

Spotting False Teachers

Using Righteous Judgement

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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During our years in the church, most of us have probably had to contend with a false teacher or some false teachings. Since Worldwide Church of God split (and I would say probably several years before that) and in specific places (such as on the east coast here, way back to the mid '70s) there have been false teachers that some of us have had to contend with. We have had our share of false teachings thrown at us, by ministers and lay members who have some new thing that they want us to swallow.

In our [CGG's] first year alone, I know you have heard us mention before (John Reid has said this several times), in 1992 we had more than three dozens requests to change doctrines—just in this little church alone. I think the number was 40 papers, where they wanted us to research this out and change a doctrine. Of course, there have been several brouhahas since then on various subjects.

It really saddens me to remember many of my friends (former brethren, now) that have fallen by the wayside—that have fallen for some sort of deception, whatever it happens to be. Whether it is the calendar issue, or early on one of the big ones was Sovereign Citizenship (part of the government controversy), whether it has been tithing that has tripped them up, or when to keep the Passover, or whatever—it does not matter. I have just been very saddened by all of the people that I can remember (some I went to college with, or for many years went to church with) that have stumbled and fallen because someone convinced them that the church was wrong about something and that their particular idea was right.

Sometimes it has not even a doctrine that trips them up. What has really astounded me since I have been an employee and a minister of Church of the Great God is how many become offended first; and then they find a doctrine to 'justify' their leaving. So, in the end, it is not really the doctrine that made them leave. It was the offense that they took at something.

It may not even to have had anything to do with doctrine. It may have been the look on a face. It may have been a choice of words. It may have been some assumed 'slight' that was never there to begin with—or something (whatever it happens to be). But then such people find a doctrine to justify them leaving, because they know that just leaving for emotional reasons is not good enough. I just have to shake my head when I think about such people—that they would put their salvation on the line because of a 'slight' or some sort of an emotional 'gut reaction,' rather than thinking it through.

Now, that is not to say that you must be in Church of the Great God in order to have salvation. That is not what I am saying at all. But the attitude is certainly not godly—to leave over a supposed offense—because that is adisunity among brethren; and God does not like that.

I need to also mention those who jump ship (jump from church to church) because of one

teaching—*just one teaching* that they happen to disagree with. In this particular case, I am not thinking of anything really major; but they are, in a sense, one-trick ponies. They wrap their entire salvation, or their entire life in the church, around one issue. Pull one out of the air—like Passover. If you do not get the particulars of the Passover doctrine "just so," then you are wrong. And so they leave and try to find some other place that agrees with them. And they hop from church to church, to church, to church—because no one is going to perfectly agree with them over that particular doctrine. And maybe they end up meeting with one other family that agrees with them over that particular issue.

Again, I have to shake my head because, being a part of the office here at Fort Mill, I know (because I open the mail) that with fair regularity we get a postcard, or a letter, or a phone call in which someone requests to be taken off our subscription list—either to the *Forerunner*, or to the tape list. One way or another, they want to get off our mailing list. And it is very frequent that it runs something like this: *"Thank you very much [Sometimes "very much" is even underlined.] for all the inspiration and instruction you've given us over the years. We've really learned a lot. We think we've grown and matured. Please cancel my subscription."*

And you say, "Why?" I have written to some of these people in the past and only received a couple of responses. But every time that I have gotten a response, it is been: *"Well, we found one thing that we didn't like. And now we are meeting with such-and-such group; and we don't want your material any more."* And I say, "Well, we are willing to give it to you—if you meet with United, or Living, or Global, or Philadelphia, or Christian Biblical, or whatever. We are very willing for you to take our material. We don't need you to come to our church or be affiliated with us. We just want to teach you. So you can 'have your subscription and eat it too.' This is what we are here for. We are here to teach you; and you can have this instruction and inspiration on-going, if you want." But no, there is one thing that they consider wrong; and so they throw out the 99% that we get right (according to them) for the 1% that they disagree with.

Now, is that a godly attitude? Is that the way that it should be? That the church that you go to and the ministers that teach you have to be in agreement with you 100% over everything, even the details? That is the way some people approach it. And it is very frustrating on this end, because you try your best to get everything right; and then in the end (because you are a man and you do not have perfect perception, and you do not have perfect understanding) occasionally you slip. Whether it is by tongue, or by pen, or by facial expression or whatever it happens to be—somebody zings you for it (because everything is noticed and criticized). So people fall away; and it is very frustrating—as much as one might try to do as well as possible.

This has been kind of a lazy introduction to my Specific Purpose Statement. But I am talking about how you spot false teachers. I had promised you, some time ago, that I would speak about false teachers; and so this is that sermon. How do you spot them?

