

CHAPTER TEN

LOVING AN EVIL PERSON: Siege Warfare



*Things are happening
you*

The world is made up of many different kinds of people. This is an obvious and intuitive observation that is often obscured by the complexity of human behavior. There are massive differences between people, but there are often enough commonalities to allow for categorization. The next three chapters will deal with the question of what it means to boldly love those who are evil, foolish, and "normally" sinful. The premise is that different kinds of "good gifts" are required to impact different kinds of people with truth and life. There are dangers involved in any labeling of persons, but there is some legitimacy for dividing humanity into these three categories.

People can be categorized according to almost any organizing theme. For example, a person can be put in a group by demographics — nationality, race, socioeconomic status, educational level, profession — or by psychological structures — temperaments, personality disorders, psychiatric classifications (depression, anxiety), addictions (eating disorder, alcoholism, sex addiction). There are probably as many schemes for organizing people in groups as there are groups.

*people feel - help
the system or be consumed by it
people feel - people are being
washed together to be
it feel - more hatred, violence
what is causing today
pg 218*

The schemes are often highly illuminating and profitable in helping us group, assess, and predict human behavior. If I know that you are an engineer, and predict human behavior. If I can who attends a very conservative church, then I can usually predict certain things about you that will be different than if I learn you are an artist, who lives up in the mountains, away from people, and are part of a non-traditional Christian community that meets in the upstairs of a rock-and-roll bar.

Demographics are usually highly interesting, but in most cases, they do not lead to a deep understanding about what makes a person tick. Psychological categories, at first glance, do a better job of guiding our understanding of human motivation, because psychological information tunes us into more substantial concerns. The facts involve patterns of response to our inner world and the world of people, which is definitely more illuminating than knowing if a person is an engineer or an artist.

But psychological information usually misses another dimension that is crucial in the process of categorization, and that is what a person does with God — with truth, beauty, and justice. The categories used in Proverbs — mocker (evil), fool, and simpleton (normal sinner; Proverbs 1:22) — deal with horizontal information (such as psychological categories), but also address the vertical dimension of our existence (what a person does with God). For that reason, we will focus on the categories of people found in the wisdom literature that addresses how a person is motivated to relate to self, other people, and God.

THE DANGERS OF LABELS

Imprecision

We need to be aware, however, of the dangers in the use of any label when attempting to account for the unique, mysterious human soul. First, all categories are imprecise and fuzzy. In order to put the diversity of humanity into any comprehensive group (given the fact that no one is precisely the same as the others in the group), a degree of precision and specificity will be sacrificed for the benefit of categorization. For example, not

all evil people do the same thing. It is nearly impossible to define evil on the basis of behavior. I've worked with people who have murdered their children and found those people not to be evil. On the other hand, I have worked with parents who have spent a lifetime grooming, displaying, and using their children and whose evil sent horrible shudders through my heart. Categories are dangerous when we require them to do more than they can bear. A label simply cannot tell us what someone will do, although it may help us assess something about their heart.

Even among the categories found in Proverbs, there is a great deal of imprecision and overlap in description. The mocker is a fool. The fool is simple. The simpleton makes foolish choices. The fool despises wisdom. At first glance, there seems to be little point in attempting to subdivide the three terms into specific categories. However, the mocker (evil) is more vicious and destructive than the fool; the fool is more resistant to change and more committed to pleasure than the simpleton; and the simpleton is more precariously disposed toward sin than the wise person. There are gradations and differences, even if there are points of considerable overlap. Labels may be fuzzy, but they are useful, especially to those who hate to be bothered by all the diversity and mystery of human existence. If we label all Republicans as white conservatives who are committed to decentralized government, states' rights, private enterprise, fewer welfare programs, and trickle-down economics, then we can simplify life and political decisions. For most people, labels are stereotypes that strip life of its complexity in order to make it more tolerable. When labels are used to generalize in this manner, they are destructive.

Labels can be useful without being destructive when they push us to consider (given the differences) the common themes that tie the different people in a subgroup together. They help us to reflect on the central, core passions that drive divergent human behavior. What is common (given that it will not be mere behavior) about those who are evil, or foolish, or normally sinful? The answer will be imprecise. But if reasonably accurate, it will enable us to consider what it means to spur a person

to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). We need to be more concerned with increasing perspective than in formulating a fine-tuned, detailed plan of attack. With perspective, we can form adaptable and unique strategies that fit the person and situation, rather than attempting to formulate a plan that fits everyone at all times and circumstances.

