

CHAPTER 4

IDENTIFYING THE WICKED, PART ONE - SOME OF THEIR TRAITS AND METHODS

¹⁸ They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.

Isaiah 44:18 (ESV)

¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 5:13-14 (ESV)

³ But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jon'adab, the son of Shim'e-ah, David's brother; and Jon'adab was a very crafty man.

2 Samuel 13:3 (RSV)

³³ "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! how can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Matthew 12:33-35 (RSV)

*¹ Transgression speaks to the wicked
deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God
before his eyes.*

*² For he flatters himself in his own eyes
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.*

Psalm 36:1-2 (RSV)

*² When pride comes, then comes disgrace;
but with the humble is wisdom.*

*³ The integrity of the upright guides them,
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.*

Proverbs 11:2-3 (RSV)

Always ask yourself whether the person you are dealing with is primarily wise, simple, foolish or wicked. Then act accordingly.

It may be an obvious question, but few people ever ask themselves "*Is this person I am dealing with mainly wicked, foolish, simple or wise?*" How can you assess a situation, or know how to handle a person, unless you ask yourself that basic question? It is an essential first step towards becoming discerning. Once you start to ask it regularly, the accuracy of your discernment, and your wisdom in handling people, will seriously improve.

It can be difficult to identify exactly what a person is, because the boundaries are often blurred, which makes it confusing and unclear. All of us, at certain times, display traits and characteristics from *all* of the four groups. Nobody is 100% in any single group, or at least not all the time. People fluctuate, both up and down, and can surprise you in either direction. However, if a person is significantly or repeatedly wicked, then it is reasonable to categorise him as wicked *overall*. In that case, you should not waste any time trying to:

- i) gain his approval
- ii) educate, train or improve him
- iii) get his cooperation
- iv) rely on him
- v) confide in him
- vi) employ him or promote him

On the contrary, always be on your guard when you're with a wicked person, especially if he is a false or apostate Christian, rather than an unbeliever. Also expect to receive hatred and malice from them. If the person is only a *fool*, rather than wicked, then (i) to (vi) above will still apply, whether or not he claims to be a Christian. However, you will not necessarily receive hatred or malice from a fool, unless you rebuke or correct him, in which case you will. That said, the chances are you will need to do so, especially if he is an employee or someone you supervise.

Take careful note of how people speak about and treat others, not just how they relate to you. That will give you a far more accurate picture of what they are really like

You can receive guidance as to a person's real nature, and how he will speak about *you* by taking note of how he speaks about *other people*. Whatever he does to them he will do to you. Whatever he says about them he will say about you. Therefore if a person is two-faced and malicious in what they say about others, they will be the same towards you. It would be naïve to assume anything else. Thus you can significantly increase your discernment by observing how they treat others, rather than focusing solely on how they treat you.

When a person is with you, they will be guarded as to what they say to you or about you. But they will be much more open in what they say to you about others. Therefore it is when they speak to or about others that you are most likely to see their real nature and the extent to which you can trust them. So don't waste, or overlook, this vital source of information. This is vital if you are in a senior position at work or in a church. If so, people are on their best behaviour when they are with you, but they are their real selves when they are with others, whom they are not seeking to impress or get something from.

Take particular note if there is a *mismatch* between how a person acts towards you, or how they treat others when you are present, and how they behave when you are not there. If a person is sincere and genuine, their behaviour when you are present should be the same as it is when you are not there. Also their treatment of others should be the same as their treatment of you. Therefore if they are nicer to you than they are to others, that *means something*.

Equally, if they are nicer to others when in your presence than in your absence that also means something. Either way, you need to take note of it and see it as your cue to dig deeper, search further and find out more about them. Don't just brush it aside and assume it has no significance or that there must be some innocent explanation. It *does* have significance, and there probably *isn't* an innocent explanation.

The most likely reason is that the person is putting on an act, either with others or with you. Therefore find out which it is. The likely explanation is they are putting on an act when you are present. That should be your starting assumption, until the opposite is proved. What is more, it should matter to you, because putting on an act, or being two faced, means they are false. Moreover, that falseness will probably extend much further than you presently realise.

That is why extensive enquiries are needed, to establish exactly how false they are, why they are being two faced, and what harm they are doing that you don't yet know about. In chapter five below I tell the story of 'Jasmine' who used to work for me. Her behaviour towards me was far nicer than her behaviour

towards others. I didn't notice that for a long time, primarily because I wasn't looking. But if I had been looking, and if I had spotted that inconsistency in her conduct, I could have carried out further enquiries. Then I would have found out the truth about her much earlier than I did.

Also take careful note of how people behave and speak when they have had too much to drink. That is when their inhibitions are reduced and so their real nature is more likely to be revealed.

You sometimes hear people say that when they have drunk too much they are “*not themselves*” or that they are acting or speaking “*out of character*”. I don't believe that. In fact, it is the very opposite. It was actually while they were drunk, and their inhibitions were reduced or removed, that their *real* nature was being revealed. While they were sober, they may have been able to hide what they really are, or what they really think. But alcohol loosens their tongue and causes them to do the things they had been *wanting* to do all along, but had held themselves back from doing.

Therefore, when a man becomes aggressive when drunk, and gets into fights, it is not the drink which *caused* him to be violent. It merely *revealed*, and let loose, the aggression that was *already there*, latent, within him. So he was already a violent man and his real nature is, and always was, violent. His nature did not temporarily become violent due to drink. Your objective is to discern the real nature of other people and you cannot afford to waste this source of information. So don't ignore it, or assume that the drunken person was ‘acting out of character’.

On the contrary, the thing they did or said while drunk shows their real nature and you need to be guided by that. You must not think that it would be unfair to rely on it. You can, and you must, take careful note of it. I say that wistfully, because I know a number of people who said or did aggressive, promiscuous or malicious things while drunk. I did not, at the time, realise its significance, or appreciate that I needed to take those things into account when weighing them up. Had I done so I would have realised much earlier that they were not what they purported to be and were not to be trusted.

Likewise, if a person does or says something that surprises you, don't assume they are “acting out of character”.

There may also be times, even when people are not drunk, where they surprise you by saying or doing things which they don't usually say or do. That said, it is more likely that they have actually done such things, but you simply haven't *noticed* it so far. Or it may be that they have, up to then, managed to control themselves when in *your presence*. If you are a boss or a leader, or if you are known to be honest, then people will behave better when they are with you than they do with others, when you are not there.

They may work for you, or you may know them from church. Then they do or say something dishonest or spiteful and you are surprised, because they have not done so before, at least not in your presence. Or, it could be that you hear about something they did or said when you were not there. The question you have to address is which version of that person is the real one? That is was it the real them who did or said that nasty thing? Or is their real nature the one which you had previously come to know in your dealings with them? You must not leap to conclusions, or give them the benefit of the doubt.

