

## CHAPTER 2

### SOME FURTHER GENERAL POINTS ABOUT THE WICKED AND HOW NUMEROUS THEY ARE

<sup>3</sup>*Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. <sup>4</sup>For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

*Jude 3-4 (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,  
says the Lord.'*

*Jeremiah 25:31 (RSV)*

<sup>31</sup> *“Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God.*

*Leviticus 19:31 (RSV)*

<sup>5</sup> *“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.*

*Deuteronomy 22:5 (RSV)*

<sup>16</sup> *For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God.*

*Deuteronomy 25:16 (RSV)*

<sup>20</sup> *The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.*

*Ezekiel 18:20 (RSV)*

<sup>26</sup> *When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die.*

*Ezekiel 18:26 (RSV)*

**We need to grasp what will happen to the wicked and take it seriously.**

Most of us don't realise what is going to happen to the wicked or how desperately serious their situation is. Unless they repent, the wicked are all going to come to a very bad end when God judges them, as He inevitably will:

<sup>6</sup>*The senseless man does not know,  
fools do not understand,  
<sup>7</sup>that though the wicked spring up like grass  
and all evildoers flourish,  
they will be forever destroyed.  
<sup>8</sup>But you, O LORD, are exalted forever.  
<sup>9</sup>For surely your enemies, O LORD,  
surely your enemies will perish;*

*all evildoers will be scattered.*

*Psalm 92:6-9 (NIV)*

<sup>15</sup> *For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations.  
As you have done, it shall be done to you,  
your deeds shall return on your own head.*

*Obadiah 15 (RSV)*

<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.*

<sup>9</sup> *What do you plot against the Lord?  
He will make a full end;  
he will not take vengeance twice on his foes.*

*Nahum 1:7-9 (RSV)*

*Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,  
for what his hands have done shall be done to him.*

*Isaiah 3:11 (RSV)*

*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 (ESV)*

*“For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.*

*Malachi 4:1 (RSV)*

We must therefore remind ourselves of what is going to become of the wicked. If we are not fully convinced of how badly things are going to turn out for them in the end, then we will be tempted to act like them ourselves. We would also be more likely to be discouraged by the fact that the wicked are so numerous, and have things so much their own way at present.

**We must also realise what will happen to the wise and godly and take that seriously too**

The behaviour of the wise also has its consequences. It will assuredly lead to God's blessing:

*Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them,  
for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.*

*Isaiah 3:10 (RSV)*

<sup>12</sup> *The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;*

<sup>13</sup> *planted in the house of the LORD,  
they will flourish in the courts of our God*

<sup>14</sup> *They will still bear fruit in old age,  
they will stay fresh and green,*

*Psalm 92:12-14 (NIV)*

God has promised to bless the wise and godly, and in many different ways. Such promises ought to give us an added incentive to persist in resisting the wicked, despite the fact that, at present, they seem to get away with so much.

**There are two main types of wicked - firstly, unbelievers who are hard-hearted and devious and secondly, insincere Christians who know the truth, but do not genuinely repent or believe.**

Wickedness is not only found amongst outright unbelievers who openly reject God. Such people may well be wicked, though many are not. Wickedness also exists in people who go to church, and even lead churches, but are *false and insincere*. Indeed, they are, possibly, the people whom God regards as the most wicked of all. Therefore, when we refer to *the wicked* we may mean one, or other, or both, of two very different groups:

**a) The non-religious wicked**

By this we mean those *unbelievers* who openly reject God but who are *also* devious, malicious and hard-hearted. They behave with higher levels of dishonesty, pride, selfishness and malice than the average unbeliever.

**b) The religious wicked**

By this we mean people who claim to be Christians but are *false*. They may attend churches and participate actively, even as leaders. However, despite all that they know, and claim to believe, their hearts are hard, proud, dishonest and unrepentant.

Some of the religious wicked know themselves to be false and are blatant about it. Some are not necessarily aware of what they really are. Either way, they have become hard-hearted and are immune to the real Gospel and deaf to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. They cling to their own religious traditions, rituals and opinions and ignore what the Bible says. Their key feature is that they are *insincere* and have never truly repented. Neither do they have any intention of repenting.