Obviously, people are free to fellowship wherever they like. We have said in the past, many times, that "You are not ours. You are God's." You are His people, and you choose to whom you will listen. We believe in the sovereignty of God. We believe that God places the members of the body where it pleases Him. So, He has put His people where He wants them at a particular time.

But, even knowing this, to me it is rather alarming how quick people are to jump from group to

group (or, from teacher to teacher), on the slightest pretext, on the smallest thing, on the most miniscule 1% of doctrinal difference. I just have to leave it general, because why each person 'jumps' is different. Nobody has the same reason for going from one group to another. And the only thing that really makes it tolerable for a minister is if he really believes that God is in control. It can be awfully frustrating at times, because we try so hard to say what is truthful and right—and to teach what the Bible teaches.

So I have come to a couple conclusions about all this. I have concluded that far too many in the church are not justifying their leaving of one group and going to another according to biblical instruction. That may sound rather judgmental; but I have to make judgments on those sorts of things, from the evidence that keeps piling up. Most people do not use the biblical instruction. They go because they *feel* like it. Usually, it is an emotional 'gut reaction' that makes them go. It is a feeling of offense, which is, most of the time, nothing more than an emotion. You *feel* slighted about something—rather than a sin or a stumbling block as the Bible defines it.

Some people feel *dissatisfied*, for whatever reason. This dissatisfaction, or this feeling of offense, is what spurs them to leave. As I mentioned before, they then find a doctrine that they disagree with. This happened a couple of years ago. It was a couple. Evidently, the man liked what we were preaching and teaching; but the wife did not. So the wife started working on the husband, and the husband found a statement in one of the *Forerunner* magazines that he disagreed with; and that was his excuse and they both left. He could not take the fire, or the heat, from his wife. And so he found a "doctrinal excuse" to leave us. It was his choice, but it makes me sad. It makes me sad to see people not sticking up for the truth or not having patience to see something through. That is, to see a doctrinal difference to the end.

I have also concluded that a significant number of "leavers" (as I will call them) or "jumpers," are *self-righteous*. Wow, another judgmental statement! But I have to think, from this evidence that I have before me, that that is true. They leave in a huff because they think that a minister has one teaching wrong. And if the minister does not toe their line on this one teaching, then they are "out of here."

It is as if only they know the whole truth of God—or "the whole counsel of God" as Paul calls it in Acts. And if a minister does not repeat back to them everything that they believe, then they are going to find somebody who does. They get very uncomfortable with a minister (or, a group of ministers) that tries to expand their understanding—because they are too comfortable with the level of righteousness that they have already reached. They have filled what they believe is the definition of "righteousness" in themselves.

With others, they seem not to have the *humility* or the *patience* to work with a minister to see the problem through (as I mentioned before). So there are lots of reasons, lots of things that are going on—and that is why I have decided to give this sermon. I do not mean to be offensive with these things, although probably somebody will take offense. I am sorry. I am not trying to be offensive. I am just trying to shoot straight from the hip—to be honest and forthright—and to show you how it looks from this angle.

Ministers, if they truly care about their congregation, feel it when even one person rejects them. In a way, it is failure. At least, you feel it as a failure—that you did not get across to them

the right things; that you did not explain it quite right; that you could not find quite the right words to get across to them this "truth" that you feel is so important for them to understand. And it makes you feel like "God, I lost another one. Isn't there any way I can get him back?"

And you try. Most of the time, it just does not work. They have made up their mind; and, in a way, you have made up your mind too—because you are going to try to defend "the truth" as staunchly as you can. There is very rarely 'a meeting of the minds' after that point. You trade e-mails, or letters, or whatever. Sometimes after the second or third one, you just have to say "I tried. I can't write any more. I'm not even going to try to write any more, because it is just going to increase the contention; and that's not good. The best thing to do is to just let it lie, and let them go."

So, this is what I see happening. Either I am blind to it and I am not seeing it correctly or there are, indeed, some serious problems in the church on this matter—about how to discern false teachers and false teaching. That is what this sermon is all about. I am hoping that those of us who hear this sermon can return to a biblical approach about spotting false teachers.

And the obvious place to start a study about this is Matthew 7. It is the foundational teaching of our Lord and Savior—the head of the church, Jesus Christ—of how to spot a false prophet. He uses the term "false prophet;" but it can just as well be a false teacher, since prophecy has the connotation of not just the "foretelling" of events but also of "forth telling" or preaching.

