

## CHAPTER 5

### IDENTIFYING THE WICKED, PART TWO - MORE OF THEIR TRAITS AND METHODS

<sup>24</sup> *But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*

*John 2:24-25 (ESV)*

<sup>18</sup> *But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?*

*Matthew 22:18 (ESV)*

*The way of the guilty is crooked,  
but the conduct of the pure is upright.*

*Proverbs 21:8 (ESV)*

<sup>3</sup> *For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul,  
and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the LORD.*

<sup>4</sup> *In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him;  
all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”*

*Psalms 10:3-4 (ESV)*

*The wicked have laid a snare for me,  
but I do not stray from thy precepts.*

*Psalms 119:110 (RSV)*

*“Scoffer” is the name of the proud, haughty man  
who acts with arrogant pride.*

*Proverbs 21:24 (ESV)*

<sup>9</sup> *Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;*

*whoever is discerning, let him know them;*

*for the ways of the Lord are right,*

*and the upright walk in them,*

*but transgressors stumble in them.*

*Hosea 14:9 (RSV)*

**Do not judge people by their natural talents, or spiritual gifts. Do so on the basis of their character.**

Never judge people on the basis of their *gifts* rather than their *character*. Even the falsest of people can have great spiritual gifts and also natural giftings like cleverness, musicality, artistic ability, entrepreneurship etc. Having such abilities, and *even spiritual gifts*, does not mean that God approves of them or considers them trustworthy. In particular, it does not mean that you don't need to weigh them up. Far from it. If a person has great ability, of whatever type, there is *even more* need to be discerning because, the greater their giftings are, the more damage they can cause if they misuse them.

I have met many people who had great natural and spiritual gifts but they were still grievously false. Such a man came to the UK from South America many years ago when I was active in a particular church. This man, 'Carlos', came to do a week-long series of meetings for all the churches in the town. This was at a time when a lot of strange things were happening spiritually. People were falling over in meetings, supposedly as a result of the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what we were told at the time and, for a while, I was naïve enough to believe it.

I took a week off work and volunteered to be a driver for Carlos throughout his stay. I took him from meeting to meeting like a chauffeur. He also stayed as a guest at my house. Therefore I got to see him at close quarters all day, every day, for a whole week and learned a lot about his real character and how badly he behaved behind the scenes when there were no crowds watching. I believe God arranged for me to spend that extended time right alongside Carlos. He wanted me to learn about my own naivety and also how false people can be, even when they are ‘big names’ in the churches.

It was very clear that Carlos had remarkable spiritual powers, which I saw many times at close range. He claimed this power came from the Holy Spirit but I eventually concluded that it was actually coming from demons working in and through him. He would go to church meetings and get people to line up. Then he would pray over them, or blow on them, or gently touch them just with his fingertips. They would then be knocked sideways, fall to the ground, and generally become unconscious. It was amazing to watch even one such incident, but I saw this happen many times.

There was no doubt at all that some force other than Carlos was knocking these people over and rendering them unconscious. I saw it repeatedly, with my own eyes, while only a few feet away. I can assure you there was absolutely no way he could have done it himself. Many times I saw people knocked sideways at such high speed, and with such intense force, that it was physically impossible for Carlos to have faked it. They could not have done it themselves either. On one occasion Carlos met a group of church leaders from a nearby city, some of whom were dubious about him.

They openly showed their scepticism in their words and tone when they first met him. He then prayed over them and, even though he was several feet away from them, every one of them was suddenly knocked over at great speed. They were all also ‘put to sleep’. I saw it all with my own eyes. Carlos actually laughed about it afterwards in the car, in a surprisingly disrespectful way. He made fun of the fact that some of those leaders had previously doubted him, which had irritated him. He believed that “*God had taught them a lesson*” and he said so openly and also very arrogantly.

It jarred with me at the time, as it seemed an inappropriate way for a ‘man of God’ to speak, especially one who supposedly had a ‘powerful anointing’. Yet, I kept putting my unease to one side. Therefore I did not realise for some time, or allow myself to believe, that he was actually a deceiver. In part I was deceived by Carlos because others in the church, who were older than me, were convinced his powers were from God. Very unwisely, I did not question it. Then, when I saw the spectacular things he did, I too was briefly convinced that he was being used by God.

My eyes began to open, and I started to wonder about him, when other events occurred which revealed that he was carnal, sensual, proud and dishonest. I will give just a few examples of what I mean and why I came to those conclusions. One thing I noticed was that, although everybody else was sent flying when Carlos prayed over them, it never happened to me. He had prayed over me, and laid hands on me, at two or three different meetings but every time I remained standing, completely unaffected.

The last time I saw irritation and frustration in Carlos’ face. He didn’t like the fact that nothing was happening to me. He then pushed me backwards, with considerable force. This time it was undoubtedly Carlos himself who did it, not God, and not even a demon. Nobody else would have known that he did it himself that time, as I had my back to the congregation. Also Carlos was out of their line of view. I therefore lost my balance, staggered backwards, and fell. But I knew that what had happened to me was not the same as with all the previous people.

They had undoubtedly been knocked over by some supernatural force but I knew that, on this occasion, Carlos himself had pushed me over. I therefore immediately got back up on my feet, disgusted at what he had just done. Carlos was trying to make it appear to the audience that I had been knocked over in the same way as the others, by what he claimed was the Holy Spirit. However, I refused to cooperate. He had hoped that I would play along and stay on the floor, as many people would have done in that situation. However, I refused to be a party to any kind of deception.

As I look back at it now, I believe it was my sincerity, and my absolute refusal to compromise, that protected me. If I had been willing to pretend to have been knocked over by the Holy Spirit, rather than by Carlos himself, then I believe I would have ceased to have God's protection. I would then have come under the influence of the same demons who were having such a terrible effect on others in the church. I was not willing to accept or receive anything spiritual unless I *knew* it was from God, but I knew that what Carlos had done to me was faked.

He did not like the fact that I got straight back up. I could see it in his face. It was a blow to his ego, because he was playing to the audience and I was getting in the way of his 'act'. I don't recall anybody else ever jumping back up immediately after being knocked over. Therefore all the others must either have been knocked over by the demons or, if it was done by Carlos himself, they were willing to play along. That incident when he pushed me over started me thinking about him very seriously. I began to ask why a "*man of God*" would deliberately deceive his audience.

Other things were revealed during that week as well. I was surprised by how rudely and ungratefully he treated people. For example, prior to coming to our town, he had worked with, and been helped by, a church leader from the South of England called Peter. However, the much larger 'success' and publicity that Carlos achieved in our town meant his profile had risen. He was actually coming to national attention, so much so that a TV crew came to film him when we held a public church service in a park.

As his fame grew he spoke openly, to me and others, of how he proposed to dispense with Peter and to work instead with some church leaders from our town. It was plain that Carlos expected us to be thrilled at the prospect of him switching his focus to us. The implication was that he was 'honouring' us by choosing to work with us, and our 'large' church, rather than with Peter and his smaller church. Although many of the others were excited and impressed, I was alarmed at how he was treating Peter, ditching him, like a toy for which he had no further use.

