

HOW TO IDENTIFY FALSE TEACHERS

Jesus put His flock of people on guard in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits" (**Matthew 7:15-16**). The word "ravenous" indicates their capacity for violence as the same word may be also translated "extortion" and defined as "to obtain by force or violence" (**I Corinthians 5:10; 6:10**). Those who otherwise seem to be "sound or faithful" gospel preachers turn against what appears to be "their own kind" when in actuality they are "ravenous wolves."

With What "Crowd" Do They Run?

That such "Christians" use the threat of, or actually resort to, destroying another Christian's name and reputation in order to appear righteous themselves is exactly what Jesus said the Pharisee did in his prayer (**Luke 18:9-14**). Paul preached the truth of the Gospel of Christ in Antioch of Pisidia and unbelieving Jews were "filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul" (**Acts 13:45**). Even though they could stir up "the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city," they "raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (**Acts 13:50**). Unbelieving Jews in Iconium "stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren" (**Acts 14:2**), and divided the loyalties of the whole city. In Thessalonica, the unpersuaded Jews, "becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason" (**Acts 17:5**).

This pattern of opposition is to be expected from unbelievers, but Jesus warned that it could come from those who pretend to be of the flock. Since Jesus said: "A servant is not greater than his master," then it followed that "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me" (**John 15:20-21**). By His own mouth, then, anyone within the flock of Christ who resorts to unbelievers' tactics to oppose the preaching of the Gospel has shown with whom his loyalties lie. While claiming to be "sound in the faith" anyone who attacks the flock with the same vengeance, ferocity and tactics as unbelievers, IS NOT SOUND; IS NOT OF THE FLOCK; AND SHOULD NOT BE IN ANY PULPIT OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST! The Devil is "the accuser of our brethren" (**Revelation 12:10**) and those who do his bidding are of the Devil, not God! It's too bad that some preacher training does not seem to include decency as well as doctrine.

Ravenous Wolves Are Those Who Use the Following Works Against Their Opponents Rather Than Discussing the Scriptures:

1. "**Maliciousness**" which is "ill will, and the desire to injure" someone else (**Romans 1:29; Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Titus 3:11**). This is the vicious and mean-spirited person who regards not the consequences or degree

of damage to the victim. Either by words, bullets, missiles, bombs, or whatever means is used for its expression, they all have one purpose: destruction of the targeted person. Politically, they are called "terrorists," societally they are "nihilists," in the media they are "sensationalists" or "yellow journalists," and in the church they are "brotherhood watchdogs" or just plain "yellow." None of them love God for they do not love their brethren whom they can see (**I John 4:20-21**).

2. **"Murder"** or literally "slaughter" has as its goal the taking of another's life. The victim is robbed either of physical life (**Romans 1:29; Luke 23:19,23; Acts 8:1-4; 9:1**) OR verbally robbed of "life" by hatred (**I John 3:14,15**). Personal retaliation has never been allowed by God's Laws (**Genesis 4:8-15; 9:6; Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 12:17-13:10**). Murderers do not "love" their victims, for "love does no harm to his neighbor" (**Romans 13: 10**).
3. **"Evil-mindedness"** refers to "the custom of evil, bad character, depravity of heart and life" (**Romans 1:29**). It is used of one who is continually seeking to harm another's welfare, putting the worst possible interpretation on their every action. Paul said this is done by the "defiled and unbelieving" who see no purity in the person they wish to harm (**Titus 1:15-16**).
4. **"Whisperers"** are those guilty of "secret slander, detraction" (**Romans 1:29**). These are the gutless, spineless, cowardly people who have much to say to others behind one's back, but when faced will have little or nothing to say. Adam Clarke said it refers to "those who, under pretended secrecy, carry about accusations against their neighbours, whether true or false; blasting their reputation by clandestine tittle-tattle."
5. **"Backbiters"** (**Romans 1:30**) are "defamers, evil-speakers." A defamer uses slander or libel to sully a person's reputation. This action may be the practice of "Gentiles" but should not characterize those who follow Christ (**I Peter 2:11-12**), for those who practice it become judges not only of brethren but of God's Law, "and are not a doer of the law but a judge" (**James 4:11**). If personal offenses have been committed, then it is sin to "spread them around" to others than the ones involved (**Matthew 18:15-17**). "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips" (**Proverbs 20:19; 11:13**). God has nothing to do with such people, for they have become ungodly and He gives them over to their "debased mind" (**Romans 1:28-32**). In other words, it doesn't get much worse than this.
6. **"Unmerciful"** means "having no mercy; or bringing no help to the wretched" (**Romans 1:31**). Christians are those who have been saved by "His abundant mercy" (**I Peter 1:3-5**). Mercy is the attitude one has toward another's plight, pity, or the beginning of compassion. It is unthinkable, therefore, to claim to be a Christian who has been saved by the mercy of God who cannot be merciful to fellow Christians! Jesus has said, "Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy" (**Matthew 5:7**). Those who show no mercy toward their fellow-

Christians cannot expect to receive anymore from God, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy" (**James 2:13**). Even under Moses' Law it was argued, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" (**John 7:51**) Yet it seems that is exactly what is happening in churches today: judging without a fair hearing.

But there is also talk of "dossiers," "files," "investigations" of individuals who may never be given the opportunity to affirm or deny the conclusions drawn therefrom. Since love "thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth" (**I Corinthians 13:5-6**), then clearly, there is no love in those using clandestine information. Besides, what makes them think they are the only ones gathering files? Since they have left Christ and wandered into the realm of the ungodly by their tactics, how can they keep someone as ungodly as they are from gathering records of past weaknesses on them or their families? "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin'" (**Proverbs 20:9**)? Wisdom said, "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him" (**Proverbs 26:27**). Jesus taught the same principle by saying, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (**Matthew 26:52**).

When "ravenous wolves" are exposed to the light of day, then by their works they are seen as "ungodly" (**Proverbs 16:27**), full of hatred (**Proverbs 10:12**), and hypocrites (**Proverbs 11:9**). They certainly are NOT "sound gospel preachers" and cannot qualify as Christian, for they are "wolves" not sheep!

I pray and teach for all who are "Hell-bound" to repent (**Acts 17:30-31**).

-----**John T. Polk II**