

"On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand"

Matthew 7:21-29

May 29, 2005 – Proper 4 A

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²³Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'

²⁴"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

²⁸Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Prayer.

The great author, C.S. Lewis, wrote a book in the early part of the 20th century titled, "The Screwtape Letters." I remember reading and discussing it in my high school Sunday school class. It is a masterpiece of satire and irony, portraying the human life from the vantage point of a devil named Screwtape, a highly placed assistant to Satan, who Screwtape describes as "Our Father Below." It is wildly comic, deadly serious, and strikingly original. C.S. Lewis gives us the correspondence of the worldly, wise old devil to his nephew Wormwood, a novice demon in charge of securing the damnation of an ordinary young man. Some have said "The Screwtape Letters is the most engaging and humorous account of temptation -- and triumph over it -- ever written."

(http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/screwtape_letters.asp)

In the spirit of "The Screwtape Letters" I would like to portray Screwtape himself, writing to his nephew, Wormwood:

Dear Wormwood,

"Our Father below" is so pleased with your recent work. You have made progress on so many fronts, where should I begin?

First of all, you've done a good job of trademark infringement. Everything you've done, you been able to cloak it in the name of Christianity. There is strength in using the enemy's weapons against himself. Wield the cross and the Bible, even use holy water if you have to, and be sure to use the term "family values" a lot. If you bill yourself as a non-denominational or independent church, then you don't have to answer to anyone. Put an ad in the paper and invite the neighborhood. You'd be surprised how many people "our Father below" has filled with false hopes.

Work the hatred angle. Work it hard, and wrap it in the name of Christianity. The hatred of homosexuals seems to be bearing much fruit in other departments down here in the Ministry of Darkness. But don't forget to hate immigrants, people who speak different languages, and people of other races. By all means, don't forget to divide the sexes, if at all possible. Keep women out of the pulpit, and continue to perpetuate the lie that ministry is only for men.

Remember, Jesus reached out in love to bi-racial people, the divorced, to women, to foreigners, and to the poor. These are exactly the people "the Father below" wants us to target in our hatred campaigns.

"Our dark Father below" is filling the airwaves with hate filled talk radio, partisan politicians, mean spirited lobbyist, and arrogant and opinionated news anchors and editors. He wants to create a black and white, spoon fed world, where no one questions his authority. Tap into this resource. Encourage your subjects to listen to the hate-mongering. You might even get a few call ins or letters to the editor!

Dear Wormwood, divide Christianity with all your effort. All you have to do is to keep them from doing the will of God. Let them gather and cry out "Lord, Lord" in their religious frenzy. As long as they aren't stopping to help the beat up stranger by the side of the road, we're gaining ground. Let them prophesy in the name of Jesus. Even let them cast you out a few times. Some will even be able to draw upon God's power; just turn away for a time so you're not blinded by His light. All you have to do is to keep them from doing God's will.

On that theme of dividing Christians, do your best to isolate them, too. Sin is a lot easier in private, behind closed doors, without prying eyes. Remember, God builds relationships, among His followers and with His followers. You work for the dark side, dear Wormwood, so do your very

best to estrange people from each other, too.

Prey upon the human tendency for being judgmental. What good Christian has ever been able to keep themselves from damning someone else to hell? They all want to do it; especially the preachers! Let them have at it. Just don't let them open the door of forgiveness. Because if they do, once it's open, there will be no going back and shutting it.

Now, I know, dear nephew, that there are some who have built their faith on the solid rock of Jesus Christ. They are the toughest ones to move. But don't get discouraged. Even the "dark Lord below" has shown some modest victories over the SRCs - "Solid Rock Christians" - as we like to call them - if only you maintain persistent, unrelenting pressure. The secret is to slowly and gradually undermine that foundation with unstable, shifting sand, one grain of sand at a time.

Money is especially effective. A crisp \$100 bill is as good as one grain of sand to some, and is a virtual beach to others. Power is another source of shifting sand. Give people a little bit of power or authority, and you can almost wheel the wheelbarrow of sand behind them.

Remember, the "dark Father below" is all the time arranging for wind and rain to beat against the house of the unwary and unprepared. It's up to you to make sure their foundation is flawed. You're doing a good job, Wormwood, keeping your subject off balance, quarreling, bickering, and fighting. It's a true sign that while the outside may appear solid, we know there is rotting at the core.

Above all else, avoid the subject of grace. Divert, distract, or run away - do anything you can to get away from grace. The Lord above has a monopoly on it. He gives it away for free, and it's like the cement that solidifies a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ. Grace is to us what criptonite is to Superman. With "our Father below" nothing is free. Everything comes at a cost. There is a price on everything and everyone. No, no, no- only God gives grace.

Instead, make sure you push adherence to harsh, unbendable laws. We're out to punish people for their mistakes, and don't you forget that. We want to estrange people from each other. We want to burden people with as much sin and guilt as possible - so that in the end, they do themselves in, and check into Hell's penthouse suite.

Just because love works for the other side doesn't mean that you can't use it in the corruption of your subject, too, dear nephew. After all, even Jesus recognized that evil loves evil. Instead, do your best to cheapen love, to exploit it, to make it dirty. Take the love that brothers feel for each other, and the love of land, and turn it into extreme nationalism, pride, and arrogance. Take the love that sister have for each other and

turn that into fights over the inheritance, greed, and disagreements in the church. Poison the love that children have for their parents, and parents have for their children, by encouraging abuse and neglect. Take the love a wife has for her husband and the love a husband has for his wife, and twist it so tight with lies, rumors, and secrets that – well, we can all sit back and enjoy the cat-fight, and cheer on the divorce.

Finally, dear nephew, inject your subject with little white lies, small inconsistencies in their faith, or shifting beliefs in the latest, newest fads. Those of us in the Ministry of Darkness call this “moral relativism.” People change their beliefs and values all the time to fit the most recent personal crisis or ethical dilemma. People love to tell others what to do, so long as the rules don't apply to them.

Just keep your subject away from Jesus, trying to learn about Jesus, and asking foolish questions like “what would Jesus would do in this circumstance?” So long as you do this, we'll be gaining ground for the dark side.

If you call yourself Christian enough, and if you are able to send mixed and inconsistent messages through words and actions, then you will be sowing effective seeds of doubt amongst people searching for a life with God. Where there is doubt, the dark side wins a victory.

Keep in touch.

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape,

First Assistant to “The Dark Father Below”

Jesus said, ²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²²On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ ²³Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’

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The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.