



## **Understanding and Applying Biblical Discernment**

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### **How to Hear the Voice of Truth – Part 1**

Do you hear them? Many voices, many teachers, many prophets, so many people claiming to provide spiritual guidance. How do we know which voice is speaking truth to us? Why is it so important that we know and follow only the truth?

Jesus answered these questions while he was teaching his disciples. He said this in John 8:31-32 –

*“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

There is a very important principle about truth in these verses. If we want to be free we must know the truth and we must abide or stay in the truth of God’s word. Truth brings spiritual freedom to our lives. Lies and error bring bondage, they make us slaves to that which is false. If we want to avoid spiritual slavery we must know the truth.

And Jesus taught us where to find the truth. In His word. So there is only one source for reliable, spiritual truth – the Bible.

So next we will look at exactly what Jesus said and what this means for our lives. In the meantime let us spend time every day reading the Bible. That way we can know the truth, we can be faithful followers of Jesus, and we can be truly free.

### **How to Hear the Voice of Truth – Part 2**

How do we know if a teacher, a pastor or a spiritual leader is teaching the truth? This is so important because as Jesus taught in John 8:32 - only the truth will set us free.

Jesus also showed us the importance of the truth in John chapter 17. Just before his death on the cross Jesus prayed for his disciples, and for all of us who would believe in the message of salvation. Here are the words of Jesus from John 17, verses 14, and 17:

*“I have given them your word .... Sanctify them by the truth. Your Word is truth.”*

Jesus is teaching us here that his words are the words of God and they are our source of truth. The Bible is where we find this truth recorded.

This is why it is so important we trust only the Bible as a reliable source for truth. When we study the Bible, we are able to know which voices, which teachers are truly bringing us the truth that will set us free. We will be free to live for God, free to love other people, and free to grow and mature spiritually. To know the truth, we must know the Bible, which is the Word of God.

The teachings of the Apostle Paul found in 2 Tim 3:16-17 –also show us we need to turn to the Bible if we want to be sure of finding the voice of truth. We will look closely at these verses in our next episode. Until then, let's stay close to God and read His word every day.

### **How to Hear the Voice of Truth – Part 3**

Let's face it, you don't want to be fooled and neither do I. But with so many voices claiming to have spiritual truth how can we protect ourselves from being led astray? We must know and trust the Bible as God's only source for spiritual truth. Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

We can trust Scripture because it is truth that God has breathed out. Through his prophets, apostles and through his Son Jesus, God has given us His Word, and it is only this truth that is profitable for teaching us, for correcting us and for training us in righteous living.

Any true man of God will understand this, and they will be careful to base their teaching on the truth of Scripture. They will not preach their own ideas, or claim to have new truth not found in the Bible. So the next time someone claims to be a spiritual teacher ask yourself – is this person teaching me from Scripture? We can protect ourselves from being fooled by carefully comparing what they teach with the Bible. Take some time today to read and study the Scripture breathed out by God himself, the truth that can set you free.

We have an example of people who did just this in the Bible. The Apostle Paul talks about them in Acts chapter 17, verse 11. He says that the people from the town of Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica because when Paul came to teach them *“they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”*

Why did Paul say they were more noble? He said this because they not only listened, but whenever they heard something new, they checked the Scriptures to make sure what they were being taught was the truth. They did this even when they were taught by the Apostle Paul. And Paul was not offended that they checked his teachings and compared them with Scripture, he was glad and called the Bereans more noble.

We learn from this that it is noble, and it is honorable to make sure what we are being taught is the truth. We must take any teaching we hear and compare it to what the Bible says. We do not dishonor our teachers by doing this. In fact, anyone who is truly a servant of God and claims to be a teacher or a pastor will be like the Apostle Paul and will be glad when his listeners do this. In this way we honor the Word of God. We know a person is teaching the truth when everything they say agrees with the Bible which is the Word of God.

## **Jesus Warns His Followers about False Prophets and Teachers**

Last time we learned how to hear the voice of truth. We do this by studying and knowing the only true source of spiritual truth which is the Bible. We also learned that it is noble and honorable to check or test any new teaching we hear by comparing it to what the Bible teaches.

