

2 Cor 11:7-15 Distinguishing True Servants of God from Charlatans, part 2

I recently heard about a Baptist pastor who was exposed for living a double life. At the same time he was serving as the pastor of a church, he was also parading around as a drag queen.

Pastor F. L. “Bubba” Copeland of the First Baptist Church of Phenix City, AL, recently was exposed as a cross-dressing Internet model. After being found out, he told his church that he had ‘nothing to be ashamed of,’ and some people in his church supported him. But shortly after that news came out, he took his own life, apparently unable to bear the embarrassment, shame, and hypocrisy of it.

I find it hard to believe that no one at the First Baptist Church or Phenix City, AL suspected anything about their pastor’s double life. He was both pastor of a church and mayor of the town. He was posting pictures of himself in drag and writing lewd stories about people in the town. He was a deeply perverted man, a wolf in sheep’s clothing if there ever was one. And no one knew about it? Hard to believe.

That’s perhaps an extreme example, but similar cases of frauds and phonies within the church are all too common. People in ministry are exposed as hypocrites and charlatans regularly. Bubba Copeland is just one in a long line of people who appear to be angels of light, but who in reality are deceitful workers, satanic imposters.

The Bible repeatedly warns us about false teachers and their harmful influence within the church. We have to be on guard, discerning, and vigilant to make sure that false teachers have no influence on us.

In today’s passage, Paul distinguishes himself from the false teachers who had infiltrated the church in Corinth. He wants his readers to see the differences between him and them. This passage shows us what distinguishes true servants of God from charlatans and frauds. We must make sure that those serving the church are honest, faithful, and qualified.

Last week we saw that...

- I. True servants of God want the best for the church. .7-11
 - A. They humble themselves for the benefit of others,
 - B. They are not motivated by money,
 - C. They tell the truth,
 - D. They work for the benefit of those they serve,
 - E. They love those they serve, and
 - F. They protect those they serve.

These are qualities that all of us should aspire to and pursue. Even if you are not in vocational Christian service, these marks should be true of you. These are basic Christian virtues. The more of these qualities you have, the better a servant of God you will be, and the more beneficial you can be for the church.

Standing in stark contrast to true servants of God are the false teachers, charlatans, the religious frauds who are destroying the church. So let's take a look at some of the qualities of false teachers. As the Bible tells us, we must mark and avoid such people; we must not allow such frauds and phonies to have any influence in the church.

Where true servants of God want what is best for the church...

- II. Charlatans work to destroy the church. .12-15

How are they destroying the church?

- A. They make false accusations.

What were they saying about Paul? What were their allegations against him?

- 1. .7b They claimed that he was worthless because he did not charge a fee for his services. They somehow blamed Paul for his desire not to be a burden to the people.
- 2. .11 They claimed that he did not love the people of Corinth. He was too severe, too strict.

3. 10:10 They claimed that he was not a good speaker and that he was ugly.

They twisted all the good things Paul had done for them into accusations against him.

Sadly, some in the church were listening to these complaints. The false teachers were creating a sense of disaffection and disloyalty toward Paul.

App: The Bible warns us to be very careful in even listening to an accusation against an elder.

1 Timothy 5:19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

Pastors are not sinless, and they sometimes make mistakes. However, the people of the church should avoid listening to minor complaints and gossip against the pastor. If genuine, serious failures have happened, that's a different matter. There are proper ways of handling serious allegations. But we should normally avoid making or listening to allegations and criticisms of the pastor, especially those that have no basis.

False accusations against legitimate spiritual leaders is a mark of a charlatan, a fraud; that's what they do. Many churches have been ruined by such complaints.

B. .13 They are false apostles.

1. Even while the original apostles were still serving the church, false teachers came along and claimed apostleship for themselves.
 - a) The original apostles were chosen directly by Jesus. That was one of the marks of an apostle.
 - b) The original apostles were able to perform miracles—what Paul calls “the signs of an apostle” (12:12).

