

Sheep Among Wolves

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that Christians are sent as vulnerable sheep among hostile wolves, called to be wise and harmless as they boldly spread the Gospel despite opposition.

Scripture: Matthew 10:16, Luke 10:3

Topics: "Christian Discipleship", "Spiritual Warfare", "Evangelism"

Description

In 'Sheep Among Wolves,' C.H. Spurgeon powerfully exhorts Christians to embrace their calling to spread the Gospel despite the dangers and opposition they will face. He vividly portrays believers as vulnerable sheep sent into a hostile world of wolves, yet empowered by Christ to minister with wisdom and innocence. Spurgeon encourages believers to actively engage in evangelism, spiritual healing, and warfare, relying on divine authority and grace. This sermon challenges Christians to courageously fulfill their vocation with prudence and holiness.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Matthew 10:16.

WELL may the text begin with a, "Behold," for it contains some special wonders such as can be seen nowhere else. First, here is a tender and loving Shepherd sending His sheep into the most dangerous position—"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." It is the part of a shepherd to protect his sheep from the wolves, not to send them into the very midst of those ravenous beasts! And yet, here is the Good Shepherd, "that Great Shepherd of the sheep," actually undertaking and carrying out this extraordinary experiment of conducting His sheep into the very midst of wolves. How strange it seems to poor carnal sense. Be astonished, but be not unbelieving—stand still awhile and study the reason.

The next remarkable thing is, "sheep in the midst of wolves," because according to the order of Nature, such a thing is never seen, but, on the other hand, it has been reckoned a great calamity that in some lands wolves are too often seen in the midst of sheep! The wolf leaps into the midst of a flock and rips and tears on every side—it matters not how many the sheep may be—for one wolf is more than a match for a thousand sheep. But lo, here you see sheep sent forth among the wolves, as if they were the attacking party and were bent upon putting down their terrible enemies! It is a novel sight, such as Nature can never

show, but Grace is full of marvels!

Equally extraordinary is the singular mixture, never yet seen by human eyes among beasts and birds—a mixture of the serpent with the dove in one person! What a strange blending! Creatures which are capable of cross-breeding must have some sort of kinship. But here is a reptile of the dust united with a bird of the air—"Be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Grace knows how to pick the good out of the evil, the jewel out of the oyster shell, the diamond from the dunghill, the wisdom from the serpent—and by a Divine chemistry it leaves the good which it takes out of the foul place as good as though it had never been there.

Grace knows how to blend the most gentle with the most subtle, to take away from prudence the base element which makes it into cunning and, by mingling innocence with it, produce a sacred prudence most valuable for all walks of life. With these three wonders outside the text, lying, as it were, upon the very surface, we shall enter into a fuller consideration of it with great expectations. But if we do so, we shall be disappointed if we expect to learn anything very extraordinary unless we are prepared to practice what we learn! I may truly say of this text, he that does its bidding shall understand its doctrine. He who follows its precept shall best know its meaning. May the Spirit of all Grace work in us according to His Divine power and perfect in us the will of the Lord.

Though primarily addressed to the Apostles, it seems to me that our text relates, in its measure, to all who have any talent or ability for spreading the Gospel and, indeed, to all the saints so far as they are true to their calling as the children of God. They are, all of them, more or less as sheep in the midst of wolves, and to them all is the advice given, "Be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Let us hear for ourselves as though the Lord Jesus spoke individually to each of us.

We may see in the text four things concerning the people of God. First, their prominent vocation—"Behold, I send you forth." Secondly, their imminent peril—"as sheep in the midst of wolves." Thirdly, their eminent authority—"Behold, I send you forth." And, lastly, their permanent instructions—"Be you wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

I. First, let us consider THEIR PROMINENT VOCATION. They had other callings, for some of them were fishermen, but their great calling was this—"Behold, I send you forth." The call of the Lord overrides all other vocations. Every child of God, according to the capacity of Grace which God has given him, should hear this voice of the Lord calling him and sending him forth to labor—"Behold, I send you forth." These disciples had been with Him and

had been taught by Him that they might teach in His name. They had for some little time been His disciples or learners and now He calls them apart from the rest, and says, "I send you forth to teach and to make disciples."

