

How to identify and handle wicked people

BOOK 6 IN THE REAL CHRISTIANITY SERIES

SEAN KEHOE

realchristianity.com

PUBLISHING DETAILS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO BIBLE PUBLISHERS

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How to identify and handle wicked people – Book 6 in the Real Christianity series

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Published by realchristianity.com of Box Number 5262, 6 Slington House, Rankine Road, Basingstoke, RG24 8PH, United Kingdom

ISBN 978-1-910968-05-5

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all of the many wicked people whom God has brought into my life over the years. Without having the chance to see their malice, craftiness and deceitful scheming at close quarters I would never have been able to learn as much as I did about their ways and methods. This book is, in large part, the product of what I have had to endure at the hands of wicked bosses, colleagues and employees but also wicked members of churches, and even wicked church leaders.

Each of these groups contained individuals who were, in various ways, false, manipulative, self-serving, malicious and devious. I did not enjoy any of my experiences with them at the time, but the lessons learned from each of them have stayed with me. Therefore I am now grateful to God for bringing all those wicked people into my life, though I cannot claim to have appreciated it at the time.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND HANDLE WICKED PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

*The wicked plots against the righteous
and gnashes his teeth at him, Psalm 37:12 (ESV)*

I have never seen any book which deals with how to identify and handle the wicked, or even what it means to be wicked. Twenty years ago I wouldn't have believed it possible if someone had told me I would one day write a book on this subject. At that time I knew very little about the wicked and, in particular, had no idea that they were so numerous. Above all, I never imagined that so many were to be found *inside churches*. When I started out as a Christian I was even more naïve, or 'simple', as the Bible puts it. I often failed even to recognise the wicked, let alone know how best to handle them.

But, over many years, God put me through a rigorous training programme whereby He brought into my life far more than my fair share of wicked people. I met some of them when I was a police officer for three years in the mid-1980s. My experiences in that job began to open my eyes to the realities of this world and how the wicked operate. However, that was only the start and I actually met far more of them in the years after I left the police, in workplaces and amongst those whom I acted for, and against, in my career as a lawyer.

However, I have probably encountered more wickedness *within churches* than outside of them, including many wicked church *leaders*. Their worldliness, dishonesty and manipulation was shocking. What was hardest to come to terms with was how brazen and unrepentant the wicked are, even inside churches. They seem to have no fear of God and no expectation of having to meet Jesus Christ face to face on the Day of Judgment and give an account. Somehow, they are unconcerned about this and they do as they please, without any apparent regard for how God sees their actions.

For some years I could not really believe what I was seeing or hearing when I discovered things the wicked had done. I kept telling myself that I must be imagining it, or exaggerating. But I wasn't. Most of the time I was actually under-estimating the true scale of the problem. Indeed, I probably still am, despite writing this book. Yet, as my eyes gradually opened, I saw that people's capacity for wickedness, even within churches, was far worse than I had suspected. God also exposed me to countless other learning experiences within my law firm, which I wholly owned, and also in previous law firms, where I was either an employee or a partner.

In this book I set out some of the situations I faced and the various people I had to handle. The facts are all true, although names have been altered for the sake of those concerned - even the wickedest of them. I still pray for these people, and even feel that I owe them a debt, in a certain sense. Without their evil schemes I would never have had the learning opportunities which led to this book. I have written it for the sake of those who are still as naïve and unsuspecting as I once was. How I wish someone had put this book into my hands 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago.

It would have prevented many misjudgements and saved me from a lot of the devious tricks that I fell for. It would also have helped to open my eyes much faster than they did open during those years. But there was no such book. Or, if it existed, I never saw it. I cannot claim that this book will solve every problem and identify every deceiver and manipulator in your life. The wicked people that you meet will each have their own features. However, the general principles and advice set out in this book will shift the odds in your favour. Then, at the very least, you won't be as naïve and undiscerning as I was in my early encounters with the wicked.

Another of my objectives for this book is to seek to persuade you that the wicked are vastly more numerous, and have much more influence over your life, than you probably believe at present. Too many of us go through life largely unaware of the impact that the wicked have. In particular, we do not realise, or are not willing to accept, that the wicked are to be found in churches, as members and even as leaders. The unbiblical structure of traditional, hierarchical churches deepens the problem.

Many are led by ‘clergymen’ who are building careers, and even empires, for themselves. Also unhealthy man-made traditions are followed, rather than what the Bible says.

The net effect of all this is that it is probably within the *leadership* of churches that the highest proportion of wicked Christians are to be found, rather than amongst the ordinary members. The traditional manmade model of church structure means that wolves and hirelings are not prevented from getting to the top, as they should be. On the contrary, their advancement is made even easier because the absence of biblical safeguards leaves the way wide open for them. Such carnal, *clergy-minded* men believe they are above God’s people and feel entitled to rule over their churches.

They act in an authoritarian and controlling manner, rather than as the gentle servants and shepherds that church leaders are meant to be. Please see Book 8 in this series for a fuller discussion of the problems caused by unbiblical church structures and practices. However, I will give examples in this book of some of the wicked church leaders I have dealt with and explain the methods they used to use, exploit, dominate, manipulate, control and deceive people. Such men are very highly skilled in the art of deception, especially with anybody they perceive as a threat.

As your discernment begins to grow those techniques will be used against you because, if your eyes are starting to open, the wicked will immediately notice. You will be seen as a threat and they will take steps to silence you and marginalise you. They feel entitled to do whatever is needed to defend themselves and their own interests. So, they react in the flesh and lash out, without any thought as to what God may think of their behaviour. They can easily persuade themselves that any reaction or tactic is justified if it is in response to a perceived threat to their own position.

However, the truth is that many of our reactions aren’t justified. We are always required to act, *and react*, in a godly way, even when we feel threatened. Indeed, it is precisely at such times that we most need to control ourselves and to do what is right, not what is expedient. That is how we Christians are supposed to operate, but it is not how most of us actually behave, even in churches. We therefore need to be realistic and wary about that, yet without being afraid of the wicked. We must not be intimidated into silence, or inactivity, when we should be making decisions and taking firm action.

Likewise, we have a duty to avoid being naïve, such that the wicked walk all over us, because we can’t believe that anyone could be wicked enough to do the things they do. Under-reaction, or non-reaction, is almost as bad as over-reacting or reacting in the wrong ways. Therefore, we need to increase our discernment and respond firmly to the tactics of the wicked, but *without resorting to the same tactics ourselves*. That’s probably the hardest part of all because, although God wants us to be as *wise as serpents*, He also requires us to be as *innocent as doves*. That seemingly contradictory pair of objectives is hard to achieve, but it is possible, if you really want it.

I need to add an important counter-balancing point to be borne in mind by those who are persuaded that the wicked are numerous and need to be taken seriously. We also need to avoid going to the opposite end of the spectrum, whereby we are suspicious and distrustful of everyone. Those who were once oblivious to the threat posed by the wicked will often go too far the other way and become paranoid instead, seeing wickedness and conspiracies everywhere. They can end up distrustful of everyone, even of those who have consistently demonstrated, by their fruits, that they *are* trustworthy.

Most Christians are clustered at the ‘South Pole’, in that they are naïve, overly trusting of everyone they meet, and unable to discern anything. But those who have been emotionally scarred by bad experiences at the hands of the wicked often go all the way across to the ‘North Pole’. They then trust nobody, suspect everybody, and can become dysfunctional through paranoia. They may consider that to be discernment, but it isn’t. It is actually a serious error and may end up causing as much damage as if they had remained at the ‘South Pole’, where they were utterly naïve and trusted everybody.

Bear in mind the Devil’s overall strategy, which the demons implement. Their preference is for you to be naïve, undiscerning and easily deceived and manipulated. However, if they see that you are

beginning to wake up, and are trying to grow in discernment, the demons will alter their approach. They will seek instead to make you paranoid by feeding you all sorts of rumours and lies, hoping to get you to over-react and falsely suspect innocent people. Then you may become alienated from the good and decent people whom God has brought into your life, and with whom He wants you to cooperate.

Imagine a general practitioner who is unaware, or unwilling to believe, that anybody at all has cancer. Thus he never diagnoses *any* of his patients with cancer, or sends any of them for tests, or gives them any treatment for cancer, because he doesn't recognise its existence. Or it may be that he assumes cancer to be incredibly rare - the kind of medical condition which he might come across once or twice in a 40 year career. Thus, anyone presenting with symptoms consistent with cancer will be reassured and told not to worry, or diagnosed as having some other, lesser ailment.

Such a misguided doctor would probably fail to diagnose, or deal with, real cancer cases on a monthly, or even a weekly, basis. That would be very damaging. However, what if he went to the opposite extreme and it became his working assumption that *all* his patients have cancer and that they all need radical intervention, including chemotherapy or even surgery? He too would be a menace and would do great harm, due to his mistaken assumptions and his excessive zeal in contending against something which, very often, isn't there at all.

