

Do Wolves Know They Are Wolves?

“Beware of **false prophets**, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but **inwardly they are ravening wolves**” (Mat 7:15). Peter understood Christ as correlating false prophets that were among God’s people with false teachers among us now, “But there were **false prophets** also among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers** among you” (2Pe 2:1). The question is sometimes asked, and I’ve also pondered many times, is if false teachers know they are false teachers. We could ask “Do wolves know they are wolves?” Of course they do! But that’s pushing Christ’s analogy too far. The sheep/wolf analogy is simply warning us about men that seem to be leading us to salvation but actually to destruction.

Christ warned His disciples, “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that **whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service**” (Jhn 16:2). This is precisely how the apostle Paul used to be: “And Saul was consenting **unto his death**” (Act 8:1); “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and **slaughter** against the disciples of the Lord” (Act 9:1); “And I persecuted this way **unto the death**” (Act 22:4); when they were **put to death, I gave my voice against them**” (Act 26:10). He would later tell Timothy that he was sincerely ignorant at the time, “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because **I did it ignorantly** in unbelief” (1Ti 1:13). Paul considered those persecuting him to be zealous for God as he also had been, “was **zealous** toward God, **as ye all are this day**” (Act 22:3); “**they have a zeal of God**, but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2); “They **zealously affect you**, *but not well*” (Gal 4:17); “**Concerning zeal**, persecuting the church” (Phl 3:6). But how could anyone truly think they’re doing God service by persecuting others even unto death?

I still remember over 30 years ago in church when I first heard the teaching about God as three persons. It just didn’t sound right but I knew very little at that time and those teaching me knew much more. Therefore, I trusted them that they must be right, and I found ways to explain away any Scriptures that spoke otherwise. This began my downward spiral of trusting men over the Scriptures. And what I experienced over those decades was a hardening of my heart and a warping of my thinking. I taught classes, small groups, main services, and even on television false doctrine while sincerely thinking I was helping people.

Do wolves know they are wolves? Each individual and situation is different. We can’t make a blanket statement that covers everyone and everything. However, the conservative and loving approach is to consider false teachers to be zealous of God in sincere ignorance. This is what Paul did, “**zealous** toward God, **as ye all are this day**” (Act 22:3), “**they have a zeal of God**, but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2); “**They zealously affect you**, *but not well*” (Gal 4:17).

Evil breaths/spirits operate through people to spread false doctrines, while not allowing them to know they’re even being used. It’s through years of compromising the truth of the Scriptures and yielding to sin that people become hardened and insensitive to the point that they can do evil and justify it to themselves as good. And since nobody’s strong enough to overcome evil breaths, the only hope is casting oneself at the mercy of Jesus Christ. He is greater and gives God’s breath.

John said that many false prophets/teachers had gone into the world, “Beloved, believe [*trust*] not every spirit [*breath*], but **try the spirits [*breaths*] whether they are of God**: because **many false prophets** are gone out into the world” (1Jo 4:1). And if God’s breath isn’t in them, then another breath is, “greater is **he that is in you**, than **he that is in the world**” (1Jo 4:4). How can we know the breaths of teachers, whether they’re of God or not? It’s if they listen to Christ and His apostles, “**We are of God**: he that knoweth God **heareth us**; he that is not of God **heareth not us**. Hereby know we the **spirit [*breath*] of truth**, and the **spirit [*breath*] of error**” (1Jo 4:6). If they won’t listen to them, then they don’t have God’s breath but an evil breath. Certainly some things are hard to understand as Peter even admitted, “in which are **some things hard to be understood**, which they that are unlearned and unstable **wrest [*twist*]**, as *they do* also the other **scriptures, unto their own destruction**” (2Pe 3:16). But what Christ and His apostles taught about God is clear, simple, and of utmost importance. If teachers have clever ways of “twisting” or explaining away what they taught, then they’re not of God. Those that handle the Scriptures as such, do so “unto their own destruction” as Peter said.

Do wolves know they are wolves? Not likely. Even many hardened criminals really don’t think they’re bad—they’re full of excuses to justify themselves. False teachers are zealous of God. They labor, study, pray, fast, give, sacrifice, and serve. But it’s only sheep’s clothing. How can we know the breath in them? It’s if they submit to the clear teaching of Christ and His apostles, or if they find ways to explain it away.