

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

Date: April 18, 1999

Scripture Reading: *II Corinthians 11:13*

Sermon Title: **The Devil's Masquerades**

One of the grandest opportunities to minister in our church is through our ministry of deacons. Several years ago, we changed many of the ways people could serve as deacons. Before, we had a committee that sought people out to serve. They would serve for a period of three years. Then we came to the conclusion that God ought to call people to the ministry of deacons like he does to everything else. So, we began to say that if people felt lead to be a deacon, then they would contact us. It has been one of the most remarkable movements of God's spirit among the leaders of our congregation. Many people have come forward and said, "I feel that this is a way in which I can serve."

This morning we are going to recognize some people who are being ordained for the very first time as well as one person who is going to be installed who has served as a deacon in other places. Let me just say to you that deacons in our congregation serve as pastoral ministers. What they do is help us take care of every member of our congregation. We are in the process right now of going from 60 people to 70. We are seeing people as they step forward to serve, not for a three-year period, but for as long as God leads them to serve.

This morning we will have the privilege of participating in the ordination of Mr. Ralph Finch. At the close, we will also recognize Mr. Jeff Brockman. We have asked that Ralph come forward and bring a chosen

person who is ordained to represent other ordained people. This person will come and have a prayer over him. Then we will have a hymn and Dr. Graham will then come and lead us in a prayer. This will be a moment for you to pray for these sixty five people who are now serving and to pray for these new people, that they will feel God's leadership in their lives. Pray that our church will be strengthened because of it. Ralph would you and the person that you have chosen to pray with you come forward?

Prayer:

"Our Lord and our God, it is such a privilege to be used by you. It is the only way in which we have real meaning in life when we surrender our whole self to you to be used. Father, I thank you for Ralph who is surrendering his life to you completely as a deacon to be a lay minister to be the hands and the feet of Christ. To be there at births and deaths and all the other crises in between. I ask that you would bless him with your power, your presence, your wisdom. Father, I ask that you will bless all the other deacons as they serve you and as they go out into our congregation in times of need. I ask that they represent the body of Christ so that people will see you in them. Bless them with the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name we pray. AMEN.

Ralph we are so very grateful that you are serving in this capacity. I understand that this is your sister. We are so grateful that you could participate with your brother. Jeff, come stand with me a moment. This is Jeff Brockman. Jeff has served as a deacon in another church and now has come to indicate his desire to serve as one of our lay ministers. Jeff, we pray for you and ask God's blessings upon you. Ralph, we want to present to you, as a first time deacon, a gift of a book that we hope will be helpful to you. Our prayers and support goes to both of these men. In the next service we will have some additional people we will ordain. I know that you will pray for them as God will bless them. As I indicated,

these people have felt God's leadership in this area. We are moving more and more in our congregation not that we go looking for you to ask you, but we are praying that the Spirit will so move in your life that you will feel what God wants you to do. That you will come to us and say God is working in my life and this is what I feel I should do. And I pray, that as they pray, you pray for them that you will be praying for yourself and God's leadership in your own life.

As we think of the deacon ministry in our church or even as we think of us becoming His disciples, we can recall the text from John 15. "Abide in Me and I in you" Christ says "as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except that it abides in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me. I am the vine and you are branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him the same bringeth forth much fruit for without Me you can do nothing." As we think of our reflections and our outreach to other people, we think of that one primary goal in life and that is to love one another. The song we sing today, that you will find in your bulletin, reflects on this very text of John 15. We ask that you join the choir on the refrain.

At this time of the year, millions of people visit New Orleans to celebrate Mardi Gras. Many people are not aware that Mardi Gras has a religious connection. Most of the people who go there do not understand why they attend at all. It has been said that one visitor seeing the Spanish Moss hanging from the oak trees in New Orleans asked "Is that Mardi Grass?" But Mardi Gras means "Fat Tuesday". It is celebrated before Ash Wednesday, which is forty days before the commemoration of Good Friday. But like most religious holidays, it has been corrupted so that few people actually know what it is. For weeks there are parades that take place during the day, and then at night every hotel is full of people who are going to balls and to dances. One of the most famous of these are the masquerade balls. Masquerade as you know is when a person will put on a costume or a

mask and you do not know who he is. So you could wear a mask like this one of the former President. You could be the current President like this mask. Masquerade balls are fun, except when you make them a part of your life.

