

How can you tell among ministers in our day the real man of God from the false shepherd? What is the test that will most adequately separate one from the other? Perhaps the best test is this question, “What is the main object that a minister loves to exalt?”

The false shepherd will exalt himself. By his words and actions, he puts himself forth, draws attention to himself, and magnifies in some way or another his own preeminence. His words, his mannerisms, his presentation all serve to draw attention to himself. Do you know any such ministers? Unfortunately, it’s not the least bit hard to find them.

And the true shepherd? What does he exalt? Whom does he exalt? Christ. He is the man who cries out with John the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God.” Bishop J.C. Ryle comments, “Happy indeed is that minister who forgets self in his pulpit, and desires to be hid behind the cross. This man shall be blessed in his work, and be a blessing.”

My theme this morning is Jesus, his life and work. His public teaching. And it is he whom I will exalt. Never has there been a man able to teach with such authority, such wisdom, such perception, and with such sovereign control over all that happens to him. Never has there been a man on earth who was also the son of God! Never before, and never again, until that Son of God returns in glorious triumph.

Some six months have passed since the events of John 6, events that surrounded the springtime festival of the passover. John 7 refers to the fall festival called the festival of tabernacles,

or booths, the last of the three festivals in which all Israelites were to make their way to Jerusalem. It was the festival roughly corresponding to our national holiday of Thanksgiving, a time to give thanks for the harvest abundance. And during those events, in and around Jerusalem, Jesus demonstrates his perfect sovereignty and divine authority over his own life. What becomes so obvious is that,

I. JESUS CONTROLS THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS OWN LIFE.

I don’t want to simply study history. I don’t want to simply teach you about the historical Jesus, but rather about the supernatural Jesus. An historical man, to be sure, who lived and died upon this earth, but also a man who came from heaven where he been with God the Father since before the creation of the world, and a man who would ascend back into heaven to sit at the right hand of his father in heaven. Not just an historical man, but the only mediator between God and man.

That man demonstrates his deity by his sovereign control over his own life. Notice that in these verses,
v.1-6, 8-9

“My time has not yet fully come.”

Jesus had such a perfect sense of timing, and it went far beyond any such ability that we might have. Because Jesus’ sense of timing was one of sovereign control. When Jesus says, “My time has not yet come,” he is referring to the pre-ordained, predetermined, predestined plan of God, about whom we read this,

Eph.1:11 “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

God works out all things according to the counsel of his own. That's pretty plain isn't it? And Ephesians 1 makes it equally clear WHEN that counsel of his own will was determined. Before the foundation of the world.

So everything about Jesus' ministry was ordained by God, determined before he ever created man in the first place. That certainly explains why God decreed the certainty of the fall and determined the certainty of the existence of sin and evil. Because he had determined to save sinners! So he determined to allow the creatures he created in his own moral image to fall into sin.

Jesus was perfectly aware of the fullness of that plan, including the exact time when he would complete his earthly ministry and lay down his life for the sins of his people. And not only was he aware of that time, he was in control of the circumstances that would bring about that time. And in John 7, that time had not yet come! So,

A. Jesus refused to agree with the request to publicly reveal himself prematurely.

Again, not merely because of human wisdom, but because of divine omniscience. He knew that his time had not yet come. So, he refused their request. He would not publicly reveal himself at this most holy of Jewish festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles.

v.2-3

Note the form of the invitation from his brothers, almost issued as a challenge, a challenge from those the Bible says didn't yet believe in him. His own brothers, I believe referring literally to his human siblings, those born to Mary after Jesus, born by ordinary conception with Joseph as their father.

v.4-5

Jesus wouldn't be intimidated or bullied. In fact, he rebukes his brothers for even making their suggestion,
v.6

It didn't matter when his brothers went to the festival, for as unbelievers, they fit right in with the crowd. There would be no opposition to them, as there would be for Jesus. And Jesus understood that opposition fully.

B. Jesus understood the hatred he received.

Again, with his divine omniscience, he knew all about it.
v.1

More deeply, Jesus understood WHY he was hated!
v.7

Turn back with me to,
John 3:19-20

That's still true, isn't it! Jesus is hated, and Christianity is hated and most deeply opposed, when it calls sin SIN. The church experiences its greatest opposition from those whose sins are exposed and identified. It's not the doctrine or theological truths that provoke opposition, it's moral declarations about sin. For Jesus, the hatred came because of his constant testimony against the sinful lives and wicked practices of the many in his day. Things like adultery. Covetousness. Hypocrisy.

And what about today? In the craftiness of wicked men today, those who proclaim biblical morality are called the agents of hate! We who would dare to say, on the basis of God's word, that homosexuality is a sin and a perversion of God's design of men as male and female, we who say that are said to be haters! And

those who oppose us on that issue accuse us of fostering hate and even stimulating hate crimes.