Matthew 7:15-20 Beware of false prophets [He says], who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

This is where you have to start, because everything hinges on the answer to this question: "*What does the teaching produce?*" Or, you may say it another way: "*What does the teacher's life produce.*" Either way, you are either going to see that it is a good tree or a bad tree, or you are going to see the effect of the good fruit or the bad fruit. You are going to be able to spot it, one way or the other. You are either going to be able to see that the tree itself is good or bad, or you are going to be able to see that what it produces is good or bad.

As He said, a good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. It is going to follow. So you have to be looking at these *fruits*. You have to be looking at the life of the person. You have to look at the person himself—his integrity, or lack thereof. Is his life one of sin? Or is his life one of goodness and righteousness? These things have to be thought of. It is not enough, necessarily, just to take the words from his mouth; but you have to look at the person himself.

Let us consider a few things about this. How long does it take fruit to be produced? In agriculture, it takes an entire growing season to produce fruit—does it not? If you are talking about something like grain, or something that comes from seed, it usually takes several months to mature. I know, for example, that on the little package of pea seeds that I planted just a few weeks ago it said that it took about 70 days to mature. That is not quite three months,

obviously, for a crop to be produced. By the time you put the seed in the ground, and water it, and watch it grow so that it gets big enough to produce flowers. Then it gets pollinated and the fruit begins to grow. The fruit has to mature and then it is finally ready to be plucked and eaten. How long does this take?

We cannot dismiss the time element here. It is important. Remember the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares. God said that the wheat was sown, and then at a certain point the enemy came in and sowed tares among them. And the tares and the wheat grew up together. What happened? Suddenly, the cry goes out that there are tares among the wheat. And what does God say? "Let them be. Let them grow up and mature. When the time comes for the harvest, we will easily be able to see the tares from the wheat." He shows a great deal of patience there, to allow the false teacher (the tare) to be among the wheat. There is a time element there—for the fruit to really mature.

Think about an elephant. How long does it take an elephant to produce a baby? I think it is about 2 years! That is a long time. That is a lot longer than getting a pea to produce new peas. Do we find people these days giving even a few months of *leeway* to a false teacher, or even a true one who says something that someone may disagree with? Often times, no. It is like "Look what I read in the *Forerunner*. They are going off the deep end." And they go. They read it. They decide right then and there that it is wrong; and they leave. And, as I mentioned before, they forget all the things that they learned in the preceding years just for this *one thing* that suddenly strikes them as absolutely wrong. They seem to think that it is going to damn them if they stick around and listen some more, and maybe understand why that certain thing is said. It is crazy.

So, how long should we evaluate a teacher before we condemn him as "false"? Let us go to James 5. This is a chapter that has a lot of prophetic implications. Three or four times in this chapter, he mentions "the last days" or "the coming of Christ." So, in a way, you could say that James 5 is the prophetic chapter of the whole book. It kind of takes you into the future and shows you some of the things that may be occurring at the end time.

This section, between verses 7 and 11, is specifically concerning being patient for Christ's return; but it also serves as a warning to us, in terms of this being the last days, that patience may be in short supply during this time. You know it and I know it. We are even impatient about cooking our rice. It has got to be done in a minute, or we do not want it.

Every house now must have a microwave. It has now joined television and air conditioning as necessities to all "normal" Americans—so that we can have things *instantly*. Is that impatience, or am I a little off here? How long does it normally take to cook rice? Okay, maybe an hour; but do we not have an hour to spare? Of course, if you get the other kind of rice, it will cook in 5 minutes. I am getting off my subject, but I think you get the point. We have to have instant coffee. We have to have instant rice. We have to have instant everything—even instant news. We cannot wait five minutes for the score of the ballgame. We have to dial it up on the telephone, or get it right away off the Internet.

Do you understand what I mean? We are impatient. So, we apply this to doctrinal teaching in the church. We want to see the fruits immediately; and God says, throughout the Bible, that it

takes *time* for fruit to be produced. If a minister says something wrong—and maybe it is one of the few things that he gets wrong—just because he gets it wrong does not mean that he is a false teacher.

Could you imagine how many ministers there would be if God struck down every one that got something wrong, as soon as they got it wrong? There would be a sum total of zero. James himself says, in chapter 3, that no one is perfect because we all slip with our tongue. I am sure that I have made a couple of false statements already in this first 25-30 minutes of this sermon—because we are human. We make mistakes. We do not see things right all the time. We do not sometimes have the whole picture.

And a true minister—if he is a man of integrity, and if he is truly trying to please God and preach the truth—will find what he has taught that was wrong in the past; and he will correct it. He will repent—just like the rest of you out there who sin. You repent when you find something in your life that is wrong. But often the ministry is not given that mercy by the people in the church. A minister has to be right 100% of the time, and is never given any slack (or, time) to repent. And that is showing a very deep problem of *impatience* on the part of those who are observing this and a lot of *self-righteousness*—to believe that one is perfect, and to expect everyone else to be.