Don't automatically assume that the impression you had formed of them accurately reflects their real nature and that their one-off act of misbehaviour was an aberration and has no significance. You cannot afford to make any such assumptions and there is no reason why you should. Nothing that anybody does is ever “out of character,” unless they have been lied to, as we saw earlier, and are acting in reliance upon what they wrongly believe to be the facts. Except in cases of deception, what a person does is a reflection of their real character, no matter how much it seems to differ from what they usually do.

Jesus said that “*out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks*”. That is that whatever is within our heart will come out. That applies equally to our actions as to our words. Therefore if the thing was actually said or done, and there is clear proof of the fact, you can be sure that it reflects what is in that person’s heart. That is the case even if you hadn’t noticed it before, or if they don’t usually behave in that way. Therefore don’t brush it aside or fail to take it into account.

You cannot rely on appearances. The wicked may seem nice, but they operate in secret, plotting and scheming behind your back. That makes them much harder to detect.

One of the features of the wicked, whether they are religious or non-religious, is that they hide their true nature, especially if you have power or authority over them. If you are their boss, the wicked are all the more likely to pretend to be one thing, whilst actually being the very opposite. They will act as if they were loyal, and cared about their work or their clients, but the reality is that they aren’t and they don’t. However, you won’t discover that two-facedness, unless you check on them closely, because they are so skilled at hiding their real character:

*“.....they take pleasure in falsehood.
They bless with their mouths,
but inwardly they curse.”*

Psalm 62:4 (b) (RSV)

*Their tongue is a deadly arrow;
it speaks deceitfully.
With their mouths they all speak cordially to their neighbors,
but in their hearts they set traps for them.*

Jeremiah 9:8 (NIV)

Instead of doing their work as they should, a wicked employee is often plotting and scheming to exploit, undermine or attack you or others. The same is true of the wicked in general:

¹² *The wicked plots against the righteous
and gnashes his teeth at him,*

Psalm 37:12 (ESV)

² *hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
from the scheming of evildoers,*

³ *who whet their tongues like swords,
who aim bitter words like arrows,*

⁴ *shooting from ambush at the blameless,
shooting at him suddenly and without fear.*

⁵ *They hold fast to their evil purpose;
they talk of laying snares secretly,
thinking, “Who can see us?”*

Psalm 64:2-5 (RSV)

The wicked are not just opportunists, who seize the chance to attack you if it arises, but otherwise have no plans. It is also in their nature to plot and scheme against you. Most of the time they operate covertly, especially if you are their boss or a senior colleague. They pretend to be something other than what they really are. But, behind the scenes, they are busily undermining you and plotting to attack you and those who support you:

*for behold, the wicked bend the bow;
they have fitted their arrow to the string
to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart;*

Psalm 11:2 (ESV)

*Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of ruin
and meditate treachery all day long.
Psalm 38:12 (ESV)*

*Arrogant men have hidden a trap for me,
and with cords they have spread a net,
by the wayside they have set snares for me.
Psalm 140:5 (RSV)*

I have been speaking primarily from the perspective of a manager, supervisor, or business owner, because that is what I was for nearly twenty years. However, the essential point is the wicked person's tendency to "go underground" or to "operate in the shadows". They do that even with people who are not their bosses. That is how most of them operate, whoever they are with.

The wicked tend to attack you when you are already involved in some other crisis or difficulty.

The wicked plot and scheme and plan their wrongdoings in advance, but they also have a keen sense of timing and an eye for an opportunity. Thus they are able to seize the moment when it arises. That is partly due to their own feral shrewdness, but it is mainly because they are demonically guided. The demons know all about what is happening in your life and will tell the wicked when the best time to attack would be. They can therefore sense when you are already weakened, or distracted by some other crisis. It is precisely at such times that they will go for you:

*They came upon me in the day of my calamity;
but the Lord was my stay.
Psalm 18:18 (RSV)*

Like sharks, the wicked can 'smell blood' and sense that a certain moment would be the best time to launch an attack. That is one reason why the wicked emerge from hiding at such times and suddenly join your other persecutors, to kick you when you are down:

¹⁵ *But at my stumbling they gathered in glee,
they gathered together against me;
cripples whom I knew not
slandered me without ceasing;
¹⁶ they impiously mocked more and more,
gnashing at me with their teeth.
Psalm 35:15-16 (RSV)*

The wicked also take pleasure from other people's misfortunes.

The wicked also take pleasure from our times of difficulty. They enjoy it for its own sake, even if there is nothing in it for them. We see that trait in the Arab nations which surround Israel and how they enjoyed seeing God's people in distress. God says He will punish them for it. If a person takes pleasure from the fact that you are down, or being attacked, the chances are they are wicked, as Israel's Arab neighbours were, and still are. In this passage from Obadiah. God is pronouncing judgement on the people of Edom, in what is now called Jordan, because they 'gloated' over Israel's misfortune:

¹⁰ *For the violence done to your brother Jacob,
shame shall cover you,*

and you shall be cut off for ever.
¹¹ *On the day that you stood aloof,
on the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
and foreigners entered his gates
and cast lots for Jerusalem,
you were like one of them.*
¹² *But you should not have gloated over the day of your brother
in the day of his misfortune;
you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah
in the day of their ruin;
you should not have boasted
in the day of distress.*

Obadiah 10-12 (RSV)

Two other features of the wicked are that they hate the righteous and also want to be feared.

One feature that emerges over and over again is that the wicked feel a lot of hatred. They especially hate the godly, simply for being godly. So, the more mature you become as a disciple, and the more you take God's Word seriously and obey it, the more the wicked will hate you. It is inevitable, because it is an integral part of the nature of the wicked. Therefore, where you see intense, irrational, inexplicable hatred, which is based on nothing tangible, it is likely to be explained in that way.

¹³ *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.*
1 John 3:13 (ESV)

*Bloodthirsty men hate one who is blameless,
and the wicked seek his life.*
Proverbs 29:10 (RSV)

Secondly, the wicked are proud and arrogant and have a strong desire to be important. In particular, they want to be feared and will try to intimidate others, as a way of gaining control. However, my point is that there is also a *desire* there. They want to be feared for the pleasure that it gives to them, not only for what they can achieve by intimidating people. They simply enjoy it. Therefore they are alarmed by, and resentful of, anybody who refuses to be afraid of them.