We need to head for the 'Equator', whereby we become genuinely discerning, seeing wickedness where it really is, but not imagining it to be where it isn't. It is a place of balance, in which we assess and classify every situation or person with an open mind, based on the evidence and on shrewd, wise discernment. Neither child-like innocence and naivety, nor sour-spirited prejudice are any good. I elaborate further on the vital need for balance in chapter 5. Please refer to that, and take its advice seriously, if you wish to grow in discernment without becoming paranoid and falsely suspecting or accusing everybody you meet.

I don't want to make any inflated claims for this book. It will not solve, or prevent, all your problems, but I believe it can *reduce* them. At any rate, it will put you further forward than if you had to figure everything out for yourself, as I had to. I hope this book will help you to achieve more victories, and sustain fewer defeats, in the battles you have to face. By the way, those battles will certainly come, whether you want them or not, especially if you have the love of the truth and aim to serve God faithfully. The unbelieving world, the demons, and the apostate churches, will make quite sure of that.

This book will also help you to fight those battles in the right *manner*, in or through your *spirit* or '*new man*', rather than your '*flesh*' or '*old man*'. (See Book 7.) It all has to be done with integrity and self-control, not by imitating the carnal, worldly people with whom we have to contend. The first goal is to grow sufficiently in knowledge, wisdom, understanding and discernment to become able to identify the wicked. The second goal is to learn how to handle them effectively and appropriately, without either over-reacting or under-reacting.

We live in a very wicked time in world history. Indeed, given the hugeness of the apostasy in the churches, and also the abortions that are now taking place on an industrial scale, ours may even be the most wicked generation that has ever lived, at least in the West. Moreover, the breadth and intensity of that wickedness is growing, most notably in the rise of Islam, militant homosexuality, gender confusion and aggressive political correctness. If we are to handle the wickedness of our age we must become like the men of Issachar, who came to join the young King David in his early days. The Bible makes this unusual statement about them, which we should all want to be said of us:

Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...
1 Chronicles 12:32 (a) (RSV)

Sean Kehoe 7 April 2016

CHAPTER 1

SOME INTRODUCTORY POINTS ABOUT THE ‘WICKED’ AND HOW WE SHOULD DEFINE THE WORD

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.
1 Corinthians 14:20 (NASB)

¹⁴ *Behold, the wicked man conceives evil
and is pregnant with mischief
and gives birth to lies.*

¹⁵ *He makes a pit, digging it out,
and falls into the hole that he has made.*

¹⁶ *His mischief returns upon his own head,
and on his own skull his violence descends.*
Psalm 7:14-16 (ESV)

*Thy commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.*

Psalm 119:98 (RSV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1 (RSV)

⁷*For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; ¹¹for he who greets him shares his wicked work.*

2 John 7-11 (RSV)

¹⁰ *Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand.*

Daniel 12:10 (RSV)

The wicked are far more ordinary, and numerous, than most of us imagine.

It is a big mistake to assume that the wicked are all exceptional, like Hitler and Stalin, and that the ordinary people we know cannot be evil enough to be worthy of that label. Actually, the wicked are alarmingly plentiful and most of them are very ordinary. I can't give a figure for their numbers in absolute terms, or even as a percentage, but they are all around us. We work with them, and live alongside them, and they look and sound quite normal. They just have hard hearts and are false, devious, selfish, manipulative and malicious. King David often came across such people, and so will you:

*More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;*

Psalm 69:4(a) (RSV)

We get an early indication as to how wickedness is defined, and of how common it is, from the account of Potipher's wife. She was attracted to Joseph and wanted to commit adultery with him. Note that Joseph says that this would be "great wickedness". Evidently, he did not think that wickedness consisted only of mass murder and genocide, but also of 'ordinary' things like adultery:

⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and having him he had no concern for anything but the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. ⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Lo, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand; ⁹ he is not greater in this house than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Genesis 39:6-9 (RSV)

If adultery would have been "great wickedness", what does that say about our society, where adultery, fornication, pornography, homosexuality, cross-dressing and even paedophilia are now commonplace? The fact that such things happen all around us doesn't mean they aren't wicked. It means there are a lot of wicked people. Whatever their exact number may be, it is large, and growing rapidly. At any rate, it is much higher than most of us assume. What Potipher's wife did afterwards was also wicked. She was enraged by Joseph's refusal and, in her spite, falsely accused him of attempted rape.

How many people today tell lies and make false accusations? If lying and deviousness are also wickedness, then the wicked must be alarmingly numerous. So, instead of thinking you will meet a wicked person every ten years, expect to meet some every day. Also, put in place new methods for dealing with the wicked and for protecting yourself, your family, your staff, your colleagues, your boss, your business and your church from them. Let's begin with a few 'case studies' of some of the wicked people I have known. That will be useful before we consider how to define "the wicked".

Andrew's story - a would-be teacher whose class-teaching assessment test was deliberately sabotaged by the very teacher who was supposed to be his mentor

'Andrew' was training to be a teacher and was in his "PGCE" year. He had to spend a number of weeks in a school, teaching classes and being monitored on his performance. Andrew had been allocated a teacher in the school who was meant to look after him and set him teaching assignments. We will call her 'Gladys'. However, she took such a dislike to him that she deliberately tried to cause him to fail. Andrew had to teach a particular lesson and be formally assessed on it by an examiner from the university. So, even at the best of times, it would be a stressful experience.

Gladys knew Andrew was nervous. She also knew there was a boy in that class with severe autism. He had to stick to his usual routine or he would become agitated. In particular, it was vital that he sit in his usual chair, as he could not cope with being moved. Gladys knew that boy well, having taught his class for a long time. So she was fully aware of what would happen if he was forced to move to another seat. Nevertheless, two minutes before the lesson was due to begin, while she was getting the class ready, but before the examiner arrived, Gladys forced the autistic boy to move.

She did this for no valid reason. Indeed, she never gave any reason, even afterwards, when Andrew appealed. Nobody had ever forced the boy to move before, because all the teachers knew he would become disruptive, which is exactly how it turned out. The boy protested, but Gladys still forced him to move chairs. Then, just before the examiner entered the room to assess Andrew's handling of the lesson, Gladys slipped out. She left Andrew on his own to handle the consequences of what she had just done. As the examiner walked in, the autistic boy was already causing chaos.

He then ruined the whole lesson by shouting, moving about and being impossible to deal with. This made it appear that Andrew could not handle a class. The assessor didn't know anything about what had just happened before he entered the room, let alone why. Andrew therefore failed that assessment and, when he appealed, Gladys made weasel-worded excuses. But it was plain that she had done it all deliberately, to sabotage Andrew's assessment. What Gladys did clearly deserves to be labelled as wicked, as it was devious, vindictive and cruel.

It was also a betrayal of trust. She had the task of mentoring Andrew while he was at that school. So, she had a clear duty to help, not to undermine him. If you don't realise that the wicked are usually ordinary people like Gladys, then you won't recognise them when they appear in your life. You will not be looking in the right places, or for the right signs. You'll be mistakenly watching out for people who look and sound strange, or who do exceptional things. Instead, you should be on the lookout for entirely ordinary people, doing ordinary things, but with malice, deviousness and manipulation.

We need to stop being surprised by the nature and activities of the wicked. They are all around us and are to be fully expected.

King Solomon, the author of the book of Proverbs, lamented the fact that so many of us are naïve or 'simple' and he repeatedly urges us to stop being so:

¹⁵ *The naïve believes everything,
But the sensible man considers his steps.*
Proverbs 14:15 (NASB)

²² *“How long, O naïve ones, will you love being simple-minded?.....”*
Proverbs 1:22(a) (NASB)

⁵ *“O naïve ones, understand prudence;.....”*
Proverbs 8:5(a) (NASB)

⁶ *Leave simpleness, and live,
and walk in the way of insight.”*
Proverbs 9:6 (RSV)

A sign that a person is naïve is their inability even to grasp the fact that so many other people are wicked, let alone to identify and resist them. Thus, a naïve person will be surprised by the nature and activities of the wicked. They will not be aware beforehand that those people are wicked, or that their motives are sinister. That said, if you are 'surprised' by a discovery of wickedness, it is at least a small step forward. It shows you are starting to recognise that wickedness exists and have identified an example of it in operation.

Nevertheless, the very fact that you are surprised by such a discovery shows you still think there is something rare or exceptional about wicked people. For example, a Christian lady called 'Imelda', told me about the actions of her former boss. He had undermined her and also lied to her and about her. She expressed amazement at *“how they can lie so easily”*. I had to smile. She sounded exactly like I did before I discovered how normal it is to be wicked, and how easy they find it to lie.