James 5:7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

He uses this idea, the same illustration, of a farmer waiting patiently for his crop to be produced. That is the same sort of patience that *we* need to have as the end comes for Christ to return. But it is also the same kind of patience that we need to give one another—not just the ministry, but also one another—to repent. It takes a long time for anyone to begin to produce righteous fruits in their lives. We should not be so judgmental, so condemnatory, of one another if we do not change and totally get it right within the first 20 minutes after a sin has been pointed out.

Have you ever noticed that if you point out a fault to someone they normally get angry? Have you also noticed that *those who are truly trying to change* (after their anger has subsided) will say, "You know, he was probably right. I'd better start working on this." It sometimes takes a while, though, for one to get from the anger to the repentance. It takes a while. And so the person who points out the fault has to give the other person a little bit of leeway, a little bit of time, to get from point "A" to point "B"—so that a change can be made. We need to do the same thing for the ministry.

James 5:8 You also be patient. [He mentions it again.] Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

It means strengthen it. Get it founded properly—meaning, "get the proper perspective" on things. Get grounded and settled in the truth. Be strong, because the Lord is coming. And in verse 9, there is a warning about this time.

James 5:9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren. . .

That is talking about criticizing, and groaning, and complaining about one another. And causing all of these little disputes and contentions, because "You're wrong." "No, you're wrong." And "This doctrine is this way," and "This doctrine is that way." And "He's so hard to get along with." And on and on it goes; and we suddenly have 15 different groups, because of this idea or that idea (or that doctrine, or this offense, or that complaint). What have we just done? We have scattered the church. We have lost our strength. We have lost our unity. And we have probably lost some good teachers—because they are in group "A" and we are in group "J."

Then you are in a precarious situation, because Christ *is* coming! And this is a time to be strengthened and to be patient. And now we are scattered, and weak, and impatient, and at each other's throat. As James says, in James 3:18, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." And so how are you going to grow in righteousness, if you are at war with one another? (With the ministry, or with the lay membership.) It is looking pretty bad for the church as the end draws near. These conditions are extant.

James 5:9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned.
[Wow! Those are strong words.] Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

As it says to the Laodicean church, He is knocking. Are you going to let Him in? Are you going to invite His truth in? Or are you going to grumble and complain, and gripe and moan, about the teaching that you are getting? (Or that pet doctrine that you have? Or an offense? Or what have you?)

James 5:10-11 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

Here is the encouragement. We are Christians, are we not? What does that mean? We are followers of Christ. We are supposed to be like Christ. What does Christ do? What is Christ like in these situations? He is the Judge, yes; and He is standing at the door. And He is watching our every move. He is seeing what kind of stuff we are made of. But, on the other hand, He is very compassionate and merciful—especially if we, with patient endurance, are taking the times as they come. And if we are still overcoming and growing—even though we may be suffering, one way or another, the slights (the insults, the offenses, the stumbling blocks, the criticisms or what have you) that are slung.

This does not stand well of the end times if James (and God, obviously) thought it important enough to put this here, in chapter 5, as a sign of the last days—because he is talking to the brethren. *Sodo not be hasty* is my meaning here. Do not throw away the baby with the bath water. Something may be wrong, yes. But patiently wait for fruits to be borne. If it turns out that it is wrong and there is no repentance, fine. But give it some time. Work with the minister. See where you may be wrong, or if you have an explanation that maybe he did not see.

There are some people who know how to make this approach properly. They come with a certain amount of humility, loads of patience, very thick skin, and a great deal of understanding. Those [characteristics] are hard to come by in a single person, but it is something that we all have to strive for. Minister's have egos. Ministers have just as much

proclivity to hold on to an idea for all it is worth, just like anybody else. They are men, with the same failings as men. They are brethren, with the same failings as the brethren. But they are put into positions in which they have a great deal more at stake.

They have been given "gifts," yes. And it is hoped that those gifts will be able to help them to discern the areas in which they judge something wrongly and change. Unfortunately, it has not happened that way often enough to convince the lay membership (in most cases, or for the most part) that the ministers are willing to change if they are shown to be wrong. And that is unfortunate; but still it must be attempted.

And *everybody* must come at it with a great deal of patience, and a great deal of love for one another—as brethren. And as I mentioned, thick-skinned. Not to be offended, and not to take it personally. It is mentioned several times in the Scripture—to watch out that you do not "contend" with one another. It is one of the worst things that can happen to a church. If you start getting into a doctrinal brawl, it really gets ugly.