That added to my existing concerns. For a long time Peter had been his unpaid driver, the same way I was during that week. He had also helped him in other ways in making his move to the UK. But now Carlos was planning to cast Peter aside so abruptly, and with such ingratitude and disrespect, that it shocked me. An even bigger issue was the way in which Carlos spoke of his wife. She was not with him, as she had stayed back in South America and it startled me that he was also disrespectful about her. More importantly, he was unhealthily interested in other women, in a sensual way.

I heard some things he said, and also things that were said about him, which showed, beyond any doubt, that he was extremely carnal with women. He was also unfaithful to his wife, at the very least in his thoughts and words, and almost certainly in his actions too. So, for a time, the Carlos situation confused me. This was a man who was undoubtedly exhibiting great spiritual power. Yet it was becoming equally clear that he was seriously corrupt in his *character* in being proud, arrogant, and even unfaithful to his wife.

He was also a deliberate liar, whenever it suited him. To me, the most surprising point of all was that he showed *no shame* about any of his conduct. That would not surprise me today. I would fully expect such a man to be shameless. I therefore came to the conclusion that the supernatural power, which he was undoubtedly wielding, actually came from demons, not from the Holy Spirit. Nothing that I have learned since has caused me to alter that view. Indeed, I am even more sure of it now than I was then.

### **Lessons and conclusions to be drawn from the story of Carlos**

The fact that a man exhibits great power, *even if it is from God*, as in Samson's case, does *not* mean that what he says or teaches is true. Moreover, in many instances, such power is not from God at all, as with the slave girl in Acts 16. In her case, and in Carlos' case, it was demonic power. Apostle Paul warned us about this in relation to the antichrist, but it is equally true of other false teachers and

deceivers at a lower level. They too can carry out supernatural acts under the power of demons. It is our duty to watch out for, and identify, such people. Never be taken in by their displays of power, however spectacular they may be:

*<sup>9</sup>The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. <sup>11</sup>Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, <sup>12</sup>so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

*2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 (RSV)*

The presence of such power or gifts, whether real or false, does not mean that a man is of good character. That is a completely different, and separate, issue from his talents and giftings. What really matters is the person's character. Power, by itself, proves nothing and validates nothing. Therefore judge everybody on the basis of their handling of the Bible, and by their character, not their gifts. Only trust them if they have a good character and teach the truth, as per what the Bible says, *regardless of their power*, even if they are performing extraordinary miracles.

**Also watch out for, and avoid, any men who hype up their own ministries or speak in self-aggrandising terms.**

A warning sign to look out for, especially in church leaders, is whether they hype up their own ministries, praise themselves, or speak in self-aggrandising terms. It is common, not only amongst the well-known false teachers like Creflo Dollar, Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn, but also at a local level. If a leader is puffing himself up, exaggerating his impact, and seeking for prominence, it tells you something about him. It is not only the sin of pride, which is bad enough in itself. It is a strong indicator that he is also false, unreliable and even wicked, *in other ways too*.

You cannot afford to ignore such a warning. It is your cue to at least watch him more closely, but probably also to leave that church. When I was in the church led by 'Rick' he often used to promote himself, seek the limelight and exaggerate about what he was doing. He craved for prominence and to be admired. That craving is an aspect of our sinful flesh nature and is present in all of us, but it is something we are meant to resist. That is why we are told to "*crucify the flesh*" and to "*put to death therefore what is earthly in you...*" We are all also meant to be humbling ourselves.

That includes refusing to indulge the cravings of our flesh, including the desire for importance and recognition. It is bad enough when any of us do those things, but even worse when a *leader* does so. The kind of phrases used by such self-promoters in their websites and on leaflets about their conferences include words like '*amazing*', '*international*', '*powerful*', '*anointed*', and so forth. We should never speak of ourselves, or of our ministries or events, in such terms. Only modest, factual statements should be made, preferably erring on the side of understatement.

I was therefore concerned one day when I saw a passage which Rick had written on a new draft website for the church. In it he made various grandiose claims about the church, and about himself, and it finished with the phrase "*some would say that his ministry is apostolic.*" When I saw that phrase in particular I winced. I could not imagine how anyone could write that about themselves, quite apart from all the rest of the hyperbole. I therefore challenged Rick about it and said "*But Rick, you have written this yourself.*" It would have been bad enough if an over-zealous friend had written all those things about him, but for him to write it all himself took it to a whole new level.

I also challenged Rick about the descriptions he made of the work our church was doing to help a church in Africa. Rick regularly hyped it up when speaking to our church and to other churches in the area. He made it appear that what our church was doing in Africa was much bigger than it really was, for example, referring to it as '*international*' work. I said to Rick "*Why don't you just say that our church*

*is trying to help another church in (name of town) and say nothing to make it seem more impressive than it really is?"*

Instead, the way in which Rick habitually spoke was proud and boastful and was centred upon himself and on our church. I should have seen far earlier that something was seriously wrong. I did see it eventually, but only after many other things had occurred. If I had paid proper attention to the hype at the outset, realised its significance, and taken it more seriously, I could have seen through Rick much earlier. Then I could have got out sooner and saved myself, and my family, from a lot of problems.

A similar pattern emerged in a very different way in another church which I went to later. This one was led by 'Carl' and was evangelical, 'reformed' and non-charismatic, but the leaders still had the same pride. I began to notice that the leaders routinely praised their own preaching and teaching and openly spoke of how the church has "*excellent teaching*" and that "*People come to this church because of the preaching*". The way Carl and his fellow ministers spoke of themselves, and the claims they made about their own preaching, jarred with me.

Ironically, their preaching and teaching was mediocre at best, and could only be considered good in comparison to the appallingly bad preaching in most other churches. It was not only Carl and his fellow leaders who praised the preaching and teaching at that church. I began to notice that many of the members did so too, and in an excessive, unwarranted and unnatural way. The superlatives they used did not even remotely accord with the reality and I wondered why so many of them spoke in such consistently glowing terms and said such similar things.

I concluded that those members were simply repeating, parrot-fashion, what they heard the leaders themselves saying about the "excellence" of the preaching. They were not really their own words or their own views. So, although Carl and his fellow ministers were not as blatant as Rick, there was still self-aggrandisement. That was not good, even though they did it more subtly than Rick. We should not praise ourselves or our church. We should leave it to others to do that, entirely unprompted, if they want to. We should not seek for it, or try to put the words into their mouths:

<sup>2</sup> *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;  
a stranger, and not your own lips.  
Proverbs 27:2 (ESV)*

**Look out for, and act upon, the tiny momentary signals that wicked people give out. Such fragments of evidence reveal their nature and intentions, but are usually overlooked.**

The biggest problem with dealing with the wicked is you are not usually *aware* that they are wicked, or that you are being manipulated or deceived. If you did know, you would act differently and would be on your guard. The wicked are also very numerous and deception is endemic. Therefore, on any given day, you will probably be lied to many times. If so, somebody must be doing it, including some whom you don't realise are lying, being disloyal, or using you. If you did realise, you wouldn't believe them or cooperate.

Therefore keep an open mind. Accept the possibility that some of your friends, or the people you deal with in your job or at church, are not what they purport to be and might be misleading you. The willingness to contemplate that possibility is an essential starting point. The alternative is to have a closed mind and to feel a misguided certainty that you are not being lied to or used. If that is how you think, you will be blind and deaf to the little signals that liars give out through their eyes, tone of voice, body language and words.