This time we are going to look at the teachings of Jesus about false prophets.

In Jesus' day there were many rabbis and teachers of the law. All claimed to know and teach the truth. But Jesus gave several warnings about being careful with false prophets. We can learn a lot from what Jesus taught his disciples.

### **The Reality and Appearance of False Prophets and Teachers**

The first thing Jesus warned about was the reality and appearance of false teachers and what they would look like when you first see them. Here are the words of Jesus from Matthew 7:15-16

*"Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."*

So the very first thing is that there will indeed be false prophets. Jesus said we should expect them. We should look for them. We should not be surprised to find that someone who claims to teach the truth about God is in reality a false prophet.

The next thing he says is they are deceptive. On the outside they do not look bad, they look good. Jesus said these false prophets come in sheep's clothing. Now if you have seen sheep, or been around sheep you know that they have a very innocent appearance. They are soft, they are gentle, little children want to pet sheep and hug them and play with them. People are very seldom afraid of sheep because they are docile and pretty

much harmless. Many people had sheep in Jesus day. Sheep also represent the true people of God. Jesus said in John 10:27-28,

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*

Jesus said this is the appearance that false prophets will have. On the outside, on the surface, they will appear good and kind and harmless and attractive. They may look like a true follower of Jesus. When people first hear and see a false prophet they will want to go to him or her. This is why they are so dangerous. But the sheep-like appearance is a lie.

Underneath the sheep-like appearance is a dangerous reality. They are a wolf. In Jesus day, a wolf was one of the most dangerous threats to sheep. If a wolf got in with the sheep it would kill and hurt many of them. A wolf was vicious, it was savage, it was destructive. According to Jesus, false prophets are a very dangerous threat to the church. They are evil, they kill, hurt and destroy the sheep, the Bride of Christ.

Now this is not just my opinion or idea, but rather this is the description that Jesus gives. False prophets will look good on the outside, but they are really deadly and destructive, so we must be looking out for them.

How will we know the false prophet? Jesus said by their fruit. What is the fruit of a false prophet, or any person? It is what they teach, and how they live. The apostle Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16 –

*“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

So we can't just look at the outside. Just because a person speaks with authority, or if a person claims to be a prophet or apostle or teacher that does not guarantee they are a true prophet. We must look at their life and we must look closely at the things they are teaching to be sure they only come from the Bible.

Jesus gave us two other warnings about false prophets and false teachers. We are going to look at those in the next segment.

## **Jesus Gives More Warnings About False Prophets**

In the last segment we learned that Jesus said we should look for and beware of false prophets. They would seem as innocent and harmless as sheep on the outside, but the truth, the reality is they are as dangerous as wolves. We can recognize them by what kind of life they lived and what they taught.

This time we want to look at two other teachings of Jesus that help us recognize false prophets and teachers.

The first is from Matthew 7:21-23. Hear these words of Jesus:

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness!’”*

What do we learn from this teaching of Jesus? We learn that false teachers and false prophets will use the name of Jesus. They will claim to prophesy in the name of Jesus. They will give revelations in the name of Jesus.

We also see that false prophets will claim to drive out demons and perform signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. Once again they will have an appearance that draws people to them and makes them popular. He says there will be many like this.

But how will Jesus respond to these false teachers? He will say “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

So we must be careful to not simply follow someone who claims to be a teacher or prophet because they use the name of Jesus or they claim to have power to do miracles or signs and wonders. We must look carefully at their fruit.

- Are they humble or are they arrogant and proud?
- Are they a servant, looking to help others by serving them, or are they seeking fame and glory and expecting their followers to serve them?
- Are they teaching the clear word of God, following the example of the apostles of Jesus, or are they making up teachings that are not found in the Bible and that go against what God teaches in Scripture?
- Are they people of holiness and righteousness or are they people who are impure, sexually immoral and dishonest?

