

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE WICKED

*All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal.*  
*1 John 5:17 (RSV)*

<sup>14</sup> *Do not enter the path of the wicked*  
*And do not proceed in the way of evil men.*  
<sup>15</sup> *Avoid it, do not pass by it;*  
*Turn away from it and pass on.*  
*Proverbs 4:14-15 (NASB)*

*When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more,*  
*But the righteous has an everlasting foundation.*  
*Proverbs 10:25 (NASB)*

*Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD;*  
*Assuredly, he will not be unpunished.*  
*Proverbs 16:5 (NASB)*

*Pride goes before destruction,*  
*And a haughty spirit before stumbling.*  
*Proverbs 16:18 (NASB)*

*He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous,*  
*Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.*  
*Proverbs 17:15 (NASB)*

*Haughty eyes and a proud heart,*  
*the lamp of the wicked, are sin.*  
*Proverbs 21:4 (RSV)*

*“Scoffer” is the name of the proud, haughty man*  
*who acts with arrogant pride.*  
*Proverbs 21:24 (RSV)*

*Do not be envious of evil men,*  
*Nor desire to be with them;*  
*Proverbs 24:1 (NASB)*

<sup>19</sup> *Do not fret because of evildoers*  
*Or be envious of the wicked;*  
<sup>20</sup> *For there will be no future for the evil man;*  
*The lamp of the wicked will be put out.*  
*Proverbs 24:19-20 (NASB)*

*He who digs a pit will fall into it,*  
*and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling.*  
*Proverbs 26:27 (RSV)*

*Many are the pangs of the wicked;  
but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the LORD.  
Psalm 32:10 (RSV)*

*I will punish the world for its evil,  
and the wicked for their iniquity;  
I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant,  
and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless.  
Isaiah 13:11 (RSV)*

*If favour is shown to the wicked,  
he does not learn righteousness;  
Isaiah 26:10(a) (RSV)*

Before we look at the wicked more closely, both in this chapter and in the Book Six, we need to make clear at the start that the wicked can be divided into two main sub-groups:

**a) the non-religious wicked**

These are the people who *openly reject God*, despise His Word, and live for themselves, without regard for right or wrong. They are dishonest, hard-faced and aggressive. They would never be mistaken for Christians.

**b) the religious wicked**

These *believe in God and may be 'churchgoers'*. However they are not sincere or genuine and have not been born again. They are false and their hearts are hard and unrepentant. They look and sound like Christians, or at least like churchgoers, which most people assume to be the same thing as a Christian. However, they are not real:

*They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.*

*Titus 1:16 (RSV)*

The same kind of people existed even in the days of the Old Testament. There were some Jewish people who were not sincere and who did not truly believe, even though they sounded and acted as if they were believers:

*Hear this, O house of Jacob,  
who are called by the name of Israel,  
and who came forth from the loins of Judah;  
who swear by the name of the Lord,  
and confess the God of Israel,  
but not in truth or right.  
Isaiah 48:1 (RSV)*

God recognises that such people are wicked, no matter how much time they spend in religious rituals and liturgy. He does not accept them, or their prayers, because He knows they are *false* and because they have *no regard for His Word, the Bible*:

<sup>21</sup> *"I hate, I despise your feasts,  
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.*

<sup>22</sup> *Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them,*

*and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts  
I will not look upon.*  
<sup>23</sup> *Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.*  
*Amos 5:21-23 (RSV)*

<sup>16</sup> *But to the wicked God says:  
“What right have you to recite my statutes,  
or take my covenant on your lips?”*  
<sup>17</sup> *For you hate discipline,  
and you cast my words behind you.*  
<sup>18</sup> *If you see a thief, you are a friend of his;  
and you keep company with adulterers.*  
<sup>19</sup> *“You give your mouth free rein for evil,  
and your tongue frames deceit.*  
*Psalm 50:16-19 (RSV)*

So, the wicked are not limited only to those who do not believe in God. Those who believe in God, or claim to, can also be wicked, if they disregard God, or assume that they are immune to His judgment. For a person even to think such things of God, they would have to believe in Him in the first place. But, although they know He exists, *they do not honour Him or fear Him.*

Regrettably, that is true of many people who are in churches. They have no fear of God and, in particular, no fear of being judged by Him. They do not believe that God sees what they do or, even if they do, they don't care anyway:

<sup>11</sup> *He says to himself, “God has forgotten;  
He has hidden His face; He will never see it.”*  
*Psalm 10:11 (NASB)*

If a person believes in God and knows the Bible then the extent of their responsibility for their sin is much greater than that of a person who does not know God's Word. To know what God has said about an issue, *but then to ignore it*, is surely far more wicked than the sins of those who don't know anything about God or His Word:

<sup>5</sup> *“Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her. <sup>6</sup> But she has rebelled against My ordinances more wickedly than the nations and against My statutes more than the lands which surround her; for they have rejected My ordinances and have not walked in My statutes.’*  
*Ezekiel 5:5-6 (NASB)*

King Solomon tells us that even where there is justice and righteousness there is also wickedness. It gets everywhere, because we are all a mixture. There is an element of wickedness, or the potential for wickedness, in every one of us:

*Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.*  
*Ecclesiastes 3:16 (RSV)*

Solomon also says that it is possible to offer a sacrifice to God, but for it still to be viewed as evil, because it is a “*sacrifice of fools*”:

*Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil.*  
*Ecclesiastes 5:1 (RSV)*

There is a sobering passage in the book of Numbers where God speaks of almost an entire generation of Israelites and describes them collectively as wicked. They were the generation who were adults at the point when God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He brought them through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, ready to enter the Promised Land.

However, He declares that the vast majority of them will not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. They forfeited their *inheritance*, though not necessarily their *salvation*. God then kept them wandering in the desert wilderness for 38 years while He waited for all of those who were over the age of 20 at the time of the Exodus to die of disease or old age:

*<sup>26</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, <sup>27</sup> “How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. <sup>28</sup> Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: <sup>29</sup> your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, <sup>30</sup> not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. <sup>31</sup> But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected. <sup>32</sup> But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. <sup>33</sup> And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. <sup>34</sup> According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.’ <sup>35</sup> I, the LORD, have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this wicked congregation who are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall come to a full end, and there they shall die.”*

*Numbers 14:26-35 (ESV)*

God was angry with that generation because they had behaved wickedly. That is how He viewed their attitudes and their unbelief. Yet, what had they done? This is the alarming part, because they actually sound rather like our modern Western churches. These are the kind of things they did:

a) They *grumbled* against God because of their circumstances. They complained about their food and the initial lack of water and about being in the wilderness. But most of us grumble and complain about far smaller things than those and we can be equally ungrateful.

b) They *had a lot of knowledge, for which God held them accountable*. They had personally witnessed, with their own eyes, a series of extraordinary miracles. The greatest of these was for each of them to walk through the Red Sea with the water stacked up as a wall to their left and right. Then they saw it come crashing down on the Egyptian army pursuing them. Yet once that series of miracles was over they quickly began to *doubt God’s promises* and to question whether He would even provide food and water for them. But the truth is that most of us have had similar doubts. Admittedly, we have not seen such spectacular miracles, as they saw, but we do have the Bible, in which these and many other miracles are written about. So, we have a very large measure of knowledge, for which we too are going to be held accountable.

c) They *criticised and blamed God* for their circumstances. They also slandered and misrepresented Him. Some even said that God must hate them because He was exposing them to such hardship and inconvenience. In saying such things they defamed God’s character. They also discouraged and misled younger people and caused their view of God to be tarnished.

d) They *did not sufficiently value the promises* that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were all the beneficiaries of those promises. Yet, like Esau, they had failed to value the promises. They did not appreciate the great privilege of being included within God’s chosen people. Again, many of us do exactly the same and despise our birth right. We don’t value God’s promises in particular and His Word in general.

The point is that when the people of Israel behaved in these ways, or displayed these attitudes, God viewed them as wicked. That particular generation which came out of Egypt as adults in the Exodus were regarded as especially wicked. They had heard God's Word through Moses and had also directly witnessed God's miraculous power. Therefore, on that basis, they were judged very severely.

They were held accountable for their attitudes in the light of the enormous *knowledge* and other *privileges* they had been granted. Few of us would think of them as an example of wicked people. We would be more likely to have in mind drug-dealers and paedophiles. But that is not necessarily how God sees it.

It is wicked to have been given knowledge, understanding, blessings and advantages and yet to *ignore those things* and act like an unbeliever instead. It seems likely that God sees such attitudes as more serious, and more wicked, than the actions of those who steal and get drunk. At any rate, there is no basis whatsoever for us to be complacent, because we, at least in the West, have been given far more access to God's Word than the Israelites of that generation ever had.

At any rate, none of us can assume that because we know the Bible, and believe in God, we cannot therefore be viewed as wicked. Perhaps there are many of us who will be surprised and appalled, when we face Jesus in judgment, to find out that His appraisal of us is far worse than the way we see ourselves.

Another surprising example of where a group of people are described by God as being wicked is the generation of Israelites which asked Samuel to give them a King. The point is that God wanted for Himself to be their King. But the people wanted a man as their king, like all the other nations. God considered their request for a king, and their implicit rejection of Him, to be wickedness:

*And Samuel said to all Israel, "Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you.*

*1 Samuel 12:1 (ESV)*

*<sup>6</sup>And Samuel said to the people, "The LORD is witness, who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. <sup>7</sup>Now therefore stand still that I may plead with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous deeds of the LORD that he performed for you and for your fathers. <sup>8</sup>When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. <sup>9</sup>But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab. And they fought against them.*

*<sup>10</sup>And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.' <sup>11</sup>And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. <sup>12</sup>And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king. <sup>13</sup>And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you.*

*1 Samuel 12:6-13 (ESV)*

*<sup>16</sup>Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. <sup>17</sup>Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call upon the LORD, that he may send thunder and rain. And you shall know and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking for yourselves a king." <sup>18</sup>So Samuel called upon the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.*

*1 Samuel 12:16-18 (ESV)*

The way God viewed this situation was that the Israelites were effectively rejecting Him. For them to do that, despite knowing who He is and what He had done for them, was wickedness. He evidently saw them as being answerable, and accountable, for all the knowledge they had and for all their other privileges.

So, for people in their position to despise God, to prefer a human king and to want to be like other nations instead of being God's special people, was a gross insult to God. Again, that has got to make us consider our own position. Are we not at least equally guilty of the same attitudes, and of rejecting God in favour of some other person or thing?