In short, they are false Christians. That is they are not, or are no longer, really Christians at all. Many of them never were, even at the outset. Though they know some of the truth, they live in a hypocritical way. In particular, they live as if there won't be any Day of Judgment. They have no fear of God and they ignore Him, and His Word, and live as they please. They also oppose the real Gospel, as Peter and John found:

*<sup>27</sup>And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup>saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." <sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." <sup>33</sup>When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.*

*Acts 5:27-33 (ESV)*

**Some real Christians, who are truly saved, can be so immature and carnal that they may appear not to be saved, but actually they are.**

It is not obvious which people are genuine, saved Christians and which are not. One can come across people who are so carnal and sinful that one has to conclude that they have either fallen away from the faith, or they were never saved in the first place. However, sometimes one is dealing with a *real* Christian who is just behaving in a carnal, ungodly way. A classic example would be King Saul of

Israel. He was unfaithful to God, and tried to kill David, and even his own son, Jonathan. He even consulted a witch to gain advice via the occult.

Yet, it seems he was a saved believer throughout all of that time, *even while he was doing those things*. Thus, we shall see him in Heaven and in the Millennium. We know that because, when he died, the Bible says he “*slept with his fathers*”. That is an expression used for those who were saved. Accordingly, things are not necessarily what they appear to be. We have to keep an open mind and be willing to assess and reassess people. We can’t just assume that those who seem to be saved really are. Some may not be.

Neither can we assume that people who seem *not* to be saved definitely aren’t. Some of them may be. More to the point, we certainly cannot assume that a person who seems to be saved can be *trusted*. That would be a grave error, but it is one which many Christians make. Indeed, even a person who seems to show signs of being trustworthy cannot be *fully* trusted. Likewise, even a person who is currently trustworthy might not always *continue* to be so, because people can change. Hence the need to be willing to reassess them.

Your assessments of people can also turn out to have been wrong all along, as mine often have. Misjudging others is not a rare occurrence. If it was, this book would not be needed. Therefore we cannot decide that a person is trustworthy and then view that as an immovable fact, on which we can always rely. Instead, we must continually reassess people and situations, as the facts change, and as new information becomes available. Having a fixed, closed mind can prevent us noticing the clues, inconsistencies and contradictions that may emerge later. That mental rigidity can stop us realising we have misjudged someone, in either direction.

**None of us belong 100% in any single group. We are all a mixture of each of the character types.**

In Book 5 we examined the wicked, foolish, simple and wise, in order to define, or at least describe, them. That could give the impression that people fit neatly into one group or another, with no overlap. In reality, it is much more complicated. Nobody fits solely into any one group, such that they are entirely one thing, all the time, and never display any of the characteristics of the other three groups. What we find, in real life, is that each person belongs *mainly* to one group. But they still exhibit some of the characteristics of the other groups, at least at certain times.

Even the most wicked man will sometimes surprise you by doing something decent. For example, Adolf Hitler had a lot of charm, and was very kind to his dog. Therefore, do not make the error of assuming that just because a person does something kind they cannot possibly be wicked and you can let down your guard. They could still be wicked, overall, and pose a very real threat. Conversely, you might see a man who is generally wise, but in certain situations, or particular areas of his life, he behaves in ways that surprise and disappoint you. He may do something naive, foolish, or even wicked.

The complexity is largely explained by the fact that within every believer a battle is raging between the old man, or flesh, and the new man, or new nature. Every Christian fails regularly. When he does, the old man or flesh looms up and takes control for a moment, or even for an extended period. There will then be a temporary manifestation of the sinful flesh nature until his new man, or new nature, reasserts itself. Likewise, there may be a person who is generally foolish, but who grew up in a Christian home or went to a Christian youth group when younger.

Though he may speak and act foolishly most of the time, there will be moments when the Christian values he learned in the past will rise to the surface. He may then surprise you by doing or saying something wise. An example of this is a police inspector I used to work with who surprised me one day by quoting verbatim from the book of Ecclesiastes. I tell that story in Book 5. Alternatively, there may be a Christian who is simple on the whole but who, in certain areas of his life, has begun to develop

some wisdom. So, you have to expect to see a mixture in everybody you meet and be ready to deal with it. Don't let it surprise or confuse you, or throw you off course.