- c) If a person were not chosen by Christ and not able to do such signs, then he is not an apostle. That was the case with these false teachers in Corinth. They were claiming a title that did not belong to them.

App: And there are still people claiming to be apostles today. But if Jesus did not appear to them and did not assign them to be apostles, and if they cannot do the signs of an apostle, then they are frauds and phonies.

- 2. In this context, we see four primary marks of a false apostle here:

- a) They are not sent from Christ. True apostles are sent by Christ. False apostles are not sent by Christ.
- b) They do not preach the biblical Gospel. Remember that Paul charged them with teaching “a different gospel” (vs. 4).

- (1) Many of them *add* to the Gospel. I.e., baptism, the Lord’s Supper, good works, etc. For them, faith in Christ is not quite enough to be saved.
- (2) Many of them *remove* the offensive parts of the message, i.e., they downplay or neglect what the Bible says about human sinfulness and the need for repentance.

E.g., Joel Osteen interview on Larry King

False teachers typically want to make the Gospel as easy and attractive as possible so the most people will accept it. So they strip it down and remove the “offense of the cross” (Gal 5:11).

- (3) Whether you add to or remove from the Gospel, the result is what Paul calls “another gospel” (Gal 1:6), a false message that does not save.

c) They do not have authority in the local church. True apostles, like Paul, have divine authority; false apostles should have no influence in the church.

d) .13end They are merely masquerading as apostles.

The word “transforming themselves”

(μετασχηματιζομενοι) implies that these people are masquerading as apostles, posing as ministers of Christ.

They are putting on a disguise or costume. They are not what they claim to be.

App: Plenty of people claim to be apostles. Most notably, the pope in Rome claims to sit in a position of apostolic authority. The Mormons recognize a group of men they call apostles. But the Bible does not teach that the office of apostle continues beyond the original apostles.

Anyone today who claims apostolic authority is making a false claim. The office of apostle does not exist today as it existed in the early church.

The word “apostle” simple means “sent one,” so in a general or generic sense, anyone sent out with the Gospel could be considered a sort of apostle in a general sense. But the office of apostle as someone chosen directly by Christ and sent out with divine authority over the church no longer exists.

C. .13b They are deceitful workers.

1. The word “deceitful” (δολος) comes from a word meaning “to snare, lure.”

2. So the deceitful workers are trying to ensnare people and lead them astray; they are luring believers away from the true faith.

App: One of the marks of a false teacher is that he is deceitful; he does not tell the truth; they are dishonest hypocrites. Such people use deceptive methods to ensnare people or lure them into accepting their teachings.

Cf. .10 “the truth of Christ is in me” – false teachers can’t say that because the truth of Christ is not in them. They tell lies. If you catch a spiritual leader in a lie—if dishonesty is a normal pattern—you can conclude that he’s a false teacher—a fraud, a phony.

Genuine servants of God don’t use deceitful methods or means. We are not trying to ensnare or lure anyone into anything. We simply proclaim the Gospel and urge people to respond to it by repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus. We don’t need or use deceitful methods.

D. .14 They are satanic.

1. Satan appears as “an angel of light.”

*Cf. Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an **angel from heaven**, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*

- a) Angels are messengers, spokesmen for God, sent to communicate a message from God to man.
- b) If they are sent from God, then what they communicate is true. E.g., the angel who appeared to Mary and Joseph. Anything a genuine angel would say would be true.
- c) These satanic false teachers do not communicate truth. What they say is false, unorthodox, and wrong.
- d) Many charlatans and false teachers have claimed to have been visited by angels who communicated a message to them contrary to the biblical message. E.g., Joseph Smith—Mormonism; Mohammed—Islam.

BTW, genuine angelic contact is exceedingly rare. If it happens at all, those in contact with an angel generally don’t even realize that an angel is involved. I am exceedingly doubtful regarding stories of angelic appearances and interactions. I don’t doubt the existence or work of angels, but most of it is behind the scenes and unknown to us. Angels operate in the unseen world.

