

THE MAN OF GOD – THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER

INTRODUCTION

Over thousands of years many have put on religious garb and posed before the people as men of God. Who is the man of God? By what tests can we know a person speaking spiritual things to us is sent from God, and how shall we identify the Holy Man from the imposter¹?

To complicate matters, not all imposters know they are imposters. There are many who pose as men of God and who are convinced in their own minds that they are men of God. Yet, as sincere as they may be, by their behavior we may discern they are not walking as men of God, but merely as workers of religion. Not a few imposters are spiritually gifted born-again believers who are misguided². There are few checks to restrain them since Gentile worshippers are easily led astray³.

The Bible addresses this issue as one of prime importance to Christians and to the Church. The first letter of instruction written to the churches in the New Testament is the Book of Romans which addresses the foundation of our faith which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The next two books, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, which address the foundation of the church: Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone together with the apostles⁴. The ministry of Paul is set forth as the example of good work⁵. When the time for testing work comes, the imposters who do believe will escape as from a house on fire⁶. Yet millions of Christians today are following imposters. Christians cannot discern a Man of God from an imposter and so they are easily seduced⁷ into the folly of religion and bondage.

The Bible presents to us in living color one apostle who is the embodiment of the Man of God sent to build up the flock: Paul. Everything about Paul's life and teaching shows us how a true Man of God – a Christian Minister ought to behave. Sixteen chapters of 1st and 2nd Corinthians are devoted to describing in detail the motives, the standards, and the practises of the apostle Paul.

As Gentile believers we can marvel at the sweet perfection of the life of Christ, but imitating the lifestyle of Christ is impractical for us. Christ was born as a Jew and walked in obedience to his Father in heaven and to the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant. Gentile believers are not under the Law of

¹ 2 Cor 11:13 'And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.'

² Gal. 2:13 'The other Jews joined him (Peter) in this hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.'

³ 2 Cor 11:4 'If someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough' Gal 1:6 'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you... and are turning to a different gospel.'

⁴ Eph 2:20 'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself the chief corner stone'

⁵ 1 Cor 3:9-10 '...you are God's field, God's building. I laid a foundation as an expert builder.'

⁶ 1 Cor 3:15 'If (his work) is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escapes from the flames'

⁷ 2 Cor 11:3 '...your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ'

Moses but under Grace and we live during the New Covenant. The example we are urged to imitate is the life of the apostle Paul⁸.

Any Christian worker who departs from the standard Paul set is not a Man of God – he is an imposter. He is a fraud to the truth and a deceitful worker⁹. There is no middle ground, no compromise, and no grey area. This is not an issue of conscience – it is a matter of the plain teaching of Scripture.

SAUL

Before he became Paul the Apostle, this same man was Saul: the Persecutor of the Way. The behavior of Saul provides us a picture of a deceitful worker, a scourge of the saints, a man whose primary motivation was to protect his religion, the traditions of men, in the mistaken belief by doing so he was serving God. Although Saul was not a Christian when he persecuted the believers, it is possible for Christian workers to blindly behave like Saul! The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! Before we place before the gentle reader the example of Paul, we must first set forth the example of Saul, in the hopes every tender heart will see the repugnance of his motivations and actions, and resolve never to follow his example under any circumstances.



“Saul: Stoning Stephen”

Paul describes his former life:

“For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, **how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.** I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was **extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.**” (Gal. 1:13-14)

On the day he was martyred, Stephen made a speech before the Sanhedrin in which he said:

⁸ 1 Cor 4:16 ‘Therefore, I urge you to imitate me...I am sending Timothy...who will remind you of my way of life in Christ’

⁹ 2 Cor 11:13 ‘For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.’

“You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! **You are just like your fathers**: you always resist the Holy Spirit! **Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?** They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you have received the law put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.” (Acts 7:51-53)

The reaction of the religious leaders of the day was immediate and fierce:

“At this they covered their ears and yelling at the tops of their voices they all rushed at him, dragging him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile **the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.**” (Acts 7:57-58) “**And Saul was there giving approval to his death**” (Acts 8:1)

Saul went to work to exterminate all those who call on the name of Jesus:

“But **Saul began to destroy the church.** Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and **put them in prison.**” (Acts 8:3)

The believers scattered and migrated out of Palestine to neighboring countries. Saul chased them:

“Meanwhile, Saul was still **breathing out murderous threats** against the LORD’s disciples. **He went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues in Damascus,** so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2)

On the road to Damascus Saul met the Lord Jesus in a vision, was converted, and became our beloved Paul whose life and teaching we will pick up at a later point in the paper.

As the complete opposite to the Man of God, what were the characteristics of Saul?

- He was learned in matters pertaining to the religion of his fathers, which for him was Judaism
- He was zealous for his religion and for the glory of its leading men, its teachers, and its founders
- He sought to promote his religion and to protect it at all costs, even if it meant human suffering
- He could not understand that rigorously following a religious life meant becoming deaf to God
- He could not see that religion has always produced men who persecute those who do hear God
- He believed religious men like him had the approval of God
- He believed spiritual authority in rested in the hands of the most senior men in his religion
- He believed those who do not recognize the authority of religious leaders must be persecuted.