Those indicators ought to warn you that they are false and so every such clue needs to be checked out. Let me give you an example of an occasion where I failed to pay attention to a number of important warning signs. Those ought to have alerted me that something odd was going on and that the person

needed to be looked at more closely. It concerns the PA called Julie, to whom I referred earlier. She had previously been the secretary to 'Chloe, a salaried partner in my law firm.

I thought Julie was extremely efficient, so I moved her to work for me and Chloe was given a different secretary. It emerged later that Chloe had been bullying and manipulating junior staff, and also telling lies about me, so I began an investigation. As a part of that procedure, I needed to record my interview with Chloe. So I asked Julie, who was by then my own PA, not Chloe's, to set up an interview room with a tape recorder. I also asked her to attend the interview, to assist me and to take notes.

Julie was very nervous about the meeting but, so far as I could see, she had no reason to be. I wasn't accusing her of anything because, at the time, I had no idea she had done anything wrong. Nevertheless, she was jittery and obviously worried about the forthcoming interview with her former boss, even though it was I who would be conducting it, with her just sitting in. At the time, I put her unease down to her feeling sorry for her former boss, or perhaps to being worried as to what might happen to Chloe.

I therefore dismissed the warning signs and *assumed they were not significant*. Then, towards the end of the first meeting, I suddenly noticed the tape recorder wasn't 'spinning'. On seeing that, I realised the interview wasn't being recorded at all. I then looked more closely and saw that, although the tape recorder was plugged in at the wall socket, the electricity was switched off at the wall. I turned to Julie and asked what had happened. She was nervous, but pretended she had made a mistake while setting it up and that she had "not noticed" it was switched off at the wall.

At the time I thought that was odd, because Julie was normally so thorough. Even so, I still felt no suspicion and it did not enter my mind that she may have turned the switch off *deliberately*, so that the tape recorder didn't record what was going to be said. I later discovered that Julie herself was false and devious, indeed even more so than Chloe, her previous boss. I then realised, very belatedly, the real reasons why Julie had been so nervous when I was about to interview Chloe that day.

Julie had said and done many wrong things herself, while working for Chloe, and she feared that she would disclose facts about her own misconduct. She knew that Chloe had a lot of information about her and that some of it might come out. That was why Julie deliberately sabotaged the tape recorder, to make sure I had no recording of the interview. Julie's aim was to reduce the risk to herself by making sure that if any incriminating things were said, that offered clues as to her own misbehaviour, I would only hear them once and would not be able to go back later and listen to them again.

That was more important than it might appear, because the opportunity to rewind the tape and listen to Chloe's evidence repeatedly might have helped me to see through Julie much more quickly than I did. Sometimes the full meaning and significance of a comment doesn't hit you when you only hear it once, especially if it is confusing or unexpected. However, if you can listen to it repeatedly, there is a much higher chance of you realising what it means or implies. Julie knew that and wanted to limit the potential damage of anything Chloe might say about her.

My naivety, and closed mind, prevented me seeing that Julie's nervousness about the forthcoming interview, and the electricity being switched off, had sinister meanings. Those little clues ought not to have been brushed aside. By the way, that point about the great advantage of being able to 'replay' conversations and events also has wider application. If you can revisit the things that people have said and check exactly what words they used, and when they said them, it can really help you to identify deceivers. Even if that is long after the event, it is still well worth doing.

Therefore, take notes in meetings, and of sermons. Better still, keep a detailed journal. Then you can go back later, when doubts are just beginning to form, and check exactly what people said and did, and exactly when. If you don't have any such records you will doubt yourself and assume that you must have remembered things wrongly. But if you do have such records, formed at a time when you had no reason to suspect anybody, you will have something reliable and accurate to guide you and to use as a point of reference.

**Sincere people, who fear doing an injustice, are reluctant to rely on small clues or little fragments of evidence. Force yourself to overcome that and make use of even the tiniest details.**

Sincere, innocent people are reluctant to conclude that other people are wicked, or even that they might be. Therefore such people take a lot of persuading and are wary of placing any reliance on isolated fragments of evidence where the suspicious incident is just a small point of *detail*. Where it is only momentary, and then is gone, they are especially reluctant and may feel they ought to disregard it entirely, as if it had never happened. Accordingly, sincere, naïve people deny themselves the right to take account of, and be guided by, very small details or ‘one-off’ events.

They don’t think it is fair to ‘brand’ another person on the basis of a single event, or a small detail, or something which only appeared fleetingly and is now gone. You can’t afford to take that approach or you will miss most of the evidence, or warning signs, that you are ever likely to get. The point is that these indications of other people’s real nature or character, or of their sinister motives or intentions, are *usually* small, brief and apparently insignificant. That is because devious people are, by definition, seeking to *hide* their real nature and intentions, not to display them.

Therefore they are hardly likely to provide you with any evidence which is complete, conclusive, unmistakable or permanent. That would require them to be extremely careless and to make major mistakes, which they rarely do. Accordingly, if you won’t take account of small details, or single, isolated, brief or inconclusive incidents, you will deny yourself 90% of the evidence that is ever likely to present itself. Then you will have to make all your assessments based exclusively on the 5-10% of facts, events, statements and incidents that you *are* willing to take into account.

If so, you can’t expect to be effective in seeing what is really going on and identifying the wicked. In raising this issue I am only speaking to perhaps 5-10 per cent of the overall population and maybe a third to a half of the people within churches, because most of us aren’t sincere, or concerned about avoiding injustice. As with everything else in this book, I am only addressing the wise and the naïve, not fools, and certainly not the wicked. However, if you are such a sincere person, and have agonised over whether you can take a piece of evidence into account, you will know what I am talking about.

It was a problem for me for a long time. I often had to make important judgments about people in my law firm where all I had to go on were fragments of evidence. I did not have the whole story, fully documented, corroborated and verifiable. In the early years I therefore ignored many of the initial warning signs, which could have saved me from a lot of damage that came later on. That error cost me heavily, as it took me far longer to identify the wicked and meant that I tended only to catch them *after* they had done their evil deeds, not *beforehand*.

**When you begin to suspect a person, or to notice puzzling inconsistencies, don’t suppress your doubts or say they can’t be correct. Force yourself to be open to the possibility that people may be false.**

One of the biggest barriers to being able to identify the wicked is the inbuilt reluctance that sincere people have to believe that others could really be that bad. When puzzling inconsistencies arise, or people do suspicious things, a sincere person tends to suppress his own doubts and concerns. He forces himself to assume that he must be wrong, or is misunderstanding the facts somehow. In this way lots of little pieces of evidence are brushed aside and ignored, such that we don’t allow them to be taken into account, or even to help form a pattern, alongside other little clues and signs.

The sincere person tells himself “*This thing that I am beginning to suspect can’t possibly be true and I won’t allow myself to think it.*” The net effect is that a sincere person overlooks, or brushes aside, the first five or six incidents or warning signs. Thus, assuming he ever figures it out at all, which is unlikely, it is not until the seventh or eighth clue has been provided to him. But you can’t afford to wait until

then. The wicked are very careful not to give out clues, and only do so when they make a mistake. Therefore you must trust your doubts, as you can't afford to waste any of those occasions.