Imelda's story - a senior administrator who was driven out of her job by a deceitful, manipulative manager

'Imelda' had worked for a government department for over 30 years and was good at her job. She was also exceptionally sincere, which is partly why she found it so amazing that other people lie. She had worked for many years under an honest boss who treated people well. He was then replaced by a

younger boss, 'Daphne'. She had less experience than Imelda in the work of that department. That was when Imelda's problems began. Daphne began to pick on her and to find fault with her work, even though it was excellent. At any rate, it had never been considered deficient before.

The victimisation got worse and a formal evaluation was carried out by the HR department. Imelda was interviewed and monitored and Daphne continued to criticise her work. She also told lies about Imelda's work and manipulated the evaluation procedure. Indeed, she had bullied the HR department into getting involved in the first place. Imelda eventually felt so worn down she stopped fighting. She passively accepted a formal disciplinary, even though she was in her fifties and had an exemplary record. Shortly afterwards, she took early retirement.

Having got what she wanted, Daphne was in a good mood. She even invited Imelda for drinks at an office get-together. Imelda found it remarkable that, having been so hostile, and having told so many lies, Daphne could suddenly be so relaxed and friendly with her now that she was leaving. She also expressed surprise that Daphne felt no guilt or shame at how she had behaved. That was a mystery to Imelda, but it was all quite clear to me. Daphne felt threatened at having a person working for her who knew more about that department than she did. In that area, Daphne was a novice, as she was from a different department.

I told Imelda that what had happened to her was actually commonplace. It is referred to as "*managing somebody out*". Daphne wanted to get rid of Imelda and was willing to tell whatever lies were necessary to achieve that. There were three main reasons for that. Firstly, she was insecure in her new supervisory role. Secondly, she didn't want a person below her who knew more than she did. Thirdly, she had also realised that Imelda was unusually honest and she was threatened by that too. She saw Imelda's honesty as a potential hazard, not a virtue.

A dishonest person won't want any honest people working under them, or alongside them. They are likely to get in the way and expose things that they don't want exposed. Therefore a dishonest boss will drive out their most honest staff and keep the dishonest ones. That may sound irrational, but it makes perfect sense to a dishonest person. Imelda could eventually see these things, when I pointed them out, but they were all new to her. She had never imagined that any of those things could be happening.

She had assumed throughout that Daphne was being 'hostile', for no apparent reason. In fact, her boss's emotions had never really come into it. Daphne had simply wanted to achieve her objective, which was to remove someone who was a threat, and to replace her with someone who wasn't. It wasn't personal. It was just a piece of business that needed to be done. It was cool and calculating, and was not done in any heat of emotion.

I said to Imelda: "She did what she needed to do to get you to resign. Daphne wasn't upset herself. She was just inventing ways to upset you, in order to drive you out. Once she had achieved that, there was no need to keep up the act any longer." Imelda had assumed that Daphne had taken an irrational, emotional dislike to her. In fact, it was the opposite. Daphne's antipathy was at the level of her will, not her feelings. Her actions were planned, from beginning to end, not spontaneous, or due to losing her temper.

Joshua's story - a school teacher who had to endure ten years under a malicious, devious Principal/Headmaster

A similar story, but with a different ending, happened to 'Joshua'. He was a schoolteacher in the USA and was subjected to a much longer campaign of bullying. It actually continued for ten years! The difference was that, unlike Imelda, he *could* see what was going on and why. His problem was he did not know how to deal with it properly, or how to defend himself. Nevertheless, he was

determined not to give in. He endured it all and refused to resign at any stage, partly because he knew that that was exactly what the Principal (Head Teacher) wanted him to do.

Similar ingredients were involved as in Imelda's case. The Principal wanted to get Joshua out of the school and tried every dirty trick in the book in the hope that he could wear Joshua down and get him to resign. However, Joshua had a stubborn streak, which the Principal had not been expecting. Therefore he would not be intimidated. However, as Joshua dug his heels in and refused to be driven out, the Principal and other managers kept on taking the persecution to higher and higher levels. They told lies about him and made bogus complaints and persuaded others to do so too.

He had to attend regular disciplinary hearings before the Principal, at which trumped-up charges would be made. Each time he proved the allegations were false but, every single time, the Principal would find him guilty. The Principal hoped this series of injustices would eventually break Joshua's spirit and that he would resign. But he always refused to do so. Therefore the school tried a new approach. Joshua was suspended, for months on end, but without being sent home. Instead, he was told to go and sit all day, doing nothing, at the offices of the Schools Board for the County.

Despite all the humiliation, month after month, Joshua still refused to resign. In the end, he had the victory. They reduced the age at which a teacher could retire and gave him a pension, when he was only 48. He then went into ministry as an assistant pastor in a Messianic Jewish church. He feels God used those ten years of vicious personal attacks to test him and develop his character. I am sure those were some of God's purposes in allowing all this to happen. But it would have been better if Joshua had also known how to defend himself, rather than just endlessly enduring things.

Be that as it may, the point is that the Principal and his deputy waged a 10 year campaign against him, which stooped to the depths in its dishonesty and malice. In fact, they were acting under the influence of demons. Even so, Joshua just kept on praying for God's help to endure it, and he got it. In the end, when he was allowed to retire early, an official in the County education department spoke to him privately. She knew all about the campaign of dirty tricks and said "*Well, you beat the system!*" There was amazement in her voice, because she knew how rarely that happened.

How two wicked women who were responsible for a training day lied about an innocent person to cover their own failure

I was told this story by 'Albert', who worked in the UK Civil Service. He went on a training course led by two women, 'Beryl' and 'Catherine'. The course was badly prepared, with poor content, and was not well presented. Throughout the day Albert and the other delegates felt increasingly frustrated at having to sit through such low-quality training. They all knew it was the fault of Beryl and Catherine, who were employed full time by the Civil Service to provide such training.

On such training days all the delegates are given an appraisal sheet with a series of questions about their view of the quality of the course, its content, presentation and so on. As the day wore, and their discontent grew, Albert suggested that they each tell the frank truth about how useless the course had been. However, Albert anticipated that Beryl and Catherine would ask them to fill out the forms in the final session and peer over their shoulders to pressurise them into giving higher scores. So he suggested they all fill in their forms at the final tea break, while they were not present.

That is what they did and they gave scores of 2/10 or 3/10 for most of the categories. Then, when the final session came they all just handed in their forms, in a pile, already completed. Beryl and Catherine had no alternative but to hand them in to be scrutinised by their managers. During the day, Beryl and Catherine had also said various things which alerted Albert to the fact that they were devious. Even when they mentioned their dealings with their husbands, they revealed that they used manipulation to get what they wanted. Albert noticed that and it made him even more wary of them. He was right to be so, because their subsequent behaviour was very dishonest.

He learned, some weeks later, that they had told a pack of lies to their own managers to explain away the critical appraisal forms that the class had filled in. They both said that the lectures had been disrupted by one of the delegates. They made this accusation against a quiet, timid young woman, whom we will call 'Deirdre'. The two of them colluded together and then pre-empted matters by complaining to their bosses about Deirdre. They said she had been argumentative and kept distracting everyone by her constant interruptions.

Ironically, the truth was the exact opposite. Deirdre was introverted and had said virtually nothing all day. When the complaint was made the management took it at face value and began an investigation. Deirdre was interviewed, and denied all the accusations. But the evidence against her was consistent and was coming from two lecturers, both of whom were senior to her. It almost resulted in Deirdre losing her job. The only thing that prevented that was that she was unexpectedly tenacious in defending herself and in consistently denying the charges.

I believe that came as a surprise to Beryl and Catherine. They had picked her out as a victim precisely because she seemed to be the one who was least likely to defend herself. However, they were at least correct about how ineffective the enquiry would be. They anticipated that their managers would not contact the delegates and ask *them* whether it was true that Deirdre had wrecked the course. I suspect that was mainly because the managers investigating it could not be bothered to go to those lengths, as it would mean more effort on their own part.

They made no enquiries beyond questioning Deirdre herself. When she denied it, they decided to leave it unresolved. It now hangs on her personnel file as an unproven accusation and could affect her future in the Civil Service. Those senior managers neglected their duty. They should not have automatically believed Beryl and Catherine. They should also have carried out a proper investigation, to find out who was lying, even if it meant a lot more work for themselves. It should have been just as important to them to find out whether senior staff were telling lies as it was to deal with Deirdre.

Of course, Deirdre should also have had enough common sense, and confidence, to insist on other course delegates being interviewed, or even on contacting them herself. But she didn't. She either didn't think she could, or was afraid to do so, or it never occurred to her. Albert therefore only found out about this after it was all over. Thus Beryl and Catherine got away with it. Their explanation for the poor feedback was accepted, even though the case against Deirdre was unproven.

