

The Threat From Within

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Jesus instructed us to “... *be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*” (Matt. 10:16). So why are so many Christians “...as dumb as hammers and dangerous as dynamite” instead?

I know - it's a loaded question and it'll evoke some reactions. So let me explain myself, and I'll start by outlining what Jesus was trying to say.

In this Matthew passage, Jesus is sending out His 12 disciples for ministry. He's taught them a lot, He's been an example to them, and now it's their turn to show what they've learned. The context is the earliest frontiers of The Great Commission, and Jesus uses figures of speech to make a key point.

He draws upon the reputations of two familiar animals: the snake and the dove. The first is regarded as wary and quick to perceive danger and escape it. The second is gentle and poses no threat. In effect, Jesus was illustrating the ideal practices of His kingdom's work. Shrewdness and innocence combine in the most effective messengers of the Gospel.

The bigger view is this: these attributes enable believers to conduct themselves responsibly in a hostile world. Jesus uses another analogy from the animal kingdom to underscore this. In the first part of this same verse He says, “*Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves...*” His fuller point was clear: “Hey, you're targets and the world wants your destruction. Therefore, be careful, be smart, and stay out of trouble.” That's my paraphrase, but you get the drift.

One important element that's easy to miss in this passage is Jesus did not want His followers to be like the wolves. The wolves oppose the Gospel. The wolves are bent on causing harm, silencing the truth, creating confusion, and imposing their agenda. The wolves embrace every unscrupulous tactic to dilute and disrupt the life-changing veracity of God's Word.

It's no surprise that the wolves try to blend in with the sheep as part of their strategy to destroy the flock. Paul had this very point in mind when he wrote his farewell to the Ephesians in Acts 20:28-30. He warned them that “*savage wolves*” would come, and he specifically stated some of them would come “...*from your own number.*” In other words, Paul was drawing attention to the threat from within.

Jesus sent out his disciples into an aggressive and unfriendly world that was filled with wolves, and Paul warned the church of the wolves within their own ranks. What's the difference here? Not much, I'm afraid. Against the appeals of Scripture, a good deal of the church has “*conformed to this world*” in stunning fashion instead.

This brings me back to my “hammer and dynamite” assessment. I'm dismayed at some of the foolish and damaging claims I've encountered from “Christians” lately. Here's just a sampling:

“Christians that do not support a two-state solution in Israel do not show the love of God.”

“The study of prophecy distracts from the important things we should be focused on.”

“This world would be a better place if more Christians would vote for democrats.”

It pains me to admit that a couple of these comments have come from established church leaders - which proves Paul's point from Acts and highlights the peril of our times.

While the Bible makes it clear that matters of Christian faith clearly expose the wolves, I offer that politics may do the same thing. This applies to the wolves in the church as well as the wolves in the world. Really, both packs *are* one and the same since they each contend with eternal truth and with Bible-based values. They just hunt in two different territories.

We'll start with politics which seems to be the more controversial of the two themes. Let's briefly glance at some political agendas which callously cross the grain of the Bible.

For starters, God was shown the exit door and Israel got the cold shoulder at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. A motion was made to omit God and any reference to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel from the democratic platform. Things got awkward when the motion was loudly supported. Embarrassed on live TV, the DNC leaders waffled and America watched as God and Israel got booted.

Barack Obama's "two state" peace plan - AKA the "Kerry Plan" - was intent on dividing the land of Israel and enforcing the country's pre-1967 boundaries. One of its key provisions was the permanent division of Jerusalem.

Strong anti-Israel views show up in the left's base too. A 2016 Pew Research Poll disclosed that liberal Democrats sympathize more with the Palestinians than with Israel. That's a big change from 2001 when this same group favored Israel 48 to 10 percent.

What about some of the social issues? Under Obama, same-sex marriage gained national legitimacy and the White House was bathed in the colors of the gay rainbow to celebrate this occasion. It's no secret that abortion finds its staunchest supporters within rank and file liberals, and it's the left that unrelentingly presses for increasing entitlements that weaken a nation. They also covet the lawless standards of open borders, sanctuary cities, and illegal amnesty. And don't even get me started on the militant feminist and transgender ambitions of liberals which seem to dominate headlines these days.

Believe it or not, I have no partisan "dog in the hunt" here. I'm a registered Independent who's just calling it the way it is.