Force yourself to be willing to doubt people, to ask questions and to ponder on little inconsistencies. Also listen to other people's doubts, concerns or suspicions if they raise them with you. Be open to the possibility that people may be false, even those whom you know, and even leaders. Being known to you, and being a leader, has nothing to do with whether a person is true or false. So don't rule out the possibility on either of those spurious grounds. Don't rule anything in or out, at least not until you have carried out a full investigation. Indeed, don't have a closed mind even then.

**Be willing to form any conclusion to which the evidence points, even if you would find that conclusion distressing.**

It is a common feature of human beings, to be reluctant to form any conclusions which they would find distressing or inconvenient. Therefore the evidence is filtered and edited, even unconsciously, and those facts which would lead us to form uncomfortable conclusions are ignored or denied. Often we are not even aware that we are doing it. But that is not always so. Sometimes it is conscious and the person says "*I can't bring myself to believe that*" or "*I'm not prepared to believe that of him*" and other equivalent phrases.

Instead, we need to "*take every thought captive*", as Paul says. That includes deciding what thoughts we will allow, or even require, ourselves to think, even where we might be reluctant to do so. It also includes forcing yourself to be open-minded such that you are willing to *follow the evidence*, wherever it leads, rather than your pre-conceived beliefs and preferences. Just as a police investigator must go wherever the evidence takes him, so you must brace yourself and force your mind to accept conclusions that it does not want to reach *if the evidence is compelling*.

That may sound like a statement of the obvious but many of us ignore any evidence if it points to a conclusion we do not *want* to form. However, what we might want or not want to be true is irrelevant. All that matters is whether a thing is *actually* true. If it is, then believe it. What you feel about it and whether it makes you happy or unhappy, relieved or alarmed, is beside the point. It is easy to say that in theory, but putting it into practice as you assess people and situations, is another matter. You will only be free to form whatever conclusions are true if you force yourself to be open-minded. It won't happen automatically.

**Don't form any judgment, good or bad, until you properly know a person. Simply hold no view at all, as with a book which you have not yet read.**

The point made in the heading above may sound obvious, but most people don't realise it. At any rate, most of us don't operate this way. Many have a "default-setting" such that anyone they meet is assumed to be good until it is proved that they are not. It is widely felt that this approach is healthy and promotes trust and mutual harmony. Actually it is extremely foolish. There is no need to hold *any view*, good or bad, about people whom we *don't yet know*.

Why should you have any view at all when there is no basis for it, in either direction? Instead, with all new people that we meet, we should consciously decide *not to hold any view*, whether positive or negative. So we should not suspect them, or be wary or defensive. To do so would be unnecessary and unjust. But it would be equally wrong to trust them, or even to "*think the best of them*". Why should you? There is no basis for thinking the best of them at this stage, because there is no evidence to say they are the best, or that they are trustworthy or reliable in any way.

In short, there is no evidence of anything. So a right-thinking person, when he has no information, won't form any conclusions at all, good or bad. It is the same as when one looks at the title of a book



which one has not yet read. At that point one does not yet know anything about the contents or the author so it would be very foolish to say “*I haven’t yet read this book, and I know nothing about it. Even so, I will assume it’s a good book, with good content, and that it is well-written and well-argued. I will also assume the author is an honest man who means to help me.*”

You would never speak in that way about a book you’ve never read. You would neither approve of it nor disapprove, but simply hold no opinion at all. We must do the same with people whom we do not yet know. At the same time, although we cannot yet say that we trust them, neither should we say that we *distrust* them. That is, we must not feel any actual suspicion or antipathy towards them before there is any basis for doing so. It is a case of being wholly neutral and of holding *no view at all*.

The people we meet should be viewed as if they were a blank sheet of paper, upon which nothing has yet been written, either good or bad. If you approach all people in that way you will avoid two equal and opposite errors. The first mistake is of being *naïve* by trusting them prematurely and unjustifiably. The second is of being *cynical* in the sense of being suspicious when you do not yet have any basis for being so.

**There is an important difference between merely saying that we ‘*don’t trust*’ a person and going further by saying that we ‘*distrust*’ them.**

Let’s clarify the distinction between merely saying that we *don’t trust* a person and saying that we *distrust* them. The first phrase is applicable with strangers whom we have just met. It also applies to people we have known for some time, but not yet well enough to safely form a view of them. Taking that approach does not imply that we hold any *negative* view of them. We simply have not yet felt able to form a positive view. Thus we can say we don’t trust them, but that does not imply that we believe anything is wrong with them. It is simply that we do not yet feel able to put our trust in them.

Accordingly, we can say we *don’t trust* them. Or some may find it easier, and clearer, to say that we don’t *yet* trust them. But, in order for it to become appropriate to actively *distrust* a person we need to have seen or heard things which justify us in forming a negative view of them, or even being suspicious. That means they are no longer a ‘blank sheet of paper’ in whom we do not yet feel able to put our trust. They are now a sheet with a blot on it, such that our view of them has become tarnished. So we now actually have a substantive basis to suspect they *might* let us down, or even to positively expect they *will* do so.

On the other hand, even as you get to know a person more thoroughly, that doesn’t mean you should suddenly start to trust them 100% in all areas overnight. Instead, you should gradually increase the extent of your trust, by a series of graduated stages. Also you may only have a basis to trust them in one area, such as in the use of money, but not necessarily in other areas, such as having power or authority. The extent and breadth of your trust in that person will then go up in small increments, and also area by area, not in one huge jump, right across the board.

**Be willing to *reassess* people, even if you have already decided they are genuine. Also be prepared to alter your view of them, if you see any evidence to the contrary.**

You also need to be willing to *reassess* your view of other people whenever new evidence arises. That may sound obvious, but it is not what many of us actually do in practice. We tend to form a settled view and then ignore any subsequent evidence which contradicts that. Once you have become convinced that a person is genuine, and can be trusted, your mind is likely to edit out automatically any facts, events or remarks which go against that preconceived view. You may not even notice those little inconsistencies, whereas you need to be looking out for them.

If you aren't, you will become blind and deaf to those new and contradictory pieces of evidence. Most of us don't like reconsidering our opinions or assessments. It feels unsettling and requires effort. Therefore we unconsciously resist doing so, until it becomes overwhelmingly obvious that we must. However that point usually only comes, if at all, when you have already missed many of the warning signs that you could have noticed earlier and benefitted from. Therefore recognise this trait, which most of us have, and seek to overcome it.

Keep reminding yourself to be willing to reassess *anybody* and to keep an open mind. When an unusual event occurs, or something is said that jars with you or seems odd, don't let yourself ignore it. Make a conscious decision to at least note it and, better still, to look into it further. Then start turning over many more 'stones' to see what you can find underneath and what crawls out. In particular, try to see whether any patterns emerge. Don't just be reactive. Take the initiative, and positively go out of your way to look for things.

Start looking and listening more intently for any other facts which confirm or contradict the new thing you have noticed, or about which you are puzzled or concerned. You may be amazed at how many new facts you then discover. Those may well cause you to realise that some other supposed 'fact', which you had assumed to be true, is not actually true at all. It may also show that someone you had trusted or believed is actually false, at least in part. I'm recommending this open-minded investigative approach to you, but for many years it was not how I operated myself.

