

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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Wisdom for Living in a Wicked World

August 30, 2020

Sermon Text: Selected

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 3

I have been studying the book of Jeremiah in preparation for our upcoming series there, but this morning I wanted to share three points with you that are vital for every Christian to firmly understand. They concern how the enemy works to undermine God's truth and deceive us. In thinking about these things we are taking this warning seriously:

1 Peter 5:8 ESV Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

You are more vulnerable to this lion than you might realize if you are not wise. He devours the foolish, making shipwreck of their faith and we do not

want to be counted in that number. We resist him with God's truth, and that is what we want to look at carefully now – God's truth. Here are the three points we need to take careful note of:

Satan Sends False Shepherds Among us to Deceive us

-and-

Satan and His Followers Mock God's Word

-and –

We are prone to believe an evil report about a righteous person, and to disbelieve an evil report about a wicked person

Let's begin with the first.

1. Satan Sends False Shepherds Among us to Deceive us

Now, this may sound like a “no-brainer” to you and I hope that it is. But Scripture spends very large amounts of space repeating this warning and we

cannot hear it too often. Listen to the Apostle Paul –

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 ESV And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

One of the repeated themes we are going to see in Jeremiah is how false shepherds, false teachers, false leaders crept in and took power over the covenant people of God. And one reason that Jeremiah suffered so much is that he was appointed by God to confront them, including the priests of whom he was one. He had to speak against his fellow “clergymen” and even against his own family. They all hated him and tried to kill him as a result.

We are not wise if we doubt that Satan does not do the same thing today. In fact, the more we grow in God’s wisdom, the more we see that false shepherds in the church today are a widespread plague.

What we have here in these five verses from 1 Corinthians is *God’s appointed means and philosophy of Christian ministry*. It is His command to all who would lead and teach His people. I can tell you that these words were NEVER taught and emphasized in my seminary experience. There were classes on leadership in which we were assigned to read books on secular leaders and learn from their methods. The focus was upon our own talents and abilities – and really, upon human greatness and strength.

But look at what Paul says to us here – listen carefully once more:

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 ESV And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much

trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Most of the so-called “faith” that is embraced by professing Christians today is false. It rests upon the wisdom of man, and it is not the product of the powerful working of God by His Spirit in us. In other words, most of these people are on Broadway. They are not born again and the Narrow Way is foolishness to them.

The enemy dupes us into following a counterfeit shepherd by using the world’s measure of “greatness and power.” Think of how a professing Christian who moves into town selects a local church to join. The moment most of them would walk in here among us and see how few of us there are and how there is no buffet of programs staffed for every age group, they are gone because they consider us to be a failure.

But what does the real power of the gospel look like? What does a true church look like? What characterizes a

true gospel ministry which is empowered and blessed by Christ? Let me answer those questions a third time-

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 ESV And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And we NEVER need to apologize for this!! When we are weak, then we are strong – right?

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong.

I want us all to dwell on this carefully. Think of all the ways today that professing Christians are basing their faith on the power of a man and remain blind to what the true power of God looks like. If the Son of God came into this world in a barn and suffered all kinds of hatred, and had no place to lay his head...then how is it that the typical “Christian” minister and his followers do not look at all like that? Paul rejected what we see today and we must reject it as well. Otherwise the gospel becomes a false gospel, the Word of God is constantly tweaked and perverted to suit fleshly ears, and Christ will have none of it.

2. Satan and His Followers Mock God’s Word

Listen again to the Apostle Paul in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 ESV For **the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing**, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the

discerning I will thwart.”

(20) Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, **the world did not know God through wisdom**, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

(22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) but we preach Christ crucified, **a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles**, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (25) For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

(26) For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. (27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) **God chose what is low and despised in the world**, even things that are not, to bring

to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

(30) And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

When I was in college right after graduating from high school, I experienced all of this. I was by no means a mature Christian, but I did have genuine faith in Christ and I knew that the Bible was His Word. But young college students are regularly exposed to some of the most evil people on the planet – chief among them being many faculty members in universities. I had an English professor, a philosophy professor (who one of the buildings at the university is now named after) and science professors who all used the classroom to mock God and anyone who was a Christian. I spoke up once in class to oppose the wickedness the professor was teaching and pointed to the Bible as my authority. He mocked and laughed at me.