We see both of these character traits in Haman, the wicked official who was second in command to King Ahasuerus, in the book of Esther. When Haman was promoted to that position it fed his ego and he loved the power and status that it brought. However, he noticed that Mordecai, the Jew, the cousin of Queen Esther, refused either to honour or fear him. Haman found that intolerable and he was filled with wrath against Mordecai and began to plot against him:

⁹ *And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mor'decai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mor'decai.* ¹⁰ *Nevertheless Haman restrained himself, and went home; and he sent and fetched his friends and his wife Zeresh.* ¹¹ *And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and the servants of the king.* ¹² *And Haman added, "Even Queen Esther let no one come with the king to the banquet she prepared but myself. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king."* ¹³ *Yet all this does me no good, so long as I see Mor'decai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."* ¹⁴ *Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mor'decai hanged upon it; then go merrily with the king to the dinner." This counsel pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.*

Esther 5:9-14 (RSV)

Therefore, be alert for such traits in others. Wherever you see a person who *wants to be feared*, or who shows any signs of *enjoying it*, then beware. He is either already wicked, or is well on the way to becoming so. You cannot afford to overlook such warning signs if you want to identify the wicked.

The wicked also hate those who have treated them well. They return evil for good and show resentment instead of gratitude.

Another sign which is typically found in the wicked is that they tend to hate those who have done them good or helped them. To any right-thinking person, that is an irrational and even a perverse response, but amongst the wicked, it is very common. When you encounter people who *'return evil for good,'* or hate those who have done them good, the likelihood is you are dealing with someone wicked. It is typical of them, so you need to watch out for it:

² *For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,
speaking against me with lying tongues.*

³ *They beset me with words of hate,
and attack me without cause.*

⁴ *In return for my love they accuse me,
even as I make prayer for them.*

⁵ *So they reward me evil for good,
and hatred for my love.*

Psalm 109:2-5 (RSV)

The wicked simply hate godly people as a species. They feel convicted by them, merely by being in their presence. But they don't want to deal with that conviction constructively, by repenting, which is obviously what they should do. Therefore they resort to hate instead, as an alternative way of relieving any guilt that they feel. Also, godly people just remind them of God and, since they hate God, it is natural that they will also hate and mistreat those who remind them of Him:

***Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,
2 Timothy 3:12 (RSV)***

Those who do acts of kindness, or who show mercy and grace, tend to be within the group called the godly or righteous. That group is made up of people who are either wise or simple. The hatred that the wicked feel towards them may be as a result of the kindness they have been shown. Or it may just be due to the fact that those who show them kindness are godly people. Most probably, both factors are involved simultaneously. An example of this 'syndrome' is 'Sally' who worked for me years ago when I was a junior partner in a previous law firm.

She had a son in primary school. Shortly after she joined us she asked to book some time off for part of a morning, to attend his school assembly. It involved some kind of drama. So I agreed to her request on that occasion. It then emerged that these dramas were staged every week. Therefore, I voluntarily offered to alter her hours on a regular basis, so she could see all of them. She eagerly accepted that offer. Some weeks later I innocently asked her how the dramas were going, just in the course of making conversation.

To my surprise, there was a sudden look of resentment in her face, and a contemptuous tone in her voice. She said *"Are you expecting me to be grateful or something?"* I was taken aback, not only by the strangeness of her response, but by the bitterness with which her words were spoken. There was real hatred in her voice. Yet, Sally had only been with us for a few months and I had done her no harm. On the contrary, I had done her quite a lot of good, as with the weekly school dramas, but in other ways too. Her animosity arose for a number of reasons.

One of those was her sense of being in my debt for the small favour I had done her. She was not willing to let herself feel any gratitude for it. But that created a feeling of turmoil or conflict within herself and her solution to that was to show contempt instead. She needed a sense of grievance to justify herself in not feeling any gratitude. She then created that by persuading herself that what I had done for her was smaller *than it should have been*, or that I had selfish motives for doing it. In fact, I had no ulterior motives at all. I simply wanted to be cooperative with all staff and it was my general policy to agree to all reasonable requests.

The point is I had done Sally some good, albeit in a small way, but she repaid me for it with evil, not only by her resentment, but also by her intemperate outburst. That response, in itself, was a sign of her own general wickedness, which manifested itself in many other ways. Accordingly, it was a clue or warning sign that I needed to take note of. Moreover, that indication that she was wicked was corroborated by her other conduct and her poisonous attitude in other ways.

There was no doubt that Sally was wicked. Her later behaviour proved that, but I could have reached that conclusion much earlier if I had understood, and taken note of, her ingratitude and her resentful outburst on that day. I should have recognised that these episodes were neither meaningless, nor random, but signified something very important about her. That willingness to take note of all kinds of indicators is one of the key messages I am seeking to convey in this book, so that you can be actively on the lookout for such signs, and not waste them.

Wicked people despise and exploit those who treat them well, or to whom they are indebted. They will often repay kindness with contempt and seek to take advantage of it.

The wicked will despise and seek to exploit those who treat them well. Kindness and generosity are inexplicable and alien concepts to them. They are assumed to be evidence of weakness, for which they have contempt. They will also see that ‘weakness’ as an opportunity, which they should exploit and capitalise upon. To them, that is the natural response to any act of generosity or, as they would see it, stupidity and naivety. By contrast, a wise, or even a simple, person will see it very differently.

In the first place, the wise and the simple will not see your kindness or decency as weakness. But, secondly, even if you really are weak, they will not see that weakness as an opportunity to press in and grab more. Instead, they will consider your generosity to be something good, for which they should be thankful. That stark difference between the ways in which other people *react* to your kindness and generosity can become for you yet another ‘litmus test’ or sign. It can help you to identify the wicked earlier, and more accurately, than you might do otherwise.

The story of ‘Stephen and Rhoda’ - their ingratitude, manipulation and love of money

Let me give an example, from real life to show how these tests can work in practice. ‘Stephen and Rhoda’, a couple in a church I was once part of, got themselves into a serious problem with a bank, due to a failed business venture. They spoke to me about it, because I was in their church, and also because I was a solicitor, with experience of business. I agreed to help them and spent many hours, over about two months, intervening, negotiating and advising, so as to minimise their losses and reduce their debt. I spoke to their bank and to their former business partner.

The end result was that instead of having to pay the bank over £18,000, plus legal costs, they only paid about £4,500, and no legal costs at all. Moreover, I didn’t charge them anything for my own services. I did it all for free, in my own time, as one fellow believer for another. After all of that, you might expect them to be appreciative, and even to return the favour, if only in a small way. Sadly, they weren’t, and they didn’t, not even to the slightest extent. They never gave me any token of appreciation, such as a bottle of wine, as any right-thinking person would have.

They didn't even send me a Thank You card. In telling you all of this, I am not seeking for your sympathy. I didn't help them to get myself a bottle of wine or a card. I am just trying to zoom in on some more of the little tell-tale signs that can help you to identify the wicked. So, on that occasion, the absence of any trace of appreciation was an important indicator and should have been spotted as an early warning sign. Such things may seem little, but they must not be overlooked if you want to assess people's characters.