There is another important teaching of Jesus regarding false prophets and false teachers. It is found in Matt 24:10-12, 24

*“And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. “*

There is one word in these verses that is repeated more than any other. It is the word “many.” Notice the “manys”: *Many* will fall away, *many* false prophets will arise, they will lead *many* astray, the love of *many* will grow cold.

What we learn from Jesus here is that we cannot know truth or a true prophet based on popularity or the number of people who follow them. Jesus said there would be many false prophets and that many people would follow them.

It is good that we want our churches to grow. The church in the first century grew rapidly in numbers. But they also grew in knowledge and devotion first and foremost to Jesus. Growth was not their goal. Their goal was sharing the message of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ alone and in devoting themselves to fellowship and the teaching of the apostles.

It is a mistake to decide a certain church has the truth because a lot of people attend. We must look at the teaching. Is it based on the Bible. Is it teaching people that Jesus is enough? Is it offering salvation as a gift of God’s grace that we must accept in humility as we repent of our sins and put our trust and faith in Jesus only to save us?

The same is true with popular TV or radio preachers. No matter what they call themselves, a prophet, an apostle, a teacher, a bishop, just because they have a lot of people who listen to them does not make them a true prophet or apostle. Instead we need to look at their message and how they are teaching. Are they humble, are they gentle, are they telling people to look to Jesus for salvation and eternal life, are they encouraging people to study the Word of God and develop an intimate relationship with Jesus? These are the marks of a true servant of God, someone who loves and imitates Jesus.

If they are not doing these things – if they are boastful and proud and are claiming special authority, a special anointing, special revelation and wisdom that no one else has, then we must be very careful, or these are signs of pride and arrogance, and are the marks of false apostles, prophets and teachers.

The focus of a true prophet and teacher will be Jesus, and he or she will imitate the humility and servant-like giving of Jesus their Lord.

Next we will look at the warnings from the Apostles – Peter, Paul, Jude and John. They will show us how to identify a false prophet or teacher.

## **The Apostles Give More Warnings About False Prophets**

Last time we looked at the warnings Jesus gave us about false prophets. We learned from Jesus that there would be many false prophets, we should expect them to come and we should recognize that they are dangerous. Jesus also taught us that these

prophets would lead many people astray, so we should not be surprised if false teachers are popular and become wealthy or have large churches. What is important is that we compare their message to Scripture, which is our only sure source of God's truth.

Like Jesus, the Apostle Paul talks about our need to use discernment. Discernment is the ability to tell the true from the false. Discernment is the ability to recognize a false teacher or false prophet and beware of them, as Jesus said.

Notice that the Apostle Paul also compares false teachers to wolves, just like Jesus. He also recognized that they were very dangerous for the church.

Acts 20:29-30 is very clear.

*I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup> Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.*

Notice, that some of these wolves – false teachers – will start out from within the church. That is why it is honoring to God and to his word to test everything that any pastor or preacher teaches in a message. True followers and disciples of Jesus know that it honors Jesus and honors the teaching of the apostles to always compare what we are being taught with the Scriptures – like the noble Bereans we learned about earlier.

Any true pastor, bishop or other spiritual leader will be honored and glad if those who hear him want to make sure he is bringing only truth from Scripture. Such a pastor or leader recognizes that his power and authority comes from God and he is nothing but a humble servant of Jesus, as the apostles of Jesus were before him.

Here is another clear warning from the Apostle Paul. This is from 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

*“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”*

This is a very important teaching from Scripture. Once again it warns us about outward appearances. It says that false teachers will disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. They will be counterfeit. Just like counterfeit money looks very much like the real thing, false or counterfeit teachers and apostles will pretend to be servants of righteousness. Like Jesus said, they will use his name, they will claim to do signs and wonders and miracles, but they are servants of Satan.

This is why we who are followers of Jesus must be careful to do as the Apostle Paul said in I Thessalonians 5:21 *“but test everything; hold fast what is good.”*

One of the signs of a believer who is growing and maturing in the faith is their ability to detect false teaching that goes against the teaching of the Bible. It is why we read and study the word of God for ourselves. It is very important that we do not let ourselves be led astray by the false apostles, false prophets and false teachers that Jesus and the apostles warned us would come.