The mode of operation in the Kingdom of God is, first make disciples, baptize them, teach them whatever the Lord has commanded and then let them go forth and do the same with others. When one light is kindled, other candles are lit from it. Drops of heavenly water are flashed aloft and scattered all around like dew upon the face of the earth and, behold, each one begets a fountain where it falls and thus the desert is made to rejoice and blossom as the rose! Do not try to teach till the Lord Jesus has first taught you! Do not pretend to instruct till you have been instructed! Sit at Christ's feet before you speak in Christ's name—but when once you are instructed, do not fail to become teachers.

The lessons of your Lord will be impressed upon your minds the more forcibly and indelibly when you have earnestly communicated them to your fellow men. First be taught, but afterwards fail not to teach! Hoard not up the treasure of Divine knowledge, for there is no shortage there—eat not, alone, the honey of redeeming love, for there is enough and to spare. Feed not upon the Bread of Heaven with selfish greed, as though there were a famine in the land and you had need to save each crumb for yourself—but break your bread among the hungry crowd about you and it shall multiply in your hands. Christ has called you that you may afterwards go forth and call others to His sacred feast of Grace.

Our Lord called them not only to teach those that came in their path, but to go after the lost sheep. "Behold," He said, "I send you forth." Some persons will hardly teach those who come immediately to their doors. Living under your own roof, with some of you, there are neglected souls! Even in some professedly Christian families there are sons and daughters who are not being trained for holiness nor taught in the way of everlasting life. This is sad to the last degree! Friend, do you fail there? Let conscience be awake to judge! Your Master supposes that you have fulfilled home duties and then He calls you forth to attempt something further.

"Go your ways," He says, "for I send you forth." You have been sitting and hearing the Gospel—leave your seats at times and go forth to bring others to the faith! You have the power of the Word upon your hearts, now go and show its power upon your lips by speaking to others, however few or many. Go out, yourselves, as sowers and scatter the seed your Lord has given you for that end. Go where Providence guides you—to the Sunday school class to teach, to the street corner to preach, to the remote village or hamlet to bear witness for Christ, or to the densely crowded city slums to lift up the banner of Christ—but go your way somewhere!

Sit not down in idleness and fold your arms in indifference to the world's woes. Behold, your compassionate Lord sends you, therefore go gladly anywhere, everywhere—where His wisdom appoints the way—where your business gives you opportunity, or your traveling gives you occasion. "I send you forth," He says. He sent them forth, we are told, to work miracles as well as to preach. Now, He has not given us this power, neither do we desire it—it is more to God's Glory that the world should be conquered by the force of the Truth of God than by the blaze of miracles! The miracles were the great bell of the universe which was rung in order to call the attention of all men all over the world to the fact that the Gospel feast was spread. We do not need the bell, now, for the thousands who have feasted to the full are the best announcers of the banquet!

Those of us who have fed upon Christ and His salvation will make the matter known wherever we go. No further announcement by miracle will be required, save only the standing miracle of the indwelling Spirit. We now have the great advantages of rapid traveling and of the printing press so that we need not the gift of tongues, since men can so much more readily learn a foreign language than they could before, and so much more quickly travel to the spot. The moral and spiritual forces of Truth to work by themselves, apart from any physical manifestation, is more to the Glory of the Truth of God and the Christ of the Truth than if we were all miracle workers and could destroy gainsayers!

But still, though we work no miracles in the physical world, we work them in the moral and spiritual world, yes, and the same miracles, too, for, behold, He has sent us forth to heal the sick as the Evangelist has it in the 8th verse of the chapter before us. Those who are depressed in spirit, faint and feeble, broken-hearted and desponding, bruised and mangled by the assaults of the great enemy—we are to go forth and pour in the oil and wine of the Gospel, apply the heavenly plaster of the promise and bind up with

the sacred liniment of consoling doctrine—and bring before sin-sick sinners everywhere the matchless medicine of the precious blood of Christ! For every spiritual disease the Gospel is the sure remedy and we are to carry it to every land.