Clear, Rigid Definitions

A significant danger in any scheme of categorization is creating a definition that is too clear. A well-defined definition asserts too much clarity over the enormous complexity of life. Any time a category is too clever or clear, it allows for the illusion of control. For example, to assume that every person who is labeled "codependent" is always afraid to speak his mind or never shows anger to others creates parameters that are too rigid. Or to assume that everyone who reads her Bible an hour a day, conducts a Bible study, and is very pleasant and kind is godly assumes too much clarity in defining godliness. We should struggle (to a degree) to define who is and who is not in a category.

A second danger involves rigid definitions. A rigid definition implies that I am what I am and will always be that in the future. But the heart and soul of a person are not eternally enslaved to a particular direction or to certain symptoms. Change can occur to a point where it can be said of the thief, the gossip, or the adulterer, "That is what some of you were" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Sufficient change can occur that invalidates the label. For that reason, I am never to judge you. I may assess your current condition and offer a tentative hypothesis, "You appear to be a fool," but I am never to say, "You are and will always be a fool." That statement is the dictum of a judge who has passed a final, unchangeable verdict. It is imperative never to feel certain or resolute about our opinion. We must remain open to seeing the facts from a new perspective and equally open to the possibility that our perception is distorted by the log in our own eye.

The central reason for resisting rigid, final judgment is the warning that we will be judged according to the sure categories

we use to judge others (Matthew 7:1-2). Further, the way we forgive others will be the way God will forgive us (Matthew 6:12). Our internal paradigm of judgment and forgiveness is of eternal importance. We must resist two extremes: a penchant to judge too freely, labeling others with condescending confidence and snarlish anger, or a refusal to assess data given the potential for error. The risks are great, but the task is crucial if we are to love with boldness and wisdom.

THE MOCKER: DEALING WITH EVIL

There are people in this world who seem to live and breathe evil. In every generation, masters of evil (Hitler, Stalin, Amin, Pol Pot) seem to serve as caricatures of the demonic. There are others, less known, who are involved in ritualistic abuse—the sadistic physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children. Few would dispute, even without definition, the accuracy of calling these people evil. Indeed, they are evil. There are many people, however, who do not perpetrate societal or individual barbarity to this demonic extent but who are more than simply arrogant, hard, and hurtful. All of us are capable of doing evil things, but evil people are driven by a self-interest that is so heartless, conscious, and cruel that it delights in stealing from others the lifeblood of their soul.

Often the one who delights in evil is an ordinary, unassuming person who hides behind a facade of normalcy. Few people who are evil ever appear evil, even after the evidence of their deceit, destructiveness, and hardness is exposed. The little old man who feeds birds and smiles warmly as you walk by his home might be a person who has abused a hundred children over the last fifty years. If he is caught, most will doubt the charge, or at least the extent of the harm. This is true, even more so, when the behavior is not societally condemned, but may nevertheless emanate from an evil heart. The father who craftily and pervasively undermines his children at every point of decision, criticizing their reasoning or their motives, superintending every one of their relationships with solicitousness and overprotection, may appear to outsiders to be a

committed and sacrificial parent, but in fact may be a jealous, obsessive accuser who devours their hearts.

One problem in defining evil, and even seeing evil in others, is that it is so common. We all behave in evil ways at times. Jesus says, "You, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children" (Matthew 7:11). He implies we are all capable of evil and commit evil in our most intimate of relationships, yet we are still able to do good. If my heart and hands are looked at from the perspective of any one event, it may be very possible to say that I have done evil. But I would argue that my life, looked at over time and in various situations, would produce evidence that would warrant a different classification for my heart. I am capable of being an evildoer, as anyone is, and actually at times do evil things, but I am not an evil person. A person's heart can be diagnosed as evil only after he is observed in repeated interactions where the patterns of harm are committed without sorrow or openness to feedback.

WHAT IS EVIL?

Evil is present when there is a profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness. Empathy involves a connectedness to the heart of another and a respect for their personal boundaries. An evil person is unmoved by the inner world of the other and has no respect for boundaries. Shame involves an ability to be exposed and disturbed about actual or perceived violations of relationships. An evil person is unaffected by exposure, so is consequently shameless. Finally, goodness involves a desire to see someone or something grow in strength, freedom, and beauty. An evil person seems to delight in stripping away purpose, individuality, and vitality.

