

## **Wolves Looking Like Sheep**

We certainly need the warning of Jesus in Matthew 7 these days. Our age is a tolerant one, at least until the tolerance itself is challenged. People look for many sides to every question, and God's Word is often regarded as an answer that isn't necessarily the final word. Nowadays in church circles all are regarded as having a contribution to make. Dialogues between churches are often satisfied to seek common points on which there is agreement\_ and soon the question is asked, "Is there sufficient agreement for church fellowship?" And, in any case, those engaged in dialogue regularly begin and end their meetings with prayers and devotions that anticipate the sharing in sacred things that ought to rest on full agreement in all of the articles of the Gospel.

Jesus changes the picture from animals to plants when he tells us how to test those who teach in God's name. There is an inseparable connection between the tree and its fruit. "You will know them by their fruits". It is a mistake to regard "their fruits" as the lives people lead, though false teachers sometimes live wicked lives. Orange trees bear oranges, and false prophets give false prophecies. All the emphasis must be on the teaching. In fact, pleasant personalities, sincerity unselfish actions, and kindness, and even a good proportion of teaching that is true may be part of the clothing that makes a wolf look like a sheep.

We must remember to distinguish between doctrine and life. Doctrine is God's: lives are ours. When we claim that our teaching is right, we don't claim that our lives are sinless. We confess, day by day, that we are wretched sinners and deserve nothing but punishment. On the other hand, people dare never defend a church that has let its teaching and practice slide by saying, "No church is perfect". Because Scripture is clear in its teaching, God expects, and you have a right to expect, that in doctrine your church will be above reproach.

When our teaching is right, we must maintain it in fear, aware of the danger of losing it, aware of the danger of hypocrisy, and of the danger of thinking that we can gain some kind of credit from God for having our teaching right. Everything depends on the Lord's knowing us, in grace, and on His work of salvation for us. We stand by grace, as children of God, led by the Spirit of Jesus, with the hope of our glorious inheritance to encourage us. Because of our Lord's unmerited gift of life to us, we endeavour to walk in the narrow way (Mt 7:13-14), we test those who claim to be prophets (Mt 7:15-20), and we strive to avoid hypocrisy (Mt 7:21-23).