However, it didn't end there. A situation developed later involving the wife, 'Rhoda'. She tried to capitalise further upon my generosity, which she had wrongly interpreted as a sign of weakness. I had suggested in a meeting that the church should pay for, or at least subsidise, the costs of a conference *for young ladies* which was happening two months later. Rhoda had a number of daughters and nieces who were interested in going to it, but she then began to push for more. She was determined to get all she could, rather than simply accept what was on offer.

She said she wanted to drive the girls to this conference herself, rather than let one of them drive. (They were all over 18). However, she said their 5-seater car would not be big enough. So, she asked if the church would hire a 7-seater car for them to use instead. Moreover, she didn't just ask for it politely, hoping it might be a possibility. She was really pushy, not only because she was determined to get what she wanted, but because she was confident that I would give way. She had seen that I had previously been generous with my time, in helping with their bank problem.

Therefore she assumed I would be a pushover on this occasion and that she could manoeuvre me into giving them even more. However, our conversation did not go according to her expectations. I was not willing to read from her "*script*" by bowing to her requests. I said Rhoda should get one of the girls, 'Rachel', to drive instead, so that Rhoda wouldn't be needed. I also said that, in any case, I didn't think the church should pay for the hire of a 7-seater, as the offer had only been to help with the conference fees and petrol costs, not car hire.

Any decent person, faced with an answer like that, would accept the refusal graciously. The offer in the first place was a gift, to which nobody was ever entitled. So there was no basis for her to grab for anything, let alone to push for more. The next day I got a phone call from Rhoda saying that, although Rachel had a driving licence, she did not want to drive as far as that. She said they had "*discussed it as a family*" and had decided that they wanted to go to "*a different conference, closer to home*".

Again, in Rhoda's mind, that was my cue to bow to her wishes and do her bidding. Instead, I said: "*The church offered to pay to help with the fees for that specific young ladies conference. The one you are now asking to go on is for adults generally, and has nothing to do with young ladies.*" She then got irritated that I was not doing what she wanted and made a revealing comment which showed her real motives. She said: "*We can afford to pay for it ourselves. It's not about the money.*" In fact, as I explain below, that was exactly what it was about.

Take careful note, and start to make enquiries, if a person spontaneously denies something of which you haven't accused them, or which you haven't even mentioned.

Take careful note when a person denies something of which you aren't accusing them, and which you haven't even mentioned. It suggests that the thought or deed which they are denying is the very thing that they *are* thinking or doing. Being alert to such spontaneous denials gives you a helpful indicator of what people are really thinking. They have a tendency to blurt out *whatever is actually on their minds*. Therefore do not be thrown off course by the fact that they express it as a denial. Simply note the words they actually say, and be guided by those, not by the denial.

Thus, when Rhoda said "*It's not about the money*", all I needed to do was delete the word '*not*' and it then became a true statement. So, when she spoke about not trying to get money, I again departed from the '*script*' that she had in mind for me to read from. She had hoped I would be worried about offending

her and that I would say: “*Oh dear, Rhoda, I wasn’t suggesting you were motivated by the desire to get money. Of course, what you’re asking for is fine. We’ll go along with whatever you prefer.*” That was what I was meant to say, if the conversation had gone as she intended.

Instead I said: “Well that’s good then, Rhoda. If you can afford to pay for yourselves you can simply go to the other conference instead. Then nobody needs to be consulted at all. Just go ahead and go to that one.” My answer was surely reasonable and I was fully entitled to give it. Neither I, nor the church, were under any obligation to give them anything. The original offer was a generous one, but it was also specific. It related only to the conference for young women. Nobody was under any duty to help at all, even with that, let alone with the other conference, which Rhoda now preferred.

So, I was doing nothing wrong in choosing not to help, and she had no valid basis for feeling any sense of grievance. Nonetheless, she felt aggrieved and said she would now ring ‘Philip’, one of the elders, and ask him what he thought. Remember, she had just said they *could* afford to pay for themselves, and that money was *not* the issue. If so, why was she continuing to push and shove for money? Also, why was she speaking in such an angry tone, rather than making a polite request?

Again, I responded calmly and said: “*That’s fine. Go ahead and ring ‘Philip’. I’m simply telling you what I think. Others must judge for themselves.*” When I said that, there was an icy silence. She was angry because she was not getting her own way. I wasn’t bowing to her wishes, as she had expected me to do, based on my previous kindness. The point is that the meaning of that past help had been totally misconstrued. She had wrongly seen it as evidence of my weakness, which she had expected to be able to exploit.

Despite what Rhoda had said about it not being about money, she was later overheard at church complaining angrily that I was against providing the money for the 7-seater and conference fees. She made such a fuss that the person to whom she spoke gave her a gift of £50 himself, to help with the costs of the 7 seater. However, when it turned out later that she didn’t actually hire any 7-seater, she didn’t return that £50 gift to him. She kept it and never told him that she hadn’t used it for that purpose. Even on that basis alone, her claim not to be seeking money was obviously untrue.

The wicked will accuse others of the very things they themselves are doing. So, you can gain insights, and be guided, by taking careful note of the *accusations* that people make.

The wicked often accuse others of doing *the very things they are doing*. They assume others have the same sinister motives and evil intentions that they have. Moreover they tend to be quite open in saying so. That gives you an opportunity to gain valuable insights into *their* real nature. As for why they do this, I can suggest a few reasons. Firstly, they like to divert attention away from themselves and from the bad things they are doing. One way to do that is to accuse others of doing those same things, or of having those traits.

By saying such things, they hope to turn your eyes away from them and towards the person they’re accusing. Secondly, many of them lack imagination or creativity. It’s not easy to dream up a series of false accusations that are all completely invented. Therefore they use their own sins, motives and plans as a ready-made source of accusations. That way it is much quicker and easier to come up with them. All the details for the story can then be obtained from their own memory, rather than having to be invented, which would require a lot of imagination, as well as thinking time.

Thirdly, a further advantage, from their perspective, of using incidents from their own lives is that it makes their account sound more convincing and coherent. It sounds more real precisely because it is an incident from real life that they are describing, albeit from their own life. A fourth reason is that, because they are wicked, they tend to be cynical. Therefore, they naturally assume that most other people are like them, and have the same selfish attitudes and dishonest intentions. They may sometimes genuinely *believe* the accusations they make, but not always.

Moreover, much of the time, they are actually right in the accusations they make about others and the person really does do or say those things, or have those motives. So, an accusation may well tell you something factually true about the person being accused or criticised. However, whether it is true or false, it can also tell you something about *the person making it*. That insight may be of great value to you. Therefore, whenever an accusation is made by person A, about person B, you must first ask yourself whether it is true and, if so, what you should do about it.

