

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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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.