Now in the Bible it warns us of people who masquerade. In our passage of scripture today from the book of II Corinthians it says this about masquerades. It talks about certain people who were going around saying they were apostles or saying they were leaders of God. Listen to what Paul says in II Corinthians 11:13. "Such men are false apostles. Deceitful workmen masquerading as apostles of Christ. But do not be surprised for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." Now many of us think that when Satan comes to tempt us he comes to present himself in such an awful way that most of us would immediately turn our back to him. We picture him in the worst sort of conditions and scenes and so we would never have anything to do with him. But the Bible says that is not the way in which Satan comes. The Bible says that he comes masquerading himself, saying that he is one thing when really he is something else. The Bible says that he most often comes as an angel of light. Now a masquerade or a fraud does not have any meaning if it does not appear to be authentic. If I came to you and said "here is a twenty dollar bill", you would look at it and say "that is authentic". I wouldn't present to you a counterfeit that looked like play money that even a little six year old could determine whether it was real or not. Counterfeit or masquerade means that they look almost exactly alike. When the devil comes, he does not come as the exact opposite of evil. He comes to look like something good. It takes a moment to

examine it and then you realize that it is truly evil.

Let me show you how Satan works in the Bible. In the Bible sometime numbers have the same meaning as letters. For example: the number 3 is a number for God, a number 4 is the number for the world. So if you add 3 and 4 and get 7 in the Bible that was a perfect number. Or if you multiply 3 times 4 and come up with 12 that is a perfect number. When you look in the Bible, it says how many gates go into Heaven. The Bible immediately says 12. Now this does not mean 1,2,3,4, .... 12. What it means is that it is perfect entrance into God's presence. Now listen to what the Bible says is the number for the devil, 666. Not 111, it's almost 7 it almost looks like 7. When the devil comes he appears to be good and righteous. He comes masquerading himself. Interestingly enough when he wanted to tempt Jesus, what did he quote? Not Hugh Hefner, he quoted the Bible. He said "God has said...." Jesus had to think a moment. That is not what the Bible said. The Bible says that when the devil finally comes in all of his evil manifestation, he is going to be in the temple and he is going to say "I am God." So all of us need to be aware that we live in a universe that is filled with spiritual deception. The only way that we are ever going to be able to see through him is to be able to look through the eyes of Jesus. Now if he therefore is the deceiver, and if he is a masquerader, wouldn't you think the place he would most likely attack is where a person could get right with God? If the very heart of scripture is to help you to have a good relationship with God, then surely the devil will come and attack at that very place. This is the way in which he operates. This is exactly what he does. He comes in areas of your life that many times you are not aware of. Let me point out some of them to you.

First, many times he comes to you and attacks you intellectually in your spiritual life. One of the most chilling accounts that you could ever read is how Adolph Hitler seized and maintained power. He was the first person who actually mastered that art of what we now call "propaganda". What he would do, is use words that you thought meant one thing when really he meant something else. For example someone used to always laugh and say Hitler would get up and say "I want peace." Well he did. He wanted a piece of Hungary and a piece of Czechoslovakia and a piece of Poland. But, he said "I want peace" and everybody said he was a man of peace. And he kept saying it over and over and over again, until people just believed what he said. The way totalitarian governments continue in control today is that they say one thing but mean something else. They say it all the time until everybody says that it must be true.

The devil is the master propagandist. He takes words that mean one thing to you, but really mean something else. The word that he uses the most to twist its meaning is the basic word of the New Testament. It is the word "Believe". The Bible says that to believe in God means I accept there is a God but I am also willing to give my life to him. I am willing to let him come into my life and begin to live like he wants me to live. The word "Believe" is two words By live. What you believe is what you live by. Show me how you live and I will tell you what you believe. A person who believes in Jesus accepts who Jesus is and is willing to let Jesus become Lord and Master of his life. Now, if the devil wanted to counterfeit you intellectually what do you think he would do? Well he would come and say let me tell you what the word "Believe" means. It means to accept that something is true. Oh well, that sounds good except he just didn't tell you all of it. But many individuals think "I am right with God because I believe there is a God." Did you know that in the Bible it says the devil believes there is a God? So

why is the devil not a Christian? Because he has never followed the second part of the definition. He has never accepted who Jesus is and let him become a part of his life and alter his lifestyle by it. There are many people who think "Well I am one of the 97% of Americans who believe in God, therefore I must be alright." The Bible then is masquerading, twisting, and making you believe that if you are not an Atheist you must be a Christian. Believe means that I am willing to give myself and let Him become Lord and master of my life. It is not just an intellectual understanding.

