

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **SOME EXAMPLES OF WICKED CHRISTIANS FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE**

*<sup>22</sup> “For my people are foolish;  
they know me not;  
they are stupid children;  
they have no understanding.  
They are ‘wise’—in doing evil!  
But how to do good they know not.”  
Jeremiah 4:22 (ESV)*

*“...and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”*

*John 18:37 (b) (NASB)*

*<sup>12</sup> Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they had no regard for the Lord.  
1 Samuel 2:12 (RSV)*

*<sup>13</sup> So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, <sup>14</sup> and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.  
1 Chronicles 10:13-14 (RSV)*

*<sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.*

*2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NASB)*

*But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. <sup>5</sup> But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*

*Galatians 2:4-5 (NASB)*

*As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

*Ephesians 4:14 (NASB)*

*Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;  
Philippians 3:2 (NASB)*

#### **The problems we had with ‘Fergus’, a carnal and insincere Christian**

I have found the brass-faced falseness of certain ‘churchgoers’ difficult to handle. One example is ‘Fergus’, a young man I met at a large Evangelical church who seemed, by all appearances, to be earnest and devout. He claimed that he wanted to be a missionary to the Muslim world but that, before going out, he wanted to qualify as a solicitor (lawyer). I wanted to help him so I took him under my wing, gave him a job in my law firm, and encouraged him in various other ways too. I also asked him, in turn, to help another member of staff called ‘Malcolm’.

He had had a very difficult past and needed a lot of spiritual, emotional and practical support. He was badly damaged by life and would have struggled to get, or keep, such a job in any other firm. But I felt

God wanted me to help him to rebuild his confidence and give him a fresh start in supportive surroundings. I therefore asked Fergus to help Malcolm and to encourage, support and pray with him and he assured me that he would. Therefore I fully believed he was already doing so. I saw no problems and was totally unaware of what was actually happening.

Months later, Malcolm was feeling particularly low one day. I therefore urged him to see Fergus, as I thought that would help him. To my surprise, there was a sudden look of panic in Malcolm's eyes at the prospect of spending even more time with Fergus. That reaction puzzled me but I said nothing at that point. Later, a series of events occurred which caused Fergus's real character to be exposed, all in the space of a single week. It was a shock because almost everything that I had ever believed about him was the opposite of the truth.

Far from being a sincere Evangelical, he was actually proud, devious and crafty. Instead of *helping* Malcolm, he had been *using* him. For example, he had manipulated him into giving him free lifts in his car every day, and also free driving lessons. Yet he never paid any contribution for the petrol. Also, he had been out socialising with Malcolm 15 times, but had let Malcolm pay for his dinners and drinks on 14 of those occasions. The only time Fergus ever paid the bill was when they only had a sandwich. Every other time, when it was more expensive, he let Malcolm pay.

Fergus had also been undermining Malcolm and increasing his anxieties instead of calming them, as I had asked him to. I wondered how Fergus had managed to get Malcolm to do all these things for him, especially to pay for all the petrol and food. It emerged that he was exerting a sinister hold over Malcolm by causing him to believe that he held the key to him keeping his job. Fergus gave the false impression that he was very close to me and could influence me. He did this with Malcolm but also with others.

As a result, no member of staff ever reported this bullying to me, even though some of them knew about it. They kept quiet because they too had been told that Fergus was "*very close*" to me and that it would not be well-received if they complained about him to me. Fergus had planted that thought in their minds to make himself appear to have power over them and influence over me. He even made a mockery of the prayer times I had asked him to have with Malcolm. He would look up while he was praying, only to see Fergus staring into space and paying no attention.

Fergus's legal work on behalf of clients also got worse and worse. He was lazy and careless and neglected his files, such that they got into a serious mess. In the months before he was eventually exposed the state of his cases became intolerable, even though I kept on reducing his caseload. He nearly caused a negligence claim on one file due to sheer neglect, for which there was no possible excuse. His neglect would have caused severe damage but God alerted me to it just in time and I was able to intervene and put things right.

However, Fergus was totally unconcerned and showed no remorse when it was discovered. A supervisor and I then had to work hard to clear up the mess and put the file back on track. In addition, Fergus told many lies to me and to other staff. When it all came out I called him in to my office and confronted him, but he initially denied it all. I then investigated it further and more information came out. In the end, I was able to prove it all. When he realised that I had incontrovertible proof of his misconduct, he changed his tactics and stopped the bare-faced denial.

