

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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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.