### **We can be wise in one area of our life but still be simple/naive in another.**

People can also be wise in one part of their life, for example their job, but not in other areas, such as their marriage. Or they may be wise in the area of relationships, but foolish, or simple, in handling money, or drink, or gambling. The list of permutations is endless. That complicates this whole subject and makes discernment much more difficult. Moreover, people are not constantly the same over time. Even within the space of a day, they can do very inconsistent things. That sends out confusing signals and can suggest they belong to two or more groups at the same time.

An example of a wise man who did something foolish is the godly King Hezekiah of Judah. His overall reign met with God's approval. He did many wise things, and was brave in standing up to the Assyrians. However, when he received a diplomatic visit from the Babylonians, he unwisely showed them all the treasures of the Temple. Isaiah rebuked him for that and prophesied that the treasure would all be carried off to Babylon, as a result of his foolishness in letting them see it. So, King Hezekiah was *generally* a wise man, but he behaved foolishly on that single occasion. Which of us hasn't been like him and behaved, or spoken, foolishly in some situation? I have, many times.

Therefore it is unrealistic to expect to suddenly change from being simple to being entirely and continuously wise, as if we were leaping instantly from one group into another. It is far more realistic to think in terms of gradually becoming wiser, bit by bit. That transformation cannot be achieved quickly. It is the result of a painstaking process of small changes, arising out of many little lessons. These move us, step by step, in the direction of becoming wiser. Each area of our life then gradually becomes more surrendered to God, rather than operating in line with our fleshly nature.

### **What about sharing the Gospel with the wicked?**

We are commanded to warn others about God's judgment and to share the Gospel with all people, from every nation. We have no way of knowing which of them will, even in the distant future, respond to the Gospel and which will not. It is possible that anybody might repent - even the most wicked person. The classic example is King Manasseh, the exceptionally wicked King of Judah. He was an idolater and an occultist and even burned some of his own children to death as sacrifices to idols.

Nevertheless, he repented in his old age and was saved. One day, those of us who are saved shall see him in Heaven. Nearer to our own day, a number of leading Nazis repented, even while they were on trial at Nuremberg. Some did so in the last few hours before they were executed, which proves that there is always hope. Therefore no person, however wicked, should ever be written off or considered beyond the reach of the Gospel, such that we do not bother to tell them about it.

Nobody is ever beyond hope. Therefore no person should ever have the Gospel kept from them, no matter how wicked they may be, or how unlikely we may think they are to respond. Who knows - some might even repent and surrender their lives to God on their death beds, in their final few seconds of life, as they remember what you told them about the Gospel several decades before. So, we should share the Gospel with every category of person. God told Ezekiel that he was to warn the wicked, even if they would not listen to him:

*<sup>17</sup> "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. <sup>18</sup> If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>19</sup>*

***But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.***

*Ezekiel 3:17-19 (ESV)*

That said, we do also need to be realistic and recognise that wicked people will usually reject the Gospel. Nevertheless, we should never be afraid to tell them about Jesus when opportunities arise, no matter how wicked they may be, or appear to be. However, we need to focus first on “*the bad news*”, namely our sin, God’s holiness, God’s wrath, judgment, Hell, the Lake of Fire and our need to repent. All of that needs to be made clear to every person, not just the wicked, before we get on to the ‘good news’ of Jesus’ substitutionary death on the Cross and the offer of salvation.

The good news makes no sense, and will not be respected until after people have been clearly presented with *the bad news*. Indeed, the very definition of the good news is that it is *the solution to the bad news*. So, all our evangelism must initially focus on these negative things, before we present the way of escape. All people need to know their dilemma first, and realise that there is something dreadful, from which they need to escape. However, we should avoid sharing intimate, sensitive feelings and experiences with the wicked. It would be both unwise and unproductive.

Firstly, it would do them no good. Secondly, it may also harm you, as your words will be trampled on and used to mock both you and God. An example might be the baptism in the Holy Spirit. To discuss that with a fool or a wicked man would probably be what the Bible calls “*casting pearls before swine*”. You are likely to regret it. They will only ridicule what you’re speaking about. Therefore do tell people the full Gospel, but don’t tell wicked people, or fools, everything else that is on your mind, or that you have ever experienced. You are under no such duty.

**If you rebuke a fool, he will hate you. That is all the more true if he is also wicked.**

If you rebuke a fool, or a wicked person, he will hate you for doing so. Therefore, he will rarely benefit from a warning, or listen to your advice. But, neither will he appreciate your patience, or your mercy, if you refrain from rebuking him and it would be naïve for you to expect anything different. By contrast, a wise, or even a simple, person is likely to respond well to all of those things. The point is that the wicked, and also fools, cannot understand mercy or grace.

