

# Five Indicators of An Evil and Wicked Heart

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As Christian counselors, pastors and people helpers we often have a hard time discerning between an evil heart and an ordinary sinner who messes up, who isn't perfect, and full of weakness and sin.

I think one of the reasons we don't "see" evil is because we find it so difficult to believe that evil individuals actually exist. We can't imagine someone deceiving us with no conscience, hurting others with no remorse, spinning outrageous fabrications to ruin someone's reputation, or pretending he or she is spiritually committed yet has no fear of God before his or her eyes.

The Bible clearly tells us that among God's people there are wolves that wear sheep's clothing (Jeremiah 23:14; Titus 1:10; Revelations 2:2). It's true that every human heart is inclined toward sin (Romans 3:23), and that includes evil (Genesis 8:21; James 1:4). We all miss God's mark of moral perfection. However, most ordinary sinners do not happily indulge evil urges, nor do we feel good about having them. We feel ashamed and guilty, rightly so (Romans 7:19-21). These things are not true of the evil heart.

Below are five indicators that you may be dealing with an evil heart rather than an ordinary sinful heart. If so, it requires a radically different treatment approach.

1. **Evil hearts are experts at creating confusion and contention.** They twist the facts, mislead, lie, avoid taking responsibility, deny reality, make up stories, and withhold information (Exodus 2:1; Psalms 5:8; 10:7; 58:3; 109:2-5; 140:2; Proverbs 6:13,14; 6:18,19; 12:13; 16:20; 16:27, 28; 30:14; Job 15:35; Jeremiah 18:18; Nehemiah 6:8; Micah 2:1; Matthew 12:34,35; Acts 6:11-13; 2 Peter 3:16).
2. **Evil hearts are experts at fooling others with their smooth speech and flattering words.** But if you look at the fruit of their lives or the follow through of their words, you will find no real evidence of godly growth or change. It's all smoke and mirrors (Psalm 50:19; 52:2,3; 57:4, 59:7; 101:7; Proverbs 12:5; 26:23-26; 26:28; Job 20:12; Jeremiah 9:34; 12:6; Matthew 26:59; Acts 6:11-13; Romans 16:13,18; 2 Corinthians 11:13,14; 2 Timothy 3:2-5; 3:13; Titus 1:10,16).
3. **Evil hearts crave and demand control and their highest authority is their own self-reference.** They reject feedback, real accountability and make up their own rules to live by. They use Scripture to their own advantage but ignore and reject passages that might require self-correction and repentance

(Romans 2:8; Psalms 10; 36:1-4; 50:16-22; 54:5,6; 73:6-9; Proverbs 21:24; Jude 1:8-16).

4. **Evil hearts play on the sympathies of good-willed people, often trumping the grace card.** They demand mercy but give none themselves. They demand warmth, forgiveness, and intimacy from those they have harmed with no empathy for the pain they have caused and no real intention of making amends or working hard to rebuild broken trust (Proverbs 21:10; 1 Peter 2:16; Jude 1:4).
5. **Evil hearts have no conscience, no remorse.** They do not struggle against sin or evil, they delight in it, all the while masquerading as someone of noble character. (Proverbs 2:14-15; 10:23; 12:10; 21:27,29 Isaiah 32:6; Romans 1:30; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

If you are working with someone who exhibits these characteristics it's important that you confront them head on. You must name evil for what it is. The longer you try to reason with them or show mercy towards them, the more you, as the Christian counselor, will become a pawn in his or her game.

They want you to believe that:

1. **Their horrible actions should have no serious or painful consequences.** When they say, "I'm sorry", they look to you as the pastor or Christian counselor to be their advocate for amnesty with the person they have harmed. They believe grace means they are immediately granted immunity from the relational fallout of their serious sin. They believe forgiveness entitles them to full reconciliation and will pressure you and their victim to comply.

The Bible warns us saying, "But when grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil and do not regard the majesty of the Lord (Isaiah 26:10).

The Bible tells us that talking doesn't wake up evil people but painful consequences might. Jesus didn't wake up the Pharisees with his talk nor did God's counsel impact Cain (Genesis 4). In addition, the Bible shows us that when someone is truly sorry for the pain they have caused, they are eager to make amends to those they have harmed by their sin. (See Zacchaeus's response when he repented of his greed in Luke 19.)

Tim Keller writes, "If you have been the victim of a heinous crime. If you have suffered violence, and the perpetrator (or even the judge) says, "Sorry, can't we just let it go? You would say, "No, that would be an

injustice.” Your refusal would rightly have nothing to do with bitterness or vengeance. If you have been badly wronged, you know that saying sorry is never enough. Something else is required—some kind of costly payment must be made to put things right.”<sup>1</sup>

As Biblical counselors let’s not collude with the evil one by turning our attention to the victim, requiring her to forgive, to forget, to trust again when there has been no evidence of inner change in the one who has been practicing evil. Proverbs says, “Trusting in a treacherous man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a foot that slips” (Proverbs. 25:19). It’s foolishness.

The evil person will also try to get you to believe

2. **That if I talk like a gospel-believing Christian I am one, even if my actions don’t line up with my talk.** Remember, Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). He knows more true doctrine than you or I will ever know but his heart is wicked. Why? Because although he knows the truth, he does not believe it or live it.

The Bible has some strong words for those whose actions do not match their talk (1 John 3:17,18; Jeremiah 7:8,10; James 1:22, 26). John the Baptist said it best when he admonished the religious leaders: “Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God (Luke 3:8).

If week after week you hear the talk but there is no change in the walk of that person, especially if you are also receiving feedback from the person who has been sinned against that there is continued covert harm, deceit, and manipulation, you have every reason to question that person’s relationship with God.

Part of our maturity as spiritual leaders is that we are to be trained to discern between good and evil. Why is that so important? It’s important because evil usually pretends to be good and without godly discernment we can be easily fooled (Hebrews 5:14).

When you confront evil, chances are good that the evil heart will stop counseling with you because the darkness hates the light (John 3:20) and the foolish and evil heart reject correction (Proverbs 9:7,8). But that outcome is far better than allowing the evil heart to believe you are on his or her side, or that “he’s not that bad” or “that he’s really sorry,” or “that he’s changing” when in fact, he is not.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *Jesus the King*, page 172

Daniel says, “the wicked will continue to be wicked”, (Daniel 12:10), which begs the question, do you think an evil person can really change?