I tended to stick for far too long to positive assessments of others, only to discover, over and over again, that people had been deceiving me. Usually they had been doing so for a long time, whilst I had clung to the belief that they were loyal and trustworthy. This probably happened to me far more than to most people, because I was an employer and, at its peak, my firm employed over 80 staff. Therefore I had a higher than average number of people with reasons to deceive me, and they all had plentiful opportunities to do so.

**Jasmine's story - she was bullying other staff and also creating unrest in the office, yet I had no idea that it was going on.**

'Jasmine' was a good worker and her files were extremely well-managed. I therefore assumed, wrongly, that she was also a loyal and faithful member of staff and I often praised her and spoke well of her. On two or three occasions, I called her in to my office to tell her that I was really pleased with her files and to award her a pay rise. That was how I did things. I never waited for anybody to *ask* for a pay rise. If I felt they deserved it I initiated it myself and awarded a pay rise willingly, of my own free choice.

I noticed, over about a year, that each time I called Jasmine in to discuss an issue on a file of hers she always looked anxious, and expected to be confronted. When I praised her instead, and said how pleased I was with her files, she looked surprised. This puzzled me each time. Eventually something unusual arose which caused me to examine her more closely. For the first time I began to check up on her attitude and behaviour towards other staff, as distinct from the condition of her files. When I did I found a string of disturbing facts about her.

For a long time she had been a bully and the ring-leader of a nasty clique in the office, yet without me knowing any of that. So she was a good worker, with well-run files, but she was also a horrible person and a malignant influence on other staff. I was surprised, as I usually was when I made such discoveries. But I ought not to have been. I could have learned the truth about her much earlier if I had forced myself to listen to my instincts and check out those niggling little things which seemed odd, rather than brushing them aside.

When Jasmine looked so apprehensive at being called to my office, I should have asked myself whether there was some *reason* why she was anxious and why she always seemed to anticipate being confronted.

If I had, I would have discovered that her expectations were not groundless or imaginary. They were real and well-founded. At the time I just assumed that perhaps she was just nervous at the idea of having to go to a boss's office and that her apprehension signified nothing. Thus I ignored it on a number of occasions.

My assumption was not necessarily unreasonable. In someone else's case it may well have been correct. But I ought not to have assumed her strange behaviour to be innocent without first checking it. I ought not to have assumed anything at all, whether good or bad. When I came to re-think it all later it occurred to me that her conduct had actually been much more odd than I had thought at the time. No one else froze with alarm, expecting to be confronted, on coming to my room.

She knew that her behaviour, especially her treatment of colleagues, was nothing like what I imagined it to be. Therefore, she thought it was inevitable that, at some point, she would be caught, as others had been before. That was why she always looked so nervous each time I called her in. She thought that was the day when I was finally going to tackle her. If I had begun to wonder about her strange responses at the time, and to ask questions of other staff, Jasmine could have been caught a year earlier and much less damage would have been done.

You might wonder why those staff didn't come forward, without needing to be asked, and tell me about her bullying and her nastiness. That is simply not how people operate. You have to accept that fact and make allowances for it. You cannot assume that if people have information about the wrongdoing of others they will come forward, of their own free will, and give it to you. That is a totally unrealistic expectation. Colleagues, employees, church members and other witnesses have all sorts of reasons for remaining silent about other people's misconduct.

They do so even when they themselves are being bullied or mistreated. For one thing, they often fear speaking up. They also assume that you must already know what they know. It all seems so obvious to them, given that it is happening every day, right in front of them. They don't realise that wrongdoers don't hide their real nature from their colleagues, but only from those above them. That is especially a problem for bosses in a workplace. Junior staff naively assume that the boss must already know what is going on. In fact, he may know very little about it, or even nothing at all.

Indeed, the boss is often the last person to know about such wrongdoing. On many occasions over the years I have discovered some wrong behaviour and sacked the bully. I have then asked other staff later, when it was all over, why they had never told me at the time about what had been going on. Their reply was often along the lines of "*I thought you were already aware of it.*" That kind of response used to really frustrate me. I would wonder why my good staff would so readily assume that I knew about, and even authorised, bad behaviour.

Nevertheless, the sad fact is they did make that unflattering assumption. You need to realise that that is often how those around you will think. At least it is what they claim to have thought, though it may not always be true. It might just be said to mask some other more sinister reason for having said nothing. At any rate, the fact is that the majority of people won't report things to you until you ask them *direct questions*. Even then, many still won't open up, unless you *persist* in asking them, and/or until you prove that you already know the information anyway.

**In a conflict situation, or where complaints and accusations are being made, the innocent will want to meet to discuss the facts, but the guilty won't want to.**

Another test you can use in any conflict situation, in a church or workplace, is to gauge how *willing* each of the parties are to meet up and talk. You will find, unless there is some deep trauma, that the innocent party, who has been wronged, is eager to meet up. In fact, they are not merely willing. They positively want to get the facts out into the open and talk about it. Indeed, it can be hard to stop them

talking. I also found that when I was a policeman. The innocent party was always available to talk on the phone, or to come to the police station, but offenders weren't.

They had to be tracked down and interviewed robustly to get them to speak at all. The same is true in workplaces and churches. The innocent person, who is telling the truth, won't avoid you or be coy. They will willingly answer your questions. But the guilty parties, who are causing the problems, will be reluctant to meet you. If you try to arrange a meeting to discuss what happened, and find out who was right and wrong, the wrongdoers will be "busy" and will say they "*can't manage a meeting this week*".

The reason for their reluctance to meet is they already know they are in the wrong. The point is they don't want *you* to know it, or to give you any help in proving it or exposing them. You may be faced with such a situation, where X and Y are in conflict. Allegations are being made, and denied, and counter-allegations are also being made and denied. You may be at a loss to know who is telling the truth and who is lying. If so, use this test.

Tell each party that you would like a meeting at which the allegations will be weighed and tested. Then, see how each of them *react*. Take careful note of how eager, or reluctant, each of them are to meet up with you and with the other witnesses. The innocent party will usually cooperate and will want the meeting to go ahead, unless they are deeply traumatised. However, the guilty party will not. He will keep you waiting for replies, and will be reluctant to put a date in the diary, or he will not attend, or will seek an adjournment, even if a date is set.

If you take careful note of their reactions you can gain useful insights. That will help you to know which of the two parties you need to keep your eye on most closely. He is also the one about whom you need to start making other enquiries, and turning over a series of stones, to see what crawls out. That early warning can be really valuable. It will alert you and get you started on other enquiries and enable you to target those in the right places and with the right people.

**Another useful test of honesty, but which can only be used with Christians, is to invite each party to pray, out loud, that God will expose them if they are lying.**

If you have managed to get the parties to the dispute to meet up with you, either one at a time or all together, you could consider using this test as well. At the start of the meeting, invite each of the parties to pray *out loud* as follows: "*Lord, if I tell any lies, or exaggerate, or mislead anybody by leaving out any relevant information, please expose me and bring the real truth to light by some other means*". This is not a fool-proof method, but it can give you some useful indications which you can bear in mind, alongside all of the other facts.

There are a number of possible reactions, each of which can give an insight into each person's real nature and credibility. Some will refuse to pray it. This will be likely to happen if the person believes in God but is lying and therefore doesn't want to pray it. If so, you could press them a little further and ask them to explain why they don't want to. Again, watch their faces and body language as they reply. Take careful note of what they say, either in refusing to answer, or in giving some excuse. Then weigh it all up and see whether it points in the direction of guilt.