However, you should then ask yourself what the accusation *also* tells you about person A. Firstly, *why* is he making the allegation and, secondly, *how does he know about it*, or how has he managed to discern it or find out about it? Although the wicked tell many lies, their accusations are *not always* false. They are skilled at seeing wickedness and falseness in others. Therefore, sometimes, their information is accurate, because the wicked are very observant and discerning, albeit in an ungodly way. So, they aren't *always* making such accusations to divert attention away from themselves.

They can often be manifesting their own feral shrewdness, or their demonic guidance, both of which enable them to see things which naïve Christians can't see. Therefore, even if an entirely *accurate* accusation is made by person A about person B, you still need to say to yourself "*How did person A get the discernment to see that, or how did they find out what person B was doing, when the rest of us had no idea? Is his discernment due to being wise and godly, or is he wicked himself and just displaying his own feral cunning and/or the 'assistance' of demons?*"

Never assume that just because a statement, accusation or prophecy turns out to be correct, the person who made it must generally be truthful and reliable.

Note the way in which apostle Paul dealt with the slave girl at Philippi who had a 'spirit of divination.' She met Paul and his colleagues and followed after them, *accurately* announcing to everyone, "*These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.*" What that girl was *saying* was absolutely true, but that did not mean that *she herself* was true, or that she could be trusted.

¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸ And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. ¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers;

Acts 16:16-19 (RSV)

In most churches today, anyone displaying that kind of discernment would immediately be accepted as having great spiritual gifts and even put into a leadership position. Few, if any, questions would be asked as to where that insight was *coming from*. That was not Paul's approach. He saw that, far from operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, she was demonised and that the information was coming from the demons inside her. Instead of accepting her 'endorsement', Paul cast the demon out of her, to the great annoyance of her owners, who made a lot of money from her fortune-telling.

You might ask why a demon would cause the girl to make a *true* statement about Paul and his message. It actually makes perfect sense. The demon wanted Paul's followers, and the public, and even Paul himself, to be taken in by that girl's endorsement. It hoped they would then accept her *subsequent* false statements and false prophecies. Had they done so, enormous damage would have been done to the church at Philippi, as is being done today in many churches, whose leaders do not have Paul's discernment. They naively accept false people and false prophecies, without questioning their nature or source.

In that way huge numbers of false members, and false leaders, have crept into our churches, unnoticed and unchallenged, and have done terrible harm. A person in your church may make a prophecy or

purport to operate in a spiritual gift and what they say comes true. If so, do not just assume, without any further thought or enquiry, that they themselves must be true and can therefore be trusted and listened to. Instead, begin to look carefully into their lives and characters, and their other statements, and evaluate them.

Ask yourself whether, in every other way, they are consistent, wholesome, have integrity and teach accurate doctrine. If they don't, they are not to be trusted, or relied on, even if they were right on that particular point. You must make yourself harder to deceive, so the demons can't get a hook into your mouth by simply attaching some true statement to it, as a form of 'bait'. You have to aim to be more intelligent and careful than a fish is when it bites on an angler's hook, merely because the bait is real food.

Likewise, the wicked will frequently accuse *you* of what they themselves have done, or are still doing. Therefore you can often also identify the wicked by the things they accuse *you* of.

The wicked will also accuse *you* of things. In fact, the more godly and honest you are, the more they will accuse you. Accusation is a weapon, which the wicked are skilled in using. It runs in the family. The Bible says they are of "[*their*] father, the Devil" and that he is "*the accuser of the brethren*". So you must expect the wicked to make false accusations against Christians. It used to amaze me that so many people would accuse me of things. I have been accused of being a liar, a conman and a fraudster. However, I came to realise that they were just describing themselves.

They took their own nature and imputed that to me, as if I was like them. It used to upset me, but I'm used to it now, and even expect it. If a person falsely accuses me today then, rather than get upset, I take a closer look at them, to see what I can learn *about them from their accusing words*. The likelihood is that whatever they accuse you of is exactly what they are doing themselves. So, their accusations can give you an early warning sign of who, and what, they are. Of course, that only applies to *false* accusations, not those of which you are actually guilty.

The fact that the wicked go about things in a sly, manipulative, indirect way, rather than be straight forward, can actually help you to identify them.

Another warning sign as to their real nature, is that the wicked don't operate straight-forwardly. They don't tell you their real aims, motives and reasons. Also, instead of making direct requests, and being willing for you to say no, they will take an indirect route. They will try to manoeuvre you into agreeing with them or doing their bidding, even unwittingly. They know that if they were honest and direct in their requests, you might say no. But they don't want you to say no, so they tell you something less than, or other than, the truth so as to prevent you from realising you are being used.

You may recall the story about 'Rhoda' who told me that her whole family wished to go to a different conference, rather than send her daughters (and nieces) on the young ladies conference which the church had offered to subsidise. I didn't agree to subsidise that alternative conference, so Rhoda then tried to manipulate me, and in a devious way. This is worth noting, because you will come across this same technique. She said her niece, 'Rachel', didn't want to drive so far as to go to the young ladies conference and therefore preferred one more nearby.

I found that reasoning rather feeble and was not persuaded by it. In fact, I didn't even think it was true. But even if it was, I felt it had no merit. So, I didn't alter my position. Therefore, when Rhoda saw that that argument had failed, she even tried to bring God into it and said "*Rachel really feels that God is leading her to go to the other conference.*" Rhoda's intention was that I should be manipulated by that spiritual-sounding claim and say "*Oh I see. In that case, that will be fine, if that's what God wants. Who am I to disagree with God?*"

The implication was that if I disagreed with Rhoda I would be disagreeing with God and obstructing His purposes, which He had supposedly revealed to Rachel, though not to me. Of course, it is possible for God to speak to another person rather than me, and also to provide them with some guidance, to which I should pay attention. However, when that is truly the case, it would never be presented in this self-serving, insincere way. Neither would it be spoken of in an irritated or aggressive tone. Be very slow to accept that God has spoken to, or through, any person who shows any signs of being carnal, selfish, devious or manipulative.

The manner, tone, approach and all-round character of that person are vital indicators of whether you can give any credence to what they claim to have heard from God. In any event, what other people claim to have heard from God is of no relevance to you, unless you also believe it is from God, based on your own discernment. In the absence of such a conviction *on your own part*, you should pay no attention to such a claim from them. On the contrary, the very fact that a person is using God's name to try to get you to let them have their way is the most appalling of all forms of manipulation.

As Rhoda said it, my stomach turned, as it was so insincere. I said "If Rachel feels God is saying that to her she will, no doubt, want to go to the other conference. However, that is entirely a matter for her, not me. I can only be guided by what I believe God is saying to me, not to Rachel". The insincerity of Rhoda's claim was further shown by the way she then reacted to my not accepting what she was saying. She immediately became irritated and angry. A person who has truly heard from God, about what they themselves should do, has no basis to be annoyed with anybody else who has not heard from God in that regard.

