

## The Two Angels Within You

On Sunday, we continued our “Lost Books of the Bible” sermon series by exploring an ancient book called “The Shepherd of Hermas” that didn’t quite make it into the Bible.

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff began the sermon by comparing the intensity of Hermas’ book to that of Pastor David playing a video game. 😊 What’s one of your favorite board or video game? How intense are you?
2. The Shepherd of Hermas was written sometime between 90-150 AD by a slave, Hermas, after he was freed. Hermas got much of the content of the book from an angel who appeared to him in the form of a shepherd. The book became very popular in Christian churches, and several early Church Fathers believed it should be regarded as Scripture. The book consists of Five Visions, Twelve Commandments, and Ten Parables. Its content reflects the absolute zeal of early Christians to live righteously.
  - a. Jeff said, “In our modern world, we tend to be pretty laid back, especially when it comes to matters of morals. After all, we don’t want to be legalistic. We’re into grace – which is a good thing. But sometimes I wonder if maybe we’ve set our moral expectations for ourselves too low.” What do you think? Are we too lax about sin? In our personal lives, what’s the right balance between basking in grace and striving for moral goodness?
  - b. In the Bible, Hebrews 12:4 says, “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of blood.” In that same spirit, Hermas, like a tough coach, challenges us to strive for the highest goodness. Did you ever have a tough coach or teacher who pushed you to your limit and helped you achieve more than you thought possible? Tell us about him/her. Are you glad you were pushed?
3. The core theme of Hermas’ book is captured in Commandment 6. Read the excerpt from Commandment 6 found on p. 3.
  - a. In what we just read, the shepherd tells Hermas that we each have two angels with us – a good angel and a bad angel. In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul says something similar, speaking of our two “natures.” Jeff also shared a folktale about the two wolves that live within each of us, fighting for ascendancy. Is that way of thinking consistent with your own personal experience? Do you feel the push/pull between your two natures/angels/wolves? Can you think of a time in the past week when you experienced that kind of internal struggle?
  - b. We saw a video clip of a little boy preacher eloquently reminding us that, “What you practice, you will get good at.” The more we practice complaining, for

example, the more a “complaining spirit” gains momentum in us and eventually becomes second nature. The same principle applies to positive practices too.

Have you ever experienced this phenomenon, i.e., a behavior (good or bad) that became stronger with practice until it became deeply ingrained second nature?

4. Hermas’ book identifies many negative behaviors that should be resisted in the quest to make our lives more Christ-like. We focused on two examples, starting with how we talk about others. Read Commandment 2 on p. 3.

- a. What does it feel like inside you when you’re badmouthing someone? What range of emotions do you experience?
- b. What does it feel like inside you when you’re listening to someone else badmouth somebody? What range of emotions do you experience?
- c. Is it ever appropriate to say negative things about another person? Under what circumstances?
- d. When you find yourself in a conversation where someone is badmouthing somebody, what’s the best way to handle the situation? What would Jesus do?
- e. Ephesians 5:29 says, “Let no evil talk come out of your mouth, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” Why is ‘watching our words’ such an important part of discipleship?
- f. Jeff suggested a 24-hour or 30-day experiment in abstaining from badmouthing others. What are some other practical ways we can get better at this?
- g. Sister Helen Mroska told how she once required her students to write positive things about their classmates, then gave each student a list of the positive things others said about them. Ten years later, many of those students still treasured their list. Give an example of a time when a good word spoken to you really lifted you.

5. For our second example, we focused on what Hermas says about sexual behavior. Read the excerpts from Commandment 4 and Vision 1 on p. 3.

- a. For you personally, what values and/or rules do you feel should guide your sexual thoughts and behavior?
- b. Jeff told a story about a young man who summoned the strength to resist sexual temptation. Think of a time you were tempted to do something sexually that you felt would be wrong and successfully resisted. If you’re comfortable, share what happened and why you decided to resist. We can learn from each other’s stories.

- c. Many of us have been burned by what we were taught about sexual ethics in churches of our past. We've had to shed many false teaches of our past. How should we go about reconstructing a healthy set of personal sexual ethics? Any advice you would share based on your journey?

## Excerpts From “The Shepherd of Hermas”

### Commandment 6

“Hear now,’ said [the shepherd], ‘in regard to faith, there are two angels with a person – one of righteousness, and the other of iniquity.’ And I said to him, ‘How, Sir, am I to know the powers of these, for both angels dwell with me?’ ‘Hear,’ said he, “and understand. The angel of righteousness is gentle and modest, meek and peaceful. . . . When all these [virtues] ascend into your heart, know that the angel of righteousness is with you. . . . [But] look now at the works of the angel of iniquity. First, he is wrathful, and bitter, and foolish, and his works are evil, and ruin the servants of God. When, then, he ascends into your heart, know him by his works.”

### Commandment 2

Speak evil of no one, nor listen with pleasure to anyone who speaks evil of another. If you listen, you will partake of the sin of the one who speaks evil if you believe the slander which you hear; for believing it, you will also have something to say against your brother or sister. Then, will you be guilty of the sin of the one who slanders. For slander is evil and an unsteady demon. It never abides in peace, but always remains in discord. Keep yourself from it, and you will always be at peace with all.

### Commandment 4 and Vision 1

**Commandment 4.** "I charge you," said the shepherd, "to guard your chastity, and let no thought enter your heart of another person's spouse, or of fornication, or of similar iniquities. . . ."

**Vision 1.** “Some time after, I saw Rhoda bathe in the river Tiber; and I gave her my hand, and drew her out of the river. The sight of her beauty made me think with myself, ‘I should be a happy man if I could but get a wife as handsome and good as she is.’ This was the only thought that passed through me: this and nothing more.”

[Then in a vision, as he kneels confessing his sins, Hermas is confronted by Rhoda.] "Lady, what doest thou here?" I asked. And she answered me, ‘I have been taken up here to accuse you of your sins before the Lord. . . .’ I said, ‘Lady, have I sinned against you? How? Or when spoke I an unseemly word to you? Did I not always think of you as a lady? Did I not always respect you as a sister? Why do you falsely accuse me of this wickedness and impurity?’ With a smile she replied to me, ‘The desire of wickedness arose within your heart.’

“I was overwhelmed with sorrow and fear, and said to myself, ‘If this sin is assigned to me, how can I be saved, or how shall I propitiate God in regard to my sins, which are of the grossest character? With what words shall I ask the Lord to be merciful to me?’”