Some of the religious wicked *know* that they are false. However, some are deceived themselves and so are not necessarily aware of how wicked they are. Many do not even realise that they are not real Christians. They fully assume that they are saved, or that everybody will be saved. However, they will get a terrible shock when they die. This group can be mistaken for Christians and they frequently are. However, *God knows those who are His, and those who aren't*. He makes no mistakes and He cannot be deceived.

In some ways, the religious wicked are the larger threat to the real Church. For one thing, they are more likely to be listened to and believed by others when they reject the truth of God's Word and preach myths and false doctrines of their own making, which are more to their liking. They then cause others to follow their false, man-made beliefs and to reject the truth. The judgment of God is going to fall on those who reject the truth, and who lead others to do so:

<sup>9</sup> *For this is a rebellious people, false sons,  
Sons who refuse to listen*

*To the instruction of the LORD;*

<sup>10</sup> *Who say to the seers, "You must not see visions";  
And to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right,  
Speak to us pleasant words,*

*Prophesy illusions.*

<sup>11</sup> *"Get out of the way, turn aside from the path,  
Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."*

<sup>12</sup> *Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel,  
"Since you have rejected this word  
And have put your trust in oppression and guile, and have relied on them,*

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore this iniquity will be to you*

*Like a breach about to fall,*

*A bulge in a high wall,*

*Whose collapse comes suddenly in an instant,*

<sup>14</sup> *Whose collapse is like the smashing of a potter's jar,*

*So ruthlessly shattered*

*That a sherd will not be found among its pieces*

*To take fire from a hearth*

*Or to scoop water from a cistern."*

*Isaiah 30:9-14 (NASB)*

Please also see below, later in this chapter, a discussion of some passages from the letter to the Hebrews from which it emerges that even *real* Christians, who have been genuinely saved and have begun to be *sanctified*, can fall away, *i.e. become apostate*, and join the ranks of the religious wicked. It is also made clear that they will end up in the Lake of Fire.

Even more alarmingly we are told that it is virtually impossible for such apostates to repent, and regain a real faith, once they have degenerated in this way. That is how seriously God takes all of this.

We need to be clear then, that when we are speaking of the wicked, we are not always referring to outright *unbelievers* who clearly aren't Christians. Sometimes we mean people *who look and sound like Christians*, and who *may once have been real Christians*, but have become apostate. Either way, whether they have *ceased to be real Christians*, or *never were real*, they are now false. Therefore, they are a danger to the real Church.

Please always keep these distinctions in mind in the pages that follow and within Book Six too. We shall repeatedly refer to 'the wicked', but it is important that you be aware, in each instance, which type, or sub-group, is being spoken of, i.e. the religious, or the non-religious, or both.

### **The wicked in general, whether religious or not**

Another name frequently applied to the wicked (and also to fools) is the *scoffer*. Such a person mocks and belittles the things that God considers precious. The values and priorities of a scoffer are the opposite of God's. Therefore, at the very least, a scoffer is automatically a fool. But many of them are also wicked as well:

***"Scoffer" is the name of the proud,  
haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.  
Proverbs 21:24 (RSV)***

Another feature of the wicked, which they also share with fools, is that *they do not fear God*. In particular, *they do not fear His judgment* and they do not expect ever to be found out, caught or punished. They believe that they can do whatever they wish and that there will be no adverse consequences for them:

***Transgression speaks to the wicked  
deep in his heart;  
there is no fear of God  
before his eyes.  
<sup>2</sup> For he flatters himself in his own eyes  
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.  
Psalm 36:1-2 (ESV)***

We hear of the wicked even back in Genesis chapter six. By that time in the Earth's history God had become dismayed. He regretted making mankind. Things had degenerated to such a low point that almost the whole population of the world was classified as wicked. The only exceptions were Noah and his family:

***Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.  
Genesis 6:5 (NASB)***

The situation became so grave that God chose to solve it by wiping out almost all of the people on the Earth, using a worldwide flood. That dramatic response indicates how seriously God takes wickedness. Moreover, He is going to do it again. Jesus will destroy all those who are wicked when He returns to the Earth at His second coming:

***For the ruthless will come to an end and the scorner will be finished,  
Indeed all who are intent on doing evil will be cut off;  
Isaiah 29:20 (NASB)***

*For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”<sup>2</sup> “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.<sup>3</sup> You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts.*

*Malachi 4:1-3 (NASB)*

Indeed, after the Millennium is over, the very Earth itself will be burned up and all wickedness will be fully and finally removed:

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.*

*2 Peter 3:10 (RSV)*

The wicked are at the far end of the spectrum. Not only are they fools, as defined earlier, they go even further. They are also arrogant and dishonest. Above all, they are *hard-hearted*. Therefore, they hate God, or they at least despise Him, i.e. under-value Him, whether they realise it or not. That is the case whether they are religious or not.

Moreover, *God hates the wicked*, and all that they stand for. He considers them an *abomination* and treats them as His *enemies*. If you are not convinced of all that, consider the following passages and take note of how strongly God feels and how resolved He is to confront and punish the wicked. I have included several passages because so many people find it hard to believe that God really does feel this strongly about the wicked:

<sup>4</sup>*You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.*

<sup>5</sup>*The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong.*

<sup>6</sup>*You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the LORD abhors.*

*Psalm 5:4-6 (NIV)*

<sup>31</sup>*Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways,*  
<sup>32</sup>*for the devious person is an abomination to the LORD, but the upright are in his confidence.*

<sup>33</sup>*The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous.*

<sup>34</sup>*Toward the scornors he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favour.*

*Proverbs 3:31-34 (ESV)*

<sup>20</sup>*Men of perverse mind are an abomination to the LORD, but those of blameless ways are his delight.*

<sup>21</sup>*Be assured, an evil man will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will be delivered.*

*Proverbs 11:20-21 (RSV)*

<sup>2</sup>*The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.* <sup>3</sup>*The LORD is slow to anger and*



*great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*

*Nahum 1:2-3 (ESV)*

*<sup>7</sup>The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.  
<sup>8</sup>But with an overflowing flood he will make a full end of his adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.*

*Nahum 1:7-8 (RSV)*

*<sup>9</sup>God scorns the wicked,  
but the upright enjoy his favour.  
Proverbs 14:9 (RSV)*

*<sup>26</sup>The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD,  
the words of the pure are pleasing to him.  
Proverbs 15:26 (RSV)*

*<sup>8</sup>Your hand will find out all your enemies;  
your right hand will find out those who hate you.  
<sup>9</sup>You will make them as a blazing oven  
when you appear.  
The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath;  
and fire will consume them.  
Psalm 21:8-9 (RSV)*

*All the wicked of the earth thou dost count as dross;  
therefore I love thy testimonies.  
Psalm 119:119 (RSV)*

*But God will strike the heads of his enemies,  
the hairy crown of him who walks in his guilty ways.  
Psalm 68:21 (ESV)*

*He will bring back on them their iniquity  
and wipe them out for their wickedness;  
the Lord our God will wipe them out.  
Psalm 94:23 (RSV)*

*<sup>1</sup>God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered;  
and those who hate him shall flee before him!  
<sup>2</sup>As smoke is driven away,  
so you shall drive them away;  
as wax melts before fire,  
so the wicked shall perish before God!  
Psalm 68:1-2 (ESV)*

Remember though not to make the mistake of assuming that when the Bible speaks of the wicked it means only spectacularly evil people, such as murderers, drug-dealers and dictators. It also includes many people who are *entirely ordinary*, but who have *proud, hard, dishonest hearts*. In particular they have *no willingness to listen to God or to repent*. They obstinately close their own ears until, eventually, they become deaf to God's convicting voice.

Moreover, that includes the religious wicked who are churchgoers but who are not sincere, or who are even outright apostates. They lack humility and have no love for the truth, no genuine repentance and

no fear of God. In fact, such falsely religious people are often the proudest and most hard-hearted of all. They are frequently also the most antagonistic to real Christians.

The wicked are very willing to lie. Again, that is the case, whether they are religious or not. They are also mean and selfish. They also have a contempt for God, i.e. for the real God, as opposed to the false god that insincere religious people create for themselves. The religious wicked develop a false image of God. It's a kind of rebranding exercise to make Him fit in with their own opinions and preferences. The wicked also have contempt for the godly, i.e. genuine Christians.

Real Christians are therefore hated by all of the wicked, but with particular venom by the falsely religious. Perhaps the main reason for that antagonism is that genuine Christians make false Christians feel convicted. Their very lives are a rebuke to the wicked, even when they aren't saying anything. As we have seen, wicked people do not like to be rebuked, however it is done.

Wicked people exist at every level of the social scale. They perhaps make up 20% to 30% of the population. It may be more. I don't know. Only God knows their exact numbers, and it will vary from country to country, but that is my personal guess.

God is determined to resist the wicked and to bring them into judgment, whatever type they may be. Ultimately, He will destroy them all. He classes them as His enemies. I emphasise that fact again, for the sake of those who find it hard to believe. Therefore consider these further verses:

*The LORD preserves all who love him;  
but all the wicked he will destroy.  
Psalm 145:20 (RSV)*

*God is a just judge,  
And God is angry with the wicked every day.  
Psalm 7:11 (NKJV)*

*The face of the LORD is against evildoers,  
to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.  
Psalm 34:16 (RSV)*

*Evil shall slay the wicked; and those who  
hate the righteous will be condemned.  
Psalm 34:21 (RSV)*

*<sup>1</sup>Why do you boast, O mighty man,  
of mischief done against the godly?  
All the day <sup>2</sup>you are plotting destruction.  
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,  
you worker of treachery.  
<sup>3</sup>You love evil more than good,  
and lying more than speaking the truth.  
<sup>4</sup>You love all words that devour,  
O deceitful tongue.  
<sup>5</sup>But God will break you down for ever;  
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;  
he will uproot you from the land of the living.  
Psalm 52:1-5 (RSV)*

Some readers may be surprised that I spoke of false Christians as having *contempt* for God, or at least that they *despise* the real God. I also spoke of them constructing a false god of their own, like a company which launches a rebranded product. Every false Christian that I have ever met has *redefined* or *rebranded* God in some way to suit their own beliefs, opinions, preferences, likes and dislikes. Above all, they do it to fit in with their own *denominational traditions*.

Any person whose focus is on their own *tradition* rather than on the Bible, and who is seeking to uphold their own *denomination* rather than the truth, is in danger of creating their own false god in place of the real God. Such a false god is then likely to tell them that real Christians need to be opposed, persecuted, and even killed, for the sake of defending that tradition or denomination. Throughout history, and also today, falsely religious people have felt able to justify such policies to themselves without much difficulty.