## **Further Apostolic Warnings About False Teachers**

The Apostle John also addresses the need for discernment. In 1 John 4:1 he writes:

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

Once again we are warned that false prophets will be many. Because this is so, we must not just believe every spirit or spiritual-sounding voice, but rather put them to the test. We have already looked at some of these tests, and in a later segment the Apostle Peter provides a very detailed description of false teachers. Therefore, because of John’s warning, we are not surprised when we put a teacher to the test and find that he or she is a false prophet, but instead we are prepared, and each time we, as men and women of God, grow more and more in our ability to discern truth from error.

The Apostle Jude also had important words to say on this matter. Notice his warning and admonition in Jude 3-4:

*“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. <sup>4</sup> For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”*

It is important to remember that content of our faith is complete – it has been delivered “once for all” to the saints. We are to contend for it, to defend it, to know it, but there is nothing that we can or may add to it. It has been delivered in its completeness by Christ’s apostles. Therefore, as Jude warns, we must be on our guard, watching out for those who would pervert the grace of God. If we are not careful, they will creep in “unnoticed.” These false teachers will try and add to the message of the gospel – often saying certain duties or works are required for salvation. In the end they will deny our very Savior and Lord Jesus and present a false gospel that will enslave people rather than bring spiritual freedom.

This is why we cannot accept any so-called prophet or apostle or teacher or preacher who says he has something new to add to our understanding, or who claims to have a new revelation for our dispensation.

As we will see in our next segment, the Apostle Peter is in complete agreement with Jude. The content of our faith has been given once for all, and according to Peter we now have everything we need for life and godliness. The apostle Peter also provides a whole list of characteristics of false teachers that will help us recognize them and avoid the errors they teach so we can protect the Bride of Christ.

## **What the Apostle Peter Teaches us About Discernment**

Next we will look at the Apostle Peter's teaching to the churches. In his second letter (2 Peter) he gives over a dozen characteristics of those who are false teachers or false prophets. We would be wise to study these and then look closely at anyone who claims to be an anointed prophet or teacher of God.

We find these characteristics in several passages, but first we must look at the positive aspects of our faith that Peter highlights at the beginning of his letter.

In 2 Peter 1:3 states: *"His divine power has granted to us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to<sup>h</sup> his own glory and excellence"*

Notice, God, in His divine power has given us "all things" that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him (God) who called us to his glory and excellence. The Christian, who is born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God through the grace of God by faith in Jesus, has everything he or she needs for life and godliness. We lack nothing.

Why is this so important? Because false teachers and false prophets will always tell you that you are lacking something. They will tell you that you lack certain knowledge, that you lack power, that you lack authority, that you lack a divine anointing, that you lack a prophetic or apostolic covering, and because you lack something you need them and their religious teaching in order to get it.

For example, the Mormon male missionaries and leaders claim that as Mormon men they have a special priesthood power and so only they have authority to baptize, to lay hands on people or to serve Holy Communion. Mormons will claim that no other church, pastor or leader of any religion or denomination has this priesthood, and no one can have this priesthood authority unless they first join the Mormon church and then a Mormon man with authority lays hands on them to give it to them.

But we can see from the Bible that this claim is a direct contradiction of the teaching of the Apostle Peter, and anyone who contradicts apostolic teaching found in the Bible is a false teacher.

I would encourage you to carefully read this first chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter for it provides clear and encouraging instruction on who we are in Jesus, and all the precious gifts and

promises we have in God. We truly have everything we need for life and godliness, and we should stay away from anyone who tries to tell us we lack something for our spiritual lives that only they or their religion can give.

In our next segment we will look in detail at these characteristics of a false teachers given by Peter.

## **The Apostle Peter Teaches us how to Recognize False Teachers**

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter chapter 2 we find this clear teaching.

*“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup> And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. ... Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, ... They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. ... For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.” (2 Peter 2:1-3, 10, 13-14, 18)*

So here are the characteristics of false teachers that we find outlined by Peter in these verses.

