

- Did I vote to call the pastor believing then he was God's man for our church?
- Is the pastor's doctrine or leadership style contrary to the Bible?
- Do I pray for my pastor every day?
- Do I consistently seek to help the pastor strengthen his ministry by being a support to him?
- Do I minister to the needs of my pastor and his family?

As we noted earlier in this book, there are times when a congregation must ask its pastor to resign and choose a new leader. However, this happens far more often than it should in churches of all denominations. Seeking a new leader is easier than addressing rebellious hearts and ways. When the path of least resistance is taken and a congregation focuses on "choosing a new leader" instead of addressing its unhealthy spiritual condition, it is only a matter of time until conflict will rear its ugly head and further mar the beauty of the Bride of Christ, the Church.

Wolves Among You

A wolf pack can kill dozens of sheep in a single night, leaving half-consumed carcasses strewn about as grim evidence of the rampage. Rather than kill their prey quickly, wolves literally eat their victims alive until they become interested in their next opportunity. Wolves are cunning, capable, and ferocious.

Sheep, on the other hand, are gentle creatures that are oblivious to the dangers around them. They are completely dependent on their caretakers. Sheep need

shepherds to protect them from wolves and other predators.

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Jesus used sheep and wolves to describe the relationship between His followers and those who seek to harm them. He said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). Because Jesus loves His followers and understood the dangers that constantly threatened them, He said, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Appearances can be deceiving as well as deadly, then and today.

Pastor Ed clearly remembered the Sunday when a particular woman joined Saint's Haven Congregation. Barbara radiated joy, enthusiasm, and confidence and was eager to become a Bible teacher. She was a refreshing change for Ed, since most new members were reluctant to become involved in ministry. Also, teachers were in short supply.

I [Paul] know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. Therefore be on the alert.

Acts 20:29-31a. HCSB

Four weeks after Barbara joined the church, Pastor Ed asked her to lead a Bible study. She was delighted to accept his invitation and quickly began recruiting class members from the congregation.

At first, Ed received glowing reports from the people in Barbara's study. Within months, very disturbing reports started trickling in as one member after another described her extremely assertive ways, how she demanded the

allegiance of class members and became unusually involved in their personal lives. Apparently, someone less than saintly had crept into the Haven's safe sanctuary.

We tend to recall extreme examples when we think of recent false teachers, men such as Jim Jones or David Koresh who advocated bizarre doctrines and horrific practices. Since their evil intent was obvious, even the secular press correctly identified them as cultists. Most false teachers, however, are much more subtle in their approach. As Pastor Ed discovered, we can welcome false teachers into our churches with open arms, becoming aware of their true identity only after they have begun to wreak havoc in our congregations.

How can we avoid this heart-wrenching experience? The Bible helps us identify false teachers by exposing many of their motives, methods, and messages.

The Motives of Deceivers

In order to understand the motives of false teachers, we must be aware of the relationship between them and the ultimate father of lies, Satan. The Apostle Paul called them Satan's "servants," noting that

such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light. So it is no great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their destiny will be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:13-15, HCSB).

Not every false teacher appears greedy, especially at first, but he or she is intrinsically motivated by selfish interests. False teachers are not interested in building up

the Body of Christ through selfless and sacrificial service. Instead, they are motivated by what they can gain through the ways they influence a local congregation. False teachers “do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites” (Romans 16:18, HCSB).

Not all false teachers advocate blatant sexual immorality (Jude 7-8), but their values will be shaped by the world’s values. False teachers lead others into sin using worldly standards to rationalize godless behavior. They might use biblical terminology, but the practical outcomes of their teaching turn grace into a pretext for sin.

False teachers are driven by the forces that motivate Satan: pride, ambition, power, control, and indulgence. Like their master, they attempt to entice unsuspecting church members into foolishly believing that they can “be like God” (Genesis 3:5) and disregard His rightful claim on their lives as the King of the universe.