Others may pray some of the prayer, but leave key parts out, or water them down. Some will pretend to get muddled up, so as to remove or reduce the meaning of the prayer, as Barack Hussain Obama did at his first inauguration. If so, try pressing them gently to say it again and see whether they do it properly the second time. If they carry on stalling, you are entitled to draw adverse inferences about the credibility of the answers they go on to give. Some people will pray the prayer in full, but you still need to take note of *how* they say it.

Do they sound as if they mean it or are they casual, or even flippant, about it? If they say it reverently then, provided their subsequent answers and evidence also seem credible in themselves, they are probably a faithful witness. However, you need to be realistic. Even a person who willingly prays the prayer may still go on to tell you a pack of lies. It depends on whether they have the fear of the LORD. Try to gauge that as well, from the words of their prayer and also their tone of voice. You may also be able to tell from the content of what they then go on to say.

Occasionally you may come across someone who wants to go even further than you ask them to. They may become theatrical, or even blasphemous, in the prayers, or even blood-curdling vows, which they offer to make. Rhoda, to whom I have referred earlier, was an example of this. When I invited her to pray that prayer, she launched instead into a bizarre prayer of her own. She asked God to strike her dead if she lied, and also to strike others in the meeting dead if they lied.

Ironically, having just prayed all that, she then went on to tell a pack of lies. Rhoda was able to ‘pray’ in that way because she had no fear of the LORD at all. Indeed I am quite sure she was not saved, i.e. that she had no genuine faith, and had never had any. I did not base that view solely on that incident, but also on a number of other things she had said and done. That assessment was later borne out when I spoke to a man who had previously been the leader of her church.

He told me he didn’t believe she was a real Christian, or that she had ever been. Indeed, he was quite certain about it. So, don’t be so naïve as to think that if a person will pray that prayer they must, therefore, be truthful. They may not be. Nevertheless, provided you take careful note of all of their reactions, and their tone and demeanour, you should be able to gain some useful insights, whatever happens.

**When dealing with multiple allegations or a complex investigation, gather all the points together and deal with them all, *as a whole*. Don’t judge each incident on its own, as a stand-alone item.**

Usually, when you deal with a wrongdoer, there will be more than one incident or complaint to address. Instead of one major piece of misconduct, they may have done several smaller things. The problem is that when you look at each of those, one at a time, each incident doesn’t seem that bad. Or you may be unsure how much it signifies. If you go about it that way, looking at each event by itself, you are likely to under-estimate the overall seriousness of the person’s misconduct or incompetence.

Your mistake is you are looking at each incident in isolation, as if it was a single dot, rather than part of a line of dots. If you do that you are unlikely to realise that, when taken together, they actually form a *pattern*. On any *one occasion*, if a person makes a feeble excuse, or tells a story that doesn’t add up, you may feel you ought to give him the benefit of the doubt. You might be dubious, but think that what he’s saying could, conceivably, be true. Therefore you may be reluctant to conclude that he is lying because you don’t want to be harsh or jump to conclusions.

I took that approach many times in the past and learned that it was very unwise. Yet, it is an easy mistake to make, especially if you are soft-hearted, as many genuine Christians are. Sincere people, who have a strong desire to avoid doing an injustice, are especially prone to making this error. To explain the problem more clearly, imagine a man was charged with five criminal offences. What if these charges were each dealt with, one by one, in five separate trials, with an entirely different set of jurors each time?

He would stand a good chance of being acquitted five times in a row, or at least in some of the trials, because most jurors are doing their first, and only, stint of jury-service. It is also because they are seeing this particular man for the first time, and are only hearing *one* implausible story from him, rather than a *series* of them. I am reminded of a church leader I knew who was called up for jury-service. After it was all over he was telling me about the case. It involved a man who was tried at Crown Court for assaulting two police officers.

The officers said he had punched both of them in the face when they approached him in the street. So the evidence against him was that both police officers had facial injuries and they both gave sworn evidence that he had deliberately assaulted them. Nevertheless, the man pleaded not guilty. He told the jury that it was a frosty day and the pavement was icy and that, as he stepped towards the first officer to speak to him, he slipped on the pavement. As he did so, he claimed he swung his arm outwards, to steady himself, and hit the policeman in the face, purely by accident.

He didn't explain why the hand of his 'swinging arm' took the form of a *fist*, or why it hit the officer with such force, or why it caught him straight in the face, rather than elsewhere on the body. However, it gets worse. He then explained that he regained his balance and went over to speak to the second policeman but, again, he slipped on the ice and, yet again, his arm swung out. Moreover, it just 'happened' to be his stronger right arm again, rather than his left. Then, by pure chance, he also hit the second officer in the face.

Moreover his hand had, yet again, somehow formed a fist and connected directly with the officer's face with great force, causing injury. I listened to this absurd account, fully expecting my friend, who had been the Chairman of the jury, to say they had found him guilty. But he didn't. He said they acquitted him! When I asked why, he said: "*Well when you think about it, you can see how it could possibly happen*". I could hardly believe how naive they had been. The jury had acquitted the man, who was obviously guilty, because they were all new to the case, and also to this defendant.

They had no previous knowledge of his character, or of whether he was honest and had never been jurors before in any other person's case. Therefore they lacked confidence and were not absolutely sure, "*beyond all reasonable doubt*", that he had meant to hit the two police officers. Lastly, they were not allowed to see his previous convictions, or even to ask if he had any. A defendant's past criminal convictions are not admissible in evidence. The prosecution can't reveal them, or even mention that there are any, in case it "*might prejudice the jury against him*".

**The procedures and safeguards used in criminal trials do not apply to you and you must not impose them on yourself.**

Two further points arise in criminal trials which do not apply in your dealings with suspected wrongdoers in a workplace or church. Criminal trials (not civil trials or tribunals) set the burden of proof at an extremely high level, namely "*beyond all reasonable doubt*". However, that is *not* how you should operate. When you are trying to decide whether person B has engaged in some misconduct, as alleged by person A, you do *not* have to be convinced "*beyond all reasonable doubt*" that he did it.

I stress that, because many wrongly think that the evidence has to be sufficiently compelling to get above the bar that is set in a criminal trial. All you usually need in your workplace, church, or daily dealings with people, is be satisfied to the standard used in a civil court or tribunal. That means where one person or company sues another, claiming damages or payment of some debt. In such a case the Judge gives a judgement which is completely in favour of one party if he concludes that that party's evidence is even a tiny bit more persuasive than the other's.

So a Judge in a civil court or tribunal hears all the witnesses and sees all the evidence. Then, if he thinks it is 50.1% likely that the Claimant is being truthful, and 49.9% likely that the Defendant is, he must give a judgement which is 100% for the Claimant. It is like a coin which has to come down either completely heads, or completely tails, every time. The Judge must do the same even if there is a large amount of doubt, i.e. even 49.9% worth of doubt.

You need to really grasp this and start to apply it in your daily dealings with people. If you don't you are effectively saying that you will reject what a complainant or witness says, and side with the accused, even if the case against him is extremely strong, merely because there is still a fragment of doubt in

your mind. If you do that, as many managers and church leaders do, without explicitly saying so, you will instead do an injustice to those who come to you for help, or with a complaint.

