

Wolves and Sheep

by Vance Havner

Vance Havner's sermon emphasizes the stark contrast between the church and the world, urging believers to understand their role as sheep among wolves and the importance of reconciliation through Christ.

Duration: 34:07

Scripture: John 4:16

Topics: "Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses various instances of misbehavior by a character named Junior and how they can be explained through modern books on child-rearing. The preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding and communication in preventing destructive behavior and resolving conflicts. He also highlights the need to be aware of the challenges and dangers present in the world, comparing it to a demonized world controlled by the devil. The preacher encourages the audience to be wise and knowledgeable about the spiritual forces at play and to rely on the teachings of the Bible.

Transcript

You always brag about it, these folks who get up early, and that is bad, but I do get up early, and I walk, and I lived on the road in motels, and they were made for motorists, not for pedestrians. Sometimes I get hooked in a lot of highways on all sides, but I'm generally able to find somewhere to walk. I was down in Sandy Cove last summer, it's a long way from there out to the highway, and I get up about 5.30 every morning.

I took off that time, one of the young fellows there, now in Asbury, said, would you mind if I walk with you? And I thought one morning to cure him, I'd start down at 6 o'clock, and I said, sure, come along. He made it every morning. Had a nice letter from him the other day.

Down in Huntsville, Alabama a few weeks ago, they have an old airport there, and the runways are still there, they're not operating the airport. Now that is a walking place, and I walk from one end of that thing to the other every morning. Two of the church staff, young fellows, great kids, and the music, they wanted to know if they could come over different mornings, and last week I was in Rome, Georgia, and one morning at 6 o'clock, four college students were banging on the door, they wanted to take a walk up the mountain right to the side of the motel.

And they wanted to talk about their problems and trials and tribulations, and it's got to be a part of my experience these days, but I like to walk mostly for meditation, and I'm afraid I wouldn't do much meditating tomorrow morning with this crowd. So count me out. But I want you to know that I'm in favor of walking.

Now Al can speak for himself. I want to read to you two passages that have two big words in them. Sometimes we Bible readers take these big words for granted, and we're not exactly certain we know what they mean.

But there are two big ones here that have a lot of meaning for us. Gypsy Smith was not well educated when he started out preaching. He wasn't too good a reader.

Some of the big words stumped him. He said the way I worked it, though, I would read until I came to one of those big words, and then I'd stop and talk a while, and then I'd start again on the other side. But these are found first in 2 Corinthians 5, a very familiar passage beginning with the 17th verse.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. All things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new.

But all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to which that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto itself, not in keeping their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us. We pray you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

The other verse is 1 John 2, verse 2. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world. We've reached a sad time in America, when everybody seems mad at everybody, and calling each other names, and unable to agree on anything. At the same time, we've never had so many conferences and symposiums, and group discussions, and panel discussions, and committee meetings, where, well, you know what a committee is, a group of the unfit appointed by the unwilling to do the unnecessary.

When they get together, they never get anything solved. And it seems that the more we get together, the further we come apart. Will Rogers said one time, one true way to prevent wars is to abolish peace conferences.

That ain't that well said. But somehow the idea has gotten around, if we can talk everything over, we can settle all our problems. All we need is understanding.

And even the escapades of youth are explained today. You can account for Junior's misbehavior in these newfangled books on how to bring up children, written by somebody who never brought up any. And they go into it with their wordy explanations.

Junior bit the meter man. Junior kicked the cook. Junior's antisocial now, according to the book.

Junior smashed the clock and lamp. Junior hacked the tree. Destructive trends are treated in chapters two and three.

Junior threw his milk at mom. Junior screamed from awe. Notes on self-assertiveness are found in chapter four.

Junior tossed his shoes and socks out into the rain. Negation bad and normal, disregard the stain. Junior got in Grandpop's room, tore up his fishing line.

That's to gain attention, see page 89. But Grandpop seized the slipper and yanked Junior across his knee, for Grandpop hadn't read a book since 1893. One's reading.

You see what I mean? Understand. The burglar, when he breaks in, you have a chat with him. Dialogue.

Ah, that's the word. That's the answer to everything. War can be prevented if we have enough summit funds.

As long as they're talking, they're not shooting. But if I remember correctly, the shooting started at Pearl Harbor while they were talking in Washington. Big word today.

