

Christ Reformation Church

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Wise as Serpents – A Practical Theology of Evil

**(Part 14 – Evil Always Distorts
God’s Word)**

March 13, 2016

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:1-21

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 10:16-17a)

This morning we turn to still another inevitable trait and tactic of evil – it’s consistent twisting and distorting of Scripture in order to deceive and enslave its victims.

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'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 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 3:1-5)

It has been so from the very beginning. Satan is, after all, a murderer and a liar. Whenever he speaks, *whenever* he speaks, he is lying with the intent to destroy and murder. So it is with each of his own servants who, by their very appearance, seem to be what they are not, sons of righteousness (2 Cor 11).

When we are in the presence of evil, we can be sure that it will evidence itself by distorting God’s Word with the intent to claim divine authority for itself.

A large part of the Spirit's work in us in sanctification is the revealing of these deceptions to us so that we might embrace His truth and be set free from the enemy's bondage. While evil certainly will often come right out and flatly *deny* God's Word (ie, denying the resurrection of Christ, the deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, the serpent's outright "you shall not surely die" in Eden, etc), it also is constantly at work *claiming to believe Scripture as the Word of God, but twisting and perverting its true meaning*. We see it here for example:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Mat 4:5-7)

See it? Satan actually quotes Scripture, with no denial that it is the Word of God, but perverting it by doing violence to the context and twisting its meaning to his own evil purpose. His goal? To destroy. To condemn. To enslave. Jesus was wise concerning evil and knew precisely what Satan was up to. It is long past time for the church to wise up to evil too.

Here is a very good comment we received this last week from a lady who IS wise when it comes to evil, having been targeted by a emissary of darkness for many years and her experience happened *in her local church*. Think it through. If evil is going to parade as righteousness, if wolves are going to wear "wool," that disguise necessarily means that they are parading as a Christian and thus we *expect* to find them hiding in the church. THEREFORE, we also must expect that, in fitting with this "saintly" disguise of choice, the servants of evil *are going to quote Scripture, distorting it to their own wicked purpose*.

And when the wool costume slips from time to time, random individuals in ministries, churches, or the community who have just witnessed the "wardrobe malfunction" (an angry outburst, a cruel act) *question themselves* instead of the wolf. They can't believe what they just saw. They question their own eyes, their own ears. They don't want it to be true. They don't want their idols to be stone-hearted – with smooth, slick, sheep-like masks. So they sit in bewilderment and say nothing, which the wolf counts on. Bewildered silence.

Or they try to appease this wolf-idol, so they won't see this "bad side" of

someone who is otherwise “normally so great and nice.”

That’s how these wolves who want to be idolized make it to their finish lines or the obit column without ever being challenged – with hallelujahs ringing in their ears. Only those closest to them see the wool slip and the tooth and claw come out consistently enough to know their true form. But those closest are now caught in the wolf’s temple/lair. They must either continue to sacrifice themselves and their families to keep peace with this wolf-idol, or eventually – hopefully – they escape the altar and run from the temple.

When I’ve explained to people familiar with us why we left X, more than one person has said, “Oh, I wondered about...” and relate some story where they saw some tooth or claw come out. Their story always ends with, “But X always seemed so nice! So I didn’t say anything more about it. But it always bothered me...” Boy oh boy, what would happen if all of these people compared notes!

But then most still chastise me for “breaking up the family” because THEY’VE only seen one incident at random, they assume there’s only been one incident here and there with someone “who’s basically a nice guy”; so that can’t be worth leaving home. I

should stop being so over-reactive to X’s slip here, X’s bad day there and go home with the kids. Or I should just get over it and move on. They don’t see the panic attacks, the triggered nausea, the sleeplessness, the confusion and crying, the scanning of all parking lots checking for X’s vehicle, the scanning of church sanctuaries to see if X showed up, the jumping at every car door slam at home, the careful seating in restaurants to be able to watch the door. They don’t walk around all the dead animals’ graves in the back yard, courtesy of X. They don’t hold my bigger-than-me children as they swing between being scared for their safety if they are in contact with their father, and feelings of worthlessness and rejection when he wants no contact with them.

They are not wise in the ways of evil.

And you can be sure that Mr. X would have professed to believe the Bible as the Word of God and quoted it often to his own evil ends.