But who is doing the hating! We who declare the truth. Or those who oppose us, often violently, because we declare the truth. Who is doing the hating? Jesus, who condemned unrepentant sinners for their sin, or those sinners who were trying to kill him!

You should never be mean-spirited, nor vain or self-righteous in appearance and presentation, but please don't let the world tell you that YOU are guilty of hatred simply by declaring that what God says is right is RIGHT and what God says is wicked is WICKED.

Jesus understood, as we should, that those whose sins are exposed will be provoked to hatred. In Jesus' case, even unto death! And in all of that, with sovereign authority and control over these events,

C. Jesus seized the opportunity to teach.

He did go to the festival, just not with the public appearance asked for. He went quietly and secretly, so as not to provoke his opposition prematurely. But when the circumstances were right, when the festival was well underway, perhaps half done, he stood up to teach.

He seized the moment, the moment predetermined in the counsel of God's own will. It was a moment when he could be sheltered from the direct attacks of those wanting to kill him.

v.10-14

Jesus will always cause such divisions among men, and those who preach the gospel can expect such divisions also. We

shouldn't seek to be divisive nor particularly contentious in our presentation, but the truth does divide people, and we shouldn't hide from that reality. Nor should it surprise us. Rather we should join the praise chorus of the Apostle Paul, by declaring,

2 Cor. 2:14 "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life."

And so I proclaim to you this Jesus, the one who had perfect and infallible control over all the circumstances of his life. And in that, we see his answers to their opposition.

II. JESUS ANSWERS ALL THE OBJECTIONS WHICH UNBELIEVERS OFFER TO HIS TEACHING.

Jesus takes the offensive. Jesus attacks their positions at their root level and leaves them. His answers are the same answers we must give to those who oppose us today. First,

A. Jesus explains that his teaching is not from human origin.

Note their objection, which we've seen in previous weeks.

v.15

It's really the same as that objection in, John 6:41-42

The point is, Jesus is not merely a man. And his teaching is not the product of his childhood training nor his Jewish rabbinical studies, which didn't exist! Jesus hadn't studied with the Rabbi's, he didn't have a college education or been to seminary, to use the language of our day. None of that. He didn't get his teaching

from any man, but directly from God! God the father.

v.16

That's the most crucial argument that we must proclaim today! The Word of God is the Word of God! The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible word of God. What the Bible says, God says! What the Bible teaches is what we must believe. What the Bible declares to be evil we must judge to be evil. We must seek to do the good things that the Bible requires us to do. We can't pick and choose.

I don't know how many of you are familiar with Thomas Jefferson's religious convictions, but if you go to visit Monticello, or study books about Jefferson, you will realize that he literally cut out of the Bible the things that he wanted removed. He simply removed what he determined not to be good or useful, with knife and scissors! He cut them out!

And people are still doing that today. Picking and choosing among the words of God recorded in the Scriptures, keeping those things that they like, and disposing of those things which offend them or cause them to stumble. That is the inevitable consequence of failing to believe that the Bible is inerrant. Either you accept the Bible as the Word of God, by faith, or you, in your own autonomy, you determine what is true and what is false.

Jesus confronts that very issue, by saying so explicitly, "My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me." It's from God. In his humanity, Jesus says so unmistakably clearly that what he teaches comes from God the father in heaven.

And if you want to understand that teaching, if you want to understand what Jesus says, then you must first surrender your mind and your will, and determine to submit and to obey.

v.17

In other words, Jesus says, "You can't test me. You can't come to understand unless you first submit yourself to obedience. Understanding follows obedience! And why is that so many don't understand the message of the gospel today? They are not willing to do God's will. They are not willing to obey. They are not willing confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord.

It's not a matter of works salvation, but a matter of genuine repentance, the repentance that goes hand in hand with saving faith. If you will not do what God reveals, if you will not submit your life to his authority, then you have no claim and no ability to understand his teaching.

If you won't live up to the light you have, you will have no ability or opportunity to gain further understanding. And that principle applies even to us as believers, for if there are areas of your life where you are consistently failing to live up to the light you already have, you should not expect to progress any farther in your knowledge of God.

The problem with bad theology today is really the consequence of the problem of immorality, and those two things go hand in hand. Where you have one, you will find the other!

To speak it again positively, in Jesus' words,

v.17

Let me repeat this for you, and give you the added encouragement that this is really the issue that you must address in speaking to unbelievers, when you want to begin to answer their objections. The Bible is not from human origin. It is the Word of God.

Don't start anywhere else. Don't start with logical arguments. Don't start with the evidences that you see for the truth of God. Don't start with your own experiences. Start with this most basic point, the divine origin of the word of God. It is the word of God. And if people stumble there, then they have stumbled, and nothing else you say will be able to straighten them out!

But Jesus does go on from there, and in a related point, in answering their objections,

B. Jesus declares that his teaching promotes the glory of God.
v.18

Again, my opening comments. How can you tell among ministers in our day the real man of God from the false shepherd? What is the test that will most adequately separate one from the other?