Instead, he admitted he had done wrong and said he wanted to repent and apologise. However, he only did so because he knew I now had all the evidence I needed to sack him and because he thought that change of approach might impress me. He even said he was "*seeking counselling from older Christians*" about his wrong behaviour. But it was all play-acting, with no sincerity. I later saw him at church, after he had left my firm and he was brass-faced and unashamed about what he had done.

His supposed apology and repentance had vanished. He could see it had not achieved its intended purpose, which was to try to induce me to let him off. Instead of doing that, I told him his misconduct

had been so serious that I needed to commence a formal disciplinary procedure. When he heard that, and realised he was not going to get away with it, he asked if he could just resign instead and halt the disciplinary procedure. I agreed to that, which was entirely his idea, and let him go.

If I had done the things Fergus did, and been exposed, I would have felt unable to show my face again due to the shame of it all. I would probably even have moved to another church. But Fergus just continued, as if nothing had happened. So far as I could see, there was no real repentance in him, despite what he said while being interviewed. He very belatedly sent a supposed letter of apology to Malcolm, but only at my insistence. I feel sure it was not a genuine apology.

It was just weasel-words about how he *regretted* the fact that Malcolm had '*thought*' he was undermining him and he had *no intention* to hurt him etc. He was effectively just saying he regretted the fact that Malcolm had '*misunderstood*' him, not that *he had actually done* all those things. Even after his supposed apology he complained about me to 'Carl', the leader of the church, as if it was he who had been mistreated. It shows that even in an Evangelical church, a young man like Fergus, the son and grandson of Evangelicals, was capable of such falseness.

Fergus is also a classic example of how the wicked feel no shame even when exposed. He knew the Gospel and had a good knowledge of the Bible, but he still did all those selfish, cruel and dishonest things. Moreover, he was not acting in ignorance or accidentally. He *intentionally* neglected clients' files, mistreated colleagues and lied to me and others. And he did all that without any apparent fear of the LORD. Few people would think of him as a wicked person, but I feel he was in that category.

**What 'Fergus' did is not unusual. There are very many other false, carnal, devious people in churches today who claim to be Christians.**

In the last 35 years I have come across many wicked people in churches, not counting those I have only heard of. I have dealt with a lot of church members, and even leaders, who have told deliberate lies. They have also attacked, slandered and undermined innocent people, merely for challenging their improper behaviour. These things were done partly to intimidate those who were questioning them. It was also to damage their reputation, so that any allegations they might make would be less likely to be believed. There was nothing accidental about any of that.

Such people have also had sexual affairs, both fornication and adultery, and have manipulated, controlled, dominated and intimidated others. Even leaders did these things, on a routine basis, to those under their care, so as to further their own ends and preserve their own positions. In each of these cases the facts of their misconduct were proved beyond all reasonable doubt. I do not say that lightly. I spent three years in the police and then 25 years as a litigation lawyer, so I know what evidence is and how to measure its reliability. Accordingly, there is no exaggeration in what I say.

If anything, I am deliberately under-stating things to avoid even the possibility of exaggerating. These wicked men and women had reached a point where they felt entitled to do whatever was needed to defend themselves or to promote their own interests. Their consciences were so badly 'seared' that they felt no concern about lying, or any other sin, even whilst continuing to pastor churches, lead worship, preach and teach. At first, in my naivety, I found it astonishing that so many church members and leaders could be so unashamed in their misconduct.

They showed no sign of even being uncomfortable, let alone under God's conviction. I am now used to seeing such carnal behaviour in churches and even expect it. I recall an episode where 'Rick', a church leader, was in a meeting with myself and two other leaders. I was the chairman of the Trustees of that church and had challenged him about his misconduct. The four of us were meeting to discuss my allegations about him. Rick then told a series of blatant lies about what he had been doing. There was no possibility of there being any misunderstanding. I wish that could have been the explanation, but it wasn't.

They were deliberate, bare-faced lies by the senior leader of a church of about 300 people. After the meeting, when the witnesses had gone and we were alone, I asked Rick, face to face, why he had lied to them. To my surprise, he didn't deny lying. He just said "*Well, I've got to defend myself*". He spoke without any trace of shame, as if he had done nothing wrong. To him it was wholly justifiable for him to lie if that was what it took to get himself out of trouble. There was no concern as to what would happen to him at the Day of Judgment over the lies he had told.

The only options I can think of to explain his brazenness are that he believed there won't be any Day of Judgment or that he was unaware of it. Or, perhaps he thought that even if there is one, it would only be for other people, and that God would never confront him. Or maybe he didn't care, even if it is brought up at the judgment. Most probably, he wasn't thinking anything and didn't reach any of those conclusions. I shall now give another example of a false Christian called 'Rhoda', to whom I have referred earlier.