"Heal the sick." This, also, we do. Such sicknesses as laugh at the physician and cannot be touched by mortal skill are healed by the servants of Him who came, Himself, to bear human sicknesses that He might bear them away. Go forth, you servants of God, with a better balm than that of Gilead! Sit not still in idleness while bleeding hearts and sickening souls are all around you! Men are perishing—go forth to heal them! You are, also, to "cleanse the lepers." There is a leprosy abroad in the world which takes different shapes in different ages, but is the same, both in its cause and effect. In our land we see on all hands the foul leprosy of drunkenness, that brutish disease which degrades and destroys men's souls. There is the leprosy of superstition which casts into the understanding and makes a man a fool! And, alas, there is the white leprosy of skepticism which, like an inward fire, consumes the very heart.

Sin is this leprosy and our business is, as God shall help us by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to make these lepers clean! It is to be done. It is done by us now in our Lord's name. He that works in us mightily will cause the Word to be mighty to this end, also, that the leprosy may depart from men and that they may come into the congregation of the Lord. He bids us, also, raise the dead, which seems the sternest work of all. But as the others are impossible to us apart from Him, this is not more difficult than the rest. We are to "raise the dead." Our Gospel begins with men where they are by nature and does not wait till they come part of the way. We go forth to preach to those who are careless and insensible, to those who have no feeling whatever and are furthest gone from any tenderness of heart with regard to their own sin or the love of God.

Go with the Gospel to the sepulcher of vice and preach to the dead in sin! The Gospel has a quickening power, Beloved, and Jesus, who is the Resurrection and the Life, sends you forth that by His Word in your mouths, dead souls may be raised! None are too dull to be awakened, too hardened to be renewed. And then He adds, "Cast out devils." This commission He gave to His Apostles and, in a spiritual sense, to us, too. The devil and his legions reign over the hearts of men, subjecting them to sin and unbelief. Behold, they claim this world as their dominion, but it is not so! They are usurpers, for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof! Go with the Truth of God and cast out the demon of error—go with the glad tidings of joy and cast out the demon of despair! Go with the message of peace and cast out the demon of war! Go with the Word of holiness and cast out the demons of iniquity! Go with the Gospel of liberty and cast out the demons of tyranny. These blessed deeds can be done and shall be done, God being with you, and to this end He bids you go in His name, for He will gird you with His strength.

Now, when I say that every Christian, according to his ability, is called to do this, I mean precisely what I say. I mean that Christian men nowadays, while they should be attached to the Church to which they belong—and the more intense that attachment the better for a thousand reasons—yet they should not regard the Church as being a peaceful dormitory where they are all to sleep, but a common barracks where they are all to be trained and out of which they are to issue and carry on the sacred crusade for Christ! We are not to be frozen together with the compactness of a mass of ice, through mere agreement of creed, but welded together like bars of iron by the fire of a common purpose and a common zeal.

If we are what we should be, we shall be continually breaking forth on the right hand and on the left—each man, each woman, according to the calling that God has given to us—we shall be seeking to extend the Redeemer's Kingdom in all directions. My dear Brothers and Sisters, you are arrows in the quiver—how

gladly would I see you shot forth upon the enemy from the bow of the Lord! Many of you are as battleaxes and weapons of war hanging on the wall. O that you may be taken down and used of the Lord in His glorious fight! Lo, on the walls of Zion hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men! But the great need of the age is that these weapons be removed from their resting and rusting and carried into the thick of the fray!

May the Lord send you forth, O you who have been saved under my ministry! May He hurl you forth with Divine power, like a mighty hail against His adversaries. May each man among you be eager to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints and to save souls from going down into the Pit. Here, then, is your permanent vocation—try to realize it.