Well, we've got the draft. You'll not forget me in these parts, will you? The draftless master. Thank you a lot.

But the big word today is reconciliation. It's the unpardonable sin to disagree on anything. Just smile a smile, and as you smile another smiles, and soon there's miles and miles of smiles, and life's worthwhile if you but smile.

Now, according to this doctrine, Elijah should have had a panel discussion with the prophets of Baal. Our Lord should have worked out a program of peaceful coexistence with the Pharisees. And Luther should have had a summit conference with the Pope.

These apostles of reconciliation imagine that communism can be won over by negotiation. But communism is moral cancer. And you do not peacefully coexist with cancer.

If you don't get the cancer, the cancer gets you. And Mr. Solzhenitsyn made a speech a few days ago that the Times published, I'm glad to say. And he spoke of the peril, the danger of détente, the warnness about being taken in by this notion that if you talk things over with communism, they'll never take care of you.

They would have us forgive communism. They say Jesus forgave the thief on the cross. He forgave one thief on the cross.

He forgave the repentant thief on the cross. Jesus was and is the great reconciler. But before we consider what he came to reconcile, we'd better know what he does not reconcile.

Some things are not negotiable. They're not settled by compromise. They cannot be arbitrated.

They are irreconcilable. Righteousness and unrighteousness. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? The only way that righteousness and unrighteousness can have fellowship is when unrighteousness becomes righteousness through faith in Christ who becomes our righteousness, imputed, imparted, implanted when we're born again.

Our Lord said, He that is not with me is against me. He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. That's a great text on soul-winning and personal work, and I've never heard it used.

I've never heard it used in that connection. Maybe somebody has, but I've never heard it. I'm in the gathering business, and we sometimes talk about inactive church members, but Jesus said, I'm in the gathering business.

And if you're not drawing them to me, you're driving them away from me. But either is activity. There are no inactive church members.

You're not drawing people to Jesus by your very inactivity. That way you're driving them away, but that's still activity. There is no communion between light and darkness.

You can't reconcile them. No twilight zones. We've tried to invent some lately.

Black and white have been smudged in the indefinite grave, but right is still right, wrong is still wrong. Truth and error cannot be reconciled. The same fountain cannot send forth both bitter water and sweet.

Two cannot walk together except to be agreed. The New Testament takes a firm stand against false doctrine in language utterly foreign to these compromisers who would blend into one fellowship, those who doubt or deny the word of God with those who believe it. And then our Lord did not come to reconcile the church and the world.

What concord hath Christ with Belial? Concord there is the Latinish form of the word in the original from which you get the musical term, symphony. There is no symphony, no harmony between Christ and evil. What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Symphony, no symphony.

I've heard of the unfinished symphony. This is the impossible symphony. Friendship of the world is enmity with God.

Whosoever be a friend of the world is the enemy of God, if any man love the world. The love of the Father is not easy. I ran across a book the other day written by a minister friend of mine, I with the Lord, written forty years ago on modern evil.

You don't find books like that much anymore. He names them. He didn't generalize.

He had a chapter on the theater. He had a chapter on dancing and so on. They don't do that anymore these days.

They say that's the wrong proof. I don't know when I've heard a sermon naming anything. Then he had a sermon on how to preach so as to convert nobody.

He said, preach on sin, but never mention any of the sins of your congregation. They'll go out shaking their heads and say sin's mighty bad, but they won't do anything about it and you've named something. When Jesus talked to the woman at Jacob's well, he talked about the water of life and where's the best place to worship, and that was important, but she did not get under conviction.

Then he said, go call thy husband. Uh-oh. She's had too many of them.

And when she went back home, she said, come see a man who told me about the water of life? No. About where's the best place to worship? No. Uh-oh.

Come see a man who told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ? Now, that preaching's getting a little thin these days, and not a lot of it, because, well, we've got the new angle today. Old Mordecai Ham, Sam Jones and Billy Sunday, skin the liquor business, for instance.

Nobody does that now. There are sermons on drunkenness, or at least it's mentioned. But nobody ever hits the sacred cow anymore.

We're trying to mop up the floor and leaving the faucet running. You don't hear anything about the liquor business. Not much.