**'Rhoda' was in a church for many years, lying and spreading gossip. She was clearly unsaved, but nobody ever challenged her until I did.**

'Rhoda' was controlling and manipulative and was also a gossip and liar. I first came across her many years ago and I later joined a church of which she was a member. She had been in that church for years, purporting to be a Christian, but she wasn't. She had never been truly converted and, in particular, had never repented. Thus, she was still unsaved, and very carnal, but was acting and talking as if she was a Christian. Yet, in all those years, nobody had ever challenged her, either about her conduct, or as to whether she was actually saved.

Maybe it was due to the leaders' misguided politeness, or perhaps a cowardly fear of how she might react if challenged. More probably it was lack of discernment, such that they never even noticed what she was. It could be they thought it wasn't their place to have any view as to whether she was a real Christian. Rhoda first came to my attention when I had been on a foreign trip. While I was away my wife was invited to Rhoda's house for a chat. Rhoda began to gossip about others in the church and, in particular, a young couple. She also made some accusations about the young man, 'Charles'.

My wife felt awkward but did not challenge Rhoda. She ought to have done so at the time, even as Rhoda was still speaking. However, my wife did telephone me later and I advised her not to go back to Rhoda's house. She had already been invited to return the following week. So she told Rhoda she couldn't make it. When I got back from my trip we discussed it more fully, in particular, the negative comments Rhoda had made about Charles, whom I regarded as a fine young man. What she had said about him was gossip, but it was also slander, in that it was untrue.

'Gossip' means speaking about other people when, where, and with whom, you shouldn't, and saying things that shouldn't be said. Those things could be entirely *true*, but it would still be gossip to say them. 'Slander' goes one stage further, in that the things said are *untrue*. Both are sinful, but slander is even worse, because it consists of lies. Gossip can involve lies, but need not do so. Something which is said inappropriately, without love and with wrong motives, is still gossip even if the facts are 100% accurate.

I felt something needed to be done about Rhoda's words. They were, at the very least, gossip and probably slander too. So I spoke to the elders about my concerns. They agreed that I should approach Rhoda, and her husband 'Stephen', to ask what she had said, why she said it, whether it was true, and to whom else she had said it. However, I didn't get very far. I began by approaching Stephen, told him what Rhoda had been saying, and asked for them to meet with me and some witnesses to discuss it. But he was immediately defensive and reluctant.

Rhoda refused to meet up and purported to feel 'outraged' at being questioned. A guilty person rarely wants to meet up to discuss their behaviour or what they have said. So Rhoda's reluctance to meet up

was an important indicator that she had been telling lies. If what she had been saying was true, or even if she had sincerely *believed* it to be true, she would have wanted to discuss it. Indeed, she would have been eager. But she knew perfectly well it was not true and she didn't want to be exposed, or even challenged.

There is no valid reason why any right-thinking person, with a clear conscience, should object to being questioned about anything, if asked politely, as Rhoda had been. Her 'outrage' at being questioned is important. If a person is merely reluctant to meet, or evasive when questioned, they are generally just trying to prevent or delay you getting to the truth. They usually do it passively, by mere non-cooperation. However, if they also become angry and aggressive then it's far more significant.

The overall objective is the same. They still want to stop you getting to the truth. But they go further, by seeking to intimidate you into backing off. In part it is a temper tantrum, due to having a carnal nature. But it's also deliberately calculated to stop you asking more questions. So it may appear that they are out of control, but they are probably not entirely so. The chances are it's partly a conscious attempt to control you through fear. That takes it to a new level. Previously they were just deceivers, but now they are also trying to intimidate you.

We persisted for a time in seeking to get a meeting with Rhoda and her husband but they resisted. Then, about two weeks later, they announced that they had left the church. Nobody had asked them to leave, or even said that Rhoda was lying. The request had only been to *discuss* it with her, to find out what she was saying and why and to whom. If her words had all been true, and if it had been appropriate for her to speak about Charles, she could have demonstrated that when we met. But she knew perfectly well that her words were neither true, nor appropriate, to share with others.

**It is essential to check the things that you are told. Yet, very few people ever do.**

After they left the church, Rhoda and Stephen approached a number of people and said untrue things about us. That caused them to leave the church too, though without ever explaining why, or even asking any questions. Stephen and Rhoda didn't want people to find out the real facts from us and they succeeded in preventing that because whatever they told those people caused them to shun us. For example, when we bumped into two ladies at a conference some weeks later, they turned and walked away from my wife and me, and didn't want to talk. It was as if we had a disease.