Now, let me shift gears and see if the Bible has anything to say about all this. We'll start with Israel. The Bible declares the Jews have been supernaturally regathered in the land of Israel by God's design, and it states this process will continue beyond the present time (Ezek. 20:33-38; 22:17-22). The rebirth of national Israel is a prophetic event (Isaiah 66:8) which affirms God's commitment to His chosen people.

According to the Scriptures, a time's coming when God will put the people of earth on trial for how they *treated the Jews* and for how they tried to *divide up the land of Israel* (Joel 3:2). A two-state solution may conform to the world's wishes, but it violates God's terms and He will judge those who demand it.

In no uncertain language, the Word of God reinforces the straightforward fact that God has not forgotten the Jews or regretted His unconditional promises to them (Genesis 13;15; Romans 11:1-12). These are among the clearest prophecies in God's Word, and the only way to derive a position from them that's not there in the first place is by claiming God doesn't mean what He says.

Where do I even start on the myriad social dysfunctions around which the left defines itself? The Bible takes a strong stance against the *sin* of homosexuality (Gen. 18 and 19; Lev. 18:22; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rom. 1:26-28). It is crystal clear that efforts to legitimize and promote the gay lifestyle fly in the face of God. The Scriptures state that human life, from conception, is sacred (Psalms 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5), that law

and order is essential for nations (Rom. 13:1-7), that personal responsibility is expected (Prov. 20:4; 2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:8), and that men and women were created different from one another (Gen. 5:2; Eph. 5:22-25; Rom. 1:26-27) no matter how much our culture wants to neutralize gender distinctions.

It's not that committed liberals don't understand the principles of ethics and virtue, but rather—they don't want them! They've become a well-defined faction of the world's wolves which wage a constant war against Biblical standards.

I feel I should make a point at this juncture. I am growing in my conviction that valid concerns stalk those who claim to be in the faith, yet choose to identify with the left. This dilemma is especially true as the left radically moves toward a militant-socialist agenda which actively suppresses the teachings and practices of God's Word.

I've talked to enough dumb sheep to know plenty of them haven't given sufficient thought to these matters as they ought to. They still perceive the left as "more tolerant" than the right. They think CNN tells the truth, and they voted for Hillary simply because "It was time for a woman to be President."

Basically, these people aren't really thinking at all. They sound like the world because they're "of it." They've bought into the basics of globalism "hook, line, and sinker," and they feel self-righteous for having done so.

Enough about politics. Now – concerning matters of faith, how do the wolves reveal themselves in the church? The short answer is this: the same way matters of faith reveal the wolves in the world. As I've indicated, they are the same creatures in both places. But, are there any specific hallmarks of the wolves that Paul warned the Ephesian congregants about?

I believe Jesus sheds some light on this question because He also mentioned the wolves in the pews and pulpits. He warned, "*Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits....*" (Matt. 7:15-16).

Aha! Here's a big clue. Jesus says we can recognize them by their fruits – those are the things they do and say.

Said another way, the wolves in the church will make the sort of choices that the wolves in the world make. They will hold to the world's ideals, and insofar as the doctrines and standards of Scripture are concerned, they will oppose these sacred matters the same way the wolves in the world do.

And so I sigh when so-called "Christians" join with the mainstream media to challenge the Bible's clear values. I cringe when these "*ravenous wolves*" enthusiastically march in gay parades under the claim of "unity and Christian love," or when they hum and buzz with the mystics to empty their minds and "receive new revelations."

I gasp at their affront to Almighty God when they insist other religions "...just have a different view of the same God we serve." I feel a righteous anger when they murmur their thinly-veiled dislike of the Jews and when they applaud the "bravery of the Palestinians against their oppressors."

I have no doubt that the Word of God is under attack – inside our churches! Because the Bible changes lives when it's properly studied and applied, "*deceiving spirits*" (1 Tim. 4:1) are presently working overtime through "*ravenous wolves*" to blur the lines between what is right and wrong, to mock the

importance of Biblical prophecy (2 Pet. 3:4), and to elevate any person or message that affirms the things they most want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3).

I feel one of the reasons the world will not believe the rapture has actually taken place when it does, is because so many “Christians” will still be found in the churches they’d always attended. I believe this fact will further feed the unprecedented deception of that time. The circumstances of these wolves who are left behind will be used to argue that the Bible does not really mean what it says.

In closing, Jesus urges us to be wary, to be careful, and to be harmless and innocent. An effective faith is one that recognizes the dangers of the threat from within.

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