You'd think Prohibition era was the dark age of American history, and even church leaders are going out of their way today to say that the New Testament does not teach total abstinence. Well, whatever your view may be upon that, why even talk about it to a crowd of folks who already don't need any more encouragement? Why even say that? If you've had any, you've had too much. And I'd like to hear old Billy Sunday come along one more time and say, as long as I've got a fist, I'll fight it, and as long as I've got a foot, I'll kick it, and as long as I've got a tooth, I'll bite it, and when I am fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gun it till I go to heaven and it goes to hell.

You don't hear anything. It's not nice. You don't learn that in seminary.

No, sir. Well, there's something else to remember in this connection. Jesus said in Matthew 10, 16, I'm sending you forth not as white sheep among black sheep.

I'm sending you as sheep among wolves. The Bible is full of vivid imagery, and many of the figures are from the animal world. The mule, the dog, the saddle, the fox, the sheep, the goats.

Twenty-third Psalm, sheep of his pasture, evil men are spoken of as wolves, God's people as sheep under the great shepherd. I suppose there are no other animals as unlike as wolves and sheep. They're at opposite ends of the spectrum.

The wolf is the symbol of everything that's vicious and violent and rapacious and destructive. The sheep is a figure of all that's gentle and innocent and peaceful and benign. And there's no way on earth to establish peaceful coexistence between wolves and sheep.

They lie down together in the kingdom age, I suppose. The sheep won't be on the inside of the wolf either, but they're not going to do it now. And there are those who try to establish liaison and rapport between the wolves and the sheep, evil and good, the world and the church.

They say, well, the good's not so good and the bad's not so bad, so let's all get together. But God sees only the wolves and the sheep. There are only two races in the sign of God.

The issue with Almighty God is the once-born and the twice-born. That's the race issue in the sign of God. The wolves are out to destroy the sheep.

This idea that the world is kindly disposed toward the church is a lot of high wash. The true shepherd does not invite the wolf into the fold in the hope of establishing communication. He lays down his life for the sheep.

It's about time we got wise to what we're up against in this world of darkness. Phillips translates the last part of that great verse in Ephesians, we are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world

and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. We're living in a demonized world, masterminded by the devil.

I heard of a fellow who had a little old dog that was always getting into a fight and always getting licked. Somebody said, not much of a fighter, is he? He said, good fighter, just a poor judge of dogs. Now, if you don't know what you're up against, you're going to get licked every time.

And we ought to know what we're up against. Sometimes these wolves wear sheep's clothing, Matthew 7, 15. They creep into pulpits and would deceive the very elect.

Satan does more harm as an angel of light than he ever does as a roaring lion. Paul warned the elders over in Ephesus about danger from the outside and danger from the inside in chapter 20, verse 29. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

That's trouble from the outside. Next verse. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Trouble from both directions. Violent opposition from without, and it is going to intensify as time goes on. But also in this age of apostasy and anarchy without, we suffer from wolves in sheep's clothing inside the church who would try to arrange an armistice between the church and the world.

There is no détente here any more than there is between a free world and a communist world. There is no point of compatibility. And this great Russian asked the other day, he said, Do we not know the difference between détente and appeasement? Mr. Chamberlain was a good man.

He was a fine gentleman. But you couldn't do business with Hitler. And so Churchill had to come along who did do business the other way.

Takes that kind of... Now, a Christian may do business with people of the world. We have to trade with them. We have to associate with them.

Of course, you're the salt of the earth, and the salt has to be rubbed into whatever it's supposed to affect. You can go fishing with the men of the world. You can go to a concert of Beethoven.

You can be in the same profession. You can go to the doctor's meeting if you're a doctor or whatever. But when it comes to matters of the soul, Christians are sheep among wolves and citizens of another country and part of another race and members of another nationality.

Sheep among wolves. I used to hear Mr. Letourneau say that what worried him was not the wolfishness of the wolves, but the sheepishness of the sheep. That's something to think about.

We are pretty sheepish today. Now, this word, world, John uses it more than anybody else in the Bible. You will only find it 15 times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Paul uses it only 47, but John 105 times. And the word generally is cosmos, from which you get cosmology and cosmogony and even cosmetics. You're in the world, but not of the world.

But you've been called out of the world to go back into the world to win others out of the world, and that's the only business you have in the world. And if young people and all other people would get that fixed in their systems, it would solve a lot of problems. That's the way we're located in the eyes of our Lord with

regard to this world.