In their minds, the only reasons why anybody would choose not to use their power and authority to defend their own business or church are because they are weak, cowardly or stupid. All three options reflect badly on you. Therefore they misunderstand, and despise, soft managers who give them second and third chances. Such managers are misguidedly showing forbearance to the wicked person’s *malice*, as opposed to their *mistakes*. Not seeing the difference between those two things is a major error.

Therefore if you ever need to confront or rebuke a fool, then just say and do the minimum necessary for the task. Do not expect a positive reaction either. Remember that the Bible says “*If you rebuke a fool he will hate you*”. That is the reaction I have always received, so I no longer even try to correct fools, if I know that is what they are. They do not respond constructively, however politely you may speak, and no matter how justified your comments are. They will simply resent you for saying it at all, regardless of how it is said. Indeed, they will resent it all the more if what you say is true.

So, the more justified your criticism is, the more they will resent it. However if, the other person is mainly simple, rather than a fool, you may be able to win his cooperation when you correct him, provided you go about it the right way. Simple people are more likely to listen to you, although even the most simple don’t *like* being corrected. However, even if they are willing to accept correction, and to profit from it, the simple are still not wise enough to be confided in. They are not safe to trust, not due to any malice. They just lack the sense, or the self-control, to be able to keep your secret confidential.

Therefore they will probably pass it on, either intentionally, or without thinking. But if the person is mainly, or even partly, wise, then everything is possible. If you correct wise people they will thank you for it and appreciate you all the more. They can see the benefit that correction brings and they realise that it was justified and necessary. Therefore, if you instruct them they will listen. Moreover, if you confide in them, they will keep your secret. So, wise people can be trusted, but the problem is they are extremely rare.

**We are to be patient, and show forbearance, in relation to people's mistakes and faults, but not with their wickedness, deceit or malice.**

The Bible *does* tell us to show forbearance, but we are only to show it in relation to people's weaknesses and mistakes, not their acts of deliberate evil. Even in saying that, the Bible is primarily referring to fellow Christians, not unbelievers, and certainly not the wicked. So, to be clear, we are told to show forbearance towards other people's weaknesses, errors, ignorance, clumsiness, tactlessness and so on. However, we are *not* to show forbearance to their deliberate, devious acts, which were planned with malice aforethought.

That distinction is profoundly important. The Bible does not give us a blanket command to show forbearance to every kind of behaviour, or to every person, no matter what they do. I am labouring this because, amongst the simple, that point is really not understood. We need to remember, therefore, that we are *not* told to show any patience or forbearance towards people's evil and malice. On the contrary, we are told to resist such things.

#### **A closer look at the possible figures for the percentage of the population that is wicked**

Let us return to the question of numbers, or percentages, and look in closer detail at how many people are wicked. We can't be precise, because we can never know exactly what is in other people's hearts. Also situations change from one country to another and over time. Therefore, some eras or generations are more, or less, wicked than others. Likewise, some groups or nations are more, or less, wicked than others. For example, I believe our own generation, at least in the West, is one of the wickedest that has ever existed in world history to date.

Nevertheless, we can try to gain a broad brush understanding of the numbers of wicked people as a proportion of the population, at least within the United Kingdom. That is the only society that I know well, and which I have been able to observe over a period of decades. However, let's begin in a more general sense, by looking at how God described the generation that existed on the Earth at the time of the Flood. That was about 1700 years after the Creation. Here's how Moses puts it:

*<sup>5</sup> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*

*Genesis 6:5-8 (RSV)*

*Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.*

*Genesis 7:1 (RSV)*

Just before the flood, God thought the wickedness of that generation was so great, and so widespread, that He needed to wipe out the entire population of the world, except for eight people. He says the thoughts of their hearts were "*only evil continually.*" Thus, those people at that time were exceptionally bad. They did evil and they thought in evil ways, almost all the time and at a high level. But note that,

even in their case, the Bible uses the word “*continually*”, not “*continuously*”. The latter would mean that every single thought was *always* evil, without any exceptions, like a solid line, without any gaps or breaks whatsoever.

