

Christ Reformation Church

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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 the 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.