What is most striking is that these two wicked women felt able to make a *completely invented accusation*, against a person whom they *knew to be wholly innocent*, purely to improve their own position. That requires a cold, calculating and heartless person. Sadly, there are a great many such people in this world. Indeed, they are all around us. What was even worse is that one or other of them must have been sufficiently brass-faced to be the first one to suggest the idea.

That is either Beryl or Catherine must have thought of the scheme and said to the other "*Let's say that Deidre disrupted the lessons all day. Then we won't be blamed*". It is one thing to tell a bare-faced lie to someone who has no knowledge of the real facts. But to be the first to suggest it to a person who knows it to be a lie, and to feel no shame when doing so, is on a different scale. But that is what they did and, though it is evil, there is nothing remarkable or rare about it. This sort of thing happens all the time.

Reasons why the wicked are so effective at identifying the naive and gullible

The wicked have a natural shrewdness, whether they are falsely religious or non-religious. Either way, they have the same feral type of cunning, like wild animals have. They also operate in the flesh and are thoroughly worldly. Therefore they are well tuned-in to this world's system and all its values. Above all, they are highly skilled in the art of self-preservation and self-promotion. Indeed, that is often their only real talent even if, in every other way, they are of limited ability. I have known

people who were stupid in every other area of their life, yet they still had this remarkable craftiness when defending or promoting their own interests.

For example, a number of staff I have employed were incapable of thinking intelligently or imaginatively on behalf of a client. Yet they could do so to a very high level on their own behalf, whenever they needed to protect their own position or advance their own interests. I have seen this so consistently that I have come to regard it as the norm. Craftiness is, therefore, one of the distinguishing features of the wicked, and you can use it as one of the ways of identifying them. To a certain extent, their ungodly features give the wicked a competitive advantage over genuine believers.

In one sense, the less worldly we are, the less we are able to compete against worldly people, at least until we grow in maturity, experience and godly wisdom. (See my Book 5) In other words, we are not on a level playing field with the wicked. They have an advantage over the godly, because the game is always being played at their 'home ground', within this world system. Therefore, in this life, most battles are fought on the basis of the wicked person's own familiar rules and values. Jesus spoke of this worldly wisdom, guile, or feral shrewdness, that wicked people have, but the godly do not:

The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

Luke 16:8 (ESV)

A sincere but naive person, when up against someone wicked, is like a tourist who is outside of his usual environment. The wicked person sees the simple person's lack of awareness and realises they are not familiar with the rules of the battle. Therefore, just as a tourist is easy to identify, the simple person stands out and can be quickly spotted by the wicked. Once he has been identified, the battle is already half over. The wicked man will generally win from then on, because he knows what type of person he is dealing with, whereas the naive man doesn't.

This feral discernment operates in only one direction. The wicked man knows the nature of any person with whom he is dealing, but the simple person doesn't. Therefore there is an inequality, at least until that naive believer has grown in maturity and gained some godly wisdom. However, that maturing process can take years, during which a naive Christian will get kicked around and outmanoeuvred by the wicked. That is just the way it is. But there is a silver lining to that dark cloud. The mistreatment that we receive from the world, and from false Christians, can also help us to grow in wisdom, if we *allow it to do so*, by seeing it for what it is and by responding in the right ways.

The wicked also have the 'help' of demons who guide, warn and 'assist' them, in a perverted sense, by giving them knowledge and perception supernaturally. That is why the wicked can have an amazing foreknowledge of what you are planning. The wicked cannot read your mind. Indeed, there is nothing in the Bible to suggest that even the demons can do so. But demons can hear your conversations and read your letters and emails. They can also find ways to pass those facts on to the wicked. That is one of the ways in which the wicked get their information and it explains why they are so frequently ahead of the game.

They can often anticipate your intentions before you disclose them to anybody and know things that nobody knows except you. If so, the likelihood is they have had a tip-off from a demon. I have seen that happen even with people who were far from being naturally intelligent. Yet they knew things, or could sense things, without needing to be told by any human being. On many occasions when I ran a law firm, I would discover some misconduct by a member of staff and come in the next day intending to deal with them. There was no way, in the natural, that they could know of my discoveries, or of the confrontation that was coming.

Yet, somehow, they still knew, and would be staring at me as I entered the building. When our eyes met I could tell they already knew they had been exposed. Before I said a word, they were aware that I had found out what they were doing and that I was going to tackle them. They had been

supernaturally forewarned. In part it is also that the wicked are just more naturally astute than the simple. They are therefore able to read our facial expressions and body language for themselves, in addition to any demonic guidance they receive. They discover a lot in that way, just by using their own innate cunning. That will often also include snooping in your private papers, and speaking to others who know you.

How the godly discernment exercised by the wise differs from the feral cunning and shrewdness of the wicked

The godly discernment which God wants Christians to exercise is entirely different from the feral shrewdness of the wicked. It also takes much longer to learn. When the wicked are shrewd it is as if they are speaking in their own native language, which comes naturally to them. But when the wise are shrewd, it is as if they are operating in a second language, which they have had to learn slowly, and with much effort. Godly discernment is not inborn or natural. It can only be developed by studying God's Word and learning to apply biblical principles and also by being taught how to discern by others, who have more discernment than we have.

It also comes, thirdly, from hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit and, fourthly, from our own painful experiences of dealing with difficult situations and wicked people. None of the above things come to us naturally, easily or quickly. Godly wisdom is not in line with the standards of this world, or the ways of our sinful, fleshly nature. On the contrary, it is in line with God's nature, as set out in the Scriptures, and as expressed by the voice of the Holy Spirit. But, whether we receive wisdom via our study of the Bible, or directly from the Holy Spirit, it is equally alien to our own fleshly nature.

Godly values and principles cannot be understood or accepted by our carnal nature, or *old man*. However, they make perfect sense to our *new man*, who is born within us when we become a Christian. Thus, until we become mature, and perhaps not even then, the wicked have certain advantages over real Christians, even over a wise one. A wicked man listens to his own flesh nature (i.e. the old man) and/or to the demon(s) guiding him, and/or to the values and principles of this world. Therefore the wicked man has available to him three 'software packages' which are all fully integrated and compatible with each other.

The flesh, the world and the Devil all speak the same language. They all operate on the same evil principles, such as selfishness, manipulation, domination and control. However, a Christian has to operate on the much less familiar basis of the nature of his new man, rather than the old man or flesh. He must listen to, and be guided by, the quiet, gentle voice of the Holy Spirit, rather than the loud, penetrating voice of a demon. He also has to absorb the principles in the Bible, which take time and effort to learn, rather than the ways of this sinful world, which come so naturally to us.

Therefore the wicked have a head start. The perverted values of this world are already well known to them, having been thoroughly learned, even in childhood. Thus the godly man, however old he may be, is still at a disadvantage, at least in this limited sense. He has to operate through his new nature or new man, with which he is unfamiliar, rather than through his much more familiar old man or flesh nature. Operating in our new nature does not come naturally. It requires effort and persistence and is only learned slowly. Even for a wise man, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, is like operating on a radio frequency which is not perfectly tuned in and is therefore 'crackly', quiet and hard to hear clearly.

The Bible, and also the voice of the Holy Spirit, can only be properly understood and heard by our new man or new nature, not by the flesh or old man. Thus we can only operate on the basis of God's ways and principles while our new nature is being allowed to take the lead and to exert its influence over us. If we are operating in the flesh, as we are so prone to doing, even after we become a Christian, we will not hear God's voice clearly. Therefore we will get things wrong. Apostle Paul

speaks in Ephesians of the new way of life, and the new way of thinking, that a Christian must develop:

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:17-32 (ESV)

The wicked man never has to learn how to change ‘radio frequencies’ or make any effort to operate in a way which is unfamiliar or contrary to his sinful nature. He can just do whatever comes naturally to him, i.e. all the things he is used to doing. That is one reason why the wicked so frequently outwit the wise and defeat them, and even more so when they are up against an immature believer. But that is no reason to give up. We must persist, for as long as it takes, until we become effective in operating according to God's principles and through our new nature. Then, having learned these things, we must persist until they become a habit.

Another factor which gives the wicked a competitive advantage is that the non-wicked have never experienced being wicked. Therefore they can't identify with how the wicked think, act and react.

Another factor which gives the wicked a further competitive advantage is that a godly person, whether he is simple or wise, usually has no personal experience of ever having been wicked. The thoughts and ways of the wicked are therefore foreign to him, and even unimaginable. He has never personally thought along those lines. Thus he cannot easily identify with a wicked man, or think the kind of thoughts which they think. It requires a major leap of imagination, even to get on to the wicked person's wavelength at all, let alone to understand their ways thoroughly.