- 1) We need to expect false teachers – they will arise. (v. 1)
- 2) They will be among us – like Jesus said they will appear to be his followers (v. 1)
- 3) They will secretly bring in destructive heresies (v. 1)
- 4) They will deny the true Jesus of the Bible (v. 1)
- 5) They will be successful – many will follow them and their sensuality (v. 2)
- 6) They will exploit their followers with false words to get money (v. 3)
- 7) They will be deceptive, even reveling in their deceptions while they try to join you as brothers and sisters. (v. 3)
- 8) They are bold even as they teach blasphemy (v. 10)
- 9) They are sexually immoral – eyes full of adultery (v. 14)
- 10) They entice unsteady souls – those who are weak in the faith or who have put their truth in them (v. 14)
- 11) They are motivated by greed – they will require money from their followers (v. 14)
- 12) They will be arrogant and boastful (v. 18)
- 13) They will appeal to the flesh of people (v. 18)

In the next segments we will look in greater detail at each of these and show examples from religious groups we see on a regular basis.

## **How to Recognize a False Prophet or False Teacher – Part 1**

Now we begin to understand why we must be on guard and compare with Scripture the teaching of anyone who claims a special calling from God. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:1 we see that we should expect false teachers and be looking for them. They will try and claim to be Christians, and look to be accepted as brothers or sisters in Christ. They may even call us “brother” or “sister.” But the danger is they bring in error that is destructive, and they bring it in secretly. It may sound good and right at first. That is why we must remember; it is only the truth of God’s word that sets us free. One way we can recognize this error is they will teach things about Jesus that do not agree with the Bible.

For example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that Jesus is not God, Jesus is not divine, but rather Jesus is a created angel – Michael the archangel. The Mormons also deny what the Bible teaches about Jesus. The Mormon Church teaches that Jesus is a spirit that was born to a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother, that Lucifer was the spirit brother of Jesus and that God the Father (who has a body of flesh and bones) got the Virgin Mary pregnant so she could give birth to Jesus.

These teachings are examples of denying the Jesus of the Bible and boldly teaching blasphemy – all things that false teachers do. For this reason we reject the founders of these groups as false teachers and we reject both the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses and any other group as false religions that are spiritually dangerous. It is true that many times the people in these groups are sincere and kind and very dedicated, and we need to treat them with kindness, love and respect. But we must recognize that they have been deceived and are following a false teacher or false leaders and not become entangled in their false teaching. Instead we should encourage them to research their own religion and carefully read the Bible with the eyes of a child so they can know and understand the truth that will set them free.

## **How to Recognize a False Prophet or False Teacher – Part 2**

The next characteristics of false teachers is that:

- They will be successful – many will follow them and their sensuality (v. 2)
- They will exploit their followers with false words to get money (v. 3)
- They will be deceptive, even reveling in their deceptions while they try to join you as brothers and sisters. (v. 3)

For this reason it is important to not just look at outward appearances like great wealth, great popularity or a large church with many followers. Just because someone is wealthy and successful does not mean they are teaching the truth. Once again, the Mormons are a very rich church with millions of followers, but this does not make them true or right. Their doctrines of God and Jesus contradict the Bible. The Prophet Owuor in Kenya also has many followers, expensive cars, much wealth and many people who

serve him and guard him, but he has clearly taught false doctrines. No matter how impressive the outside, if his teachings do not follow Scripture and if the fruit of his life does not reflect the humility of the servant of God, he must be rejected as a prophet.

The other key sign is greed – money will be an important factor in the religious system. Jehovah’s Witnesses must donate their time and money in service to the Watchtower. Mormons must give a full 10% and more of their income to the Mormon Church to be allowed to go to the Mormon Temple to perform the ritual ceremonies they need to have eternal life. Many false teachers proclaim a prosperity gospel, where if you will sow seed in faith to their ministry your money will be multiplied back to you. But the only ones who are guaranteed to benefit are these false teachers who receive the money.

