

BEWARE OF WOLVES IN THE CHURCH

FIVE WAYS TO RECOGNIZE THE SPIRIT OF DIVISION IN A CONGREGATION

BISHOP RC BLAKES, JR.

ACTS 20:28–30 KJV

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Paul gives us a sobering warning. Every threat to the church does not come from outside the church. Some of the most destructive influences emerge from within the congregation itself. Everybody who joins a church doesn't come to help build it. Some people come with an agenda that has absolutely nothing to do with the assignment God has given that house. And one of the most dangerous people in a congregation is not necessarily the person who openly opposes the church. It's the person who pretends to love the church while privately working to destroy people's confidence in it.

A wolf doesn't have to occupy the pulpit to destroy a church. Sometimes the wolf is sitting in the pews. And the tragedy is that good people, who were growing, serving, and being blessed, can become casualties of somebody else's bitterness.

Here are five things you need to recognize.

1. WOLVES CREATE CONVERSATIONS THAT PRODUCE DIVISION.

One of the first indications of a divisive spirit is the nature of the conversations a person consistently initiates. Solomon teaches us that

words can become instruments of separation, even among people who previously enjoyed strong relationships.

PROVERBS 16:28 KJV

A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

Wolves are masters of private conversations. They rarely begin by saying, "I want to destroy this church." They begin by saying, "Can I tell you something? I've been concerned about some things." They disguise gossip as concern, rebellion as discernment, and personal offense as spiritual revelation.

Watch people who are always bringing you information that makes you distrust people you previously respected.

Everybody who brings you information is not bringing you truth. Some people are recruiting you into their offense.

2. WOLVES EXPLOIT OFFENSE TO RECRUIT FOLLOWERS.

Offense becomes particularly dangerous when a person refuses to resolve it and instead begins spreading it. Scripture reveals that bitterness is never necessarily confined to the heart where it originated.

HEBREWS 12:15 KJV

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

Notice that bitterness doesn't just trouble the person carrying it. The Bible says MANY become defiled. Some people get offended with leadership, but rather than pursue biblical reconciliation, they begin building a constituency. They need other people to validate their offense.

A wolf is not satisfied with leaving a church. A wolf wants to take a

congregation with them. Be careful when somebody else's unresolved offense suddenly becomes your personal problem.

3. WOLVES UNDERMINE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY TO CREATE CONFUSION.

The enemy understands that relationships are sustained by trust. When someone systematically destroys trust through gossip, false accusations, and manipulation, they can weaken the spiritual relationships that help hold a congregation together.

ROMANS 16:17 KJV

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

Wolves understand something: before they can disconnect people from a church, they must first disconnect them emotionally from its leadership. They begin questioning motives, interpreting decisions negatively, and suggesting things they cannot prove. When you allow someone to poison your perception of leadership, they can eventually poison your connection to the house.

Now understand me. Biblical authority is never a license for abuse, and legitimate concerns must be addressed truthfully. But there is a difference between holding leadership accountable and deliberately destroying people's confidence through insinuation, gossip, and manipulation.

4. WOLVES DISGUISE PERSONAL AMBITION AS SPIRITUAL CONVICTION.

One of the most revealing statements Paul makes about wolves concerns their ultimate objective. They are not always attempting to advance the kingdom; sometimes they are attempting to develop a personal following.

ACTS 20:30 KJV

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

Listen to the language of the text: to draw away disciples after them. Sometimes the real issue is not doctrine, direction, or disagreement. The issue is somebody wants influence they haven't been entrusted with.

They want a following.

They want authority without accountability.

And when they cannot control the direction of the house, they attempt to control the people in the house.

Some people don't want the church to grow unless they can be the reason it's growing. Never confuse somebody's desire for a platform with a divine assignment.

5. WOLVES ARE RECOGNIZED BY THE FRUIT OF THEIR INFLUENCE.

Jesus never instructed us to identify spiritual influences merely by their appearance, vocabulary, or religious activity. He gave us a far more reliable standard: examine what their lives and influence consistently produce.

MATTHEW 7:16 KJV

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Stop evaluating people only by how spiritual they sound. Evaluate what consistently happens to people who come under their influence. Do people become more loving, more mature, more committed to Christ, and more responsible? Or do they become suspicious, rebellious, bitter, and disconnected?

You cannot claim to be protecting the sheep while consistently scattering

the sheep. Sometimes the greatest evidence of a person's spirit is what happens to the people who listen to them.

THE FINAL WORD

The church is a spiritual family, and like every healthy family, it must establish boundaries against destructive behavior. Paul teaches that persistent divisiveness must be confronted rather than endlessly accommodated.

TITUS 3:10 KJV

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

You must understand that protecting the unity of a church is not the same as protecting the reputation of an individual. A healthy church must welcome honest questions, biblical correction, and accountability. But it must also recognize those who deliberately cultivate division.

Don't let somebody who is angry with the church convince you that God is finished with the church.

Don't allow somebody else's disappointment to become your disobedience. And don't abandon a place where God is genuinely developing you simply because somebody else has decided to become destructive.

Everybody who leaves a church is not a wolf. But a wolf will often try to make other people leave with them.

The wolf's objective is not simply to leave the flock. It is to scatter the flock.

PROTECT YOUR HEART. GUARD YOUR EARS. DISCERN THE FRUIT. AND NEVER ALLOW SOMEBODY ELSE'S OFFENSE TO INTERRUPT YOUR ASSIGNMENT.