The emissaries of evil who parade as Christ’s sheep, ALWAYS twist and pervert the Scriptures in order to deceive us, to enslave us, to lure us away from our freedom in Jesus Christ and exalt them instead.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9)

Jesus rebuked the same wicked tactic in the body of man-made traditions that had been substituted for God's Word by evil men *in the church-*

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did

Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Mat 15:1-9)

And again:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." (Mat 12:1-2)

And you will recall from last week that evil *always works to enslave, to bring into bondage*. It's goal is to obtain power and control and thus replace God Himself. This is how, then, evil *interprets and applies God's Word*. Just like these Pharisees. But Jesus said:

And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. (Mat 12:7)

This is a vital verse to help us discern if evil is perverting Scripture. Mercy, not sacrifice. Interpretations and applications of Scripture that end up demanding more sacrifice, laying more laws on us, piling up a huge burden on

us, are not mercy. They are not consistent then with God's character. Here it is once more:

One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (Mar 2:23-28)

The kind, loving, mercy of God who gives His people every good gift, delighting in pouring out the blessings of heaven on them. Every application of the Sabbath then that added prescriptions to man's burdens was a distortion of Scripture. Scripture must be interpreted and applied, in this case for example, with the fundamental truth that God's purpose in giving the Sabbath day *was for man's benefit, not to add to his load*. Evil was at work

twisting the Scriptures then in these religious leaders.

Some Current Examples

In our ministry over the years, dealing directly with evil and its victims, we have regularly seen evil at work through its disguised agents who claim to be Christians and who have spread their poisonous twisting of Scripture in the church. We have also seen how these perversions of truth are so readily picked up by naïve Christians and pastors and others and *taught for decades as if they were true*. The result is bondage and devastation for the innocent and an increase in the power of the wicked.

Let's consider some typical examples. The first is one we talked about last Wednesday in the women's study class:

Ephesians 5

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of

water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:22-33)

Let me share with you an evil distortion of this Scripture that a power and control hungry man tried to lay on me years ago –

“My marriage has never been better. My wife and I used to have conflict all the time. And then one day not long ago I sat her down and said to her, ‘you must obey me. The Bible says so.’ Now everything is great.”

Of course it was not great, but a man like this will take this kind of perversion of God’s Word and spread it like poison in the church and pretty

soon everyone is drinking that kool-aid.

Here is a short article I wrote this last week on this subject:

Awhile back I was talking to a pastor I had never met before. He started asking me about my theological position, but this is how he did it. First thing, right off, he says, "So Jeff, are you a complementarian or an egalitarian?" He didn't ask me if I believe in the inerrancy of Scripture as the Word of God. He didn't ask if I believed in the deity and resurrection and atoning work of Christ. Nope. He wanted to know which label to put on me.

I knew if I said "complementarian" he would pronounce me "orthodox." And if I said "egalitarian" he would reject me as a pagan unbeliever if not as a false teacher.

So I have been thinking more about this "complementarian/egalitarian" labeling when it comes to our interpretation of Scripture's teaching about marriage. I think we should dump these two labels, which are *artificial* in the first place. Here is what has been rolling around in my head. I wrote this out the other day:

"I am growing to HATE this complementarian/egalitarian labeling

stuff. If a person denies *authoritarian* head/submit doctrine [ie, wife is to obey emphasis], then suddenly they are categorized as some unbelieving, hell-bound denier of Scripture. If they embrace it, then they are blasted for being a misogynistic [woman-hating] oppressor of women.

I propose a better way, though I don't claim to have every answer for every question, so don't expect me to:

I believe the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church (the Bible says so). But I also believe many Christians have it wrong and have been taught these Scriptures wrongly, *at least with the wrong emphasis*, and so here we are at the present time having to try to pick up the people devastated by it, and expose those wicked despots who want to use Scripture to justify abuse.

All the intricate word studies done, all the Greek words parsed.... have not solved the issue. For now, I say forget that stuff or at least set it aside for a moment. The bottom line here is what I think the big picture of Scripture on this issue is-

...the head watches out for, cares for, and serves the body. That is the emphasis of Ephesians five. As soon as concepts like authority, obedience, leader, and so on *become the*

EMPHASIS, the whole thing goes rotten and becomes fodder for the abuser. Husbands, watch out for, care for, and serve your wife. Wives, let that happen.

Do you see here how subtle the enemy is? He *distorts and perverts God's Word, not by a plain all-out denial of what Scripture says, but by changing the emphasis, the main point, of the Scripture.*

That is exactly what this power-crazed man was doing when he told his wife she had to obey him. In fact, what is the large majority of the content of Ephesians 5? *It is about husbands loving their wives!*

Evil Distorts the Scripture's Teaching on Forgiveness

How MANY examples we could give on this subject! Here are some of the Scriptures so commonly twisted by evildoers in this regard:

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; (Heb 12:15)

Here is Barbara Roberts' comment on this verse, taken from her article on the ACFJ Scripture page that lists many Scriptures commonly twisted by evil

and then used to oppress the righteous and justify the wicked:

“The ‘root of bitterness’ is in the hearts of the abusers, not the hearts of the victims!