Let us go to I Timothy 5. This is at the end of a section on elders. So the whole section deals primarily with the ministry. Verses 24 and 25 show, though, that a ministry's "sins," let us say, (their faults, their errors) are just like anybody else's. Notice:

I Timothy 5:24-25 Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

Yes, some men wear their sins on their sleeves; and it is very easy to see them and be able to say "That guy is not living right." But with other men, it may be a secret sin that does not come out for years. Or, it may never come out—at least, to our knowledge. It will certainly come out to the person himself. He will know what it is. God will face him with it and make him try to overcome it. But we have to understand that in some men we will never see their faults; and in some men we will see them very plainly.

On the other hand, sometimes we do not see the good fruit for quite a long time. And for some men the good fruit ripens quickly. Some people are diamonds in the rough. They do not produce their fruit until they have been through quite a bit—until they have been shined by a great deal of pain, exposure, troubles, fire, trials, and what have you. Then it comes out. So, through this whole thing, I have been talking about *time*. You have to give people *time* to show their fruit. You have to *be patient*. Some false teachers are easily identifiable, and others take a whole lot longer to determine.

Some things that we can see—that are automatically wrong and would turn us away—would be somebody teaching against keeping the Sabbath. That is clearly a sign of God's people; and we would immediately say that person is teaching falsehood. Or let us say someone was preaching the Trinity, or some other perversion of the nature of God. I think that we could see that, for the most part. Those would be pretty blatant and plain. Others are far more subtle in leading people astray.

How long did it take the Tkach team to waken the whole church to the deceptions that were happening? Some people caught them early—as early as the end of 1986 or 1987—and they

saw that things were beginning to slip. Others did not really catch on until about 1995. That is a long time for some to wake up to the problem. There are still people 'in there' that have never seen them, and they think they are great. How subtle was that?

I have something to read to you. We published this in September of 1992. It is by a man who has since left us over several doctrines. I think he even mentions some of them in here. But I want to read this, because it is very interesting. It is called:

An Ephesian Diary

Throughout history Satan has inspired his fraudulent teachers to deceive God's people with false doctrinal arguments. At times, his deception has completely subverted the organizations God has used to do His work. What follows is a fictional diary that could have been written by one of God's people during the Ephesian church era as he witnessed its decline.

Entry one: I keep this diary because there have been some changes that I want to document. My family has followed the teachings of Jesus Christ for generations, and my great grandfather even saw Christ in the flesh. Most of what I know has either been passed down through family tradition, or taught by the true church through the apostles.

In the past, we have taught that God is a family of beings who created man to become like them eventually. But just last week, our minister announced that greater clarity in understanding has been revealed. It seems that the church has misunderstood this doctrine about the God Family. He says that the Father and Christ are actually one being, but still separate. I find this hard to understand and difficult to believe. Yet, I know that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and He always makes sure that the church does the right thing. Some brethren are upset over this change; I think they have a problem with church government.

Entry two: [Sometime later.] My brother's minister told him that Passover has been observed on the wrong day. For some reason we should keep it one day later. I asked my pastor about this, and he said that we misunderstood the death and resurrection of Jesus. He said that Jesus died on Friday and rose on Sunday. I said our family had always taught that Christ was dead three days. He replied: "Well, who are you going to believe, your family or the inspired servants of God's church?" I admit he has a point, yet this change doesn't set very well with me. Also, I heard about an important minister in the East who was excommunicated because he would not accept this change. God must think this is pretty serious business!

Entry three: [Sometime later.] Last Sabbath we were told that we should assemble for worship on Sunday. Our minister explained that God assigned Saturday to be the Jew's day of worship as punishment. I don't ever recall hearing that before. He said God hated the Jews, and their worship on Saturday soiled any holiness in the day. He mentioned that Sunday worship would allow many pagans to come into God's church more easily. This seems to make sense. Oh well. God's in charge!

Entry four: [A little later.] It's been some time since my last entry. A few days ago, the church observed the birthday of Jesus. I asked my pastor why no one had ever done this before. He answered that new truth was being revealed. I told him it didn't sound like truth to me! He said I should trust Jesus Christ to lead His church.

My brother told me that many brethren have left the church over this issue. I think they lack faith in Jesus Christ's ability to lead the church. Again, it comes down to government. If church government isn't the most important thing to obey, what is?

Entry five: Last Sunday, our priest explained to us how the body of Christ can actually be imparted to us through a special holy wafer. This sounded quite strange to me! Yet, I did feel rather spiritual after eating it. The priest said that by doing this we have the very essence of God placed inside us. I have always been taught that the essence of God is His Spirit, not some wafer. It all sounds so strange. It makes me uneasy seeing how much the church has changed over the years. Yet, I know that Jesus Christ is in charge, so I don't have to worry.