Yet neither of those ladies had ever checked any of what Rhoda had told them. That is usually the case with the things people are told by deceivers. The liar puts a built-in mechanism into the lie, which prevents people making any enquiries to check whether or not it's true. For example, one of the lies which had been told about 'Charles' was that he was *violent*, and that he had even been to *prison* for it! How would you feel if such lies were told about you in your church?

I later spoke to 'Gareth', one of the elders, who told me he had believed this story and had "felt wary" of Charles as a result. However, neither he, nor his wife 'Belinda', had ever checked *whether* the allegation was true. They just accepted it instantly. The idea of checking it had never even occurred to them. That was partly as a result of their belief that Charles was violent and therefore not safe to question. However, I said to Gareth "*Did you ever ask yourself how Charles could have got into his current job, and stayed in it, if he had ever been in prison?*"

Charles had a responsible job, which would require him to be carefully security checked for criminal convictions. Thus it would be obvious to anybody, if they gave it even a moment's thought, that he could not possibly have any convictions, for violence or otherwise, and could not ever have been in prison. When I pointed this out Gareth said, "*That's a good point. I'd never thought of that.*" His failure to check what he had been told, or even to wonder whether it was true, was a typical response. Liars know that most people don't check anything and they take full advantage of that fact.

## **How Rhoda planned to plant a lie in someone's mind and how I spotted her intention and stopped her**

We did eventually get to meet with Rhoda and Stephen about two months later. In fact, we met at Rhoda's request. She also specifically asked that my wife be present, which I thought was odd, but we agreed to it. Later I discovered why they wanted her there and what a malicious motive Rhoda had. I had suggested that we meet in a coffee bar because being in a public place might cause Rhoda to behave better and not to shout, which she often did. It didn't work though.

My wife and I, together with an elder called 'Ted', met with Rhoda and Stephen. From the outset she went off like a firework display, shouting and ranting, even though other customers could hear her. She didn't listen to anything that was said to her. It was a farcical meeting and served no purpose at all. However, I did learn why Rhoda asked for the meeting and why she wanted my wife to attend it. It was sly and sinister, but it actually ended up being quite comical. She had wanted to try to create a rift between myself and my wife.

I had gone away to Israel for five weeks in the early summer of that year and, before going, I had planted a large number of trees. I also already had a lot of flower beds and tubs. All of these would need a lot of watering if the weather was dry and hot, as it was that summer. So, while I was away, my wife had to go out on many days, for hours at a time, watering my new trees and plants to make sure they wouldn't die before I got back. She didn't mind too much, but it turned into a much bigger burden than she, or I, had expected, due to the prolonged warm, dry spell.

When she was at Rhoda's house, while I was away my wife had grumbled to her, in a good humoured way, at how long it was taking to water all my plants. Therefore when we eventually met at the coffee shop in September Rhoda turned to my wife and, adopting a sinister tone of voice, she said: "*You know what you were saying about Sean at my house. How can you dare to say I'm a gossip, after all the things you were saying about him?*" My wife looked amazed when Rhoda said this, having no idea what she could be referring to. She just asked "*What things?*"

Rhoda pretended that she didn't want to give the details and said "I don't want to say because I don't want to embarrass you in front of everybody. But you know what you were saying about Sean and how you were slugging him off." As Rhoda said this I suddenly realised what her aim was, and why she had asked for the meeting, after refusing to have it in July. She wanted to inject the unsettling thought into my mind that my wife had been criticising me while I was away.

Rhoda had actually had no intention of saying *what* these scandalous revelations were. She had planned to say that she was "holding back" from revealing it all, supposedly for my wife's sake. So, to spoil her little trick, I said "*That's OK, Rhoda, please tell us. We all really want to know what she was saying*". Rhoda looked surprised and uncomfortable. That was not how she'd expected me to respond. Her own husband, Stephen, was violent towards her. They also had blazing rows in the street, to which the police had to be called, at least once.