‘Continually’ doesn’t mean that. It means a regular, consistent, repeated pattern, more like a line of dots than a solid line. Therefore even extreme wickedness may still involve gaps or intervals. My own view is that only Satan and the demons are *continuously* evil, all the time, without any exceptions. Accordingly, we who live in the West, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should not assume that we are better than the generation which died in the Flood, just because we have moments when we aren’t being evil. So did they. They were simply evil on a *regular, ongoing, systematic* basis, as our generation is.

So it was still appropriate for God to classify them as wicked overall, even though they weren’t *always* being evil. Having made that clear, if we then take the Flood generation as our starting point, the question is are we more or less wicked than they were? One’s immediate assumption may be that we are less wicked overall, because only eight people from that generation were saved from the Flood. That may be right, but I would not count on it. The mere fact that God has not (yet) wiped out our generation does not, in itself, mean we are any better than they were.

Remember, all that God promised is that He would never *flood* the whole planet again. He never said that He would not *judge* us all, or send most of us to the Lake of Fire. On the contrary, He has expressly said that He will do both of those things. Therefore, a better question is whether wickedness is now the norm or the exception. Or, do the wicked constitute more or less than 50% of the population? Those questions would be a good starting point, but the average Christian never asks them and just assumes that wickedness is rare. If we can dispel that false idea, we will have achieved something important, even if we can never know the exact percentages.

So, let’s try again. What if we compare our generation to that which died in the Flood? In broad terms, how do our values, attitudes and behaviour compare to theirs? If we take the sin of abortion as a starting point we come off worst. There is no indication that abortion was widely practised back then. If it occurred at all, it was on a one off basis, though they probably did practise infanticide, whereby they killed babies after they had been born. However, for us, abortions are now being conducted on a massive industrial scale.

In the USA alone, over 58,000,000 babies have been killed so far. Out of a total population of about 305,000,000, that adds up to more than *one sixth* of all Americans alive today. The numbers dwarf all other forms of murder put together. The same applies in most other countries worldwide, but especially in the developed world. The UK alone has killed over 8,000,000 babies. Have you ever considered these facts? Are they real to you? If so, you are unusual, because most of our generation is in a kind of coma which makes them unable to grasp the issues here, or to see their significance.

That is even true of most church leaders. The vast majority say nothing at all about abortion, at least in public. Although there is no mention of abortion in the account of the Flood, the Bible records elsewhere how strongly God feels about the killing of innocent babies. Here is a passage concerning the Canaanites, whom God considered so wicked that He told the Israelites to wipe them all out. Therefore, the significance of their treatment of their own babies needs to be assessed in the light of what God thought of them overall. See what Moses says:

***<sup>30</sup> take heed that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do likewise.’<sup>31</sup> You shall not do so to the Lord your God; for every abominable thing which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.***

*Deuteronomy 12:30-31 (RSV)*



## **How does our generation compare, in terms of wickedness, with those killed in the Flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah?**

What about fraud, witchcraft, pornography, drugs, adultery, fornication, homosexuality and the denial of one's own gender? If we again compare ourselves to the Flood generation, it is hard to imagine they were worse than us in any of these ways. Indeed, it is hard to think of any generation, in all of world history, which engaged in these sins on even the same scale as ours does, let alone on a larger one.

Yet, if we look now at the small cities called 'Sodom and Gomorrah' which existed at the time of Abraham and Lot, we see that God considered their sin to be "very grave". Homosexuals were numerous and active in both places. God was so appalled by their behaviour that He destroyed them all with a hail of fire and brimstone:

*<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomor'rah is great and their sin is very grave,*

*Genesis 18:20 (RSV)*

*<sup>24</sup> Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomor'rah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; <sup>25</sup> and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.*

*Genesis 19:24-25 (RSV)*

If we compare ourselves with Sodom and Gomorrah, are we better or worse? Do we have more or less homosexual activity? Are we more or less brass-faced about it? It would be hard to imagine them being any worse than our generation. Moreover, even if, somehow, we are not yet as wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah, we are travelling so fast downhill that it cannot be long before we match them, and overtake them. Even if one looks back 20 or 30 years, the transformation in sexual practices, and the increase in our brazenness about sin, is astonishing.