Entry six: The church has made another change. They say that we must be sinless to receive Christ's body in the communion service, so we must make a confession of our sins before a priest. The priest cited a scripture that says that we must confess our faults to one another. I'm really bothered by all these changes--the church is so different from the way it used to be.

Entry seven: As I sat at mass today, I realized that the church has very little in common with the one my family attended. More brethren have left the church, and I am quite worried. Yet, I know God sits upon His throne and Christ is the head of the church.

Kneeling before the altar and accepting the communion, my conscience bothered me. So, I kept repeating to myself, "Just let Christ handle it... Just let Christ handle it... Just let Christ handle it..."

I read that just to show how subtle false teaching can be. That is, the other side of the coin that I was mentioning earlier. I thought that it fits here. Some men's sins are clearly seen, clearly evident right away. And some men's sins follow after, follow later; and it takes a long time to discern them.

I am not saying at all that one should stay with the church throughout all that. I am certainly not saying that. But I am just giving you an idea of how slick Satan is, and those he uses (those who are his ministers). So I am aware of how difficult it can be—to judge the true from the false, in some instances. And that is why it is upon each of us to make sure that we are judging righteous judgment, that we are taking things seriously, that we are truly looking at the fruit. We are trying not to be hasty, but to be correct. And we are biding our time and seeing the fruit.

God wants us to be sure, to be positive, that we are truly leaving a false minister when we decide to go. It should not be a snap decision. It should not be hasty. But we should make sure that it is a true and right decision. So, let us see what sins are clearly evident. In Galatians 5, these are the works of the flesh.

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh [he says] are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If we would read a little bit before there in I Timothy 5:19, it says: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except by two or three witnesses." If we know something like this is

true, then that ought to automatically put up a red flag. And then we should be very serious and diligent about looking at the teaching, because these things Paul says are evident. They are out there. They are proof that something is wrong in the teacher's life. But we should always make sure that it is beyond doubt that such a thing is being *practiced*.

Notice the word is practiced. It is not just a one-time slip (or "a sin of weakness," let us say) but an actual practice. Make sure it is not rumor. Make sure it is not hearsay. Ministers are not, by any means, "angels." They are brethren. And they have the faults of brethren. They are men. And one must give the same due diligence to them that one would give to anyone else. They are held in stricter judgment by God; but among brethren there should be that same love and the willingness to wait for repentance as one would normally give anyone else.

Let us go back to Matthew 7:15. I want to pick up a point here, before we go on. I just want to add to that last section that, obviously, if a minister would be caught doing something like that, he would probably immediately be suspended or even put out of the church if it were serious enough. So, do not think that I mean that the ministry should be coddled in any way. That is something that would bring a great deal of dishonor, both upon God and the church. So it is not something that we could wink at. Even so, Christ does say (in Matthew 18) that if a brother repents seventy times seven, then we should welcome him back. So we have to balance the mercy and the judgment there.

Matthew 7:15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

I wanted to pick up that term "ravenous wolves." Christ is painting an analogy here. It is kind of like a parable. Wolves represent *the enemy*—to both the sheep and the shepherd. When a shepherd was out with the sheep, it was his own life that was at stake (along with the sheep's). So, in this analogy if we think of Christ Himself as the Good Shepherd (the main Shepherd), the wolf would be an enemy of the church and of Christ. It would also be the enemy of other shepherds that Christ would appoint as well.

The word *ravenous* means rapacious. That is another big word, and most people may not know what rapacious means. But that means excessively covetous, or grasping. It can also mean one who lives on prey, or one who lives by plunder. It is someone who has a very screwy motivation in terms of godliness. That is, very wrong motivation for being a shepherd. He is *out to get for himself*.

This is brought up many, many times about false teachers. Jude brings it up. Peter brings it up, in his section there in II Peter 2. They talk about covetousness. It is not just covetousness for money and possessions, but for anything that is *benefiting the self*—whether it is sensual pleasures that they think are a benefit, whether it is money (or gain) or anything that will seem to bring them more (power, prestige, what have you). Things that men, in the carnal mind, think are gain. That is what they live on.

He says that they come in "sheep's clothing"—that is, looking like one of us. But their real motivation inside is to get as much as they can for themselves. So they preach and they serve only for whatever fine living, or power, or prestige, or goods that will accrue to them over time. They are 'in it' for the nice car, the nice house, the nice clothes, the posh accommodations, the

travel, and what have you. Whatever the position might bring—rather than what a true shepherd does, which is to help the sheep.