You would be choosing *not to believe* them, just because they can't prove their allegations to the extraordinarily high standards required by a criminal Court. That means you would be choosing to believe the person they are complaining about, or warning you of, merely because the evidence against the accused person is not 100% perfect? When it is put in those stark terms, would you agree that that would be an absurd way to operate?

**Moreover, unlike a criminal court, you *can* allow yourself to be influenced by checking up on a person's past behaviour and reputation.**

A criminal court cannot allow the jurors to be shown any evidence of the accused's past criminal convictions. However, you need not put any blinkers on yourself when you deal with people at work, in church, or anywhere else. Therefore feel free to find out all you can about a person if called upon to investigate or discipline them, or to adjudicate in a dispute between them and another person. It is entirely right and proper for you to have as much information as you can reasonably find about their background, reputation and past history.

In particular, you need not think you are under any duty to *refrain* from looking at such things. Neither do you have to 'compartmentalise' your mind, as judges do, whereby they refuse to allow themselves to take a particular piece of evidence into account. They sometimes have to do that, *but you don't*. Also, feel free to speak to others about a person's past behaviour, or about similar, or different, complaints that have been made about him previously by others.

You should not feel that you are doing something wrong by seeking the views and knowledge of others, provided that you also weigh that up carefully. You may be amazed at how much other people do know, but which they have never mentioned, for one reason or another. An exception to this, where it may not be right to speak to others and seek their input, would be if the situation was highly *confidential*, such that you cannot reveal that you are investigating it. Another would be where you don't yet feel able to *trust* the other people because they themselves are also suspects.

If so, you would need to wait until you find out who can be trusted before speaking to them. Even then, you may need to do it in a *covert manner*, without disclosing your real purpose, or even letting them know that you are investigating anything at all. Alternatively, you could speak to one or two trusted people who are involved in that business or church and get their advice as to whether you are over-estimating or under-estimating the scale of the problems. That will help you to keep a sense of proportion too.

**Furthermore, unlike a criminal court, you do *not* have to presume that people are "innocent until they are proved guilty".**

Another misconception is imagining that one is obliged to presume that people are all "*innocent until proven guilty*". That is, quite rightly, how criminal trials are conducted, because so much is at stake for the Defendant. He could lose his reputation, his job and even his liberty, if the jury or magistrates conclude that he is guilty. It is therefore a huge decision and the legal system, correctly, seeks to stack the odds in favour of the accused. However, you are not a court of any kind, least of all a criminal court, and you do not need to impose that restraint upon yourself.

Therefore do *not* assume that people are innocent until proven guilty. In fact, don't *assume* anything at all. Conduct yourself throughout the investigation on the basis that they *could* be guilty. Don't make the assumption that they *aren't* guilty while you are trying to work out *whether* they are. Such an assumption will not help you to find the truth. It may well blind you to clues, anomalies and curious

little inconsistencies which you might have noticed, and taken more seriously, if you hadn't been trying to assume his innocence.

This point is even more important after you have finished your enquiries, and gathered all the available information. It may be that you still aren't sure who did what, or what their motives were. Where there is no clear outcome, if you were to apply the maxim "*innocent until proven guilty*", you would have to proceed on the basis that the accused is innocent. So you would have to allow him to emerge from your inconclusive enquiries with his "*character intact and his reputation unstained*" as some judges are fond of saying, at least in films.

That may be necessary for those who are found not guilty in criminal trials, but not for the people you deal with in your firm or church. If accusations are made against person A, or if you have suspicions of your own but there is insufficient evidence to be sure of his guilt, don't 'acquit' him. Treat the case as 'unproven', as they say in Scotland. That means you aren't saying he's guilty, but you aren't saying he's innocent either. You are just letting the case rest for the time being, and leaving matters unresolved, on the basis that you are *open-minded* as to whether he was guilty.

That being so, you will be willing to 'try' him again for the same offence if more evidence emerges afterwards. You will also be more willing to take seriously any further or other allegations that may be made later against that man. In other words, he has not left your 'court' with his character intact and his reputation unstained etc. He has left it with a distinct question mark hanging over him. That will then cause you to be more alert, quicker to examine any new allegations, and also more willing to believe them, than you were the first time round.

**When facing several issues or concerns about a person's character, conduct or attitude, write all the points down in one document. Then you will be better able to see the position as a whole.**

Imagine you're trying to decide whether a person is at fault or guilty of some misconduct at work or in a church. Or maybe you are investigating a complaint, or just trying to work out how serious a situation is. In such circumstances look at *all* of the allegations, complaints or incidents together, *in one go, at the same time*. If all the facts are assembled in one place, all together, it will make it much easier to identify a pattern if there is one. Don't reduce your own ability to see such patterns by making the mistake of dealing with each item one at a time, as if there were no others.

If you do that you will inevitably under-estimate the problem. You will also be much more likely to believe people's lies and to make naïve misjudgements. Therefore a good and practical policy is to write out, *in one document*, a full list of all the problems, complaints and allegations. Also feel free to include within it any unproven little 'niggles' or doubts that you, or others, have that make you feel uneasy. Do not assume that those are invalid or that they are too small, or too uncertain, to take into account.

When each of these is looked at alone it may seem trivial and/or inconclusive. You may also feel it would be an over-reaction to do anything about it. Others may already be accusing you of over-reacting. However, when you write all the items down, *in one complete list*, the real magnitude of the problem(s) becomes much more apparent. It is also surprising how long your list can be. You may find yourself writing page after page about incidents, events, inconsistencies, concerns, misgivings, clues and niggling doubts which you had never realised were so numerous, serious or consistent.

That is because you had never previously tried to *list* them and had always looked at each of them in isolation and then ignored them, or refused to believe them, one at a time. That has happened to me many times. Before you make your list, each of the problems and allegations are floating around separately in your mind. However, a person's mind can only think of one thing at a time. So, when you're focusing on concern X, you can't simultaneously be thinking about concerns Y and Z.



But if you write them all down and then look at the list *as a whole*, you become able to see the patterns within the situation much more clearly. You are also much better able to see its scale, extent and consistency. Another useful technique I have used is to write a long letter to the person who is under investigation. I set out, for them to comment on, a list of all the concerns, issues and allegations. When they see it all gathered together, in one document, the accused person may well be unable to answer it. He will often realise the game is up and resign, or leave, or admit his guilt.

Alternatively, he may continue to deny his guilt but become hostile. That is another way in which people can reveal their true nature. Any of these reactions makes the position much clearer. There are also other benefits from this approach, even where the person continues to deny everything. You will be better able to gauge the merits of the explanation which he provides for his actions. Occasionally they will try to write back answering all the points. That is rare because guilty people don't want to get drawn into specific, detailed discussions about a clear set of facts and allegations.

They prefer vagueness, evasiveness and non-specific, broad-brush answers, because they don't want to be caught out. Even if they do try to respond, when you see all their replies gathered together in one document, instead of lots of separate arguments, you will see how weak it is. That may well be the moment when you realise they are at fault. This approach also makes it much harder for a dishonest person to rely on flimsy excuses and invented stories. The fact that they all have to be put down together, in one document, makes the implausibility of their stories much easier to see.