II. Secondly, we shall consider THEIR IMMINENT PERIL. "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." That is to say, the task is one of great danger and difficulty. Our Divine enterprise is no child's play. The work has its charms—it looks very pretty upon paper and sounds well when eloquently described. At missionary meetings and revival services it stirs your blood to hear of what is to be done and you resolve to rush upon it at once! But while we would not dampen the ardor of one eager aspirant, we would have him count the cost and know what the warfare is. Enlist, by all

means, but stop a bit and know what you are doing, lest you quit the field as hurriedly as you entered it—and bring disgrace both on yourselves and the cause.

Old soldiers who know the smell of gunpowder talk not so lightly of a battle as the raw recruits may do. They remember the blood and fire and vapor of smoke and, though they are not timid, they are very serious. Come, you who have never thought about it, and look upon that which will dishearten every man who is a coward and test the brave as to whether their courage is that of Nature or of Grace. You are to go forth as sheep among wolves, that is to say, you have to go among those who will not in any way sympathize with your efforts.

Sometimes we go among amiable, quiet, almost-persuaded people, and it is somewhat pleasant work, though even there it is very discouraging, for those who are not far from the kingdom are often the hardest to be won. People on the border are a difficult sort of people to deal with and for real success one may as well go among the decidedly ungodly at once. If you discharge your souls and behave zealously before God, you will have to deal with people who cannot enter into your feelings or agree with your aims. The bleating sheep finds no harmony in the bark or howl of the wolf! The two are very different animals and by no means agree. You do not suppose that you are going to be received with open arms by everybody, do you?

And if you become a preacher of the Gospel you do not imagine that you are going to please people, do you? The time may come when, perhaps, the wolves will find it best, for their own comfort, not to howl quite so loudly, but my own experience goes to show that they howl pretty loudly when you first come among them—and they keep up the hideous concert year after year until, at last, they somewhat weary of their useless noise. The world raves as a wolf if any man is in double earnest for the Kingdom of Christ. Well, you must bear with it. What sort of sympathy can a lamb expect from wolves? If he expected any, would he be not disappointed? Be not disappointed, for you know your surroundings and you know your mission!

When our Savior used similar words to the 70, He did not call them sheep, but lambs, (see Luke 10:3), for they were not so far advanced as the 12, yet He sent them into the same trying circumstances and they

returned in peace. Even the weak ones among us should, therefore, be of good courage and be ready to face opposition and ridicule. Sheep in the midst of wolves are among those who would rip them, tear them, devour them. Luther used to say Cain will go on killing Abel to the world's end, if he can, and so he will till that millennial day when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb! The disposition and nature of the wolves cause them to be opposed to the sheep—and it is the nature of the world to hate the children of God!

All through history you see the two seeds in contention—if there is Abel there is Cain who slays him. If there is Noah, you see an ungodly world all round him. If there is an Isaac, so, also, is there an Ishmael who will mock him. And if there is a Jacob, there is an Esau who seeks to kill him. There cannot be an Israel without Pharaoh, or Amalek, or Edom, or Babylon to oppose! David must be hunted by Saul and the Son of David by Herod. There is an enmity between the seed of the serpent and the Seed of the woman—and that enmity will always remain. The ungodly roar upon the righteous and seek to bring cruel accusations against them, even as against their Lord. No matter how pure the lives of the godly, the wicked will slander them! No matter how kind their actions, they will render evil in return. No matter how plain and honest their behavior, they will suspect them and no matter how disinterested in their motives, they will be sure to attribute to them the most evil designs, for the wolf comes to kill and to devour—and he will do it to the best of his ability.

Ah, how red are his fangs in times of persecution! How the wolf raged and raved over, this, our country, in the days of Mary and Charles the Second. And afterwards when, first as a Protestant and next as a Puritan, the godly were devoured and he that followed his conscience was made to suffer bitterly! Scotland can tell how the wolf's fangs were wet with the blood of her covenanting sons! And were it not for God's own strong hand put upon them, the wolves would be tearing the sheep to this day in our own land! Again, they were to go like sheep among wolves, among a people who would hinder their endeavors, for their business was to seek the lost sheep and the wolves would not help them in that. On the contrary, the wolves, themselves, desire to seize upon the lost sheep as their prey.