For many of us that mental adjustment is very difficult. It may even be impossible initially. However, if you look at it from the perspective of a wicked man, the same does not usually apply. There was a time, even if only in the distant past, when he was not yet wicked. For a time, he was only a fool. Before that he was naive. At the very least he will be able to think back to his childhood and remember what it was like to be innocent, unaware and capable of being tricked. He can therefore identify, to some degree, with the naivety and vulnerability of the simple person, with whom he is now contending.

Thus, when a wicked man is dealing with a Christian, he can see through him, and anticipate his thoughts, far better than the Christian can understand him. That is partly because that wicked man once had some of that same innocence or naivety himself. However, the average Christian has never had any personal experience of operating with the hardness and deviousness of the wicked man. So,

again, there is an inequality of experience, knowledge and understanding, which gives a temporary competitive advantage to the wicked man.

Genuine Christians, as opposed to false ones or apostates, tend to be late developers in acquiring discernment. They usually only become a match for the wicked as they get older, if at all. We ought to be much quicker learners but, it has not been like that in my own case, and for many others I know. I have been a slow learner. It took me until my forties to learn how to deal effectively with wicked people, even where they were only in their early twenties. They could understand me quickly, and accurately anticipate my actions, but I could not do the same in return. It took me decades to understand them, see their falseness, and predict what they would do.

The wicked will stick together and help each other against the godly. However, if it suits their own interests, they will also betray each other.

The wicked will frequently stick together and help each other, especially against the godly. Yet they will also betray each other, wherever it suits them, or if their own position is in any danger. I can think of two young women who worked for me, whom I will call 'Noreen and Rita'. They were dishonest, selfish and worldly and were both either already wicked or getting close to it. One day Rita got some paid time off work by lying to her supervisor. She pretended that her grandfather had just died and that she needed to go to his funeral.

Unfortunately for Rita, on the day when she was off work, her 'dead' grandfather rang the office and asked to speak to her. He had no idea of what she had told us about him. I was later told of his phone call and I realised she was lying and that her grandfather was still alive and well. That being so, I took the view that he did not require a funeral. In fact, he wasn't even ill. She just wanted to take a day off, possibly for an interview, and telling that lie seemed to her to be a good way of getting it.

When news of what Rita had done began to leak out amongst the staff, Noreen thought her own position might be in danger, as she had known of the lie all along. She feared that her own knowledge of it would be discovered. Therefore she came to me and disclosed what Rita had done, but only to protect herself, not because she disapproved of the lie. Noreen pretended to be concerned on the firm's behalf, but she had actually been aware of the lie all along and had not disapproved of it at all.

She just wanted to get in first and distance herself from Rita before the news reached me. That incident illustrates the way that the wicked will not risk their own necks to help each other. On the contrary, when the chips are down, they "*look after number one*", and will not hesitate to betray each other whenever it suits their own purposes. That said, provided there is no danger to themselves, and if it does suit their own purposes, they will also go to great lengths to cover up each other's wickedness and to hide it from you.

Cowardice is, in itself, a form of wickedness. It is also the cause of many other forms of wicked behaviour, in particular the failure to listen to our conscience and obey God's commands.

It will surprise many people to speak of cowardice as a form of wickedness in itself and also as a cause of other forms of wickedness. Some would not classify cowardice as a sin at all, let alone a serious one. It is widely seen as a mere weakness, if that. Indeed, many would even see it as sound common sense and essential for self-preservation and avoiding danger to oneself. That is not how the Bible portrays cowardice. For example, in the book of Revelation, where John gives examples of the types of people who will be sent to the Lake of Fire, we see "*the cowardly*" in first place:

⁸ *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.*"
Revelation 21:8 (RSV)

Have you ever thought it odd that the cowardly are at the head of the parade, leading the procession into the Lake of Fire? Why is the sin of cowardice given such prominence? I believe the answer is that cowardice is actually just a form of selfishness. Fear, in itself, is not cowardice. We all feel fear from time to time, but we are not all cowards. Some fears are real and well-founded, and others are imaginary. Even more are based on demonic lies and whisperings, as they seek to create fear and anxiety in us. Cowardice is the refusal to *face up to our fear* and overcome it.

It is the choice, at any given moment, and on any given issue, to do what is easiest and safest for oneself, rather than what is right. It means choosing whatever will get us off the hook and avoid difficulty. Many would view that as sheer common sense, as it assists with self-preservation and the avoidance of trouble for ourselves. The problem is that we are not permitted to promote our own interests, or to protect our property, job or reputation in sinful ways. Our duty is to do what is right and, in particular, to obey God's commands, not to look after our own interests, or even to stay alive.

That duty comes way ahead of avoiding controversy, financial loss, unpopularity or danger. However, that is not how most people see it, even Christians. The majority of us, when under pressure, will do whatever makes life easier or safer for ourselves, not what is right. Indeed, that choice is such an obvious one that little or no thought goes into it. The average person has already decided, long ago, that he will always favour himself over others, and his own self-interest over his duty. That automatic 'default-setting' was put in place early in life and then reinforced by countless small incidents, in which selfish, cowardly choices were made.

Such an attitude is a major sin in itself. But it also illustrates a person's general selfishness. They are, in effect, making themselves into a god, whose interests they serve. That 'god' is then always put ahead of other people, and even ahead of God Himself. That choice to look after number one will be made when any test arises in which any pressure has to be withstood, or risk taken, in order to be faithful and do what is right. However, cowardice is all the more wicked because of all the other sins it leads a person into, as they seek to avoid pressure and defend their own interests.

Cowardice leads a person to lie, cheat and manipulate and to control, dominate and exploit others. It also causes people to break promises, neglect their duty, cover up their wrongdoings and look the other way when they ought to intervene. They then pretend not to have seen anything when they could, and should, give evidence, either at work or to the police or other authorities. Worst of all, cowardice causes church leaders, who are meant to be shepherds, to refuse to put themselves at risk for the sake of the flock.

So, instead of running *towards* the danger when there is a threat to the people in the church, a cowardly leader runs *away* from it. Such a man is a 'hireling', who cares only for himself, not the sheep. So these tests of his courage reveal that he is not a true shepherd. The Bible commands us not to fear, but it also commands us to *be* courageous, as God said to Joshua before he led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Joshua knew this would involve years of hard fighting against the Canaanites and so God focused on the need for Joshua to be *strong and courageous*, even if he was afraid:

⁶ Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

Joshua 1:6-7 (RSV)

Courage is not a talent. It is something we choose to have.

Have you ever thought it odd that God *commands* Joshua to be courageous? He doesn't just suggest it or advise it. God sees it as a matter of *choice*, not of *ability*. Many assume courage is a quality that one is either born with, or not. If that was so, it would not be our fault if we didn't have it. They

equate it to being tall, or having blue eyes, as if there is nothing that anyone can do to make themselves courageous if they aren't born that way.

That is the 'logic' by which some people excuse themselves for their own cowardice, but it is wrong thinking. The Bible does not command anybody to be tall, or to have blue eyes, but we see many people, not just Joshua, being commanded to be courageous. So, courage is plainly viewed as a choice, and one which is equally available to all of us. That said, Jesus does link courage to faith, or rather He links fear to the lack of faith.

We see this in the passage from Mark, where the disciples are afraid on Lake Galilee because of the storm. Jesus implies that if they had faith, they would not be afraid. The point is that He had just said, shortly beforehand, that they would *go across to the other side* of the lake. That meant it was going to happen and that they would arrive safely. Therefore they should have trusted His word, and felt sure that they would arrive safely, because no storm was capable of stopping him:

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."³⁶ And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him.³⁷ And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling.³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"³⁹ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"⁴¹ And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

Mark 4:35-41 (ESV)

None of us can say we aren't to blame for our own failure, or refusal, to do our duty in the face of risk or pressure, such that we chose to look after ourselves, rather than do what God wanted. An example of outstanding courage is the Ten Boom family in Nazi-occupied Holland. They were not born with special genes that made them brave enough to shelter Jews in their home. Neither were their neighbours unable to do so due to not having the 'courage gene'. The Ten Booms sheltered Jews because they *chose to*. They took that risk because they decided to, not due to any special ability.

Even if the Ten Boom family were braver than others when the war began, it was only because they had 'practised' being brave, long before the war, in all sorts of small ways. Thus, by 1940, courage had become a habit which they had *chosen to form*. It had nothing to do with genetics. However, we still need to ask God to help us to increase our courage, and it is still our duty to pray for it. Therefore, even praying that prayer is a matter of choice. But how many of us ever pray that God will give us more courage or strengthen our resolve, so as to make right choices and do our duty?

God will hold us accountable for our cowardice.