Saul was the embodiment of vain religion. Every sin of religion was amplified and demonstrated in the life of Saul. No surprise then that everything in the life of Paul and in the preaching of Paul concerning the right conduct and practice of the church is completely opposite to his former religious life as Saul.

PAUL'S MINISTRY MANIFESTO

Paul describes his motives, his standards, and his behavior in ministry in 1st and 2nd Corinthians:

Paul's motive in ministry:

- **The love of Christ compels me** (2C 5:14) (2C 11:11) (2C 4:15)
- **I know the fear of the Lord** ~ so I warn others (2C 5:11)

Paul's attitude in ministry:

- **I am nothing** ~ I seek no elevation (no titles, no offices among men) (2C 12:11)
- **I make myself a slave** ~ I have no desire to be a master or ruler of men (2C 4:5) (2C 1:24)
- **I spend myself and submit to suffering** ~ Self-sacrifice (2C 6:4) (2C 12:15) (2C 12:7-9)

Paul's standards in ministry:

- **I rob no one** ~ take no pay; provide for one's own means (2C 2:17)
- **I exploit no one** ~ take no privileges; make no imposition upon believers (2C 7:2) (2C 12:17-18)
- **I corrupt no one** ~ set the highest example in my life (2C 7:2) (2C 8:21)

Paul's ministry in the gospel:

- **I put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel** (1C 9)
- **I preach voluntarily** ~ free of charge to the hearers (2C 11:8)
- **I do not distort the word of God** ~ but set forth the truth plainly to men (2C 4:2)

Paul's ministry to the church; to present her:

- **Chaste** [not idolatrous] ~ completely devoted to her true husband, Jesus (2C 11:2-3)
- **Pure** [not sinning] ~ surpassing the law of Moses; loving one another (1C 13)
- **Peaceful** [no divisions] ~ following Christ; no sects following teachers (1C 1:10-17) (1C 3)
- **Strong in Faith** [the mind of Christ] ~ the power and the wisdom of the cross (1C 1) (1C 2)
- **Gracious** [giving out of abundance] ~ collection for the poor (1C 16:1-4); (2C 8:4;7-8;13-14)
- **Unburdened** [no religious obligation] ~ no collection for ministers (2C 2:17) (2C 11:9) (2C 12:14)
- **No stumbling block before her** [disputes of conscience] ~ believer's freedom (1C 8) (1C 10)
- **Holy** [not joined with unbelievers] ~ fellowship and communion among believers (2C 6:14;17)
- **Serving** [releasing ministry within the body] ~ all are ministers; all have gifts (1C 12) (1C 14)
- **Worshipping around the Lord's Table** [kingdom of priests] ~ sacred memorial of Christ (1C 11)
- **Respecting human authorities** ~ honoring marriage (1C 7: 1-16; 39-40); slavery (1C 7:17-24)
- **Judging members of the body who continue to sin** ~ by expelling them (2C 13:1-3)

THE DECEITFUL WORKER

The life and practice of Paul is the example set before us of a Man of God; what would a deceitful worker look like? Would he be the exact opposite of Paul? Or, might he be like Paul in certain respects but opposite of Paul in other respects? Here is the subtlety of the Serpent!

Rat poison is 95% good food, only 5% poison: it will still kill you. Whether a person is bound by one chain or by ten chains, they are still bound. So, let no one coddle their conscience into thinking it is acceptable as a Christian Minister to fulfill part but not all of Paul's Ministry Manifesto.

A list of common characteristics to identify a deceitful worker, an imposter posing as a Man of God:

- His goal is to **divide a flock** of Christians and gather them around him in chains of bondage
- He is the minister; **ministry is centered on him**; no one else in the flock preaches to the flock
- He gives himself **lofty titles**: Padre, Priest, Bishop, Cardinal, Pastor, Senior Pastor, etc.
- He **demand a salary**; sometimes specifying how much is due (tithing)
- He is a **trained speaker**; a 'super-apostle' who entertains and impresses audiences with wisdom
- His goal is to gather more and more saints around him; **he pushes for larger congregations**
- **He will leave the flock** if he is 'called' to a congregation that is larger or pays more money
- The moment the congregation **ceases to pay him, he is gone** to be hired elsewhere
- Lord's Table, weddings, and baptisms **he officiates**, because **he is the priest** and we are laity
- **He must have a building** with an auditorium, no matter what the cost to his devotees
- Thereby he **burdens the church** with not only his own maintenance but also with a building
- He **discourages home meetings** of believers unless it is a closely supervised program
- He takes **authority over all spiritual activities in the church**; everyone reports to him
- He views the **congregation as a possession**; speaks of it as 'my church'; like having a wife
- In so doing, he **usurps the authority of Christ**; he covers Christ's beloved with his own cloak

What is the result of the religious bondage of Christians?