Why should God speak to me about *them*, unless He wants *me* to do something? Moreover, the very fact that they do become angry is further evidence that they have not heard from God at all and are simply seeking to manipulate you. Be wary of anybody who seeks to use what God has allegedly said to *them* as a basis for *you* taking some action, or doing as they wish *you* to do. God does not operate in that way. If God wants you to do something, He will also speak to *you* about it. He will generally only use other people to give confirmation, after He has spoken to you, not to give the main message.

Having said that, if you are not listening to God, or are too entrenched in your current view to be able to hear Him, God may sometimes use another person. He may speak to them about an issue and get them to raise it with you. If so, it will be a new idea, from your perspective. However, when God does truly speak to you through another person, they are unlikely to pass the message on in a bad-tempered or domineering manner. So, when someone speaks to you in that way, and claims to be speaking on God's behalf, do not do as they say.

See it as evidence of their carnality and manipulation, not as God's guidance to you. It could, conceivably, be an innocent mistake, whereby they wrongly think God has spoken to them. However, that is unlikely, especially if they use it as a basis to change *your* plans, rather than merely acting on it themselves. Those are not the actions of a sincere person who is merely mistaken. Such a person might wrongly believe God has spoken to them but, if they are sincere, they would not seek to coerce or manipulate you. They would just act on it for themselves, irrespective of what you do.

The mere fact that a person is industrious, and a useful, effective worker, does not mean they are also faithful and trustworthy.

One of the many mistakes I have made as an employer was to assume that if a person is an excellent worker, and is productive and hardworking, then they cannot be wicked and are probably faithful. That does not follow and you must not be misled by such factors, not only in the workplace, but also in churches. So, the mere fact that some church member does a lot for the church, and is very efficient, does not mean that they cannot be wicked and must be trustworthy.

Some people are just more efficient than others, but that has nothing to do with whether they are wicked. I made this error with ‘Janet’ who worked for me as a costs draftsman and costs negotiator. She was one of the most energetic, vigorous employees I have ever had. She transformed the costs department when she took it over from ‘Chloe’ and ‘Carla’, who were lazy and ineffectual. So, when Janet took over, and I saw what a great job she was doing, I was delighted with her. That was fair enough, in itself. I had good reason to be impressed with her output and effectiveness.

Where I went wrong was to infer from all of that that she could also be *trusted*. In fact, she was just as false as her predecessors, indeed more so. I therefore made the mistake of taking advice from Janet about events and individuals in the office, and even confided in her. But she was actually false and manipulative and misled me in many ways. I should simply have valued her work-rate and skill, but should not have let those things take my eye off the other factors that I needed to look at to gauge whether she could be trusted.

When person A purports to be assisting you in a dispute with person B, and tells you what B is saying, consider it possible that A may, in fact, be working for B, not for you.

If you get into conflicts in a workplace or church, you may find that person A seeks to assist you against person B, or purports to act as a go-between. They may tell you things which B has said or give you their views as to how B may be thinking, or planning, or what deal they might settle for. Because I employed so many staff, that scenario arose a few times. The problem is that, if you are naïve, you may find out later that A was actually supporting B all along, not you, and was passing them information from and about you.

That very situation arose with ‘Janet’, in whom I placed a lot of trust. A dispute arose with a nasty secretary, ‘Yolanda’ who had brought an employment tribunal claim. Janet then approached me and said Yolanda had been texting and phoning her about her case. Janet purported to be distressed about receiving these. She said she was on my side and that she felt embarrassed by Yolanda contacting her in this way and putting her in an “*awkward position*”.

Partly because she was such an excellent worker, I assumed Janet was loyal to me. Therefore at various points in the case, we discussed how it was going and what Yolanda was claiming, and alleging. I naively thought that Janet’s input could be useful, and that I might learn some things about Yolanda’s mood and plans by hearing what she had (allegedly) been saying to Janet. I did not realise until later that Janet was actually helping Yolanda against me and was passing information to *her* about *my* mood, expectations and plans.

That possibility had not occurred to me at the time. Janet didn’t actually learn much, because I didn’t reveal all my thoughts anyway. But, I probably revealed more than I intended, and more than I was aware of. The wicked are clever and can pick up a lot more from you than you realise. Looking back, I ought to have known that a person as devious and nasty as Yolanda would not have made any error in contacting Janet and discussing the case with her. I assumed that Yolanda had simply not realised that Janet was loyal to me.

Actually, Yolanda had not made any misjudgement at all. She had accurately discerned Janet’s real nature and knew perfectly well that Janet was on her side, not mine. It was I who was getting it wrong. When such a situation arises, instead of assuming that your enemy has misjudged your ally, consider it possible that it is *you* who have done so. Be open to the possibility that your enemy understands the real facts better than you do. Indeed, when you come to think of it, what are the respective chances of the wicked person being wrong or of you being wrong?

In my experience, the wicked rarely make any mistakes when it comes to identifying another wicked person. Therefore I ought to have been guided by the very fact that Yolanda had rung and texted Janet and that she *continued to do so*. That was my cue to *reassess Janet*, not to confide in her or seek her

help. It is another example of how you can pick up valuable insights from your enemy's assessments of people, where those differ from yours.

Never just assume that the wicked person has got it wrong. They very probably haven't. Be willing to check and reconsider things carefully and to see whether you can benefit indirectly from *their discernment*, albeit that it is of the feral variety. It is still far more likely to be accurate than yours. By the way, I did not always get these things wrong. See the story below about 'Mavis and Keira' and how I spotted from the outset that Keira was reporting my views back to Mavis. I therefore made sure, during that dispute, always to say exactly what I *wanted* Keira to pass on and nothing else.

An example of how the wicked scheme and manipulate is the episode where some of the leading men in Babylon conspired to get Daniel into trouble with the King.

Here is an example from the Bible of how wicked people can attempt to manipulate events, so as to get their way and undermine a righteous person. The background to this account is that Daniel had been a faithful public servant under King Nebuchadnezzar. Then he was promoted again by King Darius. The men under him, who were unbelievers, were envious and wanted to bring Daniel down. They devised a plot by which they aimed to cause the King to fall out with Daniel and to remove him from his high position. This is how they went about it:

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. ³ Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom; but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

⁶ Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked."⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict.

¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. ¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. ¹² Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the interdict, "O king! Did you not sign an interdict, that any man who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked."¹³ Then they answered before the king, "That Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no heed to you, O king, or the interdict you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed, and set his mind to deliver Daniel; and he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. ¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement[to the king, and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no interdict or ordinance which the king establishes can be changed."¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve

continually, deliver you!”¹⁷ And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

Daniel 6:1-17 (RSV)

By their cunning they manipulated the King himself. Their aim was to trap the King into binding himself by his own words, so that he had no option but to execute Daniel. This is a common approach taken by manipulators, where they themselves lack the power to act. They pursue their aims indirectly by causing others, who do have power, to use it to do what they want. So the King was obliged, by his own commands, to kill Daniel, even though he didn't actually want to:

¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace, and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. ¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ When he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish and said to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! ²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.” ²³ Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ And the king commanded, and those men who had accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions— they, their children, and their wives; and before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Daniel 6:18-24 (RSV)

The plot went wrong for them because God intervened and closed the mouths of the lions. Later, when the King learned that Daniel had survived, he had the manipulators put to death instead. When dealing with manipulators, it is essential to seek God's help because only He can see the complete picture. We need Him to expose their secret plots. So, make prayer for protection from the schemes of the wicked into a regular part of your devotional life. We shall look at this more closely in chapters 26 and 27 about prayers of imprecation and dealing with witchcraft.

Watch closely how a person acts after they are given power, or a promotion. Power corrupts, but it also exposes the corruption that is *already* in them.

There is an old saying that “power corrupts” and it is true. However, the acquiring of power also exposes the corruption that is *already present* in a person's character, even before they have any power. That is why so many people abuse power, or can't be allowed to have any in the first place. Their character simply isn't fit to be entrusted with it. Therefore one of the most effective tests of a person's character is how they handle power and authority, at whatever level. It is not only Prime Ministers who can be corrupted by it. So can any of us, when we are promoted to any job or role.

I know one woman who was put in charge of the stationery cupboard in a company. It was her job to give out what people needed. She became just as haughty and dictatorial in that role as Robert Mugabe ever was in ruling Zimbabwe. Nobody could have anything without asking her, and they had to ask nicely too. Otherwise she would refuse, or say she was too busy to get anything and tell them to come back later. She also required people to explain and justify their requests. But that was not because it was a proper part of her job.

It was because she enjoyed being able to require people to plead with her and having the power to decide who gets what. The fact that she had less scope to cause harm did not make her any less of a tyrant than the Mugabes, Caucsesus and Assads of this world. They just had bigger ‘stationery cupboards’

than her, but the underlying heart-attitude was the same, or similar. Thus, if she had instead been put in charge of Zimbabwe, her approach would have been the same.

Therefore, when assessing how people use or abuse power, and what it reveals about their real nature, the same tests need to be used for all people, at every level, not just the high and mighty. You can therefore learn a lot by just watching closely to see how a person reacts or changes when he is promoted or given a larger role. Watch to see whether his head is turned by it. Does he develop a swagger and become imperious and abrupt in the way he speaks to those who are now 'under' him? If he does, then it may be that power has corrupted him.

However, the more likely explanation is that it has just exposed what he *already* was. He simply didn't previously have the opportunity to show it. The truth is that few people can handle power without misusing or abusing it to some extent and letting it go to their head. Together with how we handle wealth, our handling of power is one of the hardest tests we can ever face. That is why God puts His people through such tests, which so many of us fail. He wants to assess what we are really like inside and whether we can be trusted with further promotions and/or responsibilities.

God conducts such tests, and so must you. Do so whether you are the one with the power to promote and demote others, or just a bystander who can watch how those others react. Do they do their new duties humbly and without pretentiousness, or do they start to throw their weight around? You can learn a vast amount about people in this way, and your overall discernment can be increased. Therefore don't overlook this test. Use it to learn whether the people in your workplace or church can be trusted, and the real level of their maturity and integrity.

Simple, naive people often get deceived and damaged because they fail to ask themselves what type of person they are dealing with.

Relationships with the wicked, or even with fools, are hard enough, even for wise people to deal with, but the simple person has very little chance of handling them correctly. He fails at the very first stage because he does not even realise he is *meant* to assess their nature. A simple person just assumes everybody else is the same as he is. So, being innocent and sincere himself, he automatically assumes that others are equally so, even where there is no evidence to suggest it. Indeed, he will do so even when there is strong evidence to the contrary.

Therefore, simple, sincere people are usually poor judges of character. Yet, very few ever admit to having that weakness. It is a failing which most people are either unaware of, or too ashamed to admit. Therefore they will deny it, even to themselves. How often have you heard anyone admit to being a poor judge of character? I personally have never heard anybody say it. Yet, except for the wicked, who have feral cunning, very few people are accurate judges of character.

Simple people regularly misjudge others because of their naivety. So do fools, to a lesser extent. Even wise people struggle with this. The best way to begin to improve your discernment is to admit to yourself that this is a skill which you currently lack. Unless you are honest enough to admit that you aren't yet a good judge of character, you will never become one. Wicked people are much more accurate judges of character because they are naturally shrewder in the feral sense. It is also partly because "*It takes one to know one*". In other words, deceivers can spot another fraud a mile off.

The statistics also mean that the wicked are more likely to be correct in assuming that others are the same as them. Because far more people *are* wicked or foolish than are wise or simple, the odds are they will be right. So, even when they are just making prejudiced assumptions about others, they are still usually right, due to the sheer weight of numbers within the general population.

Therefore, even their cynical pre-conceived assumptions tend to be correct, quite apart from their ability to discern the nature of other people. Another reason why the wicked are able to weigh other people

up more accurately is that the simple are too open and trusting. They speak unguardedly and reveal too much about themselves and their intentions. Thus, it is much easier for the wicked to see how the simple think, and to recognise them, than it is for the simple to recognise the wicked.

Simple people say what they really think, as children do, and give out far too much information to others. Therefore, what they are is obvious to one who knows what he is looking for. By contrast, the wicked hide their innermost feelings and so the simple are given far less information *by* the wicked than they give *to* them. This stacks the odds in favour of the wicked when it comes to discerning what other people are really like.

Ask God to show you what people are really like. Pray that He will expose them, and even cause them to inadvertently reveal their true nature.

No matter how discerning you become, you will always need God's help in identifying the wicked, because they are so skilled in keeping up an act. Don't think that they can't deceive you, or that you can always spot them. There are wicked people in our lives who have not yet been recognised. Therefore be vigilant, but ask God to give you a head start by identifying them for you and enabling you to see the signs that you may currently be missing. Ask Him to open your eyes, to make things clear and to positively cause you to notice them.

Also ask Him to open your ears and mind so you can grasp the full significance of things when you do notice them. I ask God to cause the wicked to make errors, say too much, go too far, speak unguardedly and generally expose their real nature, even by blurting things out unintentionally. God has then answered such prayers by causing the wicked person, or someone else who knows them, to say or do something which opens my eyes. Remember that the wicked are cunning and they work very hard at keeping up appearances.

