

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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## *Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil*

**(Part 18 – Calling Evil Good, and  
Good Evil)**

**April 10, 2016**

**Sermon Text:** Isaiah 5:20

**Scripture Reading:** Isaiah 5

### **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)

There is something in us that can make us very reluctant to call evil for what it is – *evil*. I understand this to some extent and so do you. We do not delight in concluding that someone we know, someone perhaps that we have loved and who we *thought* loved us, is in fact a child of the devil with

malevolent intent toward us. No Christian delights in having to make such a conclusion. Here are two illustrations just from this past week's blog comments that illustrate the deceptiveness of evil, how it parades as righteousness or at least as "I didn't mean it" and how, as a result, we are so hesitant to grasp the true evil nature of what we are facing:

Cindy Burrell said:

The unspoken traditional church dogma too often infers that to exercise discernment (spiritual insight) is somehow cruel. The dogma says that, since none of us can claim perfection, there is no inherent moral standard we should anticipate or adhere to at all when dealing with any who identify themselves as 'believers.' [ie, "do not judge"]

"So what if he treats his wife like garbage; he's a good Bible teacher – and he tithes... Praise the Lord!"

To call out the wicked, to identify the destructive, ungodly fruit that falls

from his tree, is deemed gossip or slander or a failure to extend grace. So to accommodate the dogma, the truth must be compromised and the Spirit must be quenched so that wickedness can find a safe place in the body of Christ.

Dear God, what have we done?

Another reader wrote, in response to an article on the cruelty of the wicked man:

As I look back on three decades plus of marriage, this belief (that my husband really didn't know what he was doing) was what kept me in a horrible situation. Even now (post divorce) I ask myself if he is crazy or deceived by his sin (porn) or...whatever. One friend told me that it isn't important for me to figure out. I'm out of the marriage. But I AM dealing with the repercussions of my many children who saw me excuse his behavior over and over again. They are very "nice" children with no boundaries.

When I first went to my new pastor (before I separated for the third time) with the same sordid story I had gone to other pastors with, I excused my husband's behavior by saying, "He had a very detached, awful mother." My pastor replied, "Well, when my mother got pregnant with me out of wedlock

and my dad was forced to marry her, I was beaten over and over throughout my childhood and I didn't grow up to treat my family the way [your husband] has treated his family!" Hearing truth like that is like getting a good cold cup of water thrown over my head! I've stopped feeling a sense of false shame for being so deceived by the schmuck. He's a very intelligent man who knows how to deceive. Is it deliberate? Yes.

It's been very healing to be able to say that OUT LOUD but it's still hard to wrap my mind around!

It's important for us to be told, again and again, that God loves us and wants us to feel protected and safe. I encourage you to not beat yourself up over feeling anxiety. Don't call it a "lack of faith"...it's actually your gut telling you that, yes, things are bad. If you're feeling crazy it's probably because you're trying to remain calm and loving in an impossible situation. It is not wrong to be feeling anxious. That feeling is a God-given warning sign. **Sometimes it's hard for one's mind to comprehend** that one's own husband is the one who has put one in "danger."

Let me give you one more:

I have a knot in my stomach when he gets home or when I come home and he's there. He slams doors, walks loudly, sighs and shakes his head whenever I do or say something that he doesn't like, giggles and shakes his head at me if I get myself a diet drink. He communicates indirectly by leaving newspaper and magazine articles lying around (the last one was a Dear Abby column about a woman who didn't appreciate her husband). If he's obviously mad, he'll deny it if I ask him what's bothering him. He's told me that he's sick of my "princess" attitude; that as long as he doesn't cheat or beat me, that I have it better than most women; that other women have told him that they wish they had a husband like him; that I'm oversensitive, wrong in my perceptions.

My spirit cringes and pulls away when he comes near me. My youngest son says that he's evil and wishes he'd go away. Our dog avoids him. Yet everybody else is totally in awe of him.

For years, I thought it was me.

