

Who's Who? (How to Discern 5)

by Anton Bosch

To protect yourself from false teachers, you must carefully evaluate the message and the man, and surround yourself with trusted advisors and counselors.

Scripture: Ezekiel 33:4, Matthew 7:16, John 21:15, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 2 Timothy 2:15, 2 John 1:9

Topics: "Discerning False Teachers", "Biblical Discernment"

Description

Anton Bosch emphasizes the importance of discernment in checking every message against the plumbline of the Bible and evaluating the source of information, focusing on both the message and the messenger. He highlights the need to thoroughly examine a preacher's background, associations, qualifications, beliefs, life fruits, and endorsements to determine their trustworthiness. Anton stresses the significance of surrounding oneself with trustworthy advisors and discernment ministries to avoid false teachings and false teachers, urging listeners to test every spirit and hold fast to the doctrine of Christ.

Transcript

It is important that we check every word we hear or read against the plumbline of the Bible. In addition, we need to check the source of the information as well. We must check two things: The message and the man.

Many times we will hear messages that sound spot-on, and may even be doctrinally correct, but the speaker is a deceiver. Remember, the Devil will present truth in order to get you on his hook. No Mormon or Jehovah's Witness will knock on your door and begin the conversation by saying that they have come to present another Gospel and another Jesus. They all begin by affirming that they believe exactly what you believe. The problem is that by the time they get around to the lie it is often too late. Our only defense is not to listen to a single word from someone we have not checked out thoroughly first. Mormons and JWs are easy to recognize by their outward appearance. But how do we recognize someone who appears to be an evangelical, Bible believing preacher? Here are a few hints:

First, who is he and where does he come from? In other words who does he relate to and who has influenced his thinking? This can easily be established from his bio, personal history or curriculum vitae. Where did he train? Where does he fellowship? Who is he in relationship with? Who does he quote? Who quotes him? If he has a website, look at the other sites he provides links to. These questions will often reveal a lot about the messenger. Obviously, he may have had bad connections in the past and may have repented. If he has repented from former evil associations, has he publicly repudiated those links and

doctrines and broken fellowship with them? If he has, his past should not be held against him; but, at the same time, some of those influences may continue to taint his thinking and one should be on the alert for signs thereof. "Evil company corrupts good habits" (1Corinthians 15:33) and a man can be known by the friends he keeps.

Second, and closely related to the first: What qualifies him to be a teacher? By this I don't mean whether he is ordained or has papers, but what gives him the right to teach you anything? You need to ask questions about how long he has been a believer, how old he is, does he have a proven track record of serving the churches, or is he just a maverick who has set himself as a "prophet"? Is he in submission to others? Since the advent of the Internet and self-publishing any misfit who cannot work with others, and who has no desire to be a servant to the churches, can set himself up as a "ministry". Does he exhibit skill and integrity in the way he handles the Word, or is he a workman who needs to be ashamed? (2Timothy 2:15). Does he faithfully teach and preach the Word, or is his message based on stories, testimonies and jokes? Finally, does he challenge as well as encourage, or does he only speak those things that will not offend the hearers? (2Timothy 4:2).

Probably the most important qualification is his life! How many times has he been married? Does he have a testimony of integrity, uprightness and holiness? How does he relate to money and material things? These are but a few of dozens of questions that need to be asked about the fruit of his life. Jesus said: "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). By their "fruit" Jesus did not mean the fruit of his ministry (how many converts, books etc) but the fruits of his life. What does his life produce? Do you really think that if he produces thistles at home he will produce grapes in your life? (1Timothy 3 and Titus 1 contain additional questions you may need to ask.)

Fourth, what does he believe? This gets a bit harder since he will very likely hide the real truth under language that appears to be sound. Sometimes error can be discerned by carefully scrutinizing his statement of faith. But mostly you will have to read and listen carefully. The internet may contain hints at what may be wrong, but don't accept anything you find on the internet without thoroughly investigating that information and its source. Anyone can publish anything on the internet and many work very hard to discredit legitimate ministries through this means. But read carefully what is said about the individual and use that information as a cue what to look out for in his teaching. But allow me to emphasize: information from unknown sources on the internet can only serve as red flags; it cannot be trusted to approve or disqualify anyone. "Whoever... does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him (2John 1:9-10).

Fifth, we must ask the question; what do the witnesses say? In the third article in this series (Orthodoxy) we established that we need to look at the credibility of the witness as well as the testimony of the witness. Who approves of this man? If known false teachers give him a good testimonial, or he appears on the same platform as they, then you know he has to be a false teacher himself. Likewise, if those who are proven to be ministers of light condemn him, you better take note.

This is why it is important that we surround ourselves with those whom we can trust to advise and counsel. Many "discernment type" ministries have an axe to grind, but there are a few that can be trusted to give a balanced assessment of a particular ministry. These people who have been gifted to be watchmen to the church can save us a lot of time and research. (Next week we will examine the qualifications of a good

discernment type ministry.) Check their websites and blogs for warnings about specific ministries, speakers and authors. The Lord says about watchmen that: "whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his own head" (Ezekiel 33:4).

Sixth, what is his agenda? Sometimes a speaker or author can pass all the tests and still have the wrong agenda. It is therefore important to ask what it is that drives him. Is it money, ego or power? Does he bear a grudge or bitterness? Is he trying to prove that he is right and everyone else is wrong? Watch and listen carefully and his motive will shine through. If he is not driven by a love for the Lord, a love for God's Word and a love for God's people - then he probably has nothing to say. When Jesus commissioned Peter, there was one question that mattered: "do you love me?" (John 21:15-17). If the speaker does not exhibit a love for Jesus then he is disqualified no matter how much he knows (1Corinthians 13:1-3).

Unless you are able to verify the bona fides of a speaker or writer, you should never receive from them. Very few would knowingly invite the devil to preach in their church, yet many are willing to have his messengers speak in his place.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1John 4:1).

(To be continued)

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