

## How Can I Tell?

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by Bill Crews

***Many people are asking, "HOW CAN I TELL WHEN A PREACHER IS PREACHING THE TRUTH?" This is a brief effort to give a definite answer to this extremely important question.***

Of course there are those who think that "**truth**" is only relative and ethereal and who, consequently, deny that anything can be "the truth." Then there are those who think that it is all just a matter of interpretation, so that one man's interpretation is just as good as another man's interpretation. And there are not a few who think, naively, that all preachers are preaching the truth. It is not in vain that the Bible speaks over and over in both the Old Testament and the New about false prophets and false teachers. Whether one honestly and in ignorance or knowingly and deliberately teaches what is false will not change what he teaches or its negative consequences, but the first usually can be reached, whereas the second usually cannot.

But this article is for those who believe, rightly, that the Bible is the word of God and, therefore, "the truth," who understand that interpretations of any Bible Scripture are either right or wrong, who have listened closely enough to know that many contradictory teachings are found among the various preachers and cannot all be right, and who sincerely want to know how they can tell when a preacher is preaching the truth.

Unfortunately many conclude that a preacher is preaching the truth for such reasons as the following:

1. **He looks like an honest man, one you can trust.**
2. **He sounds so sincere and earnest.**
3. **He sounds like he knows what he is talking about.**
4. **He speaks so forcefully and convincingly.**
5. **He is such a personable and such a likeable man.**
6. **He is so good and kind.**
7. **He insists that he is preaching only the truth and uses a lot of Scriptures.**
8. **He declares with so much conviction that he has received his message from God by the Holy Spirit.**

Some will find it hard to believe, but a man may possess every one of these "qualifications" (better, "attributes") and still not be preaching the truth. In fact, in view of (1) the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures that God has given us (2 Tim. 3:14-17), (2) the finality of "*the faith*" that was "*once for all*" delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and (3) the cessation of the miraculous process of divine revelation upon completion of that revelation (1 Cor. 12:27-13:13), it is certain that any preacher today who claims to receive his message, not through his own study of the Scriptures, but through direct revelation or through some miraculous guidance from the Holy Spirit **is, for that very reason, not preaching the truth.**

**How, then, can you tell when a preacher is preaching the truth?** Here are some guide-lines from God's own book:

1. **When he speaks as the oracles of God (Bible language, book, chapter and verse; 1 Pet. 4:11).**
2. **When he does not go beyond the things that are written (1 Cor. 4:6).**
3. **When he speaks the things that befit the sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).**
4. **When his preaching stands the test of examination in the light of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).**
5. **When he does not preach another gospel (other than that preached by the inspired writers of the New Testament, like Paul; Gal. 1:6-9).**
6. **When he does not teach a different doctrine from that taught by the apostles (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-4).**
7. **When he does not go beyond, but abides in the doctrine of Christ, the doctrine delivered by Christ (2 John 9-11).**
8. **When he goes "to the law and to the testimony" (Isa. 8 :20) or to the Scriptures to establish all that he preaches.**

Then you can be sure that he is preaching the truth. Remember, **if a preacher does not give you Bible** (used clearly and properly, not twisted or out of context) **for what he preaches, he does not give you the word of God.** Many sermons of today are devoid of Scripture, and the preacher is aware of it, while the listeners don't care. What a tragedy!

As a hearer you are called upon to take heed **what** you hear (Mark 4:24) and **how** you hear (Luke 8:18), to prove all things and to hold fast *only* that which is good (1 Thess. 5 :21), to prove or test those who profess to be teaching from God (1 John 4:1), and to examine the Scriptures, even daily, to see whether or not the things men preach are so (Acts 17:11). Be sure that the preaching you accept as the word of God is the word of God.

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