What so many people label ‘bitterness’ in the victim is simply the victim’s longing for justice and vindication. Christians: don’t palm victims off by telling them to just put their longing for justice on hold and defer everything to the perfect justice of God which will be delivered in the end. It will. But the church needs to do its part in delivering some justice to victims now —before the second coming!....

The ‘root of bitterness’ is in the hearts of the abusers. Seek it there. The abuser [the evildoer] deeply believes in his own entitlement. He believes that because he is the man, his woman [or other victim] should do what he wants. When you challenge his entitlement, when you set boundaries, when you impose consequences for this immoral mindset and behavior, when you withstand him to his face, you will see this mindset exposed: he retaliates (*overtly* or *covertly*) in bitterness because he truly believes his thinking is RIGHT. Scrutinize the abuser’s heart, resist and cut through his fog, his red herrings, his blame-shifting, his

insinuations that his wife is crazy, unstable, untrustworthy, hysterical, a fruit cake, a nut case. Repel and denounce his claims that she should submit to him better, and if she did, all this problem would go away.”

How enslaving! How evil! To take God’s Word and use it to convince and accuse the innocent that THEY are guilty of bitterness and unforgiveness when in fact what they are truly sensing is the groaning of the Holy Spirit in them for God’s true justice.

Count on it: *Evil always works to distort and pervert Scripture, interpreting and applying it in a manner that will bring us into bondage and exalt the wicked man into the position of power and control that he so craves.*

Here is another example of this Scripture-twisting that is so common. This involves the Bible’s teaching on subjects like grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy, and so on-

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself

and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2Co 5:16-21)

Once again, here are the comments Barbara Roberts has made on the ACFJ blog Scripture page, setting the interpretation and application of this passage straight-

This passage is about being reconciled to God. Paul the evangelist is coaching other believers in how to do evangelism – how to preach the gospel to the unregenerate so that they receive Christ and become reborn, become new creations.

In verse 16, Paul says ‘we once regarded Christ according to the flesh’, which must mean he (and us as his fellow believers) once thought of Christ as just a man, or just a good teacher, or a nuisance and a political rabble rouser, or an enemy of the Mosaic Law, or a madman who thought he was God, or a liar who

convinced a lot of people to join his cult.

Those are all views of Christ that the unregenerate have of him. In each of those views, people are regarding Christ according to the flesh. Paul is saying “Before I was converted, I didn’t see Jesus as God. I saw him wrongly because I had not been reconciled to God. But now I have been reconciled to God – now I have been reborn – I no longer see Jesus through those fleshly eyes. I see him as the God-man, fully God and fully man: my Saviour, my Lord and my Redeemer. All is new. My view of Jesus is new. And my view of other people is new: I see everyone in a new light. I see them as either outside Christ (unregenerate) or in Christ (regenerate brothers and sisters).

This passage has nothing to do with reconciling in relationship with people who have wounded us, or overlooking people’s heinous unrepentant sins.

If we have been deeply wounded by a person and sometime later that person is born again, we will be clearly able to see it in the sweet, unfeigned fruits of repentance. We may be dubious at first, just like the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem were initially dubious about Paul’s conversion, but the doubt will lift naturally, as mist or fog lifts from a valley when the sun rises to

noonday. We will not have to force ourselves to trust, we will not have to squash our gut feelings to believe this person's conversion is real, it will become indubitably clear.

Similarly, it will be clear if the person is feigning conversion because their 'fruit' will have worms, or fall off the branch shriveled, misshapen or rotten. We regard no one according to the flesh means we don't look at people with our old eyes, the eyes that used to make judgments about people's worth on the basis of their social status, education, wealth, compliance with rules of religiosity (Pharisaism) etc., etc. We no longer evaluate people according to how many boxes they tick on our checklist, we regard them as either in God's kingdom or outside God's kingdom. And God's kingdom is not about social status, wealth, education, race, gender, adherence to a bunch of man-made sub-biblical doctrines, or whatever. God elects people from all backgrounds and all lifestyles.

We have not even gotten to the terrible twisting of Scripture that evil continues to do regarding marriage, divorce, remarriage and so on. Or those that concern the very character of God. Or the nature of the church and of the gospel. Evil leaves no Scripture unturned, it seems, in its diabolic work of perverting God's

freeing, cleansing truth so that people are defiled, cut off from Christ, and brought into even greater bondage.

No wonder Paul admonished Timothy, and all of us, with these words:

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. (2Ti 2:15-18)

Today an increasing number of local churches and Christian ministries are becoming more and more infected with the perverse teachings of men who claim that they are teaching God's truth. As never before, we all must be on guard and very carefully compare what we read and what we are taught with Holy Scripture. We must be ready to jettison anything that does not square with God's Word, no matter what the cost and no matter how long we were held under its delusion. For freedom Christ has set us free. We must never permit evil to put us back into its bondage.