There was also wickedness amongst those who claimed to be believers in the days of the prophet Jeremiah. But in the passages below, note the kinds of things which God regards as wicked. The sins described are not spectacular ones. They include things like not having any fear of God, being stubborn and rebellious, telling lies, and giving (and accepting) false prophecies. The problem is that all of those things, and more besides, *are being done regularly in churches today* and on a larger scale than in Jeremiah's time:

- <sup>21</sup> *Now hear this, O foolish and senseless people,  
Who have eyes but do not see;  
Who have ears but do not hear.*
- <sup>22</sup> *'Do you not fear Me?' declares the LORD.  
'Do you not tremble in My presence?  
For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,  
An eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it.  
Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail;  
Though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it.*
- <sup>23</sup> *'But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;  
They have turned aside and departed.*
- <sup>24</sup> *'They do not say in their heart,  
"Let us now fear the LORD our God,  
Who gives rain in its season,  
Both the autumn rain and the spring rain,  
Who keeps for us  
The appointed weeks of the harvest."*
- <sup>25</sup> *'Your iniquities have turned these away,  
And your sins have withheld good from you.*
- <sup>26</sup> *'For wicked men are found among My people,  
They watch like fowlers lying in wait;  
They set a trap,  
They catch men.*
- <sup>27</sup> *'Like a cage full of birds,  
So their houses are full of deceit;  
Therefore they have become great and rich.*
- <sup>28</sup> *'They are fat, they are sleek,  
They also excel in deeds of wickedness;  
They do not plead the cause,  
The cause of the orphan, that they may prosper;  
And they do not defend the rights of the poor.*
- <sup>29</sup> *'Shall I not punish these people?' declares the LORD,  
'On a nation such as this  
Shall I not avenge Myself?'*
- <sup>30</sup> *"An appalling and horrible thing*

*Has happened in the land:  
31 The prophets prophesy falsely,  
And the priests rule on their own authority;  
And My people love it so!  
But what will you do at the end of it?  
Jeremiah 5:21-31 (NASB)*

*To whom shall I speak and give warning  
That they may hear?  
Behold, their ears are closed  
And they cannot listen.  
Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them;  
They have no delight in it.*

*Jeremiah 6:10 (NASB)*

### **The wickedness that has always been, and still is, within the Roman Catholic Church**

To begin with, consider, the many things which the Roman Catholic church has done over the centuries, and what it is still doing, to oppose genuine, biblical Christianity. Their power was at its peak for over a thousand years, from the fifth century until the sixteenth. During that time they dominated all of Europe. Even kings submitted to the popes and were heavily influenced by them.

All real Christianity was therefore driven underground. Throughout those centuries they persecuted and killed genuine, Bible-believing Christians, all over Europe. Such real Christians have always existed, in every century. However, it was in the years before and during the Reformation that we saw the Roman Catholic church at its most brutal, arrogant and devious. I will give a few examples of their behaviour.

*John Wycliff*, who lived from 1320 to 1384, was originally a Roman Catholic priest but he then began to study the Bible. Very few priests ever did that. Indeed, they still don't study it much today. As usually happens when Catholics begin to read the Bible, Wycliff saw that what he was reading did not match the doctrines, practices, traditions or behaviour that he had grown up with. He began to understand the real gospel, was born again, and became a Bible-believing Christian. That did not go down well with those in authority over him. They therefore tried to silence him, using various forms of pressure, including violence.

But Wycliff refused to be silenced. Instead he trained up hundreds of lay preachers who came to be called *Lollards*. They went round the country preaching the real gospel and telling people the truth about the Bible and also about the corruption in the Catholic church. Many of those men were then put to death by the Roman Catholic church, simply because they preached the real gospel, told the truth about Catholicism, and read the Bible in public to the ordinary people. Those were three activities which the Catholic hierarchy were determined to prevent.

The popes and bishops did not want anybody to read the Bible. They were well aware that if people did start to read it they would soon realise that what the Roman Catholic church had *become* was very different from what the Bible says the Church *should be*. Their entire power structure, and all of their pomp and vast wealth, would then have been threatened. There was no way they would permit that. However, Wycliff continued to defy them and went ahead and translated the New Testament into English.

So, Wycliff bravely persisted in the face of all their threats. He had a huge influence, both in England and in Europe, where his ideas and teaching had spread. In fact, his influence even went as far as what we now call the Czech Republic and reached a great man called *Jan Hus*. What Wycliff did also set the scene for the work of *Martin Luther*, *John Calvin* and others who later played key roles in the

Reformation of the sixteenth century. That is why Wycliff is now referred to as “*the morning star of the Reformation*”

John Wycliff would undoubtedly have been put to death by the Roman Catholic church were it not for the protection of a very powerful man called *John of Gaunt*. He was a wealthy aristocrat but also a genuine Bible-believing Christian. He therefore arranged for Wycliff to be accompanied by armed soldiers everywhere he went. They were needed to protect him from being assassinated by the Roman Catholic church. Without them, the Pope would certainly have killed him.

That is how venomous they were towards him and towards the real gospel. Therefore, when one day Wycliff was discussing the question of martyrdom, which many of his followers had suffered, he said:

“*Why do you talk of seeking the crown of martyrdom afar? Just preach the gospel of Christ to naughty prelates and martyrdom will not fail you*”.

So, moving back to our main point, would it be right to describe as *wicked* the popes and bishops, and those working for them, who opposed Wycliff and killed his followers? Am I exaggerating if I do so? Let’s just summarise some of what they did and then decide if it would be right to classify them as wicked:

- a) They forbade the translation of the Bible into any language other than Latin so that only priests could read it (not that many of them ever did bother to read it)
- b) They destroyed any English Bibles they found
- c) They put the Lollards to death for preaching the real gospel and telling the truth about Catholicism
- d) They wanted to put Wycliff himself to death and tried hard to do so.

It would surely be difficult to describe the actions and attitudes of those popes and bishops as anything other than wicked. They were proud, arrogant, devious and cruel. They were also selfish and greedy for money and power. Moreover, they had no respect for the truth, or for the Bible.

It was not just *Wycliff* and his followers that were treated in this brutal way. The popes and bishops did the same, and worse, to the Czech reformer, *Jan Hus*. He preached the true gospel fearlessly and was burned alive at the stake for doing so.

Likewise, *William Tyndale* (1494-1536) later translated a large part of the Bible into English from Greek and Hebrew, despite the violent opposition of the Pope and bishops of his day. He also preached the truth about the gospel and about the corrupt nature of the Roman Catholic church and its leaders. One day a Roman Catholic bishop said to Tyndale:

“*Well then, it [is] better to be without God’s laws than the Pope’s*”.

Tyndale boldly replied:

“*I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spares my life I will take care that a ploughboy knows more of the Scriptures than [you do]!*”

*Tyndale* too was protected by powerful men, but the Pope eventually lured him to his death by a deliberate lie. He was challenged to a debate and the Pope promised him safe passage there and back. So, he went to what he thought would be a ‘debate’ but when he got there they immediately arrested him and burned him at the stake. There was no debate.

Not only was this murder, but they also broke their solemn vow not to harm him. Again, his only 'crimes' were to speak the truth, to preach the real gospel, and to translate the Bible into English. Therefore, how can we call what they did to him anything other than wicked?

The brutality I have spoken of did not only occur during the Reformation, or the years leading up to it. This is the way that the Roman Catholic church *has always behaved, throughout its entire history*. Moreover, it still does. I say that because one common response, if one speaks of these atrocities, is for Catholics to say "*That was all in the past. Things have changed now, especially since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council of the 1960s*".

However, Roman Catholicism *has not changed*, at least not in any material or meaningful sense. Its essential *character and nature* are just as they have always been. Moreover they have never, at any stage, renounced or condemned any of the wicked things they have ever done, or the actions of any of their present or former leaders.

The only change that has taken place is that the Reformation freed many European nations from the *power* of the Popes and thus reduced the influence of Catholicism over them. If they still had the power today to put people to death they would do so, as they always did when they had got that power.

If you aren't convinced that the character of the leadership of the Roman Catholic church is the same as it always has been, you need only look at the worldwide scandal of the sexual abuse of children by paedophile priests. On top of that there is also the systematic cover-up of that abuse by the bishops, cardinals and popes.

Most of them, and probably all of them, were *well aware of what was going on*, and of the extent and gravity of what was being covered up. Yet they all looked after their institution, and did whatever was needed to protect it, rather than protect the thousands of children who were being abused, on an industrial scale, by priests.

For example, Pope John-Paul II, who 'reigned' from 1978 to 2005, and who was recently made a 'saint', consistently covered up reports of child abuse and refused to take any action against his clergy. When anyone spoke out or complained about paedophile priests, they were silenced rather than helped, and the priests concerned went completely unpunished. If there was any trouble locally the offending priests were just moved to another parish. Then they could just continue, as before, unchallenged and unsupervised.

If we look at just one small country, Austria, we see that, at the time of writing, the Catholic church there has paid out token compensation to 1800 victims of abuse. However, they did so on condition that each of those victims *must remain silent* about what was done to them. Moreover, *not even one Austrian priest or bishop has been removed from his position*, either for the abuse itself or for failing to tackle the abusers.

How can one find that approach to this crisis anything other than appalling? I don't just mean the initial abuse, but the way it was then mishandled. How can they possibly justify taking no action against any of the guilty priests? Moreover, why should the victims stay silent? It might well help them, to some extent, to speak about it.

The way the Catholic authorities have acted proves that there is no genuine repentance on their part, or even remorse. They appear to care only for their own reputation. However, I am not just picking on Austria, as if they were somehow worse than the rest. What happened there is typical of how this scandal has been handled all over the world.

This paedophilia and its subsequent cover-up has not just happened once or twice, here and there. It has been *happening systematically, in thousands of places, all over the world*. In fact, even now, we are generally only getting to hear of a fraction of the abuse that went on, and is still going on.

The organisation called SNAP – Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, represents 18,000 people from 79 countries who were sexually abused by priests. But that is only a reflection of the victims who are still alive today and are choosing to take some action about it. It seems clear that even that huge number is just the tip of an even vaster iceberg.

Moreover, we are mainly getting to hear of it in countries in which the majority of the population is not Roman Catholic. In the countries where they have a majority, and in the developing world, they find it much easier to suppress criticism, undermine witnesses and stop the police enquiring effectively into complaints.