You must expect, if you are faithful to Christ and put forth zealous efforts, that there will be others who will put forth their strength and cunning to oppose you! It is often an awful game that we have to play for a man's soul. Each move we make is met by the devil and, unless God directs us, we shall lose the man. If we draw him to a Prayer Meeting,

another takes him to the theater. If we set before him the Truth of God, another puzzles him with skepticism. If we persuade him, others entice him in the wrong direction. The cunning of our foe is something terrible! We go forth to hunt for precious souls, but there are others who, in another sense, hunt for the precious life.

The streets at night tell of those whom Satan hires that he may use them as his decoys! The vicious literature scattered abroad so plentifully is another form of the nets of Satan, the great fowler, who catches the sons of men in his snares. If we are not earnest, the devil is! He never sleeps—he lost his eyelids long ago. We may slumber if we dare, but the powers of evil will never suspend their activities—day and night the deadly work goes on and the wolves howl over their prey. Therefore we go forth like sheep, not among the images of wolves, but in the midst of real active wolves that are doing all they possibly can to destroy those sheep who are as yet lost, but whom Christ has, nevertheless, purchased with His precious blood!

We are to go forth like sheep among wolves in this sense, that we are quite powerless against them. What can a sheep do if a wolf sets upon it? It has no strength to resist! And so those 70 disciples of Christ, if the Jews had hunted them down, would have gone to prison and to death, for they could not fight. "My Kingdom," said our Lord, "is not of this world, else would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." All through the history of the Church, when the wolves actually set upon the sheep, they make no active resistance, but as the flock of slaughter they suffer and die. I know there was a time in history when the sheep began fighting, but it was not their Master's mind that they should—He bids us put our sword in its scabbard. Our place is to bear and bear and bear continually—as He did!

He says, "If a man strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other, also." Fighting sheep are strange animals and fighting Christians are self-evident contradictions. They have forsaken the Master's way—they have gone off from the platform where He stands whenever it comes to carnal weapons. It is ours to submit and to be the anvil which bears the blows but outlasts all the hammers! After all, the wolves have had, by far, the worst of it—the sheep are multiplied and the wolves grow fewer and fewer! As a matter of fact, the sheep have lived in this country to see the last of the wolves—and they will in other lands, too!

The wild dogs of Australia are very fierce against the sheep, but the sheep will surely, in the end, live, and the wild dog will die. Everywhere it is so. They are weak in themselves and yet they conquer the strong. "Ah," you say, "it is the Shepherd who gives them this victory." Precisely so! And that is where our strength lies—even in "that Great Shepherd of the sheep." Though called to bow down as the street that men may go over us, by this endurance we conquer! In suffering we are invincible and in this sign we conquer—the cross of self-denial and self-sacrifice leads the way. "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing! Being provoked, you return gentleness and, being persecuted, you pray for your enemies!

"Ah," says one, "I do not like the looks of such a mode of warfare!" I thought you would not and you may go your way. As notice was given of old in the camp of Israel that he who had lately married a wife, or built a house, or was fainthearted, might go home, so do we say—"To your beds, you cowards! If you cannot undertake this for your Master, He does not need that His hosts should be encumbered by your presence!" Our Master calls out men to whom He gives Divine Grace that they may be strong to endure even unto the end! The Spirit of the Lord gives patience and forbearance to those who, in true faith, seek to be like their suffering Lord.

Brethren, it is trying work for the sheep to go forth among wolves, but it has to be done. Picture it in your mind's eye. The timid sheep trembles at it. The wolves are rough, unmannerly, coarse-minded, irritating, annoying. The poor sheep does not feel at home in such company! He sees, every now and then, the white teeth glittering within the wolf's mouth and he is ill at ease. The sheep wishes he were back in the quiet fold among his happy brethren, but the Shepherd knows what He is doing and it is the duty of the sheep to obey and to go into the midst of the wolves if his Shepherd bids him. It is very testing, too, because if a man is not truly one of God's own, he will not obey so trying a command, but will neglect duty and seek comfort.

