

"The Deceitfulness of Sin" (Hebrews 3:12–19)(11.10.19)

Ask the people to stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Hebrews 3:12–19 (NIV84)

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. 15 As has just been said:

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion."

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The word of God for the people of God.

You may be seated.

Title: The Deceitfulness of Sin

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

When is speeding really speeding? [pause] After all, what's the big deal? Everyone does it. It's actually safer to stay up with traffic. There is the posted speed limit and then the real speed limit.

Let's say that you work over at AtlantiCare Hospital on Jimmie Leeds Rd. You have access to the pharmaceuticals. Many poor people need these drugs and medical care but they don't have health insurance. Is it ok open a clinic and then to steal the drugs to help the poor?

Do you hear anything wrong with this announcement: Last week, the National Abortion Federation (NAF) tapped Katherine Ragsdale, a lesbian Episcopal priest, as the international abortion organization's new president and CEO.

Fr. Dwight Longenecker@dlongenecker1: "First we overlook evil. Then we permit evil. Then we legalize evil. Then we promote evil. Then we celebrate evil. Then we persecute those who still call it evil."

I never realized before Devil is spelled D – evil. No these are not random thoughts.

BODY:

Two Saturdays ago, The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church had a Special Called Session to discuss the findings of The Commission on the Way Forward. To be frank, the Methodist Church is not united at all. And, in my opinion the Way Forward findings undermine 2,000 years of the Christian Church's understanding of marriage and is hopelessly deceived.

It started with a praise and worship service at 9 o'clock, so Carol and I were on the road early. I got on the Garden State Parkway at the White Horse Pike. As I merged, I reached 65 mph and set the cruise control. We were on the Parkway till exit 109; nearly 70 miles.

Guess how many cars I passed? One; one car. It was a turquoise classic car from the 40's I think. Everyone else on the road for 70 miles passed me. They were all speeding. When a State Trooper was visible, they slowed down and mostly moved out of the left lane. Maybe they ALL had good reasons. Maybe they didn't really care.

When we got there, the worship service was already underway. I confess that I felt it would have been hypocritical for me to join them because I was not feeling worshipful. There was some resentment on my part to have to sacrifice the better part of a day when the outcome seemed predetermined and I felt

ungodly.

At 10 o'clock, the business portion of the meeting started. When it came time to discuss the findings and the pending legislation, two women came to the podium to inform us how we were to speak about the issues. They introduced themselves by name and then gave their preferred pronouns. They explained that this demonstrated that we were "safe" people to talk to. They continued to describe the kind of language that was acceptable.

Then they established a significant boundary. We were not to use the Bible to support our positions. Yes, you heard me correctly. We were not to use the Bible to support our positions. They explained that everyone there believed the Bible supported their position; "we just read it differently." So, a church body would not have a theological discussion about its future. The Scriptures were off the table.

The Way Forward Team recommended that the Greater New Jersey Leadership to "Make available trained facilitators to assist interested congregations to develop covenants about ministry with LGBTQIA+ persons and the LGBTQIA+ Community." Of course, this is absolutely necessary ministry as is ministry to every community. We are to love neighbor as ourselves.

What was not written down, but was explained in the discussion is that the definition of "ministry" was expanded. This ministry included clergy performing same-sex marriages. This ministry included encouraging living LGBTQIA+ lifestyles to pursue ordination as clergy in the United Methodist Church. This became crystal clear when our Bishop said that there would be no trials for anyone performing same-sex marriages in New Jersey. Even though the Book of Discipline, which all clergy vow to uphold, forbids same-sex marriage and the Special General Conference held in St. Louis strengthened those provisions, the prohibition will not be enforced by our Bishop.

The Bishop explained that the United Methodist Church has changed. The legislative branch (General Conference), the executive branch (The Council of Bishops), and the Judicial Council are all broken. He needs to consider the context here in Greater New Jersey. And, we know what is best for us.

Then the Board of Ordained Ministry shared that for the last two years they have ignored the guidance of General Conference and the Book of Discipline. They actually passed a resolution openly defying those guidelines.

