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THE BIBLE VIEW

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False Colors

Bill Brinkworth

"Friend or foe?" wondered the crew as they peered through the wandering wisps of pea-soup fog. They could only guess about the ship they were approaching.

Closer and closer they came to the many-masted vessel. Not all her sails were unfurled, as she also poked her way through the thick mist.

The clanging of her ship's bell rudely broke the silence. Soon mumbles of shouted orders could be vaguely heard. A question still puzzled most of the approaching crew. Was this heavily, cannoned ship they were getting closer to a friend or enemy?

As the English vessel inched to the starboard of the unknown ship, a mate called out that he thought he saw enemy insignia on the jib as it fluttered into the unclear mist.

Another quickly countered the alarm by stating, "She's English. See her banner!" Soon many leaned over the rail and saw the same insignia.

Quickly, the captain got the word. "She's friend," was bellowed. Great relief went through the crew. The ship's whistle called the alarm off. Cannons were pulled back off the rail. There was no need for alarm, as the approaching vessel was a friend; they thought.

Soon they were alongside this strange vessel. The crew lined the rail to wave and shout welcomes.

What a terrifying retort the approaching ship replied as her double-decks of cannons flashed an unwelcome reply. It was an enemy ship.

As the deceived vessel was ravished by a close-range barrage of cannon shots, her decks and rigging were soon destroyed. Rigging and masts came crashing down and claimed more lives. It was not long until she started taking on water and started listing to her port. She was going down.

"But she was a Britt," gasped a confused, wounded sailor. Through the fog, he got a closer picture. The enemy's vessel had lowered the English banner, and now running up the mast was a new banner. It was the pirate skull and bones. Pirates had ambushed them.

The false banner of one who claims to be a Christian or of the same stripe has fooled many a preacher, youth minister, Christian school teacher, church member, and family member. It is soon discovered that the person was not a Christian or was of different standards and beliefs than they led others to believe.

The ministry often accepts those deceivers. Some people deliberately force their doctrine on an unknowing and undiscerning membership. Sometimes there is no motive or intention. They may not even know that they are different from others. Sometimes they are not Christians, or just think they know better than the pastor and others. No matter how or why they infiltrated the lines, they can do a lot of destruction to members and a church. Too many churches have learned this truth, as a church split devastated the work of the Lord.

How can one discern that who claim to be of Christ is not? There are biblical guidelines to help one discern, but before they are put under that scrutiny, it is best to wait.

Many ministries have a weakness in this area. The need for helpers and workers is so great that the first willing, warm body through the door gets utilized for a ministry opening. Little consideration of the volunteer's spiritual soundness and maturity are evaluated before handing them a ministry position. They are moved into position so quickly that their steady church attendance, doctrinal agreement, and spiritual growth have not had adequate time to be verified.

Soon new members are involved, excited, fervent, and eager, but only for a short time. Some cannot maintain the pace required of them. They miss a week here or there. They may even whisper disapproval to others about their labors. These workers had no time to prepare and be strengthened spiritually.

Although the admonition is applied to the qualifications of a preacher, I Timothy 3:6 gives good advice about one's getting into the ministry: *"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil."* One should be grounded, strengthened, and trained before stepping onto the spiritual battlefield. Too many go into the fray unprotected, unpracticed, and unprepared. As a result, they get wounded and get out of service before they begin.

After I first got saved, the Lord made it clear that He wanted me to teach. I could not wait to teach. I quickly bounded over to the preacher for my first assignment. His wise words were, "Wait. Start attending every church service. Study your Bible and learn what He has for you, then if you still feel that's what the Lord wants you to do, come to see me in one year!"

"One year!" I was shocked and discouraged. I wanted it now; however, I did as he said. It was a very long wait. One year later, I was at his door and received my first church ministry. I did not like the wait. To be honest, I got a little mad at him. Now, I appreciate his discernment of my spiritual immaturity and his deep respect for having the ministry occupied by the right leaders. My waiting showed him how serious I was about the position, and I was better prepared when it was offered.

The Bible advises us to discern if one is what he says he is. His "fruits" must be observed. "Fruits," in this context, is referring to what is spiritually produced. A godly man will be righteous and do things approved of by his Father.

When one is truly saved, the evidence is not hard to discover. Church attendance, Bible reading, and an interest in the things of God will be natural. All these are some of the fruits that can be

expected from a Christian. Attitudes, convictions, and involvements in the right things or involvements in the wrong things will be “fruit” that can easily be observed.

In Florida, there was a good example of how hard it is to discern “fruit.” During the killing frosts of the 1980s, many orange trees died. The top of the tree died off almost immediately, but the graft, close to the root, soon sprouted up another orange tree. Within years it was producing fruit. The leaves were the same. The fruit certainly looked like a juicy orange. When the fruit was sliced open and tasted, however, it was quickly realized that it was sour and unfit for consumption. Looks are deceiving, but when the fruit was closely inspected, not just the tree, its true character was revealed.

“Well, all this talk about discerning another’s ‘fruits’ is judgmental, and I’ll have no part of it,” some may mutter. Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” usually gets some nervous about discerning one’s testimony.

If you read the verses toward the end of Matthew 7, you will find three things we are to judge. They include false messages (verse 15), false fruits (verse 16), and false hopes for Heaven (verse 21). We are to know if things are righteous, of God, and His will for our lives. How can that be accomplished without discerning?

Of the 15 times “fruits” are used in the New Testament, 11 of those are clearly about observing another’s spiritual testimony. When one’s spirituality is viewed and valued, it will be easier to get the right person in the right position.

Wait, closely observe, and one’s “banner” will be revealed. Waiting may save time and heartache for the Christian, as well as for the ministry.

“A hypocrite is a fellow who isn’t himself on Sundays.” — *Anonymous*

A Bright or False Light?

Jellhain, 1168

A virtuous man, shining in the purity of a righteous life, is a lighthouse set by the sea-side, whereby both the mariners sail aright and avoid danger. However, he that lives in evident sin is a false lantern that shipwrecks those that trust him where he leads them.

“Hypocrites in the church? Yes, and in public and at home. Do not hunt through the church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the mirror. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less.” — *Sunday*

What Kind of Example Are You?

H. Melvill

Be mean and vicious, and those character traits may be an heirloom to hundreds of future families. Be inconsistent in serving God, and that behavior may be copied by many in your church. Offend people, and many may fall, and those who are entering in the “narrow way” may be discouraged, and those who are trying to live for the Lord may stumble and quit.

All this damage can occur because of your bad example. You live not for yourselves. You cannot live just for yourself. A thousand fibers connect you with your fellow-men, and along those fibers, as along sympathetic threads, run your actions as causes and return to you as effects.

“I had a few counterfeit dollars once. Did I go to the window and throw away all my good dollars also? No! Yet many reject Christianity because there are hypocrites or counterfeit Christians.” — Biederwolf