That is the only reason for the shepherd being there: To feed, to tend, to guard, to guide, to heal, and in whatever way to aid the sheep—to bring them to maturity. So, to false teachers, the ministry is rather a *chosen career* that will get them to a nice retirement—rather than a *calling* to which they dedicate their lives. Let us go to John 10 and see "the Good Shepherd"—as opposed to thieves, robbers, false shepherds, hirelings, etc. We will sort of skip through this chapter; but I have six points that come out of this. Six basic principles of how *true* and *false* shepherds are.

John 10:1-2 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

It says in verse 7 that Christ is the door. So we can take from this that a true shepherd knows that his calling is from Christ. It comes through the proper channels. He knows by the events of his life that God has placed him in this position. I know that I can see it in my life. My life did not just happen. I am not trying to say that to say that I am a true teacher in every sense of the word. I try to be. But I know that every minister that is trying to be really is trying to be.

But look at the apostle Paul. That was a calling! And it was very evident that he came by "the door." Look where his life was going, and then suddenly it took a 180-degree turn. He went totally the other way, because Christ called him. He said, "Paul, why are you kicking against the goads? I've been trying to call you for a long time, Paul. And you haven't heard, so now you are coming My way and doing My thing. So go see this man in Damascus, and he'll baptize you. Then, "We'll send you out among the wolves. And you'll do this, and you'll do that; and you'll like it."

He had 'the perils of Paul' all through his life. We have that long list, where he describes everything that he had to go through for this calling. But he was not about to quit, because he knew that he had come by "the door" and that he had been made a shepherd. So he had better do it, or "Woe is me," he said.

So a false teacher will have taken his position. These principles will not apply in every case. But a true shepherd is called and chosen and put in his position. A false shepherd will, when everything is said and done, be seen to have taken his position for his own gain.

John 10:3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Another principle that comes out here is that there is a mutual trusting relationship between the sheep and a true shepherd. They trust one another. They can see the trueness in one another. The shepherd knows the sheep as well as he can, and the sheep know the shepherd as well as they can. And the sheep understand that shepherd, whom they know, has their eternal good as his first priority. That is what makes them trust him, and follow him—because he is not 'in it' for himself. He is 'in it' for them. What he gets as a reward is merely a byproduct of what he does for them.

John 10:4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

The true shepherd is a leader. And where he goes, the trusting sheep follow. The sheep willingly follow him and trust him to lead. We could say that they will not follow one whom they do not trust.

John 10:5, 10 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. . . .The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. [Christ said] I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

The false shepherd's inward intention is to steal, to kill, and to destroy the sheep. He uses them for his advantage! Remember we said they are covetous, and like the ravenous wolf wants to use them for his own gain. He is a user. He is therefore not really tending them, or feeding them, or maturing them, or grooming them, or leading them to grow, except as it will benefit him.

John 10:11 [Jesus said] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

That is how far a good shepherd is willing to go. And that is certainly the opposite of a false shepherd who just wants everything for himself, and would not really lay down his life for them. That would be counter-productive, would it not? What good would come of giving one's life, if you are really 'in it' to get as much for oneself as possible?

John 10:12-13 But he who is a hireling, and not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.

A false shepherd is a coward. He runs from his responsibility to protect the sheep from predators. You might call him a "compromiser." He is not willing to risk his neck or reputation for the truth. He is not willing to go out on the line because he knows something is true. He would rather cower and run away from it, and compromise, and let Satan scatter the sheep. A true shepherd will go out there and do it for the sheep. He will give himself up. He will preach until his face is blue, if that is necessary, to make sure that the people understand what the truth is.

From verse 13, which we already read: "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep." This is obvious because the false shepherd is interested in only his own ideal, and not the sheep's.

Please jot down John 21:15-17. That is the section after Christ's resurrection, when they were by the sea. He told Peter, "Feed My sheep." "Tend My sheep." "Feed My sheep." And Peter was getting all upset about that, because He kept asking Peter, "Do you love Me?" And Peter was not putting the two together. The "*Do you love Me?*" and the "*Feed My sheep.*" are like hand and glove. He is saying: "Peter, IF you love Me, [THEN] you will feed My sheep." "Peter, IF you love me, [THEN] you will tend My sheep." "Peter, IF you love Me, [THEN] feed My sheep."

What is this saying? It is the same principle that comes out in Matthew 25, about the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. What comes out of there? Jesus says "If you have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, then you have done it unto Me."