### **The wickedness that has been, and still is, within the Reformed, Lutheran and other Protestant churches and in the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches too**

In case anyone thinks I am singling out the Roman Catholic church alone for criticism, I am not. It simply contains more doctrinal errors, and has done more wicked things, than any other church. But, it is far from being alone, either in making errors or in doing wicked things. Many other churches have also done very wrong things which can properly be called wicked, albeit on a smaller scale.

For example, some of the Reformers (by no means all) acted oppressively towards people who wanted to take the Reformation even further. Those Reformers who did oppress others displayed the same kind of pride, haughtiness and cruelty that the Popes had previously shown to them. Some of the Reformers, and those who took over the leadership of the new Protestant denominations, sought to impose their views by force.

They misused and abused their positions of power in similar ways to how the popes and bishops had always operated. One example of that is the Reformers' oppressive treatment of the Anabaptists, who preached the need for believers' baptism, instead of baptism for babies.

Likewise, in Geneva, *John Calvin* and his followers were creating a city which was supposedly made up entirely of '*the elect*'. They became the leaders not only of the church in Geneva but also of the city itself. They took over the councils, and also the civil and criminal courts, and began to make the laws and to enforce them. They became very domineering and forced people to go to church, as well as imposing dictatorial rules about conduct and speech.

They were proving by their own oppressive actions that the craving to control and dominate other people is deeply ingrained in the fallen human nature. It is by no means limited to Catholicism, or to any other hierarchical denomination. Any person who achieves absolute power, as some of the reformers did, just as the popes and bishops had done, is likely to become a dictator fairly soon.

One of the brutal things which happened in Geneva, was that *Calvin* had a part to play in bringing about the execution of a good man, *Michael Servetus*. He was put to death merely because he would not accept Calvin's theology and had challenged him on various points. Today, the supporters of John Calvin try to play down the extent of his personal involvement in that brutal episode, in which Servetus was *burned alive at the stake for his beliefs*. However, it is clear that Calvin was personally involved and that he acted like a pope.

An even more stark example is Martin Luther. He began well and said many true things as he stood up to the Catholic church. Consequently, he tends to be revered by those who admire his early actions and beliefs and there is a reluctance to hear about how Martin Luther ended up. However, the truth is that he became a heretic. For example, he rejected the letter of James as a "*letter of straw*" and taught

that it should not even be in the Bible. He did the same with the book of Revelation and urged people not to bother with it.

However, the real low point for Luther came towards the end of his life when he turned against the Jewish people and *publicly taught, and wrote, that they should be persecuted and killed*. These were not just unscripted off-the-cuff remarks, which he did not really mean to say and later regretted. He *deliberately and clearly taught that people everywhere should kill the Jews*. Therefore the sermons and writings of Martin Luther later became the theological foundation and justification for the Nazi holocaust.

Indeed, *Adolf Hitler* quoted extensively from Luther's teachings in his book, '*Mein Kampf*', in which he set out the manifesto of the Nazi Party. Moreover, Hitler was not misquoting, misunderstanding or exaggerating any of Luther's words. Neither was he taking them out of context. It was an accurate representation of what Luther had said and was in its proper context.

One very rarely hears about any of this, because it is not considered polite to speak ill of a "great man" like Luther. But the facts are what they are. What Luther taught, at least in his later years, was loathsome and evil, quite apart from his heretical views about the Scriptures. Therefore, if we have any regard for the truth, we need to be willing to take note of such facts and to speak of them openly, without hiding anything.

What therefore, do those brutal actions and policies of men like Luther and Calvin amount to? Would it be fair to call it wickedness? I think it would. Some of the reformers (not all) took on the very same haughty, autocratic ways as the popes and bishops, albeit not to the same extent. However, that was mainly because they never achieved the same levels of unlimited *power* that the popes had. If the reformers had had more power, some of them would have used it and been even more brutal than they already were.

We see the same authoritarian features being manifested today, although in less dramatic ways. The churches no longer have the power to execute anybody. However, there are still elements of controlling, manipulative and dominating leadership in all the churches. At least it has been present in all the ones I have ever seen. In some cases that abuse of authority is only at a low level. Fleshly, insecure men jockey for position and do whatever they feel they need to do to preserve their own position, status and privileges.

In many cases that behaviour reaches the level of outright wickedness. A surprisingly large number of church leaders lie. They also manipulate and dominate the people around them in order to get their own way. I have certainly come across several church leaders who have gone way beyond just being carnal, in the ordinary sense of that word. Some of them have undoubtedly acted wickedly towards me, and with deliberate intent. And that is just my own experience. Far worse things have been done to others.

**The religious wicked have the very same pride, arrogance, and desire to rule, whichever denomination they come from. They are not willing to be questioned or contradicted.**

One common feature which one sees amongst all of the religious wicked, of whatever background or denomination, is that they are proud and haughty. This is especially so with those who are '*clergy*'. They display this in many ways, for example by their love of the trappings of office and the power it gives them. They like their special clothes and to be held in honour.

In particular they also hate to be challenged, questioned or taught about something by anyone whom they view as their inferior. That is especially so when they are dealing with ordinary lay people, who are not '*clergy*'.



I describe such leaders, whatever denomination they come from, as having a '*clergy mentality*'. They come to believe that God has elevated them to a special status which is high above ordinary members of the church. They believe that God has appointed them to rule over His people. So, they see it as their place to *teach, not to be taught* and to *correct, not to be corrected*.

Few of them would ever say any of that out loud in express words, but that is how they think and it shows in their actions and tone. An example of this kind of haughty attitude is seen amongst the Pharisees, in John chapter nine, who spoke to the man born blind, to whom Jesus restores his sight:

<sup>24</sup> *A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."*

<sup>25</sup> *He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"*

<sup>26</sup> *Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"*

<sup>27</sup> *He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"*

<sup>28</sup> *Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!" <sup>29</sup> We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."*

<sup>30</sup> *The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. <sup>31</sup> We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. <sup>32</sup> Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."*

<sup>34</sup> *To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.*

*John 9:24-34 (NIV)*

These particular Pharisees were incensed at the very idea of an ordinary man having the impertinence to tell them something. They saw themselves as the only ones who should be doing the telling and they were not willing to be questioned or corrected by '*non-clergy*'. That attitude is by no means confined to the Pharisees of the first century, nor to the established Christian denominations. I have come across it consistently, in *virtually every church I have ever attended*.

There has been that same kind of haughtiness wherever I have tried to question leaders, or where I have attempted to tell them something, or contradict them. They have seen it as exclusively *their role to teach me, not mine to teach them*. Moreover, it seemed that the better, and more accurate, my point was, the more they resented it.

So, they were not objecting to me making *inaccurate or unjustified* remarks. They were upset by the very fact that they were *true*. However, they were mainly objecting to the idea that someone would have the nerve to '*answer back*', i.e. to fail to show them the deference that they expect to receive.

Yet, the truth is that we are *all* supposed to teach, correct, question, challenge and inform each other. It is to be done by everybody without any distinction based on supposed rank, role or status. The only position of authority that the Bible recognises is within a local church. That is the position of an '*elder*'. But that just means a mature man, who is recognised as a leader within a local church. They were not '*clergy*' of the kind that we have today. Neither were they '*ordained*'. They did not wear fancy clothes or have any special status or powers.

Moreover an elder (also known as a bishop or *episcopos*) was not high and lifted up. On the contrary, he too was meant to submit, defer and listen *to all other members of the church*, not just to those of a particular role or status. In short, we are *all* meant to submit to *all* other believers and fellow workers when they have something to say to teach or correct us. Thus, when the circumstances require it, an elder is just as much under a duty to submit to non-elders as they are to submit to him.

We are all meant to be humble, gentle, and cooperative, whether we are leaders or not. Therefore, from time to time, we are all called upon to submit to each other, even to the youngest and lowliest of Christians. For example, if a 16 year old is in charge of the sound desk or overhead projector at church, then we would all be under a duty to submit to him while he attends to those tasks:

*<sup>15</sup> Now, brethren, you know that the household of Steph'anas were the first converts in Acha'ia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; <sup>16</sup>I urge you to be subject to such men and to every fellow worker and laborer.*

*1 Corinthians 16:15-16 (RSV)*

Whenever you come across haughtiness and a proud spirit in a leader it should immediately put you on your guard. It does not necessarily mean that that leader is wicked. He may just be foolish and carnal in his approach. Perhaps he will grow out of such attitudes as he matures. That is possible, though unlikely.

It is more likely that such a leader, having already developed an attitude of seeing himself as being above correction or instruction, may degenerate further, to the extent that he does eventually become properly wicked. That is one reason why you need to beware of, and draw back from, proud, arrogant, *clergy-minded* leaders.

For more detail on this theme please refer to Book Eight in this series, entitled '*Biblical and unbiblical churches*'. It is a very important issue, and one which you are bound to come across, especially if you start to question their teaching or decisions.

**The wicked are brass-faced, defiant and bold, even when they are exposed and ought to be ashamed**

In my experiences with the wicked, both religious and non-religious, one of their most consistent features is that they are *brass-faced*, even when they are proved to be acting wrongly. Indeed, that is when they are at their most defiant and unrepentant. Brazen, unrepentant defiance and petulance are some of the classic signs of wickedness that we should be looking out for:

*A wicked man puts on a bold face,  
but the upright gives thought to his ways.  
Proverbs 21:29 (ESV)*

*This is the way of an adulterous woman:  
She eats and wipes her mouth,  
And says, "I have done no wrong."  
Proverbs 30:20 (NASB)*

*O Lord, do not thy eyes look for truth?  
Thou hast smitten them,  
but they felt no anguish;  
thou hast consumed them,  
but they refused to take correction.  
They have made their faces harder than rock;  
they have refused to repent.  
Jeremiah 5:3 (RSV)*

I have confronted wicked people on many occasions, both religious and non-religious ones. Partly that is because God has given me jobs that required me to do that. I was a police officer and then a solicitor and I have also been an employer of a great many staff, over the years. So there have been many different times where I have needed to confront wicked people, firstly criminals, but also

employees, who have been behaving badly. However, I have also had to do it *within churches*, and on a number of occasions.

At such times I have been appalled to discover that *exactly the same techniques and attitudes* are found in wicked, false churchgoers, and even wicked church leaders, as are found in wicked, false staff, or even in the criminals I have dealt with.

If anything, the dishonesty and pride of falsely religious people is worse than that of the non-religious. That is not actually surprising, if one thinks about it. Their greater knowledge of God, and of the Bible, makes their behaviour all the more blameworthy, because it makes them more accountable. Moreover, it is indicative of *hypocrisy* rather than just *ignorance*.