As the wicked often do, Rhoda made the mistake of imputing to me, and to my wife, the same character and way of life that she had. She knew that if similar things were said to her, in front of her husband, it would have led to furious arguments and ongoing suspicion and she wanted that to happen to us. However, she miscalculated badly, because we are not even remotely like her and her husband. So I began to press her, in a jocular tone of voice, saying "*Come on Rhoda, it's unfair not to tell us. We're all longing to find out what she said. I can't wait to hear about it myself.*"

As I teased her in this way Rhoda felt embarrassed. She hadn't intended to say any more and hadn't expected to be pressed to do so. In particular, she had not expected to be made fun of. She was therefore caught in the headlights, not knowing what to say and pondering how to get out of the situation without losing face. In the end she decided she was going to have to say something or else I would keep on

making fun of her. So, she said, in a much less confident tone of voice, “*Well, you were moaning about how Sean was making you cut all the grass.*”

When she said that I laughed out loud which was the exact opposite of what she had wanted and expected my reaction to be. I then said “*But Rhoda, we don’t actually cut the grass. A man comes and cuts it for us. Do you mean all the watering that had to be done?*” Rhoda was looking even more sheepish by now and said “*Maybe it was watering. I don’t know exactly.*” I then replied “*That’s no problem, she was moaning to me about it too on the phone in the evenings. So is that the big scandal that you were holding back, Rhoda? Is that all you’re talking about?*”

I wouldn’t ordinarily make fun of a person in such a meeting but she deserved it, given how evil her purpose was. I also needed to force her into revealing her ‘terrible secret’, which I could see she had never had any intention of disclosing. She only did so in the end because I carried on making fun of her and she would have felt silly to keep refusing after making such a big deal of it. Take a lesson from this. Call people’s bluff *every time* they try to threaten you, or to exert any kind of leverage over you. That’s why I pressed Rhoda.

My wife was too stunned at the time to know what to say in the meeting in the coffee shop. If I had left it to her she might have let Rhoda leave the ‘terrible secret’ hanging in the air, as Rhoda had intended. Indeed that was the sole purpose of the meeting from Rhoda’s perspective, as nothing worthwhile was achieved by it. She wouldn’t listen to us or answer any questions. All she did was shout at us, even though we were in a public place. Her husband tried to calm her down when people at nearby tables looked over at her. But she wouldn’t lower her voice or behave herself.

Rhoda had come all that way and gone to all that effort solely to try to create ill will between me and my wife. It was intended as an act of revenge and nothing else. She would never actually have been able to succeed. But she wasn’t to know that. She assumed that her ways were our ways and that her marriage was like ours. She hoped some damage would be caused to us as vengeance for exposing what she had been up to. Rhoda’s aims were evil and fully justify the use of the word ‘wicked’. I suggest you see such behaviour in those terms, and call it by its right name, especially when it happens in churches.

### **The devious way in which Rhoda also used to lure people into saying critical things about other people, in order to use those words later for ‘blackmail’ purposes**

Another technique Rhoda used, which is widely used by manipulators, is to get a hold over you by getting you to say critical things about other people. They entice you into this by saying critical things themselves. They hope to provoke you into joining in and saying something nasty, which you wouldn’t otherwise have said, and will later regret. They will then use your own words against you, even months or years afterwards, and threaten to reveal what you said to cause you embarrassment or destroy relationships.

Or they will just continue to hold it over you more subtly, as an unspoken threat. They want you to feel that you had better not cross them or they will reveal what you said. They use this blackmail technique to prevent you exposing them or giving evidence against them at work or church. I have come across this technique many times when trying to persuade employees to open up and tell me what they know about a wrongdoer. They fear to speak because of what might then be revealed about the things *they* have said about other people in the past.

So that’s yet another reason to avoid gossip. If you don’t, the likelihood is you will get trapped in this way. This device is mainly used by women to gain control over other women, since they are more prone to talking to, and about, each other. However, nobody is immune. Whoever you are, you need to know that the words you speak today about others may be used against you later. So beware of what

you say, especially to people who seem to *want* you to say things about others. It is likely that they wish to gain some form of control over you.

Even if that is not their express purpose at the time, they will remember your words later and make use of them in this way. Therefore, the next time you feel the urge to say something sarcastic or resentful about another person, stop yourself. Firstly it would be wrong to do so. But you may also be putting ammunition into someone's hands which they can then use against you later, when the need arises. Also be particularly wary if you find that you suddenly feel a strong urge to say or reveal something where that urge seems to be *coming from nowhere*.

If that happens, the chances are you are being subjected to 'mind-control'. That is someone is inducing you to do their will and to reveal information that they can then use, either against others or against you. I have experienced such bewitching numerous times. You feel a spontaneous urge to reveal something which you hadn't intended to say. It may be something which you know, even at that moment, that you ought not to say. Even so, the urge to say it can be very strong. This kind of mind-control is an aspect of witchcraft and whenever it occurs you must resist it with all your will.