And John 15, 18, 19, he just piles up the word world in those two verses. Jesus said, if the world hates you, you know it hated me before it hated you. And believe it or not, in verse 19, the word is five times.

That sets a record. I don't know any other place in the Bible where you have anything repeated like that. If ye were of the world, the world would love you.

But because you're not of the world, but I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hated you. Now, how can you be popular up against that? Now, you may be respected. They may have to acknowledge what you stand for.

But you cannot be one of the hale fellows well met and slapped on the back by this present day. If you're going to live for Christ. Well, if he didn't come to reconcile righteousness and unrighteousness, truth and error, the world and the church, what did he come to reconcile? That's where our scripture comes in.

There's no better word, even the living Bible doesn't have another word here for reconciliation. There isn't any better word for it. Man is not right with God.

He's estranged. His heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked who can know it. There had to be a way to bring a holy God and sinful man together, and man couldn't do it.

But God did. I meet some people who seem to have the idea that God was mad at us and Jesus had to die to get him in good humor again. That's not what this means.

God was in Christ reconciling the world for himself. And the sinless Son of God took all sin on him, though he had no sin in him, and becomes sin for us. That's reconciliation.

His sin became our sin, just that. Now, there has to be a moral basis for reconciliation. When a man commits a crime, it's not enough to say, I'm sorry.

And some people say that repentance is all that's necessary. Repentance is a requirement, but it's not the basis. There must be some way of meeting the demands of God's holiness so that he can be just and justifier, both.

Therefore, there's propitiation. And propitiation takes us back to the Old Testament, and the mercy seat sprinkled with the blood of our Lamb without blemish so that the judgment seat might become a mercy seat. It's not a matter of placating an angry God.

It is God entering into this world in his Son. This is the ministry and the message of reconciliation. And you're an ambassador.

That's your business. You're in the reconciling business. That's what it's all about.

God is propitiated, and the sinner is reconciled. And all in order that there might be a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's name. All in order that sinners plunged beneath that flood might lose their guilty state.

All in order that that dying thief might rejoice to see that fountain in his day. And all in order that you and I, so vile as he, might wash all our sins away. That's why it was done.

And the cross becomes the great reconciler, but it's the Christ of the cross. Because a crossless Christ would be just as perilous as a Christless cross. Christ without the cross would be as perilous as the cross without Christ.

Let him now come down from the cross, and we'll believe him. That's what the world's always said. And it'll take him as a model.

It'll take him as an example. It'll take him as a teacher. It'll take him as the paragon, but not as the propitiation.

That's what stands in the way. Now, I'm glad that the word of life has as its emblem here the cross and the Bible. Look at that a moment.

The cross has two beams, vertical and horizontal. One speaks of the relationship to God, man to God and God to man. The other, our relationship to each other.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. Thou shalt love thy neighbors thyself. And on these hang all the Lord.

Our Catholic friends use crucifixes. I'm not a Catholic. I don't carry a crucifix.

But I do find myself many times as I walk along and checking on myself as a Christian. And I recommend it. I find myself saying, Lord, how am I doing? Is there anything between us? Now, everybody sins sometimes and is overtaken by a fault, and all of that ought to be confessed and forgiven.

But I'm thinking now, and I want to ask you this, Lord. That's what these conferences are for. We're not here to soak up information.

And I sometimes, in churches, it seems to me that after so long, the folks say, I move, we accept this as information and be dismayed. There's not a purpose. May I ask you, is there any point of willful, habitual, continuous rebellion against God in your life on some point? Maybe a small thing.

That's why that other verse says he that is born of God is not practicing sin. He doesn't make sin his business. Is there something continuous, an attitude, a position you have taken? Like Peter, not so, Lord.

That's a mixed-up statement. If he's Lord, you don't say not so. If you say not so, he's not Lord.

Is there a point of rebellion this morning in your life, Not one point where you and God are in a controversy. Nothing between my soul and the Savior. So let his blessed faith not sin.

That was written by Charlie Tinley, son of that. His son led singing for me in three meetings. Grand Rapids, Toledo, Rockford, Illinois, I remember.