In my experience of dealing with the wicked, I find that the hardest thing for me to get used to is their inability to feel shame, even when they are publicly exposed. Not only do they not repent; *they do not even feel embarrassed*. It is like water off a duck's back. They do not blush or hide themselves.

On the contrary, of the many wicked people I have confronted, whether religious or non-religious, most have gone the other way. Even after being exposed in their wrongdoing, they show their faces immediately, without any embarrassment at all. They carry on and strut about as if nothing had happened. They also socialise openly, even amongst those who know what they have done, and they display no trace of shame or awkwardness:

***"...but the unjust knows no shame".  
Zephaniah 3:5 (b) (RSV)***

***Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?  
No, they were not at all ashamed;  
they did not know how to blush.  
Therefore they shall fall among the fallen;  
when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,  
says the LORD.***

***Jeremiah 8:12 (RSV)***

### **The difference between being wicked and merely being sinful, as we all are**

Let us address another area of confusion. When the Bible speaks of the wicked it does not imply that those who are not classified as *wicked* are therefore not *sinful*. They are of course still sinful, even if they aren't wicked. Everybody is sinful, even the most godly, wise person you know. Even the prophet Daniel was a sinner, as were Job, Joseph, David and the apostle Paul.

We all continue to have a flesh nature, even if we are a real Christian. Anything that we do in, or through, our flesh nature is sin and cannot please God. At the very least, it falls short of God's standards, which is what sin is. That is why He cannot be pleased by such conduct:

***<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; <sup>8</sup> and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.***

***Romans 5:8-5 (RSV)***

Basically anything we do that does not proceed from faith is sin. That is firstly because it falls short of God's perfect standard. It is also because, if it does not come from faith, then it must come from our own flesh. That automatically makes it sin, even if it looks good to us:

***“.....for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin”***

***Romans 14:23 (b) (RSV)***

However, there are some levels and categories of sin which go farther than the ordinary sins which we all commit. These things would require us to be reclassified as wicked, rather than as ordinary sinners:

***All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal.***

***1 John 5:17 (RSV)***

So, when we speak of wickedness we do not mean ordinary sin, of which we are all guilty. It goes beyond that. The wicked sink to a lower level than the ordinary sinner, and in various ways. Even so, they are still not necessarily spectacular or extraordinary. Most of them look and sound very ordinary. Their key features are that they are *hard-hearted* and *devious* and that their *consciences are seared*. Moreover, they are not moved by pity, and they speak arrogantly:

***<sup>10</sup>They close their hearts to pity;  
with their mouths they speak arrogantly.***

***Psalm 17:10 (RSV)***

The wicked are dishonest and devious and tend also to be two-faced flatterers. They say one thing to a person's face and another thing behind their back:

***They speak falsehood to one another;  
With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.***

***Psalm 12:2 (NASB)***

The wicked do not merely ignore God and real Christians. They oppose both, whether consciously or unconsciously. Many times a wicked person will react adversely to any expression of the truth of the gospel, or even to being in the presence of a godly person. Frequently the wicked seem to have no conscious understanding of *why* they do that. Often it is simply that their flesh nature doesn't like the reborn human spirit in the godly person. Their flesh therefore reacts against it and that causes the wicked person to lash out.

However, it goes beyond that. A wicked person is also likely to be strongly influenced by demons. The more wicked you become, the more you open yourself to be influenced by demons. Therefore, when a wicked man meets a godly person, then even as they enter the room, and before anyone says a word, hostility will often spring up in him. Often it is the demon accompanying him which alerts him to the nature of that godly person. It whips up his antagonism by getting his flesh nature to react, even more than it would ordinarily.

The wicked man acts arrogantly and without any fear of God. He is convinced that he will never face God's judgment or be called to give any account of how he has lived:

***Why does the wicked renounce God,  
and say in his heart, “Thou wilt not call to account”?***

***Psalm 10: 13 (RSV)***

***Woe to those who go to great depths  
to hide their plans from the Lord,  
who do their work in darkness and think,  
“Who sees us? Who will know?”***

***Isaiah 29:15 (NIV)***

The wicked go further in their sin than ordinary sinners. Moreover, they are not ashamed of their deeds. Instead they lift them up and display their beliefs and their actions brazenly. In the end, where the wicked are allowed to gain the upper hand in a society, then their sin will be paraded openly and brazenly. It is just as we see in our own day, where homosexuality is thrust at us and treated as if it was something to be proud of, rather than something unnatural:

***<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, <sup>27</sup>and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.***

***Romans 1:26-27 (RSV)***

Likewise, abortion is aggressively proclaimed as being a so-called ‘*human right*’ when in fact it is a terrible crime in God’s eyes. The wicked therefore rise up in their pride and strut about assertively and brazenly at times in history, such as our own day, when their evil values prevail and things that are vile are exalted. They quickly sense when they are in the ascendant and that encourages them to go further, and do more, than they would in better times:

***The wicked strut about on every side  
When vileness is exalted among the sons of men.  
Psalm 12:8 (NASB)***

Therefore, if evil is on the rise in a nation or business, then the wicked will rise up and show themselves openly. However, in better times, the influence of godly people and of righteous laws will restrain them and they will keep a lower profile. So the wicked tend to come out when it is ‘dark’, like cockroaches do. That is exactly what the Nazis and Nazi sympathisers did in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

When it was evil’s hour in Germany, the wicked grew rapidly in numbers and also *in their boldness and willingness to come out into the open*. They joined the Nazi Party, the SS, the Gestapo and so on and eagerly embraced Nazi ideology. But then, in May 1945, they all vanished away overnight when Germany lost the war. It suddenly became impossible to find anybody who admitted to having ever been a Nazi.

It was as if Germany had always been a nation of Hitler-opposers when, in fact, it was nothing of the sort. The reality was that Germany from 1933 – 1945 was a place where there were advantages to be had from being openly wicked. Therefore, those whose hearts were already wicked, or going that way, seized their opportunity.

The wicked are also identifiable by the fact that they have such a strong tendency to hate:

***Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.  
Psalm 25:19 (RSV)***

***Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.....  
Psalm 69:4(a) (NASB)***

The wicked particularly hate the real God, the real gospel, and any real Christian. When the wicked come across any person who is telling the truth about God and the Bible then they will instinctively lash out and respond with hatred:

***<sup>14</sup>The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows,  
to bring down the poor and needy,***

*to slay those who walk uprightly;  
Psalm 37:14 (RSV)*

*The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him.  
Psalm 37: 32 (RSV)*

*But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty,  
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.*

<sup>20</sup>*Those who render me evil for good  
accuse me because I follow after good.  
Psalm 38:19-20 (ESV)*

### **Ordinary sinners tend to be opportunist, whereas the wicked conspire, scheme and plan their wicked deeds in advance**

Another sense in which the wicked go beyond the ordinary, common-or-garden sin that others display is that they tend to *scheme and conspire*. Much of their wrongdoing is *premeditated*. The wicked plan their sins in advance. They come to situations prepared, with a plot already worked out, by which they can more effectively lie, cheat or do harm.

By contrast, an ordinary sinner, i.e. one who is foolish, simple, or even wise, tends to sin spontaneously. He does it in unplanned ways, as and when opportunities or temptations arise. That is still sin, but it does not have the same devious, conspiratorial quality that the wicked display:

*For, behold, the wicked bend the bow,  
They make ready their arrow upon the string  
To shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.  
Psalm 11:2 (NASB)*

<sup>14</sup>*Behold, the wicked man conceives evil,  
and is pregnant with mischief, and brings forth lies.*

<sup>15</sup>*He makes a pit, digging it out,  
and falls into the hole which he has made.  
Psalm 7:14-15 (RSV)*

The wicked are particularly likely to oppose and persecute the godly. Partly that is due to the hatred they feel for them, but it is also because it suits the purposes of their demon guides that they should do all the harm they can to God's people. That is one reason why it is right that we should specifically pray for God's protection from the wicked.

If you read the Psalms you will see that this is a frequent subject for prayer, especially in those that King David wrote. He was a mighty man, but he was fully aware of the harm that the wicked can do and therefore of his need for God's help and protection in dealing with them. Accordingly, we need to pray as David did:

<sup>1</sup>*Deliver me, O LORD,  
from evil men; preserve me from violent men,  
<sup>2</sup> who plan evil things in their heart,  
and stir up wars continually.  
<sup>3</sup>They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's,  
and under their lips is the poison of vipers.  
<sup>4</sup>Guard me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;  
preserve me from violent men,  
who have planned to trip up my feet.*

<sup>5</sup>*Arrogant men have hidden a trap for me,  
and with cords they have spread a net,  
by the wayside they have set snares for me.*  
*Psalm 140:1-5 (RSV)*

*Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,  
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.*  
*Psalms 71:4 (ESV)*

*Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people,  
from the deceitful and unjust man  
deliver me!*  
*Psalm 43:1 (ESV)*

### **It is far from obvious who the wicked are, especially those who are inside churches**

It is often far from obvious who the wicked are. They are not always easy to recognise, especially if you are not yet a mature Christian, but even if you are. I have come across many people in my work as a policeman, and then as a lawyer, who were crude and foul-mouthed. Some were even persistent criminals. *Yet, they were not necessarily wicked*, even though one might imagine that they would be.

As I got to know such people better, underlying qualities of kindness, generosity and decency often emerged. Conversely, there have been others I have met who seemed very respectable at first sight, or on first hearing them, such that you would never guess they were wicked. But it later emerged that they were, because they were so hard-hearted, stingy, devious, malicious, and contemptuous towards God.

Some of the criminals I have prosecuted have had better attitudes, and been more genuine, than some of the supposedly 'respectable', professional people that I also deal with. You have to look beneath the surface and not be misled by mere appearances based on the person's status, wealth or cultured manners. Such things can easily deceive you and cause you to misjudge them.

One's view of a person can therefore alter, in either direction, as more facts emerge. One certainly cannot judge by mere appearances, such as by a person's *job*, or *where they live*. That is far too simplistic. Indeed, those things are irrelevant. Jesus warned us against judging by such superficial factors:

***Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."***  
*John 7:24 (RSV)*

Thus, one cannot just assume that a criminal or a prostitute is necessarily wicked. They could be, but *they may well not be*. Equally, we could meet a lawyer or banker, or even a church leader, and therefore assume that he cannot be wicked, only to find out later that he is. I can actually think of a number of church leaders I have come across who were, so far as I could discern, clearly wicked.