So how does the minister show his love for Christ? By taking care of the little ones, by taking care of the sheep, by making sure that they all make it (if possible). By feeding, by tending, by penning them up when they need to be penned, by taking them to the summer pastures, by ridding them of bugs and other insects and parasites (which they probably do not even know that they have). By fattening them up, by getting them whatever exercise they may need, by leading them to water, by leading them to food, by grooming their wool, by whatever it happens to be that the shepherd needs to do to make sure that sheep is ready. That is how a minister loves Christ!

Peter carried this with him all of his life. In I Peter 5: 1-5, he tells the other elders who were under him to "Shepherd the sheep." And he says:

I Peter 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers. . .

People hate that word these days. They do not like to be overseen. But it is part of the calling of a minister to oversee; and there is a way to do it properly. Peter points that out.

I Peter 5:2b Not by constraint [not as if you have a gun to your head], but willingly [because you love the sheep and because you love Christ], not for dishonest gain [because you do not want to be a ravenous wolf] but eagerly.

There is a lot having to do with attitude here. Not by constraint, but willingly. Not for dishonest gain, but eagerly.

I Peter 5:3 Nor as being lords over those entrusted to you [not as being their lord and master, and commanding them], but being examples to the flock.

That is, in one's own life—by the way you live. By the way you eat, by the way you dress, by the way you groom yourself, by the way you drive, by the way you play, by the way you study, by the way you pray, by the way you do this, and by the way you do that. That is half of a minister's life, or maybe more. When one becomes a minister, he automatically is mortgaged to a glass house. Everything that a minister does is open for everyone to see. So the minister's best way to approach that is to be the best that he can be all the time. Always ready, always willing, always eager to serve.

You ought to try it some day. It is very interesting. People think that a minister's life is easy. That all one does is sit around, answer phone calls, do an occasional article, or write a sermon. There is not much to do. Go visit the widows. They have a good time anyway. Drink sherry and talk about old times. Do an occasional anointing. That is not hard, is it?

You know how hard it is to do right all the time. But the pressure that is put on a minister to do that is probably double what is on a lay member—because the lay member is not being watched by others. (In this congregation, about 350 "others.") But the minister is. In this church, where everybody is sort of scattered all over the country, it is not as easy to see the minister up close and personal that often. But it is still there; and the grapevine is alive and well.

I am not complaining. I am just telling, because people are not aware of some of these things. I do not think people think about those sometimes. But that is just "part of the job." It is what you have to do. It is part of the life. I know that when my mom and dad approached me before my ordination, they gave me about a month to decide whether I actually wanted to be ordained. They knew that I knew (having lived with them for years of their ministry) just how things went as a minister. And they knew that I would consider that very carefully—whether I wanted to take that on, or not. I was very grateful for that—that I actually had a choice. Some men have not had choices. In fact, my mom just pointed to my dad. He did not have a choice. It was sprung on him.

It is something that needs to be evaluated by anyone who has that ambition. In I Timothy 3, it says that if anyone desires to be an elder he desires a good work. So desiring that position is not necessarily wrong; but then he goes on to list all these things that one needs to try to live up to. And it is not an easy list—I Timothy 3:1-7, the qualifications of the elders. One of the hardest ones for me, with my 4 kids, is ruling my own house. Jarod is no fun when it comes to that one. Sometimes he really takes me to the edge; but he is a fun boy, though.

I am not near finished with my sermon, so I am not going on any further. But I hope you have begun to understand that our evaluation of whether a man is a true or false teacher needs to go deeper than just how we *feel* about a person, or whether he has one thing "wrong" that we may disagree with.

We need to remember that we are brethren. We are in this together. We need to have a little *patience*. We need to have a little bit of *forbearance*. We need to have a great deal of *humility*; and remember that this is a body—meaning, like a team. I think that is one thing that many of us have forgotten in this time of "personal independence" and "personal ethics" (as Martin was talking about not too long ago).

We all think that it is just what we believe—personally, individually. That is not true. It is what we all believe. We are all a team. We are all a body—moving toward the same goal. We have a responsibility to one another, to bear one another up. In the first few verses of Galatians 6, it says that the strong are supposed to bear the burdens for the weak. Those who are more spiritual are supposed help those who are less spiritual.

We are not in this as a competition. That is what I am trying to say. We are all in this together. It is not a bunch of individuals who are trying to beat each other to the finish line. We are like a scrum—if any of you understand that weird British game of rugby—where all the people get in one big group and they all move (all together) around this ball. In a way, that is the way we are. We are all supposed to cross the finish line at the same time. And not only us, but also the great cloud of witnesses that have gone on before.

I am not done with this sermon. The next time that I speak, which will be after the day of Pentecost, I am going to pick this up and add to it "the spirit of antichrist"—which I think adds a great deal of understanding to "What is a false teacher?"