Later, a male clergy person went to one of the microphones and raised an objection the redefinition of ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community. He said that he was conservative and held to traditional understandings of marriage. BUT, he has a son that is gay. This minister says that he does substantial ministry in the LGBTQIA+ community.

That objection seemed to fall on deaf ears. Instead a resolution to affirm the bishop's no trial position and the Board of Ordained Ministry's position was put forth. This resolution passed. The Wesleyan Covenant Association leadership subsequently submitted written requests for the Bishop to rule on points of law they believed were violated. The bishop is allowed 30 days to respond.

Not only was I highly disappointed by the proceedings, I found it incomprehensible. How could the seemingly obvious not be clear I wondered? My conclusion was that they were deceived.

So, this was the week before election week. Radio, TV, and even Facebook were exploding with political advertisements. Some of these campaigns have devolved into name calling: "You're a liar." "No, you're a liar." The thing is that they tell partial truths. You voted against women health initiatives. No, I voted against the bill because it included forced the Catholic Church to pay for things it doesn't believe in. You voted to raise taxes. Well actually, it was to subsidize school lunches.

You can see why deception and the deceitfulness of sin have been on my mind. A friend suggested I look up the word insidious. It means having a gradual and cumulative effect. A good example would be a disease that develops so gradually as to be well established before becoming apparent. Insidious means

awaiting a chance to entrap. It is harmful but enticing. It is seductive. Yes, insidious is a good synonym for deceitful.

This is why we are warned against unbelief and rebellion. We are warned against hardened hearts that turn away from God. We need to be diligent because otherwise we will not be aware of it happening. It is similar to the way ice forms. At first, the slightest skim of hardness forms on the top. Any movement of the water would break it up. Gradually, millimeter by millimeter, it firms and hardens. It gets to the point where you need a hammer to break the ice. Eventually, it will get thick enough for you to drive your snowmobiles on it.

Brothers and sisters we must encourage each other in the things of the faith daily. Some translations say we must exhort each other daily. Yes the threat is real and the consequences are eternal. The coldness of sin can kill.

I read an account of a survivor of the German concentration camps. A teenage boy was in a train boxcar with many other Jews on their way to a concentration camp. It was cold, very cold. At night, the train pulled off onto a sidetrack. They were locked in that boxcar with no heat.

Next to the boy was an old man. He looked terrible. The boy knew that he had to do something to prevent the old man from freezing to death. Even though the boy was extremely cold and tired, he huddled with and rubbed the old man all through the night.

When morning finally came, the sunlight revealed a gruesome sight. As the boy looked around the boxcar, death was everywhere. There were only two people that survived the night; the teenage boy and the old man. Yes, we find survival power in community. We must constantly connect and cajole to keep out cold-heartedness. Layer by layer, sin hardens the heart.

This requires diligence. Always stay alert. It requires endurance. Our Enemy is crafty and knows our weaknesses. Each day we must hold firmly to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus. We are warned in 1 Corinthians 10:12 (NIV84) So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! Our brothers and sisters in the faith can help sustain us.

About a month ago, I was at the basketball court down one block from the church. As usual, there were young men and teenagers there. One of them put on some loud rap music. It was filled with profanity and filth. I started to go to the other side of the court. One of the guys asked me if I was leaving. I said no, I was just getting away from the music. What's wrong with the music he asked. I said it was unholy. After conversing with one of the other guys, it was turned down.

I use to like to listen to Sports Radio; but, lately it has become a problem. Different gambling companies have started advertising on these shows. Additionally, the radio personalities have started talking about their personal sports gambling activities. On one show this week, this devolved into talking about which cities had the best strip clubs. One better had a theory that a certain star player performed poorly in cities with the better strip clubs. I had to turn the radio off in disgust.

Charles Spurgeon said, "Sin has a way of adapting itself to us and to our circumstances." We know this is true from experience. Over and over again, politicians are corrupted, celebrities are disgraced, sports heroes are shamed, and pastors have to give up the ministry. We need to be self-aware. We need to have brothers and sisters in the faith to hold us accountable; to encourage, to exhort, to sustain each other.