Therefore if you are ever going to identify them, you will often need them to make some kind of mistake. That is what God can, and will, arrange *if you ask Him to*. Therefore ask Him. Make it a part of your regular prayer times that you ask God to expose the wicked and enable you to see them quickly and easily. Given how important this is, it is extraordinary that most of us never pray for this at all. It simply doesn't occur to people to do so. But it needs to, because it really matters.

The simple are squeamish about labelling anyone as wicked and are often reluctant to do so until it is proved categorically, by which time, it is usually too late.

The simple are often reluctant to label others as wicked, especially if those people are in a church. They feel squeamish about classifying others as evil, or even being dubious about them. They also get very confused about what the Bible says about 'judging'. They mistakenly think that it is 'judgemental' to assess other people's teaching or characters. But that is not the kind of 'judging' which Jesus forbids in Matthew 7:1. There is widespread misunderstanding about that verse and it is routinely misapplied. Here is the famous verse:

***“Judge not, that you be not judged.
Matthew 7:1 (ESV)***

Many think that Jesus has forbidden us to judge anybody, in any way, at any time, or in any place. They therefore assume they have to sit back and say nothing at all, without ever intervening, objecting to anything, or expressing any disapproval. Those who make that error then ignore all the other parts of the Bible where we are positively commanded to judge other people's characters and trustworthiness and also their teaching or prophecies. For example, consider this verse which deals with judging the prophecies that other men give:

***29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.
1 Corinthians 14:29 (KJV)***

I chose to use the King James for that verse, to help to illustrate where the confusion comes from, or at least how it is added to, by unfortunate translation. The King James Version uses the same English word, ‘judge’, in each of the verses above, despite the fact that what is meant in each case is very different. We know that because, in the original Greek, two entirely different words are used in Matthew 7:1 and 1 Corinthians 14:29.

The Greek word used in Matthew 7:1 to record what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount was κριτής (“kree-tace”). It refers to operating as a judge in a court, or as Jesus will operate when He finally judges every one of us at the Judgment Seat of Christ or at the Great White Throne judgment. For us to judge any other person, in either of those senses, would be to usurp the place of the judge or, even worse, of Jesus Himself. That kind of judging is something which we are neither authorised, nor qualified, to do.

It would, inevitably, also involve hypocrisy because we would be condemning sins and faults in others when we either have the same sin in our own life, or some other sin, which is either equal to it or even worse than it. For all those reasons, we are not allowed to barge in and try to perform Jesus’ role, whereby we form a judgment of the sinfulness, blameworthiness or merit of another person *in comparison to ourselves*. We have to leave that to Him alone or we would be both usurpers and hypocrites.

However, we know from 1 Corinthians 14:29, and other verses, that we are not only permitted, but commanded, to judge the character and trustworthiness of others and/or the accuracy of what they teach, say or prophesy. The Greek word used in this verse, which the KJV unhelpfully translates as ‘judge’, is διακρίνω (“diakrino”). This has a very different meaning, namely to discern, separate thoroughly, discriminate between, decide, or make to differ. Perhaps the best words we could use to sum it up would be to *weigh, assess or evaluate*. The ESV helpfully chooses not to use the word judge in its rendering of this verse and prefers ‘weigh’:

***29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.
1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)***

Whenever confusion arises as to whether we should or should not ‘judge’ others, the best place to begin is to check in a concordance to see what Greek word is used. The point is that we are allowed, and even commanded, to weigh, assess, critically appraise and discern the real nature of other people’s characters and teaching, and whether they can be trusted or not. We must do so, based on all the currently available evidence and, in particular, the fruit produced by that person’s life.

We need not feel squeamish or uncomfortable about doing any of that and it is not ‘judgmental’, in the sense which Jesus forbids. Accordingly, there is a time and place for forming the view that another person is wicked, or at least for being open-minded enough to look into it. We must be willing to do all of this because God hates evil and wants us to hate it too, however, wherever, and by whoever, it may be manifested:

***The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.
Proverbs 8:13 (RSV)***

God is not sentimental or reluctant to call evil by its proper name. He is blunt and frank about it. We must never allow our cowardice to cause us to shrink from a challenge, or to call evil things good. If we do, we shall have to answer to God for it. He wants us to be bold, strong and truthful, and to call things what they really are, rather than compromising or dodging issues:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Isaiah 5:20 (RSV)

Sincere people place a high value on justice and fairness. As a result, they often misunderstand what is required in order to conclude that something has been ‘proved’. They have muddled ideas from watching films about criminal courts, in which things have to be proved “*beyond all reasonable doubt*”. That is what criminal courts have to do, but you are not a criminal court and God does not want you to act as if you were. Therefore, that is *not* the test which you must use, because it involves an impossibly high burden of proof.

Admittedly, if you operated on that basis, you would never falsely label an innocent person as wicked. However, it would be at the price of falsely labelling multitudes of wicked people as innocent. A very different burden of proof is used in civil courts, namely the “*balance of probabilities test*”. That means a matter is said to be ‘proved’ if a judge concludes that it is even a tiny bit more likely to be true than untrue. Even 50.1% to 49.9% is enough to pass this test and to consider the point proved.

Even that burden of proof, which is used in civil courts, can often be too high because, where we have even a suspicion that a person might be wicked, but it has not yet been ‘proved’, our level of vigilance still needs to be increased. We may need to take some precautions, even if we don’t yet have enough evidence to show that it is more than 50.1% likely that they *are* what we suspect them to be. It would be most unwise to refrain from taking action, or from ceasing to trust a person, merely because you don’t yet have that amount of evidence.

Both good and evil can come from the same person. Indeed, that combination is to be expected.

Never assume that just because you see a person doing something good, or saying something true, then no evil could ever come from them. It certainly can, and it very often does. Likewise, if we hear a person operating in spiritual gifts, even validly, that does not mean that they could never also do so invalidly, inaccurately, or even falsely. The mere fact that a person has operated in the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit, does not mean that they could never operate mistakenly, in their own flesh, dishonestly, or even under the influence of a demon.

People can, and frequently do, operate in all sorts of inconsistent ways. You have to take account of that when assessing others. Never assume that a person could never do evil, or be wicked, merely because you have seen them do something good in the past. That absolutely does not follow. Making that sweeping assumption causes you to switch off your ‘carbon monoxide detectors’ and to be complacent. You can’t afford to do that. Your discernment must be in operation *all the time*, whoever you are dealing with, and no matter what your past, or current, assessment of them may be.

Moreover, the mere fact that someone has been a *victim* of the wicked at some point does not in any way imply that they themselves must therefore be a good or innocent person, whom you can trust. The wicked regularly attack, use and undermine each other and so the enemy of your enemy is *not* necessarily your friend. I have made this mistake a number of times, assuming that a victim of the wicked was likely to be on the same side as me, and someone I can work with. I have then found, to my cost, that they were just as wicked as their persecutor, and no more loyal or faithful than he was.