We are unrecognisable from the societies of the 1970s and 1980s, let alone the 1950s and 1960s. Things are routinely said and done today which the people of those decades would not have been able to believe possible if they had been told it was going to happen. What then should we conclude? We cannot put precise figures on it. However, measured purely in terms of abortion, sexual immorality, dishonesty, systematic fraud and corruption, we are surely as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah, and even Noah's generation.

If you add the abandonment of Christianity since the 1960s, and also the huge growth in witchcraft and the occult, the point can be made even more strongly. In any event, leaving aside precise figures, can anyone deny that the amount of wickedness, and the proportion of wicked people, is now appallingly high? If so, you probably need to rethink your expectations as to how likely you are to encounter wicked people, and how often. Instead of thinking of it as a rare occurrence, see it as a problem to be faced on a virtually daily basis.

## **How God viewed the wickedness of the generation that came out of Egypt in the Exodus which complained and doubted God, despite all they had seen and heard**

The 'Exodus generation' saw more miracles, and had more direct exposure to God and to a mighty prophet, Moses, than any generation until the time of Jesus. Yet, despite all that they saw God do, including the plagues, parting the Red Sea, drowning the Egyptians, giving them water from a rock and feeding them with manna, they were still ungrateful. They also grumbled about the position God had put them in, as if He hadn't done enough for them. Their attitude angered God and He was hurt by it.

They also lacked faith and did not trust God to fulfil His promises, or to protect them, when the time came to enter the Promised Land, which meant fighting the Canaanites. Instead of going in with courage

and faith, they were filled with pessimism and fear. They would not believe the positive reports which Joshua and Caleb brought back about the land, as we saw earlier. Therefore God refused to allow any of that generation to enter the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb. They had both given a positive report and had urged the people to have faith and courage.

God made them all wait for 38 years, while everybody who was over 20 years old at the time of the Exodus died in the Wilderness. Note also that God referred to them as “*this evil generation.*” He plainly took their ingratitude, complaining, cowardice and lack of faith very seriously. That needs to chasten us, and make us rethink very carefully our definition of the word ‘wicked’ and our assessment of ourselves. Many of us are far too easily satisfied with our own performance, attitude and character and assume that God is as pleased with us as we are with ourselves.

For many of us the thought would not enter our minds that our own ingratitude, faithlessness, indifference, cowardice, disobedience and lack of motivation might be viewed by God as wickedness. But why wouldn’t they be? God judges us by reference to how much we know, how much we have seen, or been given, and how many privileges and opportunities we have had. That explains why He was so severe with the Exodus generation, and the people who lived in the towns around Lake Galilee during Jesus’ earthly ministry. They were given enormous advantages and got to see and hear things which went far beyond what others had had.

Therefore, they were held more strictly accountable. Their indifference, ingratitude and lack of faith were seen as wickedness even though the same sins, when displayed by earlier or later generations, would have been judged less strictly. So, when you consider all the advantages and privileges that our generation has, at least in the West, you may start to reassess how well you are doing. You may even tremble at the prospect of hearing Jesus’ assessment of you, either at the Judgment Seat for the saved, or the Great White Throne for the unsaved. Some very robust and critical things may be said to us, as they were to the Exodus generation, when God refused to let them enter the land.

### **Is there a gender imbalance in the proportions of wicked people?**

Of all the examples I have given of wicked behaviour, more than half relate to women. However, that’s not because women are any wicked than men. I see no reason to think that either gender is any more or less wicked than the other. The first reason why I give a disproportionate number of examples involving women is simply that churches in the UK have more women than men. The second is that I used to run a law firm with a disproportionately high number of women. It was probably 80:20 in their favour most of the time and therefore many of my stories relate to them.

That gender imbalance was partly because a majority of those becoming lawyers today are women. In addition, the vast majority of support staff, such as secretaries, cashiers, clerks and cleaners etc, were women. At its peak, my firm employed over 80 people at any one time, and I was in business for a total of 17 years, not counting the years when I was an employee myself. So I had a lot of people to choose from when selecting examples of wicked conduct, scheming and deceitfulness. It so happens that most of them were women.

However, if I had employed exactly the same numbers of men as women, I think I would have had broadly equal numbers of problems from men as from women. Having said all that, I do think that the types of wicked behaviour differ. Men and women are equally wicked, but they go about things in different ways and use different methods and techniques. Broadly speaking, women are more likely to use softer or more indirect methods, such as lying, gossiping and manipulation.

