darkness as a result of the quest for size and power. For example, the PC USA 2016 General Assembly:

Declining a proposal to admit to and apologize for harming the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community, commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) instead opted to express deep regret for ways that those minorities of “God’s beloved

children” have been led to feel that they stand outside the grace of God and are unwelcome in the denomination.

At the same time, the resolution expresses the deep sorrow of all in the PC(USA) who have left the fellowship of the church, and expresses appreciation to those who have maintained relationships despite profound disagreement. <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2016/6/24/ga-expresses-regret-harm-lgbtqq-members-sorrow-tho/>

Christian church denominations must therefore be on constant guard against wolves creeping in who would pervert the gospel of Christ and the Word of God. Another example from the recent GA of the PC USA in Portland, Oregon -

*Prayers To Allah-Offered At PCUSA’s General Assembly Plenary Session
Written by Dominic Aquila | Friday, June 24, 2016*

“Allah bless us and bless our families and bless our Lord. Lead us on the straight path – the path of all the prophets: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad,” and so went the

prayer offered up by Wajidi Said, from the Portland Muslim Community, as part of the “first order of business” during the opening plenary session of the 222nd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Wajidi was taking part in the assembly’s scheduled time of remembrance for those killed in the recent Orlando terrorist attack and those killed last year in the shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston, S.C.

“In the days leading up to this assembly we all know that our nation’s peace has once again been ripped apart by an act of mass violence,” said Heath Rada, moderator of the 221st General Assembly, when introducing it.

Evil unions, you see. The same spirit as at Babel. Working for the glory of man to replace the glory of God.

The End of Evil & Under One True King

We end then with this wonderful promise of what is to come. WE will be there! We are going to see the end of all evil once and for all. The kingdoms of this world will become

the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever!

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place." "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (Rev 22:1-7)

The End