They were motivated by personal ambition, had cold, hard hearts, a lying tongue, and they regularly manipulated others. Moreover, so far as I could see, they had no fear of God whatsoever. Thus they could comfortably preach a sermon, or lead worship, and then go on to lie, use others, control people and abuse their position. They did so without feeling any shame, or being the least bit uncomfortable. Such leaders did the same in Jeremiah's day:

<sup>11</sup>***Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness, says the LORD.*** <sup>12</sup> ***Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they***

*shall be driven and fall; for I will bring evil upon them in the year of their punishment, says the LORD. <sup>13</sup>In the prophets of Sama'ria I saw an unsavory thing: they prophesied by Ba'al and led my people Israel astray. <sup>14</sup>But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomor'rah." <sup>15</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: "Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and give them poisoned water to drink; for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone forth into all the land."*

*Jeremiah 23:11-15 (RSV)*

Such carnal and apostate believers seem to me to fall very clearly into the camp of the wicked, however 'respectable' they may be and whatever leadership position they may occupy. Indeed, their wickedness is all the more intense, given that they know so much more and are, therefore more accountable and have transgressed more directly.

In other words, they have sinned more in *knowingly disobeying God's Word* than an unbeliever does, who possibly had no knowledge to begin with, and had never even seen a Bible. The sins of an outright unbeliever might well be *more visible and obvious*, but the sins of a false Christian or an apostate are probably *more serious*, from God's perspective.

Therefore we need to get into line with God and start to be more discerning and see people as He sees them. Have you ever noticed that the gospel accounts show that *not one of the other disciples of Jesus ever realised that Judas Iscariot was false?* Not only did they not realise the *scale* of the problem, they did not seem to notice *any* problem with him at all:

*<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." <sup>22</sup> The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.*

*John 13:21-22 (NASB)*

One cannot even say that Judas had only degenerated into that condition of wickedness very shortly beforehand. On the contrary, we are told that he was already a thief, and had been stealing regularly since long before the time when he betrayed Jesus:

*<sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, <sup>5</sup>"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?" <sup>6</sup>Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.*

*John 12:4-6 (NASB)*

The clear impression one gets is that Judas had been false from the very outset and had never been a genuine, believer at any stage. If so, we have to face the fact that he was, nevertheless, able to *appear* to be a believer and a disciple, for three and a half years. And he was able to do that so convincingly that none of the disciples suspected him of anything.

Note that when Jesus said that one of them would betray Him, none of them said or thought "*I'll bet it's Judas – I've always thought there was something not right about him*". Far from it. We are told above that the disciples were "*at a loss to know of which one He was speaking*". Thus we can conclude that they saw nothing wrong or unusual about Judas' speech or actions. He seemed to be one of them, and to be genuine.

Therefore, if even the apostles could be so effectively deceived by Judas, and so unable to see that he was false, why should you assume that you are going to be able to identify false/bogus/apostate Christians easily? Sometimes they can be spotted straight away, because they stand out a mile. But very often they don't.



Thus, we cannot always easily, or immediately, discern the real nature of those we are dealing with, whether in churches or outside in the world. If we think we can then we are deluding ourselves. We can all get it wrong, especially if we are too quick to form a view. Sometimes it takes quite a long time to correctly weigh up a person's character. Nevertheless, that is what we need to *aim* to do and to begin to *learn how* to do.

The only sure way of knowing what someone is like is to assess the *fruit* that their lives produce. When you are eventually in a position to do that, you can end up being surprised in either direction. In the end, a man's wickedness shows itself in every part of his life. It is what he is. It defines him and the fruit that he produces can be identified and assessed, provided you are looking for it.

If you aren't looking at all, then you won't see anything. But if you are alert and vigilant you will see the evidence, because the wicked cannot stop themselves from producing wicked fruit and behaving wickedly. Their nature manifests itself in their actions:

***"As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness';  
1 Samuel 24:13(a) (NASB)***

As with the fool, the wicked man ignores, and even rejects, God. Every wicked man starts off simple, and then becomes a fool. But his decision to ignore God eventually leads him downwards to engage in many other kinds of sin and depravity. Eventually he moves into open and blatant rebellion. That is how a fool 'graduates' into being a wicked man. That is where every man's life is heading if he ignores or rejects God. It will always lead to degeneration and decline.

Quite possibly, that descent will be sufficient to qualify him to be classified as wicked. For some people the pace of that decline intensifies as God "*gives them up*" That means He hands them over and allows them to sink as low as they wish to go. God eventually does that when He sees, after spending a period of time trying to get them to repent, that they are determined not to acknowledge Him:

***Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,***

***Romans 1:24 (RSV)***

***<sup>28</sup>And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. <sup>29</sup> They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips,***

***Romans 1:28-29 (RSV)***

These are the kind of things that the wicked do. But *it all begins with ignoring God* and not *acknowledging* Him. That's all it takes for any of us to get on to this downward spiral from being simple, to being a fool, and then eventually becoming wicked.

### **The non-religious wicked very rarely become Christians**

Experience indicates that there is very little hope for the wicked to be saved. By the time they have sunk to that level, they rarely ever choose to repent. They have already travelled a long way downhill by then. However, no matter how low they sink, they could still repent *if they wished to*. They just *don't usually want to*. The people who do choose to repent are mostly drawn from the ranks of the simple and, to a lesser extent, fools. But the wicked seldom repent or change their ways:

***"Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.***

***Daniel 12:10 (NASB)***

Also, it is because the wicked have no interest in, or respect for, the Bible:

***Salvation is far from the wicked,  
for they do not seek thy statutes.  
Psalm 119:155 (RSV)***

***To whom shall I speak and give warning,  
that they may hear?  
Behold, their ears are closed,  
they cannot listen;  
behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn,  
they take no pleasure in it.  
Jeremiah 6:10 (RSV)***

The wicked man does not often choose to listen or respond, even when he is shown God's kindness. He does not understand or respect goodness or mercy. These are alien concepts to him and he despises them. He wrongly assumes that they are signs of weakness. The wicked man therefore deals wickedly, even when he is with the upright (the wise and godly). He is oblivious to God's majesty and grace, even when it is straight in front of him:

***Though the wicked is shown favour,  
He does not learn righteousness;  
He deals unjustly in the land of uprightness,  
And does not perceive the majesty of the LORD.  
Isaiah 26:10 (NASB)***

Because of the way the wicked think and act, they are far away from God. However, it is also true to say that He is far from them. In a sense He keeps the wicked at arm's length. That makes it even less likely that they will ever find God and be saved:

***For though the LORD is high,  
he regards the lowly;  
but the haughty he knows from afar.  
Psalm 138:6 (RSV)***

Nevertheless, the fact remains that until the moment we die, the offer of the gospel is always available, even to the wicked. If they want to they can repent and be saved. So, even though very few of them actually choose to accept that offer, it is still made. Therefore, we do need to share the gospel with the wicked. We must not keep it from them or assume that they would never respond. Sometimes they do repent and God is willing to receive them, and save them, if they do:

***Let the wicked forsake his way  
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
And let him return to the LORD,  
And He will have compassion on him,  
And to our God,  
For He will abundantly pardon.  
Isaiah 55:7 (NASB)***

<sup>21</sup> ***“But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. <sup>22</sup> All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. <sup>23</sup> Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord GOD, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?  
Ezekiel 18:21-23 (NASB)***

<sup>30</sup> *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. <sup>31</sup>Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup>For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”*

*Ezekiel 18:30-32 (NASB)*

Perhaps the most famous example of wicked people being willing to repent comes from the book of Jonah. He went to Ninevah to tell the people of that city that God was about to destroy their city because of their wickedness. Surprisingly, the King of Ninevah chose to listen and to repent and he urged the whole city to do so as well. Amazingly, many of them did:

<sup>4</sup> *Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”<sup>5</sup> Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. <sup>6</sup>When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. <sup>7</sup>He issued a proclamation and it said, “In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. <sup>8</sup>But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. <sup>9</sup>Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.” <sup>10</sup>When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.*

*Jonah 3:4-10 (NASB)*

**Likewise, the *religious* wicked rarely ever become real Christians, or regain their faith if they become apostate. They prefer to maintain their positions of power within churches and are too proud and hard-hearted to repent**

In all my personal experience, I cannot think of even one falsely religious or apostate person that I have dealt with who has ever repented, changed and become a real Christian. If anything, the chances of a genuine repentance seem to be even lower amongst the religious wicked than with the unbelieving wicked. However, that ought not to surprise us. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that false religious people very rarely repent, or find their way back to having a real faith after having become apostate:

<sup>4</sup> *For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup>if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. <sup>7</sup>For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup>But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.*

*Hebrews 6:4-8 (RSV)*

Moreover, in case anybody thinks that the wickedness of the religious wicked is less serious than that of the ordinary unbelieving wicked, or that God will not punish the religious wicked, then consider this further passage from Hebrews:

<sup>26</sup> *For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup>but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. <sup>28</sup>A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two*

*or three witnesses. 29 How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

*Hebrews 10:26-31 (RSV)*

The passage above is clearly speaking of the Lake of Fire as the punishment that awaits these people. Yet it is referring to people who *used to be Christians*. Indeed, there is every reason to conclude that they were *real Christians*. We are told that they had '*receive[d] the knowledge of the truth*' and also that they had '*profaned the blood covenant by which he was sanctified*'.

That last point is really crucial. Nobody can even begin to be 'sanctified' until after they have been justified, i.e. forgiven and made righteous. So the person being spoken of must have been genuinely saved or born again. The point is that even after they had received God's grace and blessing in that way, they '*spurned the Son of God*' and '*outraged the Spirit of grace*'.

Therefore we are dealing here with a situation where a genuinely saved Christian chooses to turn away from the truth and to become apostate by speaking and acting in a manner which despises God's grace and dishonours His name. But what makes it alarming is that there is nothing unusual or rare about this. *It is happening on a massive scale today in the Western churches.*

More than any other thing, the falsely religious harden their hearts towards God's Word. Many of them ignore it and even those who read some of it are unmoved by it. They do not see that it is calling on them to repent and change. They harden their own hearts towards it, so that God's Word bounces off them and is not understood, or even noticed:

<sup>12</sup> *They made their hearts like adamant lest they should hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.* <sup>13</sup> *"As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the LORD of hosts,*

*Zechariah 7:12-13(RSV)*

Note that this is clearly *speaking of people who claim to be believers*, because we are told that their hardness towards God's Word results in Him refusing to hear their *prayers*. But they would not even attempt to pray in the first place unless they were religious, in some sense of the word, either genuinely or falsely.