2. .15 Satan's ministers/servants transform/disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.

App: Evil often disguises itself as good. E.g., those who support abortion claim that it's good for women and for society that women have the right to kill their babies. Those who promote immorality claim that living free of moral constraints is a good thing. Even those who deny God and the Bible claim that it is good for people not to believe in God. Many people in the world today claim that evil is good and that good is evil. Just like Satan, they appear as angels of light, but in reality, they are promoting demonic, evil, immoral ideas. They are serving Satan, not God.

And religious people can be equally guilty of this. People cloak their evil intentions with religious language. Their goals are evil, yet they use religious language to promote their evil intentions. E.g., many churches promote the LGBT lifestyle by appealing to Jesus as loving, gracious, and accepting of all people.

Cf. 2Sam 12:14 ... by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme...

The influence of false teachers will continue and get worse. The Bible foretells of a future one-world apostate church. Those churches will be led by false teachers. Right now, many churches are apostate in that they preach another Jesus, a false gospel, and a different spirit. Such churches are led by people who appear to be "ministers of righteousness" (.15) but who in reality are "false apostles" and "deceitful workers."

How should a church respond if it finds that its pastor or leaders are “false apostles”? What do you do if your pastor turns out to be a drag queen? What do we do if we find out that someone in the church is an immoral pervert or an abuser? We expose their errors, remove them from leadership, and call for repentance. We don’t leave people like that in positions of authority and influence. We “cut them off” (vs. 12) from any opportunity for further influence. We don’t wish that they’d commit suicide, but we prohibit them from having any positions of authority within the church. If necessary, we contact the police or other appropriate authorities.

- E. .15b They will suffer the just desserts for the works.
1. Charlatans, false teachers, phonies and frauds who disguise themselves as ministers of God will receive the due punishment for their sin.
 2. They will be judged “according to their works.” We don’t want our eternal destiny to be based on our works. If salvation were based on our works, we’d all be in deep trouble because our sins are more than our good works. We want our eternal destiny to be according to mercy and grace, not according to our works.
 3. Those who repent of their sins and trust in Christ for salvation will not face any punishment for their sins. The wages for their sins has already been paid—Jesus paid it all.
 4. The implication here is that the false teachers will not experience God’s grace; they are not saved. They will receive judgment for their deeds, not grace and mercy.
 5. Jesus talked about those who claim him as Lord and yet continue in sin:

Matthew 7:21–23 21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

6. I would guess that there are many pastors who fit into that category—they profess Jesus as Lord, and they claim to be “ministers of righteousness,” yet they practice lawlessness. They disguise themselves as angels of light and ministers of God, but their claims are false; it’s all a masquerade, just a costume, a disguise.
7. The Lord will say to them, “Depart from me.” I.e., they will not be saved. They will be judged according to their works.
8. Imagine the strict judgment for such people.

Mt 18:6 *But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

Jas 3:1 *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

The marks of a true servant of God are obvious—they humble themselves for the benefit of those they serve, they preach the Gospel freely, they serve for the benefit of others, they proclaim the truth, and they love and protect those they serve.

On the other hand, the marks of a religious charlatans and frauds are equally obvious—they are false apostles and deceitful workers, they are hypocrites who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ, they are satanic, and they deserve and will receive severe punishment for their crimes.

Perhaps the most important thing for us is that we refuse to tolerate religious charlatans. If they show up, we must cut them off and not allow them any influence. Don't be deceived by their angelic appearance or alluring arguments. Recognize the satanic nature of what they are doing and refuse to be taken in by their deceit. The better we know the truth, the more obvious error and false doctrine will be.

Those of us who maintain the genuine Gospel are a small remnant. The road to heaven is narrow and few are on it. We must be able to recognize falsehood, false teachers, and satanic deceit when we see it. And we should appreciate those genuine, godly leaders who proclaim the true Gospel, serve their people humbly, and love their people sincerely.