One incredible thing may be believed, but not five or ten in a row, *all in the same letter*. When I have set out my entire case in a long list, followed by a series of probing questions, the accused person usually just gives up. My long letter often gets no reply at all. The wrongdoer knows the game is up and that he simply can't answer it. That in itself speaks volumes because an innocent, truthful person will be motivated to answer you and is willing, and able, to go into detail and provide full explanations. Moreover, it will all fit together because the truth is always consistent with itself.

Even if you don't get a written reply, or don't ask for one, you can still use your own detailed letter or list as the basis for a subsequent meeting or interview with the alleged wrongdoer. As you work your way down it in the meeting, asking a series of questions and noting their replies, the position becomes much clearer. Having that list in front of you as you question them also gives you more confidence and clarity of thought. It is all set out in an orderly way, if only for yourself, irrespective of what the accused person thinks of it, though you needn't always show it to them.

Your being able to go through all of the facts so methodically will often cause the person to think they are inevitably going to be defeated. They may then feel they have little to lose. So they may take their 'mask' off in the meeting. You will then see a very different demeanour which wasn't there before, while they were still putting on an act. They may even become openly hostile. That in itself can be useful to you in weighing them up. However, you would probably never have got that intemperate response, or that extra evidence, if you had not written your detailed list or letter.

**Never form a positive judgment based solely on what people say. Always judge others primarily by their actions and by what their lives produce.**

You can validly form a *negative* view of another person based solely on what they say. Therefore you can conclude that they are *not* to be trusted on the basis of their words alone. However, you cannot safely form a *positive* view, or feel able to trust them, based solely on what they say. Jesus told us to judge people by their fruits. That means focusing mainly on what they do, and what their lives produce, rather than what they say. That will give us a much more accurate impression of that person's character than we would get from forming our conclusions based solely on what they say.

**A warning against going to the opposite extreme and becoming cynical, suspicious and even paranoid, seeing wickedness where there is none, and falsely accusing the innocent**

The most common problem, and the main one which this book is seeking to remedy, is the tendency to be naïve and overly trusting. Then you fail to see wickedness, or to identify the wicked, where they *do* exist. However, if you have begun to open your eyes to this issue, and are now actively on the lookout for deceivers, abusers and manipulators, it is easy to fall into the trap of going to the opposite extreme and starting to see wickedness where it *does not* exist.

You could then become cynical, jaundiced, suspicious, prejudiced, and even paranoid, in your dealings with other people. If so, you could end up seeing everyone as false, every stranger as a threat, and assuming that others always have sinister motives, even when there is no evidence for any of that. The Devil and his demons are very adaptable. If they can't get you to remain naïve and undiscerning, whereby you can't see any wrongdoers anywhere, they will be quite content to push you in the opposite direction instead.

Then they take advantage of your new found openness to this issue, so as to make you too quick to see malice and falsehood where there is none. They will seek to get you to *assume* automatically, as a given, that others have evil intentions rather than finding out *whether* they do, based on facts and evidence. An analogy which springs to mind is with judo. That is largely based on seeking to get the opponent to lose his balance. If one fighter can achieve that, he can actually use his opponent's greater size and weight against him.

Thus, if he sees his opponent leaning in one particular direction, he would seek to push him further in that direction. But if he was leaning the other way, he would be equally happy to push him further in that direction. That is pretty much how the demons operate when seeking to trip us up. If they see that you are currently leaning in the direction of being naïve, unaware and undiscerning, they will seek to push you further in that direction and to get you to be even more naïve. Ideally, they would like you to go so far that way that you can't see any evil, even when it is right in front of you.

They will also seek to convince you that you should trust everybody, even if it is obvious that they are false. However, if the demons can see that you are starting to be aware of the wicked, and that you are now on the lookout for deceivers, they will try to push you further in that direction so that you start to trust nobody at all. They will keep whispering into your mind until you make it your standard default-setting to assume that everybody is wicked, malicious, devious, and out to get you.

Christians being paranoid, and making false accusations against innocent people, is just as useful to the demons as our inability to see wickedness anywhere. Therefore, as with every other part of the Christian life, the aim should be to achieve a healthy overall balance. Then your eyes would be wide open, such that you are fully alert to the likelihood of coming across some wicked people, wherever you go. But, at the same time, you would be keeping an open mind and not forming any actual judgment, *in either direction*, until you have the necessary evidence to enable you to do so.

Then you will be capable of trusting that minority of people who have proved themselves to be trustworthy. That is vital because, otherwise, you will not be able to function properly or to form, or keep, healthy relationships. You would be treating strangers as if they were enemies, and friends as if they were strangers, or even enemies. It would still be based on the same error - that you do not differentiate between people. The only difference is that it is now causing you to continually suspect them *all* of malice and falsehood, rather than none of them.

**When ‘diagnosing’ wickedness, as when diagnosing an illness, you generally need to be looking for a number of factors and signs, rather than forming a judgment based on one fact or event.**

If you were a doctor you would not leap to the conclusion that a patient has chickenpox merely because you see red spots on their skin. That symptom would be consistent with chickenpox, and you would take it into account. But you would also want to check for various other signs, indicators and symptoms, such as temperature, itching and so on, in addition to those spots, before you came to any conclusion. If not, you might mistake any one of a host of other conditions for chickenpox. Then, not only would your diagnosis be wrong, but also your prescription and treatment.

Therefore, in chapters 4 and 5, but also in this book as a whole, I have set out many tests, indicators, warning signs, issues and other forms of evidence which you need to watch out for when weighing up what a person is. Rather than arriving at a conclusion based on only one fact or event, you would, ideally, want to take into account every piece of information and evidence that you can reasonably gather, so as to maximise the chances of forming a correct judgment. That is the only safe and sensible way to approach this, and indeed any other, form of enquiry.

Each test or indicator does need to be applied and taken into account by itself. However, it also needs to be assessed alongside, and in the light of, as many other indicators as you are able to gather. You need those to either confirm or exclude various possible alternative explanations for what you have seen or heard. Moreover, that checking and double checking needs to be done in both directions. You need to find out whether good reports and positive indicators are true and reliable, but also whether rumours, suspicions, accusations and other negative indicators are true and reliable.

If you take that careful and balanced approach it will be more difficult for the demons, or the wicked, to get you to misjudge any situation, or to over-react or under-react to it. Therefore be careful in applying these tests, especially in the early days, while you are still getting used to all of this. Take your time in forming conclusions. As in one’s early days studying medicine or law, a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. So the hasty or over-zealous application of a test, without taking into account all other relevant factors, is hazardous.

The demons, and the wicked themselves, will also seek to get you to take their bait by taking offence at things you have heard, or which you suspect others have said or done. Don’t be too quick to believe what you are told about what others have said about you or done to you. Naivety does not only consist of being too slow to believe that others have behaved wickedly. It is just as naïve to be *too quick* to believe such reports, without proper enquiry. Many of us are too ready to believe evil of others, who may well be innocent, just because somebody has said something about them.

In my own case, I have been amazed at how willing some people have been to believe false statements about me, without a shred of investigation, or any attempt to verify the allegations. In that way the demons, and the wicked, find it easy to drive a wedge between good and decent people. They take advantage of our willingness to immediately believe, and take offence at, the things that we are told others have said or done. If we could all be aware of that trick, and avoid falling for it, we would see the Church greatly strengthened.