That is mainly because they don’t often have the power, authority or physical strength to dominate people in more direct ways. They are less likely to occupy positions of authority which they can use to dominate people directly. So, they choose the next best thing, which is to operate indirectly and to manipulate those who do occupy the positions of authority. Then they can control other people through

them. Men tend to be more direct and obvious in their wickedness. It will frequently involve bullying and intimidating others and general domination, rather than indirect manipulation.

The overall objective is still the same. Both men and women want to control other people, get their own way and protect their own position. It is just that, instead of pushing their weight around, women will generally seek to get what they want indirectly, by deception and manipulation, not by force. Perhaps the clearest argument for there being equal numbers of wicked people in both sexes is that, in the Flood, men and women were wiped out equally. An equal number were also spared. Then again, centuries later, at Sodom and Gomorrah, all the men and all the women were destroyed, except for Lot and his two daughters.

### **What then might the percentage figure be for the number of wise people?**

Let's now consider what percentage of the population are wise. I believe most Christians seriously over-estimate the figure, even if we define 'the wise' very broadly. For one thing, most people automatically include themselves within this category, despite having no valid basis for doing so. Secondly, they forget that to be wise at all, a person must first be a *genuine Christian*. That drastically reduces the numbers who are even potentially eligible to be classified as wise. However, let's assume 5% of the UK population are real Christians, as opposed to the high percentage who call themselves Christian in the census.

If so, we are limited to a maximum of 5% of people even being saved, let alone wise. However even that figure must then be reduced heavily because only a small proportion of even genuine Christians are wise. The majority of Christians, even genuine ones, are what the Bible calls simple, or naïve. That is they are not wicked, but they are not fools either. The key point is that they lack discernment. They also don't know the Bible properly and don't know how God thinks or what His plans are. More to the point, they don't understand the world, or other people.

### **Then how numerous are the simple and the fools?**

The simple are frequently to be found within churches. They may be saved, but are not yet wise and may never become so. However, there are also simple people amongst the unsaved. Indeed, it is primarily from the ranks of the simple that future Christians are drawn. They are more likely to be searching for God and more willing to listen to the Gospel. I would guess that 10 to 15% of the UK population are simple. Thus, if you are looking for good employees, it is in this group that you will find them. That explains why it is so difficult to find faithful, honest staff. There are very few of them, because the vast majority of the population are not simple. They are either wicked or fools.

### **Don't assume that just because a person is stupid, they can't possibly form a cunning plan. They can, but they get it from a demon, not their own mind.**

Many wrongly assume that a stupid person can't form a wicked scheme, because they aren't clever enough to do so. If you think like that you will misjudge situations and under-estimate what people are capable of. Although the wicked may not be able to do maths, write good essays, or pass exams, they can come up with extremely devious plans to deceive and manipulate others. That is because the real source of those schemes is often not their own mind, but the demon who is within them or alongside them. It is as if they were cheating in an exam by getting help from someone else.

That explains why the stupidest, least qualified, people can outwit others who have far greater natural ability. Bear this in mind when dealing with people or you will make very serious misjudgements. Such people are like a puppet, doing what the demon instructs them to do. They may be unaware of the source of their ideas or why they are more skilled at being devious than at passing exams. But you

at least can now be aware of where they get it all from. That will help you to stop under-estimating them, which is vital if you want to defeat them.

**Don't assume that just because a person has done something nice, or helped you in some way, they therefore can't be wicked.**

Another error is to assume that just because a person has done something nice or helped you out, or supported some charity, then they can't be wicked. They most certainly can. To judge the character of another person accurately you need to examine their fruit on a regular basis, over a sustained period of time. A single incident, or even a few incidents in quick succession, don't prove that a person is wise, faithful or trustworthy. You need to see a *consistent* pattern and for *long enough* to be able to conclude that their behaviour is both genuine and typical.

It is easy for a person to do things purely to impress you, especially if they know you are on the lookout for such things. My wife was once travelling on an aeroplane from England to Scotland and had our kids with her. It so happened that on the same plane was one of the salaried partners in my law firm. She offered to change seats so that one of our children could sit near my wife. That was a nice gesture, but it proved nothing. The lady in question was actually a nasty piece of work.