### **What God will do to the wicked, both the falsely religious and the non-religious, in the present and in the future**

Whether the wicked are falsely religious or non-religious, they will all come under God's judgment in this life. He will intervene in their lives to oppose them and to bring judgment and retribution on them, even while they are still alive:

<sup>5</sup> *Him who slanders his neighbour secretly  
I will destroy.*

*The man of haughty looks and arrogant heart  
I will not endure.*

<sup>6</sup> *I will look with favour on the faithful in the land,  
that they may dwell with me;  
he who walks in the way that is blameless  
shall minister to me.*

<sup>7</sup> *No man who practices deceit*

*shall dwell in my house;  
no man who utters lies  
shall continue in my presence.  
<sup>8</sup> Morning by morning I will destroy  
all the wicked in the land,  
cutting off all the evildoers  
from the city of the LORD.*

*Psalm 101: 5-8 (RSV)*

*<sup>1</sup>Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. <sup>2</sup>They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. <sup>3</sup>Therefore thus says the LORD: behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks, and you shall not walk haughtily, for it will be a time of disaster.*

*Micah 2:1-3 (ESV)*

The wicked will inevitably receive God's opposition but they generally have no idea that it is Him who is opposing them and bringing them to ruin and disaster. So, the wicked will eventually fall, in all sorts of ways, but they do not usually realise *why* they are stumbling:

*But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know what makes them stumble.*

*Proverbs 4:19 (NIV)*

To a very large extent it is the wicked person's own evil deeds which ensnare him and keep him trapped. In other words, he brings judgment upon himself by his own actions. I have witnessed that on countless occasions with people I have dealt with, especially employees. The things that they do build up and eventually catch up with them and they are ruined:

*<sup>22</sup> The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them;  
the cords of their sins hold them fast.*

*<sup>23</sup> For lack of discipline they will die,  
led astray by their own great folly.*

*Proverbs 5:22-23 (NIV)*

*But a man who commits adultery has no sense;  
whoever does so destroys himself.*

*Proverbs 6:32 (NIV)*

God also specifically curses those who steal and lie. He makes sure that they are opposed and obstructed. In the end they will be cut off completely as a result of God's intervention in their lives:

*<sup>3</sup> Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off henceforth according to it, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off henceforth according to it. <sup>4</sup> I will send it forth, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in his house and consume it, both timber and stones."*

*Zechariah 5:3-4 (RSV)*

In the case of some wicked people, God even chooses to end their lives early. An example of this is a man called Er who was Judah's son and Jacob's grandson. He was wicked and God therefore ended his life. The Bible says God "*slew him*".

*But Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him  
Genesis 38:7 (RSV)*

We are not told what Er did, or how wicked he was, or how exactly God killed him. Perhaps it was through some illness. But the point is that God did it. Therefore He might choose to do the same in other specific cases too. It is certainly the case that the wicked have shorter lives on average, because God deliberately shortens their lives.

***The fear of the LORD prolongs life,  
But the years of the wicked will be shortened.  
Proverbs 10:27 (NASB)***

That reduction of life span is partly a direct judgment upon them, but also it is the consequence of the ways in which they choose to live. An obvious example is that of those who are violent will also encounter violence.

More importantly, people's own *lifestyle choices* have a major bearing in their life expectancy. In this regard, the clearest example is *sexual sin*, which is very highly correlated with the contracting of serious diseases and cancers which can either be fatal in themselves or shorten lives indirectly.

In that particular context, the most striking example of all is *homosexual activity between men*. The data gathered by insurance companies, based on health service figures, shows unmistakably that men who engage in homosexual sex have, on average, well over 20 years taken off their life expectancy. Many will die in their twenties, thirties and forties, such that, *on average* they tend not to live beyond their late fifties or early sixties.

You might imagine that statistical date of that kind would be seen as something which should be continually spoken about, with public information campaigns. We continually hear news of research projects and surveys concerning the dangers of processed sugar or fat or smoking etc. However, neither politicians nor the media, nor even doctors, choose to say *anything* about the health consequences for homosexuals of their chosen lifestyle.

There is, effectively, a wall of silence about their dramatically reduced life expectancy. These alarming statistics do not fit in with their politically correct ideology and so they are simply not willing to publicise any of it. However, apostle Paul spoke of it very directly and he also identified it as a judgment from God. As we saw earlier, Paul says that homosexuals were:

***"...receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error"  
Romans 1:27(b) (RSV)***

We can do the maths and see how the life expectancy of the wicked is shortened by simply adding up the average length of reigns of the wicked Kings of Israel and Judah, as compared to those of the good kings. There is a stark difference. The wicked ones almost all had short reigns and died young. Evidently, one of God's reasons for shortening their lives was to limit the amount of harm that they could do.

The only major exception to that rule was King Manasseh of Judah, who reigned for 52 years. However, he repented close to the end of his reign and was saved. He was also the grandfather of the most faithful King of Judah, i.e. Josiah. Those two facts may explain why God spared his life during the many years when he was doing so much evil.

It may not seem to us that the wicked are doing badly or suffering much in this life. In fact it often seems that the opposite is the case:

***<sup>3</sup>For I was envious of the arrogant,  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
<sup>4</sup>For they have no pangs;***

*their bodies are sound and sleek.*  
<sup>5</sup> *They are not in trouble as other men are;*  
*they are not stricken like other men.*  
<sup>6</sup> *Therefore pride is their necklace;*  
*violence covers them as a garment.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Their eyes swell out with fatness,*  
*their hearts overflow with follies.*  
<sup>8</sup> *They scoff and speak with malice*  
*; loftily they threaten oppression.*  
<sup>9</sup> *They set their mouths against the heavens,*  
*and their tongue struts through the earth.*  
<sup>10</sup> *Therefore the people turn and praise them;*  
*and find no fault in them.*  
<sup>11</sup> *And they say, "How can God know?*  
*Is there knowledge in the Most High?"*  
<sup>12</sup> *Behold, these are the wicked;*  
*always at ease, they increase in riches.*  
<sup>13</sup> *All in vain have I kept my heart clean*  
*and washed my hands in innocence.*  
*Psalm 73:3-13 (RSV)*

However, it is the way that things work out *in the end* that really counts. Whatever may happen in the short term, when God's judgment is delayed, the end result is inevitably the same, and the wicked are swept away:

<sup>16</sup> *But when I thought how to understand this,*  
*it seemed to me a wearisome task,*  
<sup>17</sup> *until I went into the sanctuary of God;*  
*then I perceived their end.*  
<sup>18</sup> *Truly thou dost set them in slippery places;*  
*thou dost make them fall to ruin.*  
<sup>19</sup> *How they are destroyed in a moment,*  
*swept away utterly by terrors!*  
<sup>20</sup> *They are like a dream when one awakes,*  
*on awaking you despise their phantoms.*  
*Psalm 73:16-20 (RSV)*

*For lo, those who are far from thee shall perish;*  
*thou dost put an end to those who are false to thee.*  
*Psalm 73:27 (RSV)*

*The clamour will resound to the ends of the earth,*  
*for the LORD has an indictment against the nations;*  
*he is entering into judgment with all flesh,*  
*and the wicked he will put to the sword,*  
*declares the LORD.'*  
<sup>32</sup> *"Thus says the LORD of hosts:*  
*Behold, disaster is going forth*  
*from nation to nation,*  
*and a great tempest is stirring*  
*from the farthest parts of the earth!*

<sup>33</sup> *“And those pierced by the LORD on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground.*

*Jeremiah 25:31-33 (ESV)*

<sup>23</sup> *Behold the storm of the LORD!*

*Wrath has gone forth,  
a whirling tempest;  
it will burst upon the head of the wicked.*

<sup>24</sup> *The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back  
until he has executed and accomplished  
the intentions of his mind.*

*In the latter days you will understand this.*

*Jeremiah 30:23-24 (ESV)*

However, much it may seem that the wicked get away with things and profit from their wrongdoing, there will inevitably come a time when God will confront them and give back to them what they did to other people:

*Woe to you, destroyer,  
who yourself have not been destroyed;  
you treacherous one,  
with whom none has dealt treacherously!  
When you have ceased to destroy,  
you will be destroyed;  
and when you have made an end of dealing treacherously,  
you will be dealt with treacherously.*

*Isaiah 33:1 (RSV)*

There is a cup of judgment which is being prepared for the wicked. Usually they get to drink some of it in this life, though not always. However, every wicked person will, in the end, have to drink every bit of that cup of judgment:

<sup>2</sup> *At the set time which I appoint*

*I will judge with equity.*

<sup>3</sup> *When the earth totters, and all its inhabitants,  
it is I who keep steady its pillars.*

<sup>4</sup> *I say to the boastful, "Do not boast,"  
and to the wicked, "Do not lift up your horn;*

<sup>5</sup> *do not lift up your horn on high,  
or speak with insolent neck."*

<sup>6</sup> *For not from the east or from the west  
and not from the wilderness comes lifting up;*

<sup>7</sup> *but it is God who executes judgment,  
putting down one and lifting up another.*

<sup>8</sup> *For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup,  
with foaming wine, well mixed;  
and he will pour a draught from it,  
and all the wicked of the earth  
shall drain it down to the dregs.*

<sup>9</sup> *But I will rejoice for ever,  
I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.*

<sup>10</sup> *All the horns of the wicked he will cut off,  
but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.*

*Psalms 75:2-10 (RSV)*



The Bible is even blunter than that about what will happen to the wicked in the end. They will be sent to Sheol/Hell when they die and there is no reason to suppose that that this is only referring to the non-religious wicked. It would seem clear that false, unrepentant, hard-hearted, apostate churchgoers, and especially insincere church leaders, will fall into this group that faces this judgment and this dreadful fate:

*<sup>13</sup>This is the fate of those who have foolish confidence,  
the end of those who are pleased with their portion.*

*<sup>14</sup> Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol;*

*Death shall be their shepherd;*

*straight to the grave they descend,*

*and their form shall waste away;*

*Sheol shall be their home.*

*Psalm 49:13-14 (RSV)*

*The wicked shall be turned into hell,*

*And all the nations that forget God.*

*Psalm 9:17 (NKJV)*

Moreover, they will eventually be sent onwards from Hell to the Lake of Fire:

*<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup>Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup>and if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

*Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV)*

Having said that, unless we repent and believe in Jesus Christ, that same end awaits *all of us, whatever category we may currently be in*. We are all sinners, even if we aren't wicked. It is a man's sin, and his rejection of Jesus, that takes him to Hell, and from there to the Lake of Fire. Nevertheless, it still remains true that the wicked are in that group and they are all on their way to Hell, unless and until they repent. Their problem is that they do not care about that fact, even if told of it.