Have you heard about the Prime Video series called Goliath? Let me tell you how I got reeled into watching this show. While it demonstrates that your pastor is human, more importantly it shows the deceitfulness of sin. We can all learn from each other. This is part of our encouraging and exhorting each other.

Right off the bat, the name Goliath intrigued me. The Bible story of David and Goliath has inspired many other stories of the underdog taking on a herculean task.

Here is Amazon's description of the show: "Once a powerful lawyer, Billy McBride is now a washed up ambulance chaser, who spends more time in bars than the courtroom. When Billy reluctantly agrees to pursue a wrongful death lawsuit against the massive law firm he helped create, a vast and deadly conspiracy comes to light. Billy and his team end up in a life-or-death trial against the ultimate foe, which could end up helping Billy find redemption and exact revenge on the firm."

The series started with the theme song "Bartholomew" by The Silent Comedy. The singer begs God for help. There are references to baptism and being made clean. There is a call to believe and the alternative is hell. There is confession. There is truth. One verse recounts Jesus' temptation by the devil.

Before the first scene, I was hooked. I love a story of redemption. I love a story where justice is victorious. I love a story where truth is triumphant. Billy Bob Thornton plays the likable and sympathetic character of Billy McBride. William Hurt effectively plays the diabolical lawyer Donald Cooperman. The whole show is done professionally at a high level: music, acting, and action; with many other compelling characters. You could argue that it is just being true to life, but nowadays, even the good guys have serious flaws. The show gets gritty and shows the dark side of humanity. In fact, much of the scheming is in the dark. Of course, there is cursing, drinking, drugs, smoking, gambling, greed, murder and mayhem.

There are several sexual situations. Of course, none of the sex is between husband and wife. Billy unwilling takes on a lawsuit and then violates the lawyer client relationship by having sex with that client. The bad guy, Cooperman, uses his position of power to seduce a young female lawyer. Billy's ex-wife is involved in a lesbian relationship.

Why did I tell you all that you might be wondering? Well, I watched four or five episodes on my laptop. The next episode, I was going to watch in the living room on the large screen TV. With Carol there, it was harder to ignore the profanity. Then I realized that anyone going by the house could see my TV screen through the windows.

What if one of my neighbors who knew I was a pastor saw what I was watching? They would suspect me of being a hypocrite. Worse, I would discredit my relationship with Jesus. What if one of you saw me watching such a show? It would undermine my authority and dignity. Here's the clincher: the Almighty not only sees everything we are doing, He sees everything we are thinking, dreaming, or fantasizing about. A person might argue that it is no big deal. No one would be shocked. After all, look at percentages of people that regularly view pornography. By comparison that show is small potatoes. But, I ask you, "What does God's word say?"

Ephesians 5:11-12 (NIV84) 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

If we are not even to talk about these things, surely we shouldn't be watching them. We shouldn't be celebrating or supporting them. We should avoid all contact with the deeds of darkness. I pray that I have shed some light to expose the danger.

CONCLUSION:

Yes, it is easy to go astray. For Christians trying to live faithfully, we would reject sin if it was openly offered. So Satan stealthily serve sin in roundabout ways. He is the Deceiver after all, the Father of lies, and a murderer from the beginning. Here try this. Have a little taste. It won't do you any harm. You're strong enough to resist. Besides, God will forgive you.

In a culture where we are inundated with sin, surround by sin, we become a little numb. If everyone is doing it, how can it be that bad? Look, even people who profess to follow Jesus are supporting it.

In our Lord's prayer, we pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." In the Eastern Orthodox tradition they pray, "deliver us from the Evil One." Yes, we need to protect our hearts; to keep them tender towards our Lord. We need to stand firm in the Lord Jesus and on the Word of God. Let us

exhort each other. Let us encourage each other. Each day; every day; as long as it is called Today; hold firmly till the end.

Believe your God. Believe that God's promises are superior to the promises of sin. For the deceitfulness of sin can harden your heart and leave you vulnerable to falling away from Christ Jesus. Believe that God's call to holiness is not about keeping rules just to get into heaven. Believe that living for Jesus in this life, holy living, set apart living, is what is best for us here AND for eternity. Believe and be saved.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.