Some of the major false teachings infiltrating our churches today include:

- There are many paths to heaven
- We cannot judge others
- Politics and religion don’t mix
- Women have an innate right to choose abortion
- Homosexuality is not a sin; it is an acceptable lifestyle
- The Bible is unreliable, filled with errors
- Spiritualism and spirituality are the same

The Methods of Deceivers

False teachers “will secretly introduce destructive heresies” to a congregation (2 Peter 2:1). They enter churches “secretly” (Jude 4), and “flatter others” to “deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Romans 16:18, HCSB).

False teachers are “idle talkers” (Titus 1:10, HCSB). They frequently have big plans and exciting ideas that lack spiritual substance. Their proposals catch the attention of church members but slowly lead them away from the basic disciplines of the Christian life and faithful service in the church.

False teachers are divisive. The Apostle Paul understood how damaging their presence can be to the Body of Christ. He wrote, “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions....Keep away from them” (Romans 16:17). They grumble and find fault (Jude 16), creating strife and division among believers (Jude 19).

Finally, false teachers distort scripture. Referring to the Apostle Paul’s epistles, Peter observed that “the untaught and unstable twist them to their own destruction, as they also do with the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16, HCSB). Truth becomes blurred and impotent when mixed with falsehood. During His earthly ministry, Jesus strongly rebuked false teachers, saying, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matthew 22:29).

The Messages of Deceivers

Word about Barbara’s disturbing teaching spread like wildfire through the membership of Saint’s Haven Congregation. One Sunday she questioned the inspiration and reliability of the Gospels, telling class members that modern scholarship had proven long ago that the Gospels contain

numerous discrepancies. "Because of this," Barbara declared authoritatively, "we cannot know with certainty what Jesus actually did and said. All we know is what various people wrote long after Jesus walked on the earth. Our New Testament reflects their beliefs, not historical facts and events."

When class members told her they had not heard this before, Barbara questioned Pastor Ed's theological training. She even suggested that he might be deliberately withholding the truth about the Bible from the congregation. Class members were bewildered and upset, wondering if Barbara's accusations about the pastor might be true.

False teachers blaspheme spiritual realities (Jude 8), enslaving themselves and others to darkened thinking and sinful lifestyles. In the early church, they sought to change the truth about salvation (read Acts 15 and the Book of Galatians to learn more about their legalistic approach to salvation). Later, other false teachers blatantly denied "the sovereign Lord who bought them" (2 Peter 2:1). False teachers often will add or subtract to the basic biblical truths about Christ, creating "a different gospel" (Galatians 1:6) that is not really the gospel at all. Satan and his servants will do anything in their power to keep people from being saved.

Our Shepherd Will Protect His Sheep

Unfortunately, there are many false teachers and deceivers who are attempting to destroy churches and keep people from experiencing saving faith through Jesus Christ (Titus 1:10). They possess "a form of godliness but [deny] its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). However, they "will [bring] swift destruction on themselves" (2 Peter 2:1). Their judgment is certain (2 Peter 2:3) since the "gloom of darkness has been reserved for them" (2 Peter 2:17, HCSB).

We should be encouraged and emboldened by what John MacArthur has written regarding sheep, wolves and the Good Shepherd:

We are sheep among wolves. It was not uncommon in Palestine to hear about a shepherd found dead among the sheep he was trying to defend. But our Shepherd is not dead - He ever lives and is our defender. There is an invincibility about us because He controls everything. Zechariah 2:8 says, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." If you think it's tough on the sheep, it will be tougher on the wolves for what they do to the sheep. God will make all things right in the end. No matter what Satan does, he can't destroy God's sheep.²⁵

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them; and they follow me. I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28). Our Shepherd will protect His sheep!

The Spirit of Jezebel

Just mention the name Jezebel and people think of an evil, conniving, strong-willed woman. Her name has become synonymous with evil, so much so that many people who haven't read the Bible know it's not flattering to be called a "Jezebel."

The Original Jezebel

Jezebel was born in the Phoenician city of Sidon, located north of Israel in modern-day Lebanon. She was the daughter of King Ethbaal, whose name honored the