The wicked do not generally enjoy their lives, especially in middle age and old age. They usually end up miserable. They begin by ignoring and then rejecting God, as every fool does. They then sink into all those other things that are associated with wickedness. Though a wicked life may bring some temporary pleasure, it never brings joy or peace. That is partly because a man's wickedness provokes God into opposing him. God will not allow the wicked to have any real peace. He deliberately intervenes in their lives to ensure that they don't:

*"There is no peace for the wicked," says the LORD.*

*Isaiah 48:22 (NASB)*

*The LORD has made himself known; he has executed judgment;*

*the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands.....*

*Psalm 9:16 (ESV)*

*Many are the pangs of the wicked;*

*but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the LORD*

*Psalm 32:10 (RSV)*

God is watching everything and testing everybody. He will make sure that the wicked encounter His opposition and judgment, both in this life and after death:

*<sup>4</sup>The LORD is in his holy temple,  
the LORD's throne is in heaven;  
his eyes behold, his eyelids test,  
the children of men.*

*<sup>5</sup>The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked,  
and his soul hates him that loves violence.*

*<sup>6</sup>On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and brimstone;  
a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.*

*<sup>7</sup>For the LORD is righteous, he loves righteous deeds;  
the upright shall behold his face.*

*Psalm 11:4-7 (RSV)*

*I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless.*

*Isaiah 13:11 (RSV)*

*<sup>10</sup>The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance;  
he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked.*

*<sup>11</sup> Men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;  
surely there is a God who judges on earth."*

*Psalm 58:10-11 (RSV)*

Righteous Job, when speaking to his friends about the fate of the wicked, put it this way:

*<sup>13</sup>"This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage that oppressors receive from the Almighty: <sup>14</sup>If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword, and his descendants have not enough bread. <sup>15</sup>Those who survive him the pestilence buries, and his widows do not weep. <sup>16</sup>Though he heap up silver like dust, and pile up clothing like clay, <sup>17</sup>he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it, and the innocent will divide the silver. <sup>18</sup>He builds his house like a moth's, like a booth that a watchman makes. <sup>19</sup>He goes to bed rich, but will do so no more; he opens his eyes, and his wealth is gone. <sup>20</sup>Terrors overtake him like a flood; in the night a whirlwind carries him off. <sup>21</sup>The east wind lifts him up and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place. <sup>22</sup>It hurls at him without pity; he flees from its power in headlong flight. <sup>23</sup>It claps its hands at him and hisses at him from its place.*

*Job 27:13-23 (ESV)*

### **The wicked will tend to hate people who are righteous and godly**

The wicked frequently have a hatred for the wise and godly:

*Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless,  
and the wicked seek his life.*

*Proverbs 29:10 (RSV)*

I have observed this in the wicked many times. It is often automatic and even unconscious. There is something about a godly person that sets a wicked person's teeth on edge. They react to them with hatred and malice. It happens instinctively, sometimes without even knowing why. A wicked man will often take an instant dislike to a godly person, for no apparent reason.

In fact, a wicked man sees a righteous/godly person as an abomination. In just the same way as a righteous man sees injustice or wickedness as an abomination:

***An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous,  
but he whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked.  
Proverbs 29:27 (RSV)***

Therefore, the more blameless and innocent a person is, *the more they will be hated*. A wicked man cannot usually be won over or softened by kindness. On the contrary, he will have contempt for it. Goodness makes no sense to the wicked. They see it as weakness and it only increases their malice.

***The wicked plots against the righteous  
And gnashes at him with his teeth.  
Psalm 37:12 (NASB)***

The wicked particularly hate anybody who *rebukes* them about their wrongdoing. Moreover that is still the case even when the criticism is justified. In fact their hatred is all the greater where the criticism is justified and the person rebuking them has integrity. They cannot stand those who speak the truth:

***They hate him who reproves in the gate,  
And they abhor him who speaks with integrity.  
Amos 5:10 (NASB)***

The starkest example of how the wicked hate the righteous is the treatment that was given to Jesus as He died on the cross. He was surrounded by wicked men and He could see the malice of those who hated Him, even as He was giving His life for them. There is no person more blameless than Jesus. Yet nobody has ever been more hated. If they treated Jesus that way, they will hate you too. Also, if even His goodness and grace could not melt their hard hearts, yours is unlikely to do so.

Many times in my own life I have treated a person well, and have helped, encouraged and prayed for them, but they have hated me in return with an irrational intensity. Part of that could be explained by my being an employer and a boss, but not all of it, and certainly not the intensity. Besides, it also arose many times, long before I ever became a boss. It comes from deep within the heart of the wicked person.

**The wicked “*hate the light*” because it exposes their evil nature and because the very life of a godly person transmits an unspoken rebuke to them**

If a person is wicked then they will react against anybody whose life brings light. Every Christian is meant to be a source of salt and light. If they are, then the way they live lights up the darkness of their surroundings, whether at home or at work. The light that such a believer's life gives off is, in itself, a kind of unspoken rebuke to the wicked.

It convicts him of his wickedness and he sees that as an affront, which aggravates him. The wicked do not want their evil deeds to be exposed, or for them to be made to appear to be in the wrong. Therefore they avoid Christians if they can, and attack them if they can't:

***<sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”  
John 3:19-21 (ESV)***

***<sup>15</sup>But at my stumbling they gathered in glee,  
they gathered together against me;***

*cripples whom I knew not slandered me without ceasing;  
16they impiously mocked more and more,  
gnashing at me with their teeth.*

*Psalm 35:15-16 (RSV)*

The mere fact that a righteous, God-fearing person is in the room creates a feeling of being rebuked in the mind of the wicked, *even if that godly person doesn't say a word*. They feel told off, even if nothing is said, because the contrast between their own life and that of the godly person is very apparent to them. It irritates them and they will tend to lash out in an unprovoked verbal blast.

**A false, apostate Christian hates the true gospel. He also hates any real Christian who speaks of it or demonstrates it in his life**

If anything, the hostility manifested towards real Christians by false Christians and apostates is greater than that which comes from outright unbelievers. I have been in many discussions and debates with unbelievers, including atheists and I have never particularly found them discourteous. When I was involved in an evangelistic ministry to students, in my twenties, I knocked on literally hundreds of doors on campus and had countless conversations.

Most atheists are quite happy to talk and argue. By contrast, I have often found, that falsely religious and apostate people cannot cope with any debate. They will lose their temper and shut it down, especially where it is clear that they are out of their depth and unable to justify their own position.

Moreover, falsely religious people cannot cope with being challenged or corrected about what they believe. Therefore, in general I have found that they are less open-minded, and more proud, than atheists are. Most unbelievers, especially atheists, are just very badly informed. Some have been damaged by abusive churches. But even so, they can often be less hostile, and less likely to try to silence you, than false Christians are.

That said, things have been changing over the past 20 years or so. There is a growing wave of militant political correctness which does have the aim of silencing debate and stifling any opposition to itself. But those who act in that way, even if they are not religious, are only doing what the religious wicked have always done. It is just as when the popes burned evangelical believers who had left the Roman Catholic church when they realised how unbiblical that church is.

**Do not 'cast your pearls before swine'.**

Here is a hard lesson about dealing with fools, and especially the wicked, that I have had to learn. This is how Jesus put it:

*"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*

*Matthew 7:6 (NASB)*

Though it sounds a little harsh, this is a practical and realistic statement. Jesus is telling us to recognise that some of the people with whom we come into contact are going to be callous scoffers and mockers, with no sense of respect. They will care nothing for the precious things that Jesus came to do for us or to teach us. They are also fools, and Solomon tells us that fools will despise your words of wisdom:

*Do not speak in the hearing of a fool,  
for he will despise the wisdom of your words.*

*Proverbs 23:9 (RSV)*

So, we must not go out into the unbelieving world and naively share every precious truth with wicked people whose hearts are hard and who have no respect for the Bible. If we do, they will take the truth that we speak and trample it under their feet. They will do the same as a pig would do if we threw pearls on the ground in front of it.

So how does this principle work out in practice? What should we say and what should we avoid saying and to whom? *It doesn't mean that we should never discuss Jesus or never share the gospel with unbelievers.* We need to do that, or they can never be saved. What it means is that there are certain truths or experiences which are *particularly intimate and precious*. We should not speak openly about those things in front of people whose hearts are hard and flippant.

Reserve such precious things for that minority of people who are wise, or at least simple. When speaking to the wicked, and the foolish, our message needs to be more basic and less intimate. It needs to focus on sin, judgment, the Lake of Fire, and on how to be saved through what Jesus did on the cross. Unless people are willing to listen to such things as those, don't go any further. Don't share more intimate truths unless the situation is exceptional.

However, we certainly *should* share the gospel with the wicked and tell them of their need to be saved. We should never write them off and assume that they will never respond. There is always a small, but real, chance that they might. Neither should we ever fear them or be intimidated into silence. On the contrary, the wicked need to hear the gospel as much as every other person does. Moreover, God will hold us accountable if we do not warn the people that He wants us to warn. That undoubtedly includes the wicked:

*<sup>8</sup> When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. <sup>9</sup> But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.*

*Ezekiel 33:8-9 (NASB)*

### **How should we handle the wicked and in what ways should we pray about them?**

In this book we have merely begun to examine the wicked, to define what they are and to describe how they operate. The question then is how we should handle them, so as to defend ourselves from them, yet without becoming like them ourselves. In particular, one thing I have grappled with for years is the question of how we ought to pray about the wicked. Are we expected to pray *for* them? Can we pray for protection *from* them? We see David and others doing that very often in the Bible, such as here:

*Hear me, my God, as I voice my complaint;  
protect my life from the threat of the enemy.*

*<sup>2</sup> Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked,  
from the plots of evildoers.*

*Psalm 64:1-2 (NIV)*

The Psalmist also felt, and expressed, indignation at the attitudes and activities of the wicked:

*Indignation grips me because of the wicked,  
who have forsaken your law.*

*Psalm 119:53 (NIV)*

However, are we allowed to go further, such that we actually pray *against* them? Can we ask God to defeat, and even destroy, them as Moses did? Here is an example of how Moses prayed to God about God's enemies. King David also often prayed in this way:

***And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee."***

***Numbers 10:35 (RSV)***

These are very big questions which require a detailed response. I have attempted to provide some answers in Book Six entitled "*How to identify and handle wicked people*". I would urge you to read that book to take this subject further. It sets out a fuller explanation of what the Bible says about dealing with the wicked, as well as a lot of practical examples and advice from my own personal experience.