Also ask yourself: "*Why did I just feel the sudden urge to say that? What's happening here?*" Then ask yourself whether somebody may be exercising mind-control over you and, if so, who might they be. The most obvious candidate is the person you are speaking to at that moment. They have the most to gain and the clearest opportunity. So begin to check them out and be extremely careful as to what else you say to them from then on. However, it may not necessarily be the person you are with. It could be another person who is exercising mind-control over you from afar.

### **How Rhoda refused to cooperate with the Matthew 18 procedure for resolving conflicts**

Because Rhoda was a married woman I began by speaking to her husband, Stephen. I asked for a meeting with Rhoda, with Stephen present, to discuss what exactly she had been saying about people and why. It was the first stage of what I call the "*Matthew 18 procedure*":

*<sup>15</sup> "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

*Matthew 18:15-17 (RSV)*

Rhoda had no intention of cooperating. She made various excuses and refused to meet us. Then, about two months later, she suddenly announced that she did want to meet with us after all. However, it was only to try to cause trouble, not to make any genuine attempt to hear our concerns, let alone resolve them. If you are a sincere person, who is genuinely trying to deal with a person's misconduct, their refusal to engage in the Matthew 18 procedure can provide you with helpful guidance about their real nature.

Their refusal to meet strongly suggests guilt, unless they can offer some compelling reasons for refusing. By contrast, if they are willing to meet with you, and if they listen sincerely to your concerns, and take real steps to resolve them, they are probably a genuine person with whom you can do business. But if they refuse to meet, or won't cooperate when you do meet, the chances are you are dealing with someone false, and probably wicked.



## **An incident involving ‘Philip and Sonia’, with whom we felt there was no point in going through the Matthew 18 procedure**

There are also some rare situations where a wicked person says they want to meet with you, supposedly under the Matthew 18 procedure, but you feel it would be pointless, or even harmful, to meet with them. I can think of such a situation involving Philip and Sonia. A number of us in that church had decided that their behaviour was so bad we would need to insist on Philip standing down as an elder. More realistically, both of them would also need to be expelled as members, because they were such a malignant influence.

That could all have been dealt with through a Matthew 18 type meeting. However, a number of us discussed it and felt there would be no point in it. We had already had various discussions with them in the past which had been completely unproductive. We felt that yet another meeting would be a pointless waste of effort, with no real prospects of success. The alternative we chose was for those of us who felt concerned at the conduct of Philip and Sonia to simply leave the church ourselves, without going through the charade of confronting them yet again.

The church was very small, with only 18 members. Six of us decided to leave and start a new church, rather than attempt either to reform Philip and Sonia’s behaviour or remove Philip as an elder. Before doing so, we did not share our concerns with any of the other church members. However, on the very day when we met with Philip and Sonia to explain our concerns and tell them we were leaving, Philip emailed the rest of the members notifying them of our departure. That was the first any of them had ever heard of our concerns because we had been so discreet throughout.

To Philip and Sonia’s surprise, almost all the other members said, without any contact from us, that they wanted to join our new church. We therefore had 14 members on the day when it began. Philip and Sonia then asked why we had not gone through the Matthew 18 procedure with them, given that, in the previous year we had complained at Rhoda’s refusal to meet with us under it. I explained to them that Matthew 18:15-17 is not an absolute requirement. Thus it is not mandatory at all times, in all circumstances, and with all people.

It requires judgement to gauge whether the person or group is reasonably likely to respond constructively. That assessment is both necessary and reasonable because a high percentage of people are so false, malicious and disruptive that they will turn any attempt at a Matthew 18 meeting into a farce. They may even use it as an opportunity to do you further harm. Imagine a situation where a person has been abused, lied to or lied about by a person or group, or by a church.

They are not under an absolute obligation to use the Matthew 18 procedure, regardless of how wounded they already are, or how futile it would be, or what further damage might be caused by meeting with the wrongdoer(s). Wounded Christians, and those helping them, are entitled to use their common sense to discern the *nature and intentions* of the other person or group. They need to decide whether such a meeting would have at least reasonable prospects of success or whether it might result in further harm to themselves and/or to others in the church.

So Philip and Sonia were making an unusual complaint about our decision *not* to go to them and raise our concerns under Matthew 18, but to simply leave quietly instead. However, we all felt that a series of meetings with them would, almost certainly, have been futile. It would just have used up a lot of time and energy and caused further upset to our own people. They had already done a lot of harm, especially to Charles, through their malice and gossip. We all felt there was no realistic chance of them paying any genuine attention to our concerns.

