

A Charge to the Congregation on the
Installation of David Andrew Jones as Senior Pastor
February 18, 2007

Well, it's happened again. As I was thinking on the nature of our vows this week (the ones we just made), and preparing to give you this charge to say, some correspondence fell into my hands that I wanted to apprise you of. I immediately recognized the addressee on the letter and realize that it might be important for you to hear this. In essence, it is providential that this has fallen into our hands at this auspicious time.

Well, you know the Author of this letter. In fact, on a previous occasion I have informed you of his intentions. His name is Screwtape; his loyal minion, the addressee, Wormwood.

(Now those of you who are familiar with C.S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters will recognize the author of the letter to be a representative of Satan himself and the recipient his loyal henchman. Yes, they are fictional characters in the book, but they are real in the sense that they mean what they say.)

It is not often we obtain such insight into the Enemy's ways. It may be unpleasant, but listen well.

My Dear Wormwood :

I thought we had made more progress, and yet your charges are at it again with their new man, making vows and such. No, the words mean nothing to me. They are mere scratchings on a page, sounds in the air. The truly dangerous thing is that your charges might remember and believe what they say and, worse, that they might actually act on their beliefs. Yes, with this rogue pastor in place, you have your work cut out for you. So, get busy, man! Redouble your efforts. The Enemy is at work.

Chief among your goals must be to convince your charges that the church, that outworn and yet dangerous conspiracy, is nothing more than any other organization. They owe it no particular allegiance. They can leave when they want. Be careful not to confront them directly on this point, as

the vile doctrine of the church is deeply rooted. Rather, suggest to them that there are un-democratic elements to the doctrine, that it needs revision, that in certain ways it is outmoded.

But I disagree. Back to the business at hand.

They say they will receive the word of truth with meekness and love, but what is truth? You must remind your charges that truth is in the eyes of the beholder, and that certainly one man cannot tell another man what to do. Fine for them to speak of truth but let it be a more subjective truth, one permitting each man to hold his own truth and thus room for Our Father to subvert the real meaning of the word. Suggest that they hold the words of this man as opinion, not necessarily truth.

And meekness? The word is so outdated that we have much room to convince your charges that it is an outmoded concept, that they must accept the truth spoken only if they believe that truth. But never mind that --- If you draw their attention to every failing, every inefficiency, and every disagreeable personality trait of the new man it will soon not matter because they will soon think him a rather good bloke --- good for a game of golf, perhaps, or amusing enough for 20 minutes or so --- but, of course, no better than themselves.

Above all, formwood, keep them from their prayers for this man. Prayer, of course, is one of the most diabolical of weapons the Enemy has granted them. To pray for this man increases their sympathy for the object of the prayer and it's even said (though it makes me shudder) that the stench of such prayers reaches the Enemy Himself. If they pray, they cannot hear Him, formwood. He must not be shut out. I confess my own resolve can wane when I hear these prayers, all of which are undecipherable mumblings to me. At such times distractions, business, and other amusements are your best tools. As I said in a previous letter (perhaps you should pay better attention!), whenever they are attending to the Enemy Himself, we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves. Remember what I said this time.

Did they say they will encourage this man? Never let them. Magnify for them every failing of the man --- his sleight of this or that ministry, a theological quibble, a perceived snub. Let the hurt or disagreement fall on them like seed on a field, growing until they become vocal in criticizing him aloud. Be patient. Give it time. And if that critical spirit doesn't take root and still their encouragement, suggest flattery to them. Whisper to them that a compliment here or there will increase their access to him, will magnify their own importance. The hollowness of such praise is beautiful to hear.

Is it not the Enemy's man, Oswald Sanborn, who said that encouragement is the least exercise ministry of the church? Let it be so.

Finally, they say they will submit to this man. Rubbish. This is the least of your problems, nephew. Who, after all, in these times, believes in a notion such as this? We have pretty well removed this rotten idea from the culture at large. Why, in fact, we have an entire culture of co-belligerents in this battle! Merely suggest the hateful nature of this concept, its non-egalitarian nature, and they will abandon it in their hearts if not their mouths. And if you've done your work of sowing the seeds of discontent, they will not submit. I cannot tell you what pleasure it brings me to hear them think, who this man to lord it over us? Why he owes us his job! What sweet music such grumblings are to my ears!

So, wormwood, the task looms large before you. Our Anniversary is on the move. Do not underestimate Him. Do not fail.

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape

Once again, you see what we are up against. We are bound to this man now. The promises we make today are really no less than promises that we will love and support and encourage this man as a Shepherd for this church, that we will *be* the church. There is no weapon of the Enemy that can stand against such love.

So, will we *receive* this man as our Pastor, and by *receive* I think the vow means that we must open heart and life to him, as he is our spiritual overseer? Will we grant him access to our lives?

Will we receive the *word* of God as he gives it to us with meekness and love, submitting to his discipline? If he must speak a hard but true word to us, corporately or individually, will we hear it and submit to it?

Will we encourage him and cooperate in our instruction and spiritual edification? How teachable will we be? Must we be drawn to the well to drink or will we run to it and shrink from it with him?

The duties our pastor faces are awesome and, but for God's grace, frightening. Will we pray for him? Will we do that daily?

By God's grace, we can.