

## SHEEP AMONG WOLVES

Matthew 10:16-23

By Raymond White

Christians make enemies. Just saying that there is such a thing as sin is enough to drive some people to violent rage. Jesus knew that he was sending his disciples into harm's way so he gave them advice how sheep are to survive among wolves who want to destroy them. First, Jesus wanted his disciples to understand clearly enough where wolves might be coming at them from.

1. **Religion**     *Matthew 10:17* ...they will scourge you in their synagogues;
2. **Government** *Matthew 10:18* ...ye shall be brought before governors and kings...
3. **Family**       *Matthew 10:21* And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death.

It's ironic that the very institutions — church, government, family — from which we should expect safety and protection are the very people who are the most dangerous. Jews killed Christians, Christians killed Jews, Christians killed Christians, and Moslems kill anybody who will not "submit." Nothing justifies violence more than religion — except government.

When it comes to body count, government sets the record. Nazis killed 6,000,000 Jews, Communists killed 20,000,000 Russians and 40,000,000 Chinese, and abortion is off the chart. Every major government in the history has been guilty of genocide. The purpose of government is to protect the people, and usually governments do, but sometimes they don't. And when governments turn against a people, governments have power to inflict whatever injustices they wish. And Christians occasionally find themselves wearing targets.

But the biggest surprise is family. The greatest love can sometimes morph into the greatest hatred. A sense of betrayal is the driving force that sometimes causes families to reject or even harm a family member who has changed their religion.

Jesus gave his disciples fair warning about those possibilities, he also gave them advice.

### [1] BE WISE

*Matthew 10:16* ...be ye therefore wise as serpents...

God places no premium on stupidity. Preach the word, yes, but don't be a bull in a china shop. *Colossians 4:5* Walk in wisdom toward them that are without. Learn to say the right thing at the right time. Find the best way to handle confrontation. Use the brain that God gave you. Even Jesus ducked away from combative situations, that's why he taught in parables, to cloak truths that would only enrage some people. But with his own, he shared everything freely.

### [2] BE HARMLESS

*Matthew 10:16* ...and harmless as doves.

Christians are not to be violent. *Luke 6:26* Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. This is the real power of Christianity, that it genuinely seeks to be at peace with everyone. That is Christianity's appeal and its draw.

Mormons have a wonderful Article of Faith. It is #11 which reads: *We claim the right to worship almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege. Let them worship how, where, or what they may.* Amen to that. A superior religion must be able to advance its cause simply by defending its ideas in the arena of public debate, without violence. Any religion that needs to resort to violence, to kill or threaten, in order to gain converts or keep its members proves that it is an inferior religion with weak ideas.

### [3] BEWARE

*Matthew 10:17 But beware of men: for they will...*

Be alert, be perceptive, be on your guard. Use common sense and good judgment. Yogi Berra said it whimsically, "You can observe a lot just by watching."

### [4] BE CALM

*Matthew 10:19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. :20 For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*

Sometimes, in spite of your best efforts, you just can't escape. When you are finally brought to that place of high danger, trust the Holy Spirit to guide your words. God may get you out of the mess or he may not. Maybe it's time for you to be offered. Whichever, be assured that your words matter. What you say at that moment of greatest peril will not be spoken in vain. God is doing the talking so why worry? *Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing.*

### [5] BE GENUINE

*Matthew 10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

Only a real faith has the strength to survive the worst. Phony faith dissipates before any real test begins. Anyone can claim to believe anything, but when the wolves arrive, then we see whose faith is real and whose is not. *Hebrews 3:14 We are partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast to the end. 1 Corinthians 15:2 ...ye are saved if you keep in memory what I preached unto you...*

### [6] BE GONE

*Matthew 10:23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*

This is really good advice, and welcome. Jesus does not require you to take abuse. You are allowed to flee. And besides, you don't have time to talk to everyone anyway, so you might as well be choosy. If you're surrounded by wolves, don't waste your time with wolves, escape.