We should all pray for courage, but most of us don't, and we are accountable for our decision not to. We are also answerable for the people whose own courage is undermined by our cowardice, such that they lose their willingness to fight because of us. There is a sobering passage in Deuteronomy on this issue. It concerns the episode at Kadesh-barnea, where the Israelites hear of the reports of the 12 spies who had been sent to spy out the land prior to beginning the war of conquest.

Moses begins by reminding the people of what God had wanted, and why the 12 spies had been sent:

²⁰ And I said to you, 'You have come to the hill country of the Amorites, which the Lord our God gives us.²¹ Behold, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up, take possession, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has told you; do not fear or be dismayed.'²² Then all of you came near me, and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may explore the land for us, and bring us

word again of the way by which we must go up and the cities into which we shall come.’²³ The thing seemed good to me, and I took twelve men of you, one man for each tribe;

Deuteronomy 1:20-23 (RSV)

Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, were courageous. They came back with a positive report and encouraged the people to believe the Canaanites could be defeated. The other ten were cowardly and defeatist, and gave a pessimistic report, even though they had seen the same things. Their words sapped the confidence of the people. Therefore they lost their courage too, and became afraid to enter the land and to begin the war of conquest. But God had commanded them to fight this war and had promised to help them. Moses then rebuked the Israelites for their lack of courage, particularly the ten cowardly spies, whose cowardice had spread throughout the nation:

²⁶ *“Yet you would not go up, but rebelled against the command of the Lord your God;²⁷ and you murmured in your tents, and said, ‘Because the Lord hated us he has brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.²⁸ Whither are we going up? Our brethren have made our hearts melt, saying, “The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakim there.”²⁹ Then I said to you, ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them.³⁰ The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes,³¹ and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God bore you, as a man bears his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.’³² Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the Lord your God,³³ who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night, to show you by what way you should go, and in the cloud by day.*

³⁴ *“And the Lord heard your words, and was angered, and he swore,³⁵ ‘Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers,³⁶ except Caleb the son of Jephun'neh; he shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the land upon which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the Lord!’³⁷ The Lord was angry with me also on your account, and said, ‘You also shall not go in there;³⁸ Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter; encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.³⁹ Moreover your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall go in there, and to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.⁴⁰ But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea.’*

Deuteronomy 1:26-40 (RSV)

God was so concerned by the cowardice of the ten spies, and those whom they influenced, that He postponed the war of conquest for nearly 40 years. He made that generation stay in the wilderness, so they could all die off, one by one. Then He used the next generation to fight the war instead. This shows the responsibility we all have not to cause others to lose their courage as a result of seeing our cowardice. That responsibility is especially heavy for church leaders. Their spinelessness can lead a whole church astray. That helps to explain why God sees cowardice as a major sin, and even as wickedness.

The foolish and the simple are the only groups who lack discernment.

The simple have little or no discernment of any kind. That is also true, to varying extents, with fools. It depends where they are on the spectrum, i.e. closer to being simple, or closer to being wicked. If a man is mostly simple and only partly foolish, then he will have little or no discernment. But if he has lost most of his naivety and is now a fully-fledged fool, even edging towards being wicked, then he will already have developed quite a lot of shrewdness. But it will only be of the feral, worldly type, not godly discernment. So, when assessing yourself, or other people, it is important to be realistic about where you, or they, really are on the ‘spectrum’. In particular, you need to admit that you lack discernment, if that is the case. Denying the fact will not prevent it from being so. Accordingly, an essential first step in the process of developing more discernment is to be frank enough to admit to yourself that you don’t currently have much of it, if indeed any at all.

CHAPTER 2

SOME FURTHER GENERAL POINTS ABOUT THE WICKED AND HOW NUMEROUS THEY ARE

³*Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. ⁴For admission has been secretly gained by some who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

Jude 3-4 (RSV)

*The clamour will resound to the ends of the earth,
for the Lord has an indictment against the nations;
he is entering into judgment with all flesh,
and the wicked he will put to the sword,
says the Lord.'*

Jeremiah 25:31 (RSV)

³¹ *“Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God.*

Leviticus 19:31 (RSV)

⁵ *“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.*

Deuteronomy 22:5 (RSV)

¹⁶ *For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God.*

Deuteronomy 25:16 (RSV)

²⁰ *The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.*

Ezekiel 18:20 (RSV)

²⁶ *When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die.*

Ezekiel 18:26 (RSV)

We need to grasp what will happen to the wicked and take it seriously.

Most of us don't realise what is going to happen to the wicked or how desperately serious their situation is. Unless they repent, the wicked are all going to come to a very bad end when God judges them, as He inevitably will:

⁶*The senseless man does not know,
fools do not understand,
⁷that though the wicked spring up like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they will be forever destroyed.
⁸But you, O LORD, are exalted forever.
⁹For surely your enemies, O LORD,
surely your enemies will perish;*

all evildoers will be scattered.

Psalm 92:6-9 (NIV)

¹⁵ *For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations.
As you have done, it shall be done to you,
your deeds shall return on your own head.*

Obadiah 15 (RSV)

⁷ *The Lord is good,
a stronghold in the day of trouble;
he knows those who take refuge in him.*

⁸ *But with an overflowing flood
he will make a full end of his adversaries,
and will pursue his enemies into darkness.*

⁹ *What do you plot against the Lord?
He will make a full end;
he will not take vengeance twice on his foes.*

Nahum 1:7-9 (RSV)

*Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him,
for what his hands have done shall be done to him.*

Isaiah 3:11 (RSV)

*He will bring back on them their iniquity
and wipe them out for their wickedness;
the Lord our God will wipe them out.*

Psalm 94:23 (ESV)

“For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

Malachi 4:1 (RSV)

We must therefore remind ourselves of what is going to become of the wicked. If we are not fully convinced of how badly things are going to turn out for them in the end, then we will be tempted to act like them ourselves. We would also be more likely to be discouraged by the fact that the wicked are so numerous, and have things so much their own way at present.

We must also realise what will happen to the wise and godly and take that seriously too

The behaviour of the wise also has its consequences. It will assuredly lead to God's blessing:

*Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them,
for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds.*

Isaiah 3:10 (RSV)

¹² *The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;*

¹³ *planted in the house of the LORD,
they will flourish in the courts of our God*

¹⁴ *They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,*

Psalm 92:12-14 (NIV)

God has promised to bless the wise and godly, and in many different ways. Such promises ought to give us an added incentive to persist in resisting the wicked, despite the fact that, at present, they seem to get away with so much.

There are two main types of wicked - firstly, unbelievers who are hard-hearted and devious and secondly, insincere Christians who know the truth, but do not genuinely repent or believe.

Wickedness is not only found amongst outright unbelievers who openly reject God. Such people may well be wicked, though many are not. Wickedness also exists in people who go to church, and even lead churches, but are *false and insincere*. Indeed, they are, possibly, the people whom God regards as the most wicked of all. Therefore, when we refer to *the wicked* we may mean one, or other, or both, of two very different groups:

a) The non-religious wicked

By this we mean those *unbelievers* who openly reject God but who are *also* devious, malicious and hard-hearted. They behave with higher levels of dishonesty, pride, selfishness and malice than the average unbeliever.

b) The religious wicked

By this we mean people who claim to be Christians but are *false*. They may attend churches and participate actively, even as leaders. However, despite all that they know, and claim to believe, their hearts are hard, proud, dishonest and unrepentant.

Some of the religious wicked know themselves to be false and are blatant about it. Some are not necessarily aware of what they really are. Either way, they have become hard-hearted and are immune to the real Gospel and deaf to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. They cling to their own religious traditions, rituals and opinions and ignore what the Bible says. Their key feature is that they are *insincere* and have never truly repented. Neither do they have any intention of repenting.

In short, they are false Christians. That is they are not, or are no longer, really Christians at all. Many of them never were, even at the outset. Though they know some of the truth, they live in a hypocritical way. In particular, they live as if there won't be any Day of Judgment. They have no fear of God and they ignore Him, and His Word, and live as they please. They also oppose the real Gospel, as Peter and John found:

²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." ³³When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

Acts 5:27-33 (ESV)

Some real Christians, who are truly saved, can be so immature and carnal that they may appear not to be saved, but actually they are.

It is not obvious which people are genuine, saved Christians and which are not. One can come across people who are so carnal and sinful that one has to conclude that they have either fallen away from the faith, or they were never saved in the first place. However, sometimes one is dealing with a *real*

Christian who is just behaving in a carnal, ungodly way. A classic example would be King Saul of Israel. He was unfaithful to God, and tried to kill David, and even his own son, Jonathan. He even consulted a witch to gain advice via the occult.