She had been disloyal and unfaithful to me and had lost me a lot of money through her neglect and laziness. So, the kind deed was not a valid basis upon which to conclude that she could be trusted. However, if it had been the other way round, then a single incident *could* suffice. If a person behaves spitefully, dishonestly or manipulatively, even if it is only once, you can conclude that they are *not* to be trusted. You don't need to see a sustained pattern of behaviour to form that conclusion.

**Don't assume that just because a person is a hard worker, or good at their job, then they can't be wicked, unfaithful or disloyal.**

I have misjudged workers, and assumed they were loyal and trustworthy, simply because they were excellent at their jobs and worked hard. That does not follow, as I have found to my cost. Admittedly a wise, godly person who loves the truth and fears God will be a good worker. But it doesn't work in both directions. Therefore merely being a hard worker doesn't mean that a person will also be wise, faithful or trustworthy.

I can think of quite a few employees who came into this category. They fooled me for a while, and got me to drop my guard. I automatically assumed that anyone who worked as hard as they did, and at such a high standard, must be faithful. Yet a number of them later proved to be unfaithful, not necessarily in their work, or the quality of their files, but in their treatment of me, the firm, or their colleagues.

**One reason why God lets wicked people attack you is so that you can grow in character. You learn to be an overcomer through your battles with them.**

One of God's main aims for His people is to learn how to '*conquer*'. This is a regular theme in the Bible and we hear of it repeatedly, especially in the book of Revelation:

*<sup>17</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.'*

*Revelation 2:17 (RSV)*

*<sup>5</sup> He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.*

*Revelation 3:5 (RSV)*

*<sup>21</sup> He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

*Revelation 3:21 (RSV)*

*<sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.*

*Revelation 12:10-11 (RSV)*

*<sup>2</sup> And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.*

*Revelation 15:2 (RSV)*

*<sup>7</sup> He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son.*

*Revelation 21:7 (RSV)*

God also wants us to learn how to be ‘overcomers’. That has to involve regularly coming up against opponents as there is no other way of achieving this. We have to face them, and gradually learn how to overcome them:

*<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

*Romans 12:21 (RSV)*

*<sup>4</sup> For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

*1 John 5:4-5 (RSV)*

It has always been part of God’s purpose for His people to learn how to fight. When the Israelites went into Canaan, God did not let them just walk into an empty land. He required them to fight to occupy every part of it, albeit with His assistance. He could have handed the land to them on a plate. But He chose not to, because the process of fighting for it was *necessary*, in itself, as a means of turning the people into overcomers who knew how to fight.

That could not have been done without opponents, including some really vicious ones. They therefore needed their enemies, just as we need ours, in order to develop the character-qualities that God wants us to have. The same applied to the next generation of Israelites. God ensured that their children also had some enemies left to fight, so that they too could learn from the experience of conflict:

*Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan; <sup>2</sup> it was only that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, that he might teach war to such at least as had not known it before.*

*Judges 3:1-2 (RSV)*

**King David could not have become the great man that he was without the ‘benefit’ of having had many wicked opponents.**

The same applied when King David was on the run from King Saul’s army, and also afterwards, when he became King in Hebron and had to deal with continual conflict. That went on for years, so the ordeals must have seemed very long and drawn out to David while he was going through them. Yet, the hardships and battles that he endured during those years made him stronger, not weaker:

***There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.***

***2 Samuel 3:1 (RSV)***

David had to go through all of those years on the run. Then he had six and a half years when there were two kings and he only reigned in Hebron, not in Jerusalem. Without the many things he went through, he would never have become the man he turned into. He would not have learned how to fight, how to lead, or how to overcome the wicked. He had earlier battles too, while he was in Saul's army and when he fought Goliath. Indeed, he had even earlier battles than those, when he fought with lions and bears while defending his father's sheep, while he was still only a boy:

***<sup>34</sup> But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, <sup>35</sup> I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. <sup>36</sup> Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God." <sup>37</sup> And David said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." And Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you!"***

***1 Samuel 17:34-37 (RSV)***

There is no use asking God to remove all opponents, difficulties and trials from our lives. He won't do it, even if we keep asking Him. Therefore, forget about asking God to keep you away from all difficult people and circumstances. He will answer those prayers, from time to time, and give us temporary periods of respite. But we must face the reality that we all need opponents and struggles if we are going to learn how to conquer and overcome. That being so, we should set our minds to learn how to become overcomers, rather than seeking for a permanent 'leave of absence' from the battles of life.