And every time Charlie Tinley, Jr. would sing this, and sang the others too, take your burden to the Lord and leave it there and so on. When he sang his daddy's great song, nothing between my soul and the Savior, I always got under conviction. What does the Lord have against you this morning? Jesus had something against Ephesus, Pergamum, and fire and power.

I have something against me. Is there a point of controversy between you and God? Think it over. Is it a sin of omission, the good that I would, I do not? Something God's been trying to get you to do and you won't do, or turn it around? Is it commission, the evil that I would not, that I do? Is it a sin of the Spirit,

having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the Spirit.

How's your disposition? Does it take two cups of coffee to make you fit to live with of a morning? Maybe you ought to go to the mourner's bench. If it's a doubtful thing whatsoever, it's not a faith, it's sin. Check it.

What's between me and God? Have you gone over that list? Lord, how am I doing? And then the horizontal. Is there anything this morning between you and anybody in this world that ought to be straightened out and set for you to make the move? Because Jesus said if you bring your gift to the elder, if you bring your little duplex envelope to church on Sunday, remember that somebody's at odds with you. Hang on to your envelope.

Did you get right? Now, that would ruin a lot of offerings on Sunday morning. Over this thing. Husbands and wives sometimes need to have a revival in their own home, their own heart.

You can come to a Bible conference and soak up a lot of information and not attend to this. I heard a woman say she was a teacher of a women's Bible class for ten years before she ever got right with God. She said it went to an old man to the shoulder and knelt and said, Lord, I'll go anywhere.

I'll go to Africa, I'll go to India. The Lord said, I don't want you in Africa. I don't need you in India.

I want you to get right with Susie right here in the church. She said, I hadn't thought about that. I started over.

Lord, I'll go to Africa. She said, I'd rather go to Africa than get right with Susie. The Lord said, I want you to get right with Susie.

He said, who's she coming to? I said, I'm a Sunday next Sunday with Susie. And Susie said, I hear you've got religion. I said, well, if I didn't, I wouldn't be sitting beside you here.

And we got right. I'm a Sunday. I'm in a different church just about every week, and I turn you into a scandal and a disgrace because of Jesus Christ, the first one there is in a lot of our churches.

Church staffs, discord, church members. I was in Arlington, Virginia, and a little Mennonite brother came every night to the service with his little recorder, and he bought a track. One night I said, man, I've got to have that.

And he said, well, you can keep it. It was a carpenter shop, and one night after he'd gone home, the tools that he used all had a meaning. There had been some friction among them.

And they said, we ought to get rid of some of our crowd. There's Mr. Hammer. He makes so much noise.

And somebody else said, well, Brother Gimley, he's so insignificant. We could do without him. You'd never know if he wasn't here.

Somebody else said, Brother Klain, he just goes on the surface all the time, superficial, never gets down. And then there's Sister Rue, always measuring everybody. We could do without her.

And then there's Brother Sandpaper, always rubbing everybody the wrong way. And Mr. Saul, with that short, cutting edge, he's next morning there. The carpenter came back and picked them all up and started

to work.

And Lord meant not to have them eat until we'd better get together, because we are laborers together. I wish some of our churches could find that out. We are laborers together with God.

And so you represent many churches here. If I can make you a minister of reconciliation, maybe God wants to start something there and send you here on purpose to get some coals to start a fire with when you get back there. Have you faced it, beloved, seriously, solemnly? How am I doing? Anything between you and God of willful habitual.

I'm not talking now about sinless perfection. Nobody's perfect, but you can be blameless, though you cannot be faultless. You can be blameless.

The Bible says to be blameless. When a child writes a letter, it's not faultless, but it's blameless if it wrote the best it could at that time under those circumstances. They're not faultless.

You can be blameless. Anything between you and God of willful habitual. Anything between you and somebody.

You ought to put in a phone call, maybe write a letter, or go to sea. That's the way revival begins. And that's the way we really face the cross, instead of so glibly on Sunday morning singing, I'll ever be true to the old ruddy truth.

It's shame and reproach gladly there. Then they fold up the shame and reproach and put it in the rack. Hurry home to that big dinner and watch ballgames all afternoon.

Lord, help me. Think it over and do something about it, dear friend, because no matter how old you are and how long you've been going to meetings and how much you work in the church, we need to have a going over for once in a while. Lord, how am I doing? Vertically, horizontally.

That is the ministry of reference at each.

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