Yet, it seems he was a saved believer throughout all of that time, *even while he was doing those things*. Thus, we shall see him in Heaven and in the Millennium. We know that because, when he died, the Bible says he “*slept with his fathers*”. That is an expression used for those who were saved. Accordingly, things are not necessarily what they appear to be. We have to keep an open mind and be willing to assess and reassess people. We can't just assume that those who seem to be saved really are. Some may not be.

Neither can we assume that people who seem *not* to be saved definitely aren't. Some of them may be. More to the point, we certainly cannot assume that a person who seems to be saved can be *trusted*. That would be a grave error, but it is one which many Christians make. Indeed, even a person who seems to show signs of being trustworthy cannot be *fully* trusted. Likewise, even a person who is currently trustworthy might not always *continue* to be so, because people can change. Hence the need to be willing to reassess them.

Your assessments of people can also turn out to have been wrong all along, as mine often have. Misjudging others is not a rare occurrence. If it was, this book would not be needed. Therefore we cannot decide that a person is trustworthy and then view that as an immovable fact, on which we can always rely. Instead, we must continually reassess people and situations, as the facts change, and as new information becomes available. Having a fixed, closed mind can prevent us noticing the clues, inconsistencies and contradictions that may emerge later. That mental rigidity can stop us realising we have misjudged someone, in either direction.

None of us belong 100% in any single group. We are all a mixture of each of the character types.

In Book 5 we examined the wicked, foolish, simple and wise, in order to define, or at least describe, them. That could give the impression that people fit neatly into one group or another, with no overlap. In reality, it is much more complicated. Nobody fits solely into any one group, such that they are entirely one thing, all the time, and never display any of the characteristics of the other three groups. What we find, in real life, is that each person belongs *mainly* to one group. But they still exhibit some of the characteristics of the other groups, at least at certain times.

Even the most wicked man will sometimes surprise you by doing something decent. For example, Adolf Hitler had a lot of charm, and was very kind to his dog. Therefore, do not make the error of assuming that just because a person does something kind they cannot possibly be wicked and you can let down your guard. They could still be wicked, overall, and pose a very real threat. Conversely, you might see a man who is generally wise, but in certain situations, or particular areas of his life, he behaves in ways that surprise and disappoint you. He may do something naive, foolish, or even wicked.

The complexity is largely explained by the fact that within every believer a battle is raging between the old man, or flesh, and the new man, or new nature. Every Christian fails regularly. When he does, the old man or flesh looms up and takes control for a moment, or even for an extended period. There will then be a temporary manifestation of the sinful flesh nature until his new man, or new nature, reasserts itself. Likewise, there may be a person who is generally foolish, but who grew up in a Christian home or went to a Christian youth group when younger.

Though he may speak and act foolishly most of the time, there will be moments when the Christian values he learned in the past will rise to the surface. He may then surprise you by doing or saying something wise. An example of this is a police inspector I used to work with who surprised me one

day by quoting verbatim from the book of Ecclesiastes. I tell that story in Book 5. Alternatively, there may be a Christian who is simple on the whole but who, in certain areas of his life, has begun to develop some wisdom. So, you have to expect to see a mixture in everybody you meet and be ready to deal with it. Don't let it surprise or confuse you, or throw you off course.

We can be wise in one area of our life but still be simple/naive in another.

People can also be wise in one part of their life, for example their job, but not in other areas, such as their marriage. Or they may be wise in the area of relationships, but foolish, or simple, in handling money, or drink, or gambling. The list of permutations is endless. That complicates this whole subject and makes discernment much more difficult. Moreover, people are not constantly the same over time. Even within the space of a day, they can do very inconsistent things. That sends out confusing signals and can suggest they belong to two or more groups at the same time.

An example of a wise man who did something foolish is the godly King Hezekiah of Judah. His overall reign met with God's approval. He did many wise things, and was brave in standing up to the Assyrians. However, when he received a diplomatic visit from the Babylonians, he unwisely showed them all the treasures of the Temple. Isaiah rebuked him for that and prophesied that the treasure would all be carried off to Babylon, as a result of his foolishness in letting them see it. So, King Hezekiah was *generally* a wise man, but he behaved foolishly on that single occasion. Which of us hasn't been like him and behaved, or spoken, foolishly in some situation? I have, many times.

Therefore it is unrealistic to expect to suddenly change from being simple to being entirely and continuously wise, as if we were leaping instantly from one group into another. It is far more realistic to think in terms of gradually becoming wiser, bit by bit. That transformation cannot be achieved quickly. It is the result of a painstaking process of small changes, arising out of many little lessons. These move us, step by step, in the direction of becoming wiser. Each area of our life then gradually becomes more surrendered to God, rather than operating in line with our fleshly nature.

What about sharing the Gospel with the wicked?

We are commanded to warn others about God's judgment and to share the Gospel with all people, from every nation. We have no way of knowing which of them will, even in the distant future, respond to the Gospel and which will not. It is possible that anybody might repent - even the most wicked person. The classic example is King Manasseh, the exceptionally wicked King of Judah. He was an idolater and an occultist and even burned some of his own children to death as sacrifices to idols.

Nevertheless, he repented in his old age and was saved. One day, those of us who are saved shall see him in Heaven. Nearer to our own day, a number of leading Nazis repented, even while they were on trial at Nuremberg. Some did so in the last few hours before they were executed, which proves that there is always hope. Therefore no person, however wicked, should ever be written off or considered beyond the reach of the Gospel, such that we do not bother to tell them about it.

Nobody is ever beyond hope. Therefore no person should ever have the Gospel kept from them, no matter how wicked they may be, or how unlikely we may think they are to respond. Who knows - some might even repent and surrender their lives to God on their death beds, in their final few seconds of life, as they remember what you told them about the Gospel several decades before. So, we should share the Gospel with every category of person. God told Ezekiel that he was to warn the wicked, even if they would not listen to him:

¹⁷ "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ¹⁸ If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely

die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.
¹⁹ *But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.*

Ezekiel 3:17-19 (ESV)

That said, we do also need to be realistic and recognise that wicked people will usually reject the Gospel. Nevertheless, we should never be afraid to tell them about Jesus when opportunities arise, no matter how wicked they may be, or appear to be. However, we need to focus first on “*the bad news*”, namely our sin, God’s holiness, God’s wrath, judgment, Hell, the Lake of Fire and our need to repent. All of that needs to be made clear to every person, not just the wicked, before we get on to the ‘good news’ of Jesus’ substitutionary death on the Cross and the offer of salvation.

The good news makes no sense, and will not be respected until after people have been clearly presented with *the bad news*. Indeed, the very definition of the good news is that it is *the solution to the bad news*. So, all our evangelism must initially focus on these negative things, before we present the way of escape. All people need to know their dilemma first, and realise that there is something dreadful, from which they need to escape. However, we should avoid sharing intimate, sensitive feelings and experiences with the wicked. It would be both unwise and unproductive.

Firstly, it would do them no good. Secondly, it may also harm you, as your words will be trampled on and used to mock both you and God. An example might be the baptism in the Holy Spirit. To discuss that with a fool or a wicked man would probably be what the Bible calls “*casting pearls before swine*”. You are likely to regret it. They will only ridicule what you’re speaking about. Therefore do tell people the full Gospel, but don’t tell wicked people, or fools, everything else that is on your mind, or that you have ever experienced. You are under no such duty.

If you rebuke a fool, he will hate you. That is all the more true if he is also wicked.

If you rebuke a fool, or a wicked person, he will hate you for doing so. Therefore, he will rarely benefit from a warning, or listen to your advice. But, neither will he appreciate your patience, or your mercy, if you refrain from rebuking him and it would be naïve for you to expect anything different. By contrast, a wise, or even a simple, person is likely to respond well to all of those things. The point is that the wicked, and also fools, cannot understand mercy or grace.

In their minds, the only reasons why anybody would choose not to use their power and authority to defend their own business or church are because they are weak, cowardly or stupid. All three options reflect badly on you. Therefore they misunderstand, and despise, soft managers who give them second and third chances. Such managers are misguidedly showing forbearance to the wicked person’s *malice*, as opposed to their *mistakes*. Not seeing the difference between those two things is a major error.

Therefore if you ever need to confront or rebuke a fool, then just say and do the minimum necessary for the task. Do not expect a positive reaction either. Remember that the Bible says “*If you rebuke a fool he will hate you*”. That is the reaction I have always received, so I no longer even try to correct fools, if I know that is what they are. They do not respond constructively, however politely you may speak, and no matter how justified your comments are. They will simply resent you for saying it at all, regardless of how it is said. Indeed, they will resent it all the more if what you say is true.

So, the more justified your criticism is, the more they will resent it. However if, the other person is mainly simple, rather than a fool, you may be able to win his cooperation when you correct him, provided you go about it the right way. Simple people are more likely to listen to you, although even the most simple don’t *like* being corrected. However, even if they are willing to accept correction, and to profit from it, the simple are still not wise enough to be confided in. They are not safe to trust,

not due to any malice. They just lack the sense, or the self-control, to be able to keep your secret confidential.

