

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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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.