It will try even you who are most sincere. You think you have much patience—get among the wolves and see how much is left! You fancy you could put up with a great deal of annoyance—let it come upon you and you will see how it torments you. When it comes to the loss of your good name, to downright lying and slander against the most tender part of your character. When it comes to bitter sneers and sarcasms and

words which eat like acid into the flesh and burn like

coals of fire flung into the bosom, it is not easy, then, to maintain the love which hopes all things, endures all things. Grace, alone, makes Believers press forward in their work of love, seeking with gentleness to win souls.

Oh to say—though the wicked man curses me and foams at the mouth with rage—I will still seek his good! This is the victory of faith, but the battle will test all your Graces and make you see that all is not gold which glitters. You will soon see whether the Spirit of God is in you or not, for patient love is not natural, but supernatural—and only he who is filled with the supernatural indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be able to live as a sheep among wolves! If you can accomplish this work it will be very instructive to you.

You will never know why Christ wept over Jerusalem till you get among the Jerusalemites and painfully feel the cruel wrongs which make men weep because they love! You cannot understand the Savior's death throes, the bloody sweat, the heaviness even unto death and the broken heart until you go, like a sheep, into the midst of wolves! Then you will be where Jesus was and you will have fellowship with Him! Practical learning is best—books cannot teach us fellowship with our Lord, but when we get to do Christly work, then we come to mourn the evil which He lamented and prize the remedy which He supplied. Thus we gather knowledge and are, ourselves, the better for our labor for others.

III. Let us now look at God's servants sent forth and note THEIR EMINENT AUTHORITY. "Behold I send you forth." What a grand expression! It could be used by no mere man! He who spoke thus is Divine. Brothers and Sisters, our commission justifies us in what we do. For a sheep to go into the midst of wolves of its own accord would be a foolish courting of peril. But when the Great Shepherd says, "I send you," it would be a grievous fault to linger. Who is this who says, "I send you"? First, it is "The Lord of the Harvest." Did you notice while we were reading in the 10th of Luke, how the two verses ran on, "Pray you, therefore, the Lord of the Harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest. Go your ways; behold, I send you."

The same connection is here, only there is a little parenthesis—read the last verse of the ninth chapter of Matthew, and you will see that it is the same. It is the Lord of the Harvest to whom we pray, who actually sends us forth in answer to our own prayers! He is the Master of all worlds and owner of the souls of men. He puts His sickle into your hands and bids you go forth and reap the golden grain which is the reward of the travail of His soul. "I send you,"—the Lord of the Harvest. Armed with His authority, who shall daunt you? Go even to the gates of Hell if Jesus commands!

Next, "I send you"—I, who prize you, for you are My sheep. I who love you, for I bought you with My blood. I, who would not expose you to a needless danger. I, who know by My infinite wisdom that I am doing a wise and a kind thing. I send you, you, My sheep, My dear sheep, for whom I laid down My life—I send you into the midst of wolves—therefore you may safely go, for I, who love you, send you there. Lord, we ask no questions, but we go at once. "I send you," that is I who have gone on the same errand Myself.

Did He not come into the world like a sheep in the midst of wolves? Remember with what patience He endured and with what glory He triumphed! Remember His poverty and shame and death! Remember how, like a sheep before her shearers, He was dumb, like a lamb that is taken to the slaughter, He opened not His mouth. He does not bid you go where He has not gone Himself. It is dangerous, but then He has passed through the danger, endured it and triumphed in it. "I send you"—mark that—I who overcame in the very Character in which I send you! Have you not read in the book of Revelation, "The Lamb shall

overcome them"? And again, "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb." And know you not that Heaven's high songs go up to Him that sits upon the Throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever?