When our two sons were growing up, usually if there was a difficulty the first thing you would say was "John". John just happened to be the one who would push the envelope and got in trouble the most. One day some men were fixing the roof on our house. I had come home for lunch and the men had taken the time off for lunch. They had left the ladder against the house. So we were inside and I heard this voice say "Help!" I went outside and four year old John was on top of the house and had kicked the ladder down. "Help". Now we had an "A" frame home and at the back was the carport with a flat roof. Smart dad I am, I said "John stay right there. Now go get on the flat roof. I'm going to back the car out, stand on the car, and I'll get you." I backed the car out and I'm standing on the car. I said "okay boy this is it, the big moment, jump!" John looks down. I said "John I am your dad, I love you. I would never let anything happen to you." This is the big moment, "Jump! John you're four. I'm thirty-four. I'm strong enough to catch you. This is it." I had to put the ladder back up, get him like a sack of potatoes and bring him down. Now let me ask you, what did John believe? Did John believe I was his dad? Yes he did. Did John believe that I could catch him, yes! Yet, John didn't jump.

I believe there is a God. I believe Jesus is the Son of God. I believe the Bible is the Word of God. You can believe all of that, if you accept the devil's definition of the word "Believe". But if you

have never surrendered, if you have never jumped, if you have never given yourself to him, then the Bible says you have never come into a saving relationship with him. Now what better way to trick you than to make you think everything is alright when it is not. All He has to do is to come and effect you intellectually.

There is a second way in which he will come, so you need to watch for him. The second way in which he will come is to come to you morally. Most people who are moral really want to live right. If I came to you and said "Listen, I have a good deal for you . I can give you a hundred dollars worth of drugs for 25 cents". In this congregation I would not get many takers. Most of you really want to live right, you really want to do what is right. Now listen to what the Bible says. The Bible says that regardless, listen carefully, regardless of how much you want to live right you cannot live right enough to satisfy God. That what God does not want is your best. What God wants is for you to recognize that in spite of all of your effort, in spite of all of your good intentions, you cannot come to be what God wants you to be. So what you do is, you get on your knees and you say, "God I'm going to have to depend on you. Dear God, I need you to forgive me. Dear God, it is not what I can do, it is what you can do and I am going to trust you." The Bible says that God, not in His justice but in His grace reaches down and says I love you and I forgive you and I accept you. Why? Because you were saying, "boy I am going to really try." No! Because you come to a spot where you trust, you surrender, you give yourself to Him. Now some of you are trying awfully hard to do everything you can to do your very best. All of the time in which you are trying, you come to recognize that you can't do enough. You see, everybody has to come to a decision. You either have a two letter religion or a four letter religion.

The two letter religion is spelled D-O. It's what I do. If you are here this morning and say, "look at what I have done. I went to church and I do this and I and I and I...," then you are saying "I" have done it. The Bible says what you are going to do is get really proud. When you get to Heaven you are going to say, God, aren't you fortunate to have me?" You could have a four letter religion, D-O-N-E. I accept what Christ has done for me. I can't do it and I accept what has been done.

Ebenezzar Wooten was a Scottish evangelist. He used to put up tents and hold revivals in little villages in Scotland. One day he had been preaching and the revival was over when a man came up to Ebenezzar Wooten and said, "Mr. Wooten, I have been thinking about what you said last night. I want to ask you a question. What must I do to be saved?" Mr. Wooten didn't even stop taking down the tent. He said, "you're too late." The man said "what!" Mr. Wooten said, "you're too late" and just kept taking down the tent. He said "Mr. Wooten, I'm really serious, what must I do to be saved?" He said "I told you, you're too late" and kept taking down the tent. Finally the man took him and turned him around and said "Listen preacher, what must I do to be saved?" "I told you, you are too late.