Of all places in this world, we should, in light of what the Lord is plainly telling us here through the Apostle Paul, recognize that the university is the most common leading place where the wisdom of God – Christ crucified, the gospel – is going to be mocked. As a fellow, older seminary professor reminded the young Charles Hodge when he went to Germany to study theology, “the air you breathe there is poison, Charles.”

The word of the cross is foolishness to the wise of this world – and they are perishing! They want to take us down with them. Their foolishness, which they embrace as wisdom, begins right at Genesis 1. What a mockery they make of the idea that there is a Creator and that He created the heavens and earth in 7 days! Science is so steeped in evolutionary, atheistic thinking that if you took all elements of evolution out of, for instance, a botany or zoology or comparative anatomy course, *there would be nothing left* because even the taxonomy systems of naming things is classified with an evolutionary mindset. The gymnosperms for example – that is, the cone-bearing trees like pine trees and fir trees – are regarded as being less evolved and advanced than the

angiosperms – the flowering plants. Or removed evolution from the standard geology course, and you will find that you have very little left! Throw out the supposed geological ages chart (which by the way NONE of my professors really understood or agreed upon) and a large chunk of the semester is gone!

The enemy mocks God's Word. If you are a professor for instance, and you even mention that you consider intelligent design to be an option for the origin of the universe, you will be booted out of most universities.

But the university world is just one leading example. Think of Hollywood, or the business world, or even *churches* – and how they mock God's Word and all who embrace it in faith. And their goal? To stamp out the gospel, to destroy the faith of everyone who is even thinking that Christ's word is true.

Finally, consider one more way that the enemy works to undermine our faith – a way in which he particularly uses our own foolishness.

3. We are prone to believe an evil report about a righteous person, and to disbelieve an

evil report about a wicked person

John 8:44-45 ESV 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. (45) But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

Now, the devil is not our father if we are truly in Christ. God is our Father and His Spirit of truth is in us leading us and teaching us His wisdom. But we all still battle our flesh and the devil works 24/7 through his lies to tempt and deceive us.

One chief example of this is something I see multiple times every week. I have experienced it as its target and so have most of you. But I have also experienced it by being the one duped by this tactic. Listen to it again:

We are prone to believe an evil report about a righteous person, and to disbelieve an evil report about a wicked person

We are certainly going to see this played out in our study of Jeremiah. You see it in the lives of all God's people in the Scriptures and you will experience it as well as you follow Christ faithfully.

Consider the irony of the thing.

- A false report about a righteous person – *believed*.
- A true report about a wicked person – *rejected*

Here are some examples:

2 Corinthians 10:10 ESV For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."

2 Corinthians 11:4-9 ESV 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. (5) Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. (6) Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in

knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things. (7) Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge? (8) I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you. (9) And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.

Galatians 4:16-20 ESV Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? (17) They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. (18) It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, (19) my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! (20) I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

And of course there are all of the false accusations made against Jesus by which ultimately He was crucified.

Now, I do not pretend to fully understand the psychology behind this, but I do know that it is absolutely true. There is a tendency in us to believe a false, evil report against a righteous person, and to disbelieve a true report about the wickedness of a wicked person.

Consider how it plays out when you have, for instance, a wolf in sheep's clothing who has been hiding in the church for years as a "pious saint." All along he has been committing some great secret evil, and now one of his victims steps forward. What happens?

The victim's report is met with disbelief and denial, and the counter false charges of the wolf are accepted!! Is that not what happens? Of course it is. And if we are going to avoid being duped by the enemy in this respect, *we need to admit that this tendency is in us.*

You see how our enemy works this angle in his attempts to turn us against the gospel. That is what was going on in the Galatian churches. False teachers with a false gospel made accusations against Paul and those "foolish Galatians" believed the lies. As a result-

Galatians 5:1-4 ESV For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (2) Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. (3) I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. (4) You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.

These then are tactics of our enemy that we cannot afford to be ignorant of:

Satan Sends False Shepherds Among us to Deceive us

Satan and His Followers Mock God's Word

We are prone to believe an evil report about a righteous person, and to disbelieve an evil report about a wicked person

These are, after all, the weapons used to put man into the mess he is in:

"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Three Enemy Tactics -9