Evil Is Cold

Evil is (for the most part) unfeeling. It lacks sorrow when someone suffers and joy when there is happiness. But an evil person is more than emotionally detached; he simply will not allow himself to enter the heart of his victim as a person. The victim

is an object — an entity to be controlled or destroyed — and not a living, breathing being who feels hurt, fear, sorrow, and shame. In that regard, evil sees the other as nothing more than a service to itself. Most of us will use a paper cup and, when finished, discard it without feeling or concern. As long as the cup is useful, it is used, but when its use is finished, there is no reason to keep it or honor it as valuable. Similarly, an evil person feels nothing toward those who are used to satisfy his craving for unlimited power and control.

A husband of one of my clients spent the vast majority of every waking moment exposing the errors of her ungodly thinking. If she expressed an opinion about a friend or if she ordered a meal without his approval, he began a long discourse on the flaws of her logic. His lecture might literally last for hours, and if she differed with his facts, he intensified his onslaught of criticism. He was more than intolerant of other viewpoints; he was methodical and relentless in stalking every thought that differed from his until it was tracked down, shot, and left to die. She felt like she was a prisoner of his words. If she tried to get out, she was forced to endure even more relentless torture. If she sat quietly and endured his tirade, she would be spared the full extent of his violation.

Evil may exhibit normal emotion at appropriate points. In many cases, evil is able to offer sorrow at a funeral or joy at a wedding, but the feelings are not connected to those who are suffering or rejoicing. They are a facade that hides a coldness of heart. I once met the father of one of my clients who was sexually abused by him over a ten-year period of time. He introduced himself and gratefully thanked me for my work with his daughter. He spoke glowingly about the changes he saw in her and then remarked, "I'm sure you are aware she has suffered a great many delusions about her past. What I have been most pleased by is that you seem to be concentrating on her sin, unlike her other therapists, who get caught up in her exaggerated stories." I answered, "I am honored to work with a woman of such integrity and willingness to grow in spite of her wounds," then I stood and looked into his face. When I did not respond enthusiastically to his compliment, he smiled wanly and his eyes

turned dark. We parted, and I felt a chill run through me.

Part of my work with her was to free her from his grasp. I concentrated on her refusal to face the real state of his heart and her tendency to assume responsibility for the abuse in order to hide his stalking evil. She was terrified to face the extent of his heartlessness. At one time when she was six, he put a noose around her neck and forced her to stand all day long on a chair underneath a tree limb. If she fell or swooned, the noose would hang her like a condemned criminal. After standing for hours, she felt weak and began to faint. Her knees crumpled and the noose pulled tight. She fought to regain her balance, but the chair toppled below her and the rope snapped around her throat and then gave way. He had tied the rope so that it would cinch tight and then release when the pressure was strong enough. She blamed herself for being so naive. She thought she should have known as a six-year-old that her father would not really kill her. He was only teaching her a lesson to obey him the next time he asked for something.

In one emotional fight with him twenty years after the event, she recounted the feelings of torture she experienced that day and in many other equally evil assaults. His demeanor was the same as it was with me — pleasant and condescending. He did not deny the event; he merely reinterpreted it as an acceptable means of making a dramatic statement to a little girl who would not listen to or obey her father. He was utterly estranged from the feelings a six-year-old girl might experience at the prospect of hanging to death. He felt no empathy or concern for her pain, then or now. From his perspective, he was trying to be a good parent, and she misinterpreted his concern as cruelty.

An evil person, regularly and masterfully, portrays his motives and behavior as innocent. Others just do not understand. He is deceptively gifted in making the victim of his abuse feel like the perpetrator of the harm. When the victim protests and exposes the abuse, he will accuse the victim of being too sensitive, emotional, troubled, or unreasonable. He portrays himself as the real victim, cruelly misunderstood and falsely accused.

The coldness of evil is a passionless hatred toward any who resist or fail to succumb to the evil person's desires. The hatred is passionless in that even passionate hatred involves an entanglement with those who are hated. Evil seems to transcend passion and feeling. It finds its nourishment in the ability to soullessly eschew relational and emotional entanglements. It is as if the Devil offers the person freedom from human emotion, including the ability to harm others without guilt or fear, if he merely gives his soul to evil. When the innocent veneer is stripped away and his methods are exposed, the eyes of an evil person may look straight into yours with an unflinching strength born of an absence of shame. A second attribute of evil is shamelessness.

Evil Is Hard

Evil is devoid of conscience. It lacks moral boundaries; right is whatever it desires. A seared conscience does not respond with mercy to a cry for help, nor is it stopped by the threat of shame. Evil has an energy that continues to move without restraint or rest. In one sense, it seems boundless, consuming, and all powerful. Its power lies in its coldness and hardness — the fact that it is neither caught up in human suffering nor bound by a dread of shame. Therefore, it does not succumb to the normal give and take of loneliness and fear of rejection.