The Lamb in the midst of wolves has conquered the wolves and is Lord of All! And so He, in effect, says, "You are My lambs, therefore, go forth,, as I did. Endure, as I did. Conquer, as I did, and you shall sit on my Throne and the Lamb shall lead you to the living fountains of water."

IV. We close by noticing THEIR PERMANENT INSTRUCTIONS. You have a tough task before you, to act as

sheep among wolves! Your Lord leaves you not without guidance in the form of plain precepts. What are you to do, then? Be bold as lions? Yes, but that is not the principal thing. Be swift as eagles? Yes, by all means, but that is not the main requirement. For everyday life, for the wear and tear of this great battle, there are two grand requisites. The first is prudence—be wise as serpents. And the next thing is innocence—be harmless as doves.

First, be prudent and wise as a serpent. Do not imitate a serpent in any other respect but in this. Never let the devil enter into you as he did the serpent, nor become groveling and cunning. But, still, the serpent is an exceedingly wise creature and it had need to be, for it lives in a world where it is hated by a deadly foe. It is natural for man to hate the

whole serpent tribe. The very first thing you do if you see a viper is to look for a stick to kill it. Everybody is the enemy of serpents and if they are to exist, at all, they must be very wary—in this you are to copy them.

What does a serpent do to preserve itself? What is it which proves its wisdom? First, it gets out of the way of man as much as it can. Our Lord meant this, for immediately after our text He says, "But beware of men." It is well to get out of the society of ungodly men and let them see that their habits and modes of conversation are not ours. Seek to benefit them, but do not seek their society! Their wolfish propensities are most seen in their leisure time, in their drinking and reveling and, therefore, keep far from these. You have no business in their parties, their frivolous assemblies, their drinking bouts and places of lascivious song.

Do not accept their invitations when you know that they will be under no restraint. Do not linger near them when they are talking lewdly or profanely. Your moving away will be your most telling protest. You must be with them in your business—indeed, you are sent to them—but while you are with them you must not be of them! And you should discreetly avoid them when you know that you can do no good. You younger ones should get out of the way of old blasphemers and scoffers as much as you ever can, for they delight to worry the lambs. Do not attempt to answer them, but keep out of their way. Do not court quarrelling and controversy, but avoid all disputing upon the Gospel.

Your workmates will chaff you and, no doubt, you will receive many opprobrious epithets, but neither provoke this treatment nor resent it in any way. Do not cast pearls before swine and do not introduce religion at unseasonable times. Hold your principles very firmly, but when you know a man will only blaspheme if he hears you name the name of Jesus, do not give him the occasion. Stand up for Jesus when the time is fit, but do not exercise zeal without knowledge. When a man is half drunk, or in a passion, leave him to himself and thus escape many a brawl. At another opportunity, when the occasion is more favorable, then endeavor to instruct and persuade, but not when failure is certain. Be very prudent and hold your peace when silence is better than speech.

How else does the serpent act? It glides along very quietly. It can hiss, but it does not very often do so. As it glides along, it neither sings, nor roars, nor barks. It does not court observation. It slips off quietly, gracefully, swiftly and without noise. Now, do not seek after great publicity. There may be times when it may be well to ring the great bell. If you can get multitudes of people together to hear the Gospel, by all means ring the bell as loudly as you can! But as far as you are personally concerned, do not make a fuss, do not blazon abroad what you are going to do, do not call upon everybody, saying, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts."

Glide along through a useful life as quietly as the serpent which does what he finds to do and says nothing, dreading, rather than courting the eyes of man. Unobtrusive earnestness, quiet, simple-minded resolution to achieve your purpose—whether men will bear or whether they will forbear, whether they will praise, or whether they will laugh at you—this is your wisdom. Then, again, the serpent is famous for finding his way where no other creature could enter—any little space, any tiny opening will be sufficient for his purpose. His form is adapted to progress among obstacles. You may block the way to other creatures, but he will wriggle in somehow.

