

On Identifying False Teachers

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As our Lord drew the Sermon on the Mount to a close, He gave the following warning: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them" (Mat. 7:15-16). Do we still need this warning?

It is presently easier to find protectors of wolves among the sheep than to find those who will expose them. In fact, it is the common thing nowadays for the false teacher to be praised, endorsed, supported, and welcomed, while one who would correctly identify him as a wolf is treated as the wolf should be treated. How different from the Lord's is the attitude of many brethren on this matter. We are not left to wonder how the apostolic church dealt with false teachers: They were watched for and when discovered, they were marked, avoided, silenced, shunned, rejected refused endorsement, and "delivered to Satan" (Acts. 20:29-31; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; Tit. 1:10-11, 14; 3:10; 2 John 9-11).

Now there may be some "witch-hunters," "alarmists," and those who "play God" among us (as defenders of false teachers are wont to accuse), but I doubt it. (If there are, the wolves greatly outnumber them.) These and similar appellations are smoke-screen words designed to mitigate the exposures of the false teachers and their errors without their having to answer them or repent of them. Such terms are designed to intimidate and silence the one who exposes the false teacher. They are employed to create prejudice against those who stand for the Truth, and they are a favorite ploy of the liberals. (Ironically, false teachers who claim to abhor "name-calling" and "labeling" don't mind doing it themselves when they are being exposed.)

I know of no one who enjoys exposing sin or error of any kind in a brother or sister. I certainly do not. I would much rather always be able to commend and praise and never have to criticize or reprove. However, one is not really a Gospel preacher (or a true follower of Christ, whatever his work in the kingdom) who shrinks in cowardice from this necessary task.

If it makes me a "witch-hunter" or an "alarmist" to warn brethren of a "wolf" among the "flock" (or "flocks"), then I am such with Heaven's blessing. If I am such a one, then what shall we call the Lord and His apostles who commanded and practiced this responsibility? If exposing false teachers is to "play God," I would rather do that than "play the devil" by

refusing the Lord's mandate to do so. If one would be great in the Master's eyes, he must be faithful to the charge to identify and expose false teachers, even if they are dear friends or even relatives.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, June 4, 2006, of which I was editor.]

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