The test? Who is being exalted. A man. Or God? That is the question.

It's a good question to ask people, "Who is your god?" If someone says they don't believe in God, or they don't believe in the God of the Bible, then ask, "Who do you believe in?" Who, or what, is the highest object of your devotion and worship? Who, or what, do you live for? What is the meaning and purpose of your life? What are you trying to accomplish?

Those are all very easily answered for Christians. God. God's glory. And that is what Jesus himself is teaching. In his humanity, in his role as mediator and redeemer, he is not seeking his own glory, but the glory of the one who sent him. So also it

must be for us!

We must seek the glory of God the father. Our chief purpose in life, our chief end, as the first question of the Shorter Catechism pointedly defines, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Our purpose in life is to glorify God. Our goal in teaching and in framing our doctrinal understanding of the Scriptures is to glorify God. To exalt the greatness of God, which is, by definition, to humble us.

And so, if I am faithful in teaching what Jesus taught, if I am faithful in proclaiming the message that Jesus proclaimed, then in everything I teach, God will be exalted and I will be humbled! God will be glorified, and man will be made low. He will increase, and I will decrease.

So measure what you hear by that standard. Evaluate the doctrine you believe by that standard. And judge the appropriateness of the worship services you attend by that same measure. May God be exalted and may God be glorified, as we are humbled before him in the glory of his presence.

That's how we ought to answer the objections to those who oppose the truth of the gospel today, by exalting God and humbling man!

And we can do the next thing Jesus did, too. With the authority of God as he reveals himself in the word, we can rebuke the wicked. We can confront the wicked and self-righteous and call them to repentance. As Jesus did. For at this great festival of booths, in this courageous public testimony,

III. JESUS REBUKES THOSE WHO SEEK TO HARM HIM.
He rebukes them two ways, first by appealing to Moses, in

whom they supposedly believe. And then by exposing their hypocrisy.

v.19

And, v.24

Let's look at the appeal to Moses first.

A. Jesus rebukes them for violating their own law.

He knows that they will have to claim to believe in Moses, then he allows that knowledge of Moses' law to be their judge. He gets specific. "Why do you seek to kill me?"

He knew that they knew the 6th commandment. YOU SHALL NOT MURDER. So he appealed to their own understanding, to point out their guilt! And they got the point, but rather than admit their guilt, they worked to shift the blame.

v.20

But Jesus appeals to the law of Moses, and rebukes the people for violating their own understanding of the law. And then,

B. Jesus rebukes them for their self-righteous hypocrisy.

v.21

What's he referring to? A "work" is a miracle, and the reference is most likely to the miracle recorded in, John 5:5-10

Jesus is so devastating in his rebuke. There is no place to escape.

v.22-23

You circumcise on the sabbath, if that was the eighth day of a child's life. That's what the law required. Why, then, is it wrong

for me to heal the whole man on the sabbath?

Jesus is exposing their hypocrisy. And their self-righteousness. They thought themselves to be such marvelous law-keepers, but they missed the whole point. They had only looked on the surface. The rebuke is plain,

v.24

Did Jesus break the law of the Sabbath? Did he violate the 4th commandment by healing the man of the Sabbath Day? NO. Absolutely not. There was nothing in the law forbidding such a good work. There was just a vague appearance of a violation of the law, and the rebuke is easy to understand, "Do not judge according to appearance."

People still do, don't they? I've been on the receiving end, and it hurts deeply. And we all need to avoid this deadly tendency, to look only upon the appearance of things, and to miss the truth. To miss the reality.

Some would say that we should never make judgments, quoting, and misquoting,

Mat 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged."

But the prohibition in Scripture isn't against making any and all judgments, but against superficial and hypocritical judgments. Read on in,

Mat. 7:2 "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 "Hypocrite! First remove the

plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”

So, you should be able to judge that there is a speck in your brother's eye, and you should help him to get rid of it, but only after you have removed the beam from your own eye. What Jesus condemns is hypocrisy. Judging on the basis of outward appearance.

God is the perfect judge, for remember what the Lord said to Samuel, in the process of selecting a new king,

1 Sam. 16:7 “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

It will most often be the case that those who oppose you, those who oppose us as a church, will be guilty of such self-righteous hypocrisy, and we need to gain the humility and wisdom to recognize and identify that. And to hold ourselves to this very high and strict standard, “For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

So where does all of that leave us? Hopefully, with a greater sense of the glory of the majesty of Jesus Christ, whose teaching silenced all his enemies. And whose proclamation of the truth brought many to salvation.

v.30-31

Let me end with a great prophetic description of Jesus, one found in Isaiah 11. It is a description of the one whom we have studied in John 7, and this is the one upon whom you must fix your eyes. This is the one whom you are called to honor and

worship as the eternal son of God.

Isaiah 11:1 “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. 2 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. 3 His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; 4 But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.”

And so I say to you,

Rev. 5:12 “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!...Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”