So should it be with us. If we cannot get at men's hearts one way, we must try another. If you cannot induce them to read the Gospel, get them to hear it. If you cannot induce them to hear a sermon, drop a verse into their ears. If a tract is refused, put a word in edgeways for your Lord and Master. There is a way into everyone's heart if you know how to find it—be wise as serpents and discover it. Though it seems very difficult to reach some minds, yet with holy perseverance and serpentine adroitness continue the attempt and you will succeed. There is a weak point in the strongest man's mind, where his opposition can be wounded. Even Leviathan that laughs at the spear has a tender place where the spear's point may come at him—and so the most ungodly, wicked, blaspheming, profane infidel has some point where you may reach his better feelings if you do but search it out. Be wise as serpents in this respect.

But then you are to add to this—which might otherwise degenerate into cunning—the innocence of the dove. The Greek for, "harmless," is, "without horn." The dove is without horn, hoof, fang, or other means of defense. You are to have positively no weapons! Like the dove, you are to be defenseless. It seems an amazing thing to set doves flying at eagles, and lambs at war with wolves, but this is what the Lord has done! This defenselessness, however, which looks like our weakness, is our real strength! Our being harmless appears to predict sure destruction, but it is to be the means of certain victory!

You are to be gentle and easily entreated. You are not to fly into a passion because you are contradicted, nor to be angry because you are reviled. You are to endure contradiction and slander with tenderness and gentleness, as a dove bears all things. You are not to be driven into any sin by opposition. The dove is pure—it loves to be by the rivers of waters, in the quiet and clean places. So should you never be driven to sinful word or deed, but do good to all men and glorify God in all things by being both gentle and pure as a dove. And as the dove is very simple and is altogether artless and unworldly, so let your strength and your wisdom lie in your artless truthfulness and childlike dependence upon God.

See how Christ explains His own utterance a little further down. "Harmless as doves," then He adds, "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak." Be like a dove, confident because fearless, gentle, artless, simple and restful. Do no ill, and fear none. You Christian people, if you are going to defend the Gospel, need not study oratory or become expert in pleading such as are used at law. Tell the truth and baffle the devil! The Truth of God is the most powerful weapon and the most subtle policy.

I believe that even in affairs of State, truth is wisdom. No diplomatic agent would so confound intriguers as a man who should tell the truth. They would conclude that what he said was a lie because they are accustomed to regard everything as having another meaning. An ambassador, it was formerly said, was to be a gentleman who is sent abroad to lie for the good of his country—but I hope it is not so now. If straightforward truth should ever become the policy of any country it would be invincible in council! If in politics a man were to throw away all arts and tricks and adhere only to principle, he must gain respect. The greatest art in all the world is to fling all art away and the grandest policy is to have no policy, but honest dealing. The bravest thing that can ever be done and the most noble, is to be artless and harmless as a dove.

There, then, is the policy of your warfare—be prudent, but be innocent and simple-minded. Oh, the power of truthfulness! Do not believe that men are strong in proportion as they are artful. By no manner of means! Do not believe that they are strong in proportion as they can bend a fist. No, the power of a Christian must lie in his holy heart, in his earnest tongue and in his look of love. By this he shall vanquish, and by nothing else! The conclusion of my sermon is this. Does it come home to you, Brothers and Sisters? Do you hear the Lord sending you out to work? Then I entreat you, go forth! Suppose I make that one sentence my last word—"go forth"?

You may have heard of the Scot officer who had his men drawn up for the battle and felt bound to make them a speech. He pointed to the enemy, and said, "There they are, lads. If you don't kill them, they will kill you." My words are the same—There are the enemies of all righteousness, the enemies of Christ, the enemies of the good of men, the enemies of progress—if you do not overthrow them by publishing the Gospel to all according to your ability, they will overthrow you! Which is it to be? By the Grace of the Eternal and the Omnipotence of Him who bled for us, we will conquer even by His Cross after His own fashion! Only let His Holy Spirit rest upon us. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/sheep-among-wolves/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net