You are 2,000 years too late. What has been done for you has been done by Jesus Christ and if you ever want to be a Christian you are going to accept what He has done, not what you can do."

Now some of you are trying hard and you think if you can do enough, surely God is going to accept you. But He comes and says you can't do enough. Some of you are struggling so that you can be accepted. You see the opposite is the truth. Once I know that I have been accepted, then I live my life out of gratitude and love and thanksgiving to God for

what He has already done for me, not for what I can do for myself.

Here comes the last way. Satan masquerades intellectually. He masquerades morally. Then he comes to masquerade to good people in the church. Many people, when they were children were taken by their parents and baptized. The word that is usually used is christened. I was not raised in that tradition, so I didn't understand christening. The only time I ever heard the word christened was when a ship was christened. For a long time as a child, I didn't understand christening. Your parents came and dedicated you to God and they said "we want this child to grow up as a child of God." Many of you were raised in the tradition that as you got older you went through Catechism or through confirmation to be helped to the point where you would understand.

Now in the middle of the reformation there came along a group of people who said that christening is good but something can be wrong with this idea. What can be wrong is that as the child gets older, he will look back and say "I'm a believer because I was christened when I was a baby." These people began to say "do you understand that is something that your parents did for you? Now you have to come to the point where you accept Christ for yourself." As you come to accept Christ for yourself then you would be baptized to show that you put your faith and your trust in Christ.

Behind me there is a baptistery. We are part of a group that says if you dedicate your child that is wonderful and fine, but a person cannot look back on a church ritual and think the ritual was the thing that saved them. What saves them is that they put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and they show this by being baptized. Now I understand that there are folks who can be baptized and never be Christians. What I am saying is you must never let the devil come and say to you that because you have had some kind of religious rite

performed upon you, therefore you must be a Christian. If I asked you today, "Are you a believer; do you know you have a relationship with God?", would you go back and say, "Well I was baptized, I was christened?" Or would you say, "No Pastor, that is not what my faith is about. My faith is that I have given my heart and my life to Jesus Christ." What a shame that even baptism and confirmation would be twisted so that people would put their faith and trust in them.

There were some friends of mine in North Carolina who decided that they were going to Broadway and see a very famous play. They saved their money and they actually were written up in the little North Carolina paper: "Mr. and Mrs. 'so and so' were going to Broadway to see the play." When they got to New York, there was a long line of people waiting to buy their tickets. After standing in line for a while they learned there were no more tickets. A little teenager came up as they were turning around and said, "You didn't buy a ticket did you?" The couple said no, they were sold out. "I bet you told everybody that you were coming up here to buy a ticket." "That's right." "You're going to have to go back and tell people you came all the way to Broadway and you didn't see the play." "That's right." He said "I have a deal for you."

He pulled out some ticket stubs and said, "I'll sell them to you for \$5.00 a piece." "Why would I pay \$10.00 for ticket stubs?" The teenager said, "It makes sense. You go back home and people ask, "How was the play?" You say, "Fine." They say, "I bet you didn't even see the play." He says, "Sure I did, here are the ticket stubs." You know the biggest masquerade the devil can play on you is for you to walk around with some little stubs in your pocket thinking you have "seen the play" when all you have are the stubs.

Listen to how the devil is described. He is described as the "angel of light" masquerading. He is going to do everything he can to give you "stubs" while making you think you have seen the

real thing. I want to ask you, "Have you ever looked through the scripture at what Jesus said?" He said, "I want you to believe in me. I want you to give your life to me and I want you to live out of gratitude to me. I want you to be involved in a church to help other people know me. Do not use this as a ladder to try to get yourself to Heaven."

Let me ask you, have you ever come to the point that you could say, "Oh yes, now I know I'm a Christian?" There are people in this room today that are not Christians. They are good people, but you are not Christians. I want to ask you if you won't give your life to Jesus Christ today humbly and be dependent upon Him for what He has done for you. There are people in this room today who need to do that. There are people in this room today who are believers who very much need a church family and a church home to express their gratitude for what God has already done for them.

Our tradition as you know is to stand and sing a hymn to say, would you like to come to Christ today? If you would like to come and be a part of this church family, would you come forward and say that is what I would like to do? Would you do it today?

Let's stand together and sing.