

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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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.