Most of us don't want to be isolated; loneliness draws us into the will of the group. Evil, on the other hand, allows no feelings of true loneliness, so it is free to violate the values of the group. Similarly, the fear of rejection may repel us from offending the powerful in a group so we won't become the object of contempt. Evil rarely feels shame, so it is free to do as it pleases. It is no wonder evil is a powerful option in a fallen world; it gives a person almost absolute freedom from pain and almost total control over others.

Shame. Shamelessness thrives on the ability to avoid exposure. The experience of shame always involves an exposure of one's inner world by another and is usually a potent deterrent to proceeding in a shameless direction. Shame involves the gut-wrenching threat of being seen and cast away from rela-

tionships. But a person can avoid the experience of shame if he can put out the eyes that see inside him. When his accuser is blind, he can escape the gaze that penetrates his soul. For that reason, evil almost always works to shame the other. Shame works to blind the eyes that expose.

Evil uses arrogance and mockery to escape being shamed. The ability to cover loneliness and fear of rejection without reliance on the mercy of God is predicated on a hardening of the soul through arrogance and a blinding of the eyes through mockery (Proverbs 21:24). Mockery may take obvious forms, such as biting sarcasm and vicious cynicism, or it can be much more subtle.

One client's mother is a pleasant and hospitable woman who is known as a "good" Christian. She bakes meals for shut-ins, serves on church committees, and is involved in many civic organizations. A negative trait, overlooked by most, is a significant temper that never explodes, but oozes molten contempt. Behind closed doors, however, her volcanic fury melts everyone who dares stand in her path. One time, her daughter refused to participate in an activity because she believed it was morally compromising, so the mother slapped her, pulled out a shank of hair, and explosively recounted every wrong her daughter had ever committed. Her daughter finally caved in and agreed to participate. The mother remarked, "I'm glad you've come to your senses."

One awful, abusive event does not make a person evil, but when it represents a repetitive pattern of excessive disregard for others (mockery) and a wanton, vicious refusal to look at the damage done (arrogance), then one can ascertain a significant inclination to evil.

Arrogance. An arrogant heart assumes the prerogatives of God. It claims one's own status, gifts, power, health, and/or finances emanate from oneself — and from nowhere else. It is more than self-sufficiency; it is the boastful claim that one's life is a byproduct of a personal fiat to be powerful and successful. An arrogant person, at core, hates God (Psalm 74:10). He sees God as an affront to his claim of dominion. Does this mean that an evil person will be an atheist or obvious God-hater? No, evil

can parade as an angel of light committed to observing certain religious tendencies, but despising the law of love with a cold, unbridled contempt.

Arrogance swaggers to its own inner rhythm. It sings its own boastful songs of conquering potency. The bravado of arrogance is, at times, enormously attractive. It walks into potentially dangerous and shameful situations, and calmly and powerfully exerts control. There is a sense of confidence, a *savoir faire*, a leader's energy that allows others to abdicate choice and relax in the swagger of their boldness. Arrogance creates a mood of "follow me or get lost." And who wants to be lost in a world such as ours?

Consequently, arrogant men and women rule the world and offer the illusion of rest (from choice) for the weary, and hope (for protection) for the frightened. An arrogant heart is hardened to its own sin and blinds the hearts of those it controls. The more evil a person is, the greater the degree of arrogant hardness ruling his heart. In turn, the greater the hardness, the more likely the control of others will be achieved through vicious contempt.

Mockery. Contemptuous mockery is the language of accusation. It is the bony finger that uses shame to cut through our defense to the fragile, lonely parts of our heart. Few experiences are as difficult to endure as being the object of someone's cackling contempt. For that reason, we will often do anything in the world to avoid the fiery eyes of mockery, including a denial, or at least a hiding of our deepest convictions and beliefs. Mockery is the weapon that evil uses powerfully to strip its victim of a sense of self and life. The withering look of mockery shames the heart and seems to compel it to flee to higher ground in order to avoid the impending flood.

For example, I recently spoke to a prominent physician who is respected as a leader in his community and in his field. He told me of an interaction at a professional conference where he presented a paper. A fellow physician, in a tone of incredulity and contempt, asked him, "Are your findings based on enough research, or do they come from the same kind of hope you have in an unprovable God?" He told me that he wilted.