- The saints in the congregation **do not exercise their spiritual gifts**; over time, they lose them
- The saints **do not learn how to feed themselves**, they become dependent on a man's teaching
- The members of the church are **ineffective at sharing the gospel**; they lose passion for the lost
- The **church does not grow organically**; so it must steal believers from other churches
- **Competition between churches deepens divisions**; believers are cut off from each other
- **The gospel is hindered**; Unsaved people realise to become Christian brings with it a heavy yoke of financial obligation and religious duty;
- **Fear of man's authority** quenches the Holy Spirit;
- The **local witness of Christ is destroyed**

RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

There is only one way to revitalize the church of Jesus Christ and that is to set her free from religious bondage and to guide her according to the principles laid down by the apostle Paul. If even a solitary Christian lives by these principles, in time they will find kindred spirits and the church of Jesus Christ will eventually be restored in the community. Practical suggestions:

- Never hire anyone money to minister to you; this is as wicked as paying a prostitute for love
- Support missionaries like Paul to plant churches in places where there is no Christian testimony
- Meet in homes, in temporary facilities, or in nature
- When numbers expand, divide into more small fellowships
- Gather in Christ's name only; be known as Christians
- Do not form an association or religious organization under the laws of men
- Do not assign formal titles to those who minister; call them 'brother' or 'servant'
- Give honor to those who have the gift of prophecy and teaching; and to all who serve well
- A dedicated Christian worker may receive food and clothes as support (1 Tim 6:8)
- Make the Lord's Supper the central focus of worship; a daily or weekly observance
- Uphold and teach Bible instruction concerning Christian faith and practice
- Have nothing to do with deceitful workers and their seductive religions

IF YOU ARE IN A RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

You must quietly leave as soon as possible. Just pack up your stuff and go. Like the Israelites who departed from Egypt, put your sandals on in haste. Moses spoke many times to Pharaoh and pleaded with him to 'let my people go and worship me' but he would not let them go. Here is the point: you will not change the system by working from within it – the deceitful worker (Pharaoh) won't listen to you. Jesus said '**Do not pour new wine into old wineskins**'. There is no need to disturb the peace or make accusations or defend your case. The deceitful workers and the religious devotees have the Bible, let them read it and obey it. When you leave you will see how quickly they drop you. You were never loved in the first place. Once you stop paying money and stop serving their religion they will value your company very little. If the deceitful worker calls, do not answer that call. If any of the lay people call to say they miss you, explain your position and provide your Scriptural basis. Expect no one to follow you: they love their religion more than they love God.

YOU HAVE LEFT AND FIND YOURSELF IN THE WILDERNESS

Your faith will now be tested. This is your own personal escape from Egypt and wilderness journey. Set a goal of surviving on your own for forty years if necessary. Will you be like the Israelites in the desert and miss the sumptuous food of Egypt? Will you miss the big church choir, the powerful sermons, and the church banquets?

Here is how Proverbs describes the adulteress:

“I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house ... as the dark of night set in. Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. (She is loud and defiant, her feet never stay home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks). She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: ‘I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows. So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and I have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, lets drink deep of love until morning; let’s enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home until the full moon. With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. At once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierced his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life.” (Proverbs 7:6-23) “Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death.” (Prov. 7:26-27)

What are these religious systems? Is it not spiritual adultery? They do not exist to honor God (the husband away on the long journey); they exist to waylay naïve people, to entice them, and to ensnare them. How do they attract people? First, they offer a pretense of spirituality (I have fellowship offerings; today I fulfilled my vows). Second, they offer sensual stimulation: great buildings (my bed); stained glass windows: a feast for the eyes (linens from Egypt); and swelling emotional oratory (persuasive words; smooth talk). Third, they offer a veneer of affection (she kissed him) and a counterfeit of true love (why suffer? Let’s enjoy ourselves). The prostitute preys on the precious life of her clients. Her profession is the most ancient occupation of all: man’s religion.

Go back to Egypt? No, never! Better to die a free man in the desert than to die a slave back in Egypt.

GETTING STARTED

Moses spent forty years in the wilderness tending sheep before he saw the burning bush. Welcome to your new calling. You are now a shepherd. You will minister without public recognition, in the back side of the desert, and your entire attention will be focussed on a few scraggly sheep. You will lead them to good grass; to find some rest; and to find some still water. You will be a church planter. You will succeed in leading a few souls to Christ. You will spend yourself sacrificially in ministering to them. You will weary yourself for their spiritual welfare. They will not be able to support you, nor should you seek that. You will give them the best of everything you have; and then you will die. Just like the Lord Jesus. His ministry on earth was humble: only a few disciples in three years. But after Christ died those disciples spread the gospel to the whole world. So, do not look at the results. And never look back at Egypt. Follow the Good Shepherd down the straight and narrow way to the very end.