Learn these things carefully! Hear them! This is wisdom. Evil deceives. Evil hides. Evil parades as good and Evil calls good – evil. *If we fail to*

*grow wise about evil we will be enslaved to it, often for decades.*

It is this maligning of good by evil and this disguising of evil as good that we want to examine this morning. In large part it is this very dynamic that keeps the victims of evil in bondage:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isa 5:20)

He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD. (Pro 17:15)

This is the diabolic dynamic that drives the deceptions of the wicked. It is what drives its craving of secrecy ("Keep it secret, keep it safe"). The devil does not come right out in the open as some terrible dragon serpent, but rather as an angel of light, a wolf in sheep's clothing, as a fine Christian and humble servant of the Lord in your church. He and his emissaries effect this deception by disguising evil as good, *and by maligning good so as to convince us that it is evil.*

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter

for sweet and sweet for bitter! (Isa 5:20)

See it? This is a two-edged assault on truth. This is not merely some open, unhidden declaration that "homosexuality is good" or a denial of Paul's words to the Corinthians:

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. (1Co 6:9-10)

No, evil goes much further in these lies. Evil *makes out that these wicked things are good AND that righteousness and good is what is evil!* Listen to Paul again:

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them **but give approval to those who practice them.** (Rom 1:29-32)

Evil actively maligns righteousness at the same time that it calls itself, *good*. Certainly this was the very reaction of evil to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into this world:

The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (Joh 8:48)

The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" (Joh 7:20)

Many of them said, "He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?" (Joh 10:20)

It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Mat 10:25)

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds." (Mat 11:18-19)

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." (Mat 12:24)

for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mar 3:30)

And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." (Mar 3:21-22)

Isn't that remarkable? Did you ever think about how often evil people called the Son of God Himself, *evil*? If we are going to be wise about evil, we must get a firm hold on this truth. Evil always portrays itself as the good, while it maligns the good as evil. Evil insists that it is right while the good is wrong. Expect it. Recognize it when it comes your way.

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This is one of the reasons that God hates the sin of slander so much. It is of the devil. It is an essential quality of evil.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. (Rev 12:10)

The abuser is an accuser. He is never wrong. But the one who is right, normally his victim, is wrong. Understand?

This wicked strategy was employed right at the start:

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Gen 3:4-5)

This is behind the persecution of the righteous by the wicked. If you want to see it in action, just call out evil for what it is and the fangs will come out. YOU will be the evil one and IT will be "righteous." How many times we have seen this in our work of exposing evil abusers hiding in churches! Suddenly they are righteous and we are the evil ones. We have experienced this here in this church numbers of times over the years and many of you have been the targets of this wicked

strategy. You have been called evil by evil, all the while the evil ones call themselves righteous.

We have seen it when we have sought to expose sin in various organizations or denominational entities. Suddenly *we* are judgmental and guilty of slander for daring to malign these fine servants of the Lord, while the real evil ones make themselves out to be righteous and godly. Count on it. This is the nature of evil and this is how it always works its wickedness. And if you are not wise in this regard, you will find yourself falsely guilty and shamed and wearing a load of self-condemnation that is unjust.

This deception has been the experience of every prophet or apostle that the Lord has sent to preach truth. They are maligned and made out to be evil while the evil ones utter their lies, calling good evil and evil good. It happened to Ezekiel:

They have seen false visions and lying divinations. They say, 'Declares the LORD,' when the LORD has not sent them, and yet they expect him to fulfill their word. Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, 'Declares the LORD,' although I have not spoken?" Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore

behold, I am against you, declares the Lord GOD. My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. (Eze 13:6-9)

And it happened to Jeremiah:

Then they said, "Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah, for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words." Hear me, O LORD, and listen to the voice of my adversaries. Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for my life. Remember how I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. May a cry be heard from their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from

your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger. (Jer 18:18-23)

Isaiah spoke of it:

As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil; he plans wicked schemes to ruin the poor with lying words, even when the plea of the needy is right. (Isa 32:7)

Did you notice Jeremiah's prayer regarding these wicked ones? He saw evil for what it truly is and his imprecatory prayer evidences that. "Let their wives become widows and their children fatherless." Destroy them in your wrath, O Lord! This is the just prayer of a righteous servant of God.

Finally, notice how evil calls itself good and maligns the righteous as evil in probably the most evident case to be found in the Bible – at the Cross:

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him

not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall

divide the spoil with the strong,  
because he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the  
transgressors; yet he bore the sin of  
many, and makes intercession for the  
transgressors. (Isa 53:1-12)

Evil calls itself good, and evil makes  
good out to be evil. Every time. Expect  
it. Be wise to it. Because as you follow  
Christ in righteousness, this attack and  
deception is coming your way.