Moreover, we had good reason to think that. We had already had several discussions with them previously, in which they had been immature, ill-tempered and unable to maintain their self-control. Furthermore, they did not listen to our advice or pay any attention to the evidence when we had told them about Rhoda’s lies about Charles and other such matters. On the contrary, they had consistently

defended Rhoda and undermined Charles. We felt therefore that a lengthy Matthew 18 procedure, going through an even longer list of concerns, would have been equally useless.

Nevertheless, when Philip and Sonia rebuked us for not attempting such a meeting, I made an alternative proposal as a concession. I said that three of the men from our group, i.e. those of us who had left, would meet with them. Then we could go through our concerns one by one, giving them a chance to respond to us. We did not want our wives to be present as we fully expected it would turn into a nasty meeting, at which Philip and Sonia's real aim would be to attack people and undermine relationships, as Rhoda had already tried to do.

I also emphasised that if we did have such a meeting it would need to be seen as one which *they* had called for, not us. We also said that the purpose, as far as we were concerned, was to help them to understand what they had done wrongly and why we had all left. It was not to seek to bring about a reconciliation whereby they could then be admitted to the new church. Our firmness in excluding them from our plans for the new church was essential. We knew they would continue to be a major problem, at least in the short to medium term.

Of course, nobody knows for sure what may happen in the long term, as even the very worst people may one day repent. However, one has to be realistic. We could not afford to operate on the basis of the tiny theoretical possibility that they *might* repent. We needed to focus on the practical realities of the actual situation we then faced, not the hypothetical long term future. After I explained our terms, Philip and Sonia no longer wanted a meeting and just let it drop.

However, they still continued to malign us to others and to oppose and obstruct us wherever possible. Moreover, when we saw them a week later at a teaching day involving people from other churches, their behaviour was appalling. So there had clearly been no change of heart or self-examination in the meantime. Accordingly, our expectation that they would have badly mishandled a Matthew 18 type meeting was well-founded.

### **Our experiences with Julia, a selfish, devious, domineering woman who made herself a pain in the neck when we were on a bus tour of Israel**

Many years ago we went as a family on a bus tour of Israel. On the bus was an obnoxious woman called Julia who was very self-centred and domineering. The tour group were all Christians and were extremely patient with her, far more so than any secular group would have been. Julia claimed to be a Christian, but she behaved intolerably for the whole trip. For the first few days the group suffered in silence but by day 6 or 7 tempers were wearing out and people were more vocal. The tour manager even had a row with her when Julia made yet another selfish demand.

When booking the trip, she had told the tour company that she must always have the front seat, across from the tour guide, or she would get travel sickness. They naively believed her and agreed to this, which she had insisted be made a formal written condition of her contract with the company. So instead of all of us taking turns to have the panoramic view from the huge front windscreen, she had it all to herself for the whole trip. Yet she never once showed even the slightest sign of travel sickness. I feel sure it was a fabrication, especially in view of the various other devious things she said and did.

She also killed a beetle one day, just for the sake of it. It was happily walking along the side of the path and some people in the tour group were admiring it. It was out in the open, not indoors. But Julia then deliberately stamped on it and killed it. She found this amusing and assumed we would too. I have only twice before seen people do such cruel things so, that incident was, in itself, evidence of a wicked heart. But the main problem was that Julia was so domineering. We pitied her poor husband, a mild mannered man over whom she ruled with a rod of iron.

She literally whistled at him, as one might do with a dog, when we were out walking and she wanted him to come to her. I winced when I heard her do this - and at the supine way in which he obeyed her commands. Early in the tour we were in the hotel dining room and were unfortunate enough to be seated on her table. Julia was being very forceful in conversation, as she could tolerate no view other than her own. Her husband, and most of the group, chose to let her have her own way all the time. They thought it was much easier just to agree with her.

However, I decided not to. I refuse ever to be controlled or dominated by others, as a matter of principle. Therefore I stood up to Julia at the dining table, by which I mean I simply disagreed with her. She couldn't cope with that and lost her temper and stormed off to her room. As she left, she paused to look at her husband, expecting him to follow her. But somehow, on this occasion, he didn't do so. He stayed with the rest of us at the table and we then had a very pleasant dinner in her absence. The atmosphere was utterly transformed by her departure.

From then on Julia bore me a strong grudge and I got many dagger looks. But the most disturbing thing was towards the end of the tour. Julia manoeuvred herself so as to be alone with our children, aged 13 and 11, while we were not present. She waited for an opportunity to get them on their own, away from us and the other tour participants. She then tried to create division between our children and us by asking how they felt about us as parents and by trying to plant resentful thoughts in their minds.