And finally for this segment, the religion will be marked by deception. There is a whole culture of deception that allows Mormons to deny the teaching and history of their church, or to say they believe like other churches, or to cover-up questionable behaviors of their leaders. Mormons call it “lying for the Lord.” It is okay to be dishonest if you are protecting the image of the Mormon Church or the prophet Joseph Smith. Jehovah’s Witnesses have a similar policy. They call their right to be deceptive “Lying for the Lord.” If they decided a person does not deserve the truth, then they can mislead them to protect the Watchtower organization. Prosperity gospel teachers often twist the scriptures and take them out of context so it appears the Bible supports their false teaching. The apostle Peter teaches that such deception is the sign of a false teacher.

### **How to Recognize a False Prophet or False Teacher – Part 3**

Here are the next characteristics the Apostle Peter gives for a false teachers:

- They are bold even as they teach blasphemy (v. 10)
- They are sexually immoral – eyes full of adultery (v. 14)
- They entice unsteady souls – those who are weak in the faith or who have put their trust in them (v. 14)
- They will be arrogant and boastful (v. 18)
- They will appeal to the flesh of people (v. 18)

These are some of the easiest signs to detect. False teachers teach false doctrines. We have already discussed several of these in detail.

False teachers are very often sexually immoral. They use their power and position to have multiple women and often justify their actions by saying God told them to do it. Joseph Smith the Mormon founder had over 30 secret wives. Some were young girls, as young as 14 years old. At least 10 of his other women were already married to other men. Joseph did this in secret to keep his first wife from knowing, but then later

threatened her with a revelation from God saying she would be punished if she did not accept all his new wives.

Smith coerced young girls to marry him by saying he would be destroyed by an angel if they did not comply. In this way he enticed and manipulated unsteady souls. A false prophet will take advantage of the very weak and vulnerable people he is supposed to be ministering to.

Once again, it does not matter how rich, famous or powerful a religious leader is. If he is involved in any of these practices or behaviors he has showed himself to be a false prophet and we must not follow him or support him in any way, but rather expose the unfruitful works of darkness.

And finally, according to this teaching from Peter, false teachers will be boastful, arrogant and proud. They will take on lofty titles and raise themselves up above all other spiritual leaders. In doing so, they appeal to the flesh of their followers. Listen to the attitude of the teacher, prophet or self-claimed apostle. Is he loud and proud? Does he claim special spiritual authority, or special revelation that God has only chosen to give him? Is he arrogant and unwilling to listen to correction or instruction from other men and women of God? Does he boast of the mighty miracles he has done (even if he says its in God's name)?

Does this person offer wealth, material success, good health, prosperity, honor, fame or other things that appeal to our flesh and take our eyes of God? If so, they are not demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) but rather the works of the flesh and showing themselves to be a false teacher.

Scripture is clear – the closer a person is to God the more aware they are of their own shortcomings, of their own sin, the more humble they are and the less they seek any glory for themselves. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Even the Apostle Paul in Romans 7 talked openly of his struggle with sin. We must avoid and beware of arrogance, pride, boasting and the belittling or mocking of others – all these are signs of a false teacher and not a true servant of God.

### **Conclusions: Our Discernment Honors God and our Leaders**

When we are aware of these signs and when we are careful to look for them in those who call themselves spiritual leaders we are honoring God. When we take heed to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles we honor them and we honor the Holy Spirit who inspired them. It is never dishonoring to be discerning, rather it means we recognize the authority of God and his prophets and apostles over any human authority.

All of us can be prone to error, and so when any pastor or leader teaches and instructs his church, he should want his congregation to be like the noble Bereans who search the Scripture to make sure only the truth from the Word of God is being taught. It is not

dishonoring to our pastors to listen and study carefully what they are teaching us. Rather we honor them by desiring the best for them and wanting to help them teach us and everyone else the truth – for it is only the truth that can set us free.

When we who are pastors and leaders do this, when we practice humble dependence on the Word of God and the Spirit of God, then we are faithful servants of Jesus Christ. Then we are able to help lead and protect the church who is His Bride. In this way all of us, as brothers and sisters in Christ, can grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I close with the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:9-11:

*“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*