It didn't work, as our kids were already wary of her. All they wanted was to escape. They came straight over to tell us what Julia had been saying about us and the intrusive, sinister questions she had been asking. They were a bit shaken and felt they had been accosted by a wicked witch, which was pretty much what had happened. Later we were able to laugh about it with them. It formed one of those lifelong memories of a shared experience which can strengthen families.

So Julia's scheme backfired, but not for lack of trying. We learned later from the tour organisers that they had written to Julia to say that she would not be allowed on any future tours with their company. That was the first time they had ever had to ban anyone. Yet the point is that she claimed to be a Christian, was part of a church, and used all the language that Christians use. However she was one of the most wicked people I have ever met in a church context. Interestingly, even the tour organiser later used the very word "wicked" when describing her.

### **The wickedness of 'Jeremy', a tour guide who claimed to be a Messianic believer, but was dishonest and devious**

I have been to Israel many times and have met many tour guides, all of whom were excellent. There was just one exception, a man whom I will call 'Jeremy'. He was an American Jew, but also claimed to be a Messianic believer, i.e. that he accepted Jesus (Yeshua) as the Messiah. However, after spending nearly two weeks with him, I concluded that he was false. At the very least, he was dishonest. I also had grave doubts as to whether he was really born again. He seemed to show no signs of having grown in his character and conduct since his alleged conversion, over 40 years earlier.

He did not do anything spectacular, but there were a number of small actions and incidents that caused me to conclude that he was wicked. When we stayed at hotels the tour guide got a room, plus breakfast and a full three course dinner. This was all free of charge for him. However, when we got to one particular hotel, which was especially nice and thus more expensive, Jeremy invited his wife to meet him at the hotel and to stay over. But he did so without informing the hotel and *without paying* anything for her to use the room or to eat in the restaurant.

I was less concerned about the room because it did not cost the hotel anything for her to stay that night. That said, the fact remains that she was meant to pay, and would have had to pay, if she had stayed anywhere else. So the hotel lost the payment that she should have made. What concerned me far more was that he sneaked her into the restaurant in the evening, and again the next morning, as if she was

part of our large tour group. The hotel staff did not check each of our identities and just operated on trust.

So he got her free food, which would have cost at least £40 (\$60) if they had been honest and paid for her. What I also found surprising was that Jeremy was completely relaxed about this and spoke openly to the tour group about the fact that he was sneaking his wife in without paying for her. He wasn't ashamed to speak of it and had obviously done it before. It plainly did not matter to him that what he was doing was dishonest. Moreover it did not appear to matter to him that God will one day judge him for his actions. So he clearly had no fear of God.

Secondly, Jeremy was speaking to us one day about how his wife is observant of the Kosher dietary rules. Therefore she does not eat dairy products and meat at the same time and so on. Jeremy himself is not observant and does not worry about such rules. I am not commenting on that. Each of them are free to do whatever they wish. The point is Jeremy told us that when he does the cooking he breaks the kosher rules, such as by putting milk or cream into a pan along with meat. But he does so *without telling his wife*. Thus she is unaware that he is causing her to break the kosher laws.

The reality is that the Law of Moses is no longer in operation. It ended when Jesus died. However, that is not the point. The issue is that he is deliberately deceiving his own wife about something which matters a great deal *to her*, even if he doesn't choose to be observant himself. If he is willing to lie to her about that, then he would be equally willing to lie to her about other things. He would also be willing to lie to other people. Indeed, he proved that when he deceived the hotel.

Thirdly, we were telling Jeremy about another Jewish tour guide we know who had become a believer in Jesus. When we said this his immediate response was to say "*She is probably just saying she has become a Messianic believer to get tour groups to give her bigger tips.*" When someone makes an accusation against another person, especially if it bursts out of them suddenly, without time to reflect, they are often just saying whatever is *in their own heart*. That is the wicked person simply imputes to other people whatever *he himself thinks or does*.

When Jeremy spontaneously attributed a dishonest motive to the other tour guide he was inadvertently revealing that he himself only pretends to be a Messianic believer to impress tour groups and get bigger tips. This is an important indicator, to which you need to be alert, because it can give you useful insights into the real nature and character of the one *making* the allegation. Do not waste such clues. You need every indicator you can get if you are to maximise your discernment.

Fourthly, each of these indicators matched our overall gut-feeling about Jeremy. They also tallied with the fact that he had never prayed out loud or worshipped or read from the Bible or given any original or personal insight from his own (alleged) spiritual life. He was also snappy and short-tempered and showed no evidence of sanctification. So, if he had truly become a believer over 40 years earlier, as he claimed, it had not yet had any impact on his character, conduct or ethics.