Therefore they will probably pass it on, either intentionally, or without thinking. But if the person is mainly, or even partly, wise, then everything is possible. If you correct wise people they will thank you for it and appreciate you all the more. They can see the benefit that correction brings and they realise that it was justified and necessary. Therefore, if you instruct them they will listen. Moreover, if you confide in them, they will keep your secret. So, wise people can be trusted, but the problem is they are extremely rare.

We are to be patient, and show forbearance, in relation to people's mistakes and faults, but not with their wickedness, deceit or malice.

The Bible *does* tell us to show forbearance, but we are only to show it in relation to people's weaknesses and mistakes, not their acts of deliberate evil. Even in saying that, the Bible is primarily referring to fellow Christians, not unbelievers, and certainly not the wicked. So, to be clear, we are told to show forbearance towards other people's weaknesses, errors, ignorance, clumsiness, tactlessness and so on. However, we are *not* to show forbearance to their deliberate, devious acts, which were planned with malice aforethought.

That distinction is profoundly important. The Bible does not give us a blanket command to show forbearance to every kind of behaviour, or to every person, no matter what they do. I am labouring this because, amongst the simple, that point is really not understood. We need to remember, therefore, that we are *not* told to show any patience or forbearance towards people's evil and malice. On the contrary, we are told to resist such things.

A closer look at the possible figures for the percentage of the population that is wicked

Let us return to the question of numbers, or percentages, and look in closer detail at how many people are wicked. We can't be precise, because we can never know exactly what is in other people's hearts. Also situations change from one country to another and over time. Therefore, some eras or generations are more, or less, wicked than others. Likewise, some groups or nations are more, or less, wicked than others. For example, I believe our own generation, at least in the West, is one of the wickedest that has ever existed in world history to date.

Nevertheless, we can try to gain a broad brush understanding of the numbers of wicked people as a proportion of the population, at least within the United Kingdom. That is the only society that I know well, and which I have been able to observe over a period of decades. However, let's begin in a more general sense, by looking at how God described the generation that existed on the Earth at the time of the Flood. That was about 1700 years after the Creation. Here's how Moses puts it:

⁵ The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

Genesis 6:5-8 (RSV)

Then the LORD said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are righteous before me in this generation.

Genesis 7:1 (RSV)

Just before the flood, God thought the wickedness of that generation was so great, and so widespread, that He needed to wipe out the entire population of the world, except for eight people. He says the thoughts of their hearts were “*only evil continually*.” Thus, those people at that time were exceptionally bad. They did evil and they thought in evil ways, almost all the time and at a high level. But note that, even in their case, the Bible uses the word “*continually*”, not “*continuously*”. The latter would mean that every single thought was *always* evil, without any exceptions, like a solid line, without any gaps or breaks whatsoever.

‘Continually’ doesn’t mean that. It means a regular, consistent, repeated pattern, more like a line of dots than a solid line. Therefore even extreme wickedness may still involve gaps or intervals. My own view is that only Satan and the demons are *continuously* evil, all the time, without any exceptions. Accordingly, we who live in the West, in the 21st century, should not assume that we are better than the generation which died in the Flood, just because we have moments when we aren’t being evil. So did they. They were simply evil on a *regular, ongoing, systematic* basis, as our generation is.

So it was still appropriate for God to classify them as wicked overall, even though they weren’t *always* being evil. Having made that clear, if we then take the Flood generation as our starting point, the question is are we more or less wicked than they were? One’s immediate assumption may be that we are less wicked overall, because only eight people from that generation were saved from the Flood. That may be right, but I would not count on it. The mere fact that God has not (yet) wiped out our generation does not, in itself, mean we are any better than they were.

Remember, all that God promised is that He would never *flood* the whole planet again. He never said that He would not *judge* us all, or send most of us to the Lake of Fire. On the contrary, He has expressly said that He will do both of those things. Therefore, a better question is whether wickedness is now the norm or the exception. Or, do the wicked constitute more or less than 50% of the population? Those questions would be a good starting point, but the average Christian never asks them and just assumes that wickedness is rare. If we can dispel that false idea, we will have achieved something important, even if we can never know the exact percentages.

So, let’s try again. What if we compare our generation to that which died in the Flood? In broad terms, how do our values, attitudes and behaviour compare to theirs? If we take the sin of abortion as a starting point we come off worst. There is no indication that abortion was widely practised back then. If it occurred at all, it was on a one off basis, though they probably did practise infanticide, whereby they killed babies after they had been born. However, for us, abortions are now being conducted on a massive industrial scale.

In the USA alone, over 58,000,000 babies have been killed so far. Out of a total population of about 305,000,000, that adds up to more than *one sixth* of all Americans alive today. The numbers dwarf all other forms of murder put together. The same applies in most other countries worldwide, but especially in the developed world. The UK alone has killed over 8,000,000 babies. Have you ever considered these facts? Are they real to you? If so, you are unusual, because most of our generation is in a kind of coma which makes them unable to grasp the issues here, or to see their significance.

That is even true of most church leaders. The vast majority say nothing at all about abortion, at least in public. Although there is no mention of abortion in the account of the Flood, the Bible records elsewhere how strongly God feels about the killing of innocent babies. Here is a passage concerning the Canaanites, whom God considered so wicked that He told the Israelites to wipe them all out. Therefore, the significance of their treatment of their own babies needs to be assessed in the light of what God thought of them overall. See what Moses says:

³⁰ take heed that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do likewise.’ ³¹ You shall not do so to the Lord your God; for every abominable thing

which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

Deuteronomy 12:30-31 (RSV)

How does our generation compare, in terms of wickedness, with those killed in the Flood and at Sodom and Gomorrah?

What about fraud, witchcraft, pornography, drugs, adultery, fornication, homosexuality and the denial of one's own gender? If we again compare ourselves to the Flood generation, it is hard to imagine they were worse than us in any of these ways. Indeed, it is hard to think of any generation, in all of world history, which engaged in these sins on even the same scale as ours does, let alone on a larger one.

Yet, if we look now at the small cities called 'Sodom and Gomorrah' which existed at the time of Abraham and Lot, we see that God considered their sin to be "*very grave*". Homosexuals were numerous and active in both places. God was so appalled by their behaviour that He destroyed them all with a hail of fire and brimstone:

²⁰ Then the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomor'rah is great and their sin is very grave,

Genesis 18:20 (RSV)

²⁴ Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomor'rah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; ²⁵ and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground.

Genesis 19:24-25 (RSV)

If we compare ourselves with Sodom and Gomorrah, are we better or worse? Do we have more or less homosexual activity? Are we more or less brass-faced about it? It would be hard to imagine them being any worse than our generation. Moreover, even if, somehow, we are not yet as wicked as Sodom and Gomorrah, we are travelling so fast downhill that it cannot be long before we match them, and overtake them. Even if one looks back 20 or 30 years, the transformation in sexual practices, and the increase in our brazenness about sin, is astonishing.

We are unrecognisable from the societies of the 1970s and 1980s, let alone the 1950s and 1960s. Things are routinely said and done today which the people of those decades would not have been able to believe possible if they had been told it was going to happen. What then should we conclude? We cannot put precise figures on it. However, measured purely in terms of abortion, sexual immorality, dishonesty, systematic fraud and corruption, we are surely as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah, and even Noah's generation.

If you add the abandonment of Christianity since the 1960s, and also the huge growth in witchcraft and the occult, the point can be made even more strongly. In any event, leaving aside precise figures, can anyone deny that the amount of wickedness, and the proportion of wicked people, is now appallingly high? If so, you probably need to rethink your expectations as to how likely you are to encounter wicked people, and how often. Instead of thinking of it as a rare occurrence, see it as a problem to be faced on a virtually daily basis.

How God viewed the wickedness of the generation that came out of Egypt in the Exodus which complained and doubted God, despite all they had seen and heard

The 'Exodus generation' saw more miracles, and had more direct exposure to God and to a mighty prophet, Moses, than any generation until the time of Jesus. Yet, despite all that they saw God do,

including the plagues, parting the Red Sea, drowning the Egyptians, giving them water from a rock and feeding them with manna, they were still ungrateful. They also grumbled about the position God had put them in, as if He hadn't done enough for them. Their attitude angered God and He was hurt by it.

They also lacked faith and did not trust God to fulfil His promises, or to protect them, when the time came to enter the Promised Land, which meant fighting the Canaanites. Instead of going in with courage and faith, they were filled with pessimism and fear. They would not believe the positive reports which Joshua and Caleb brought back about the land, as we saw earlier. Therefore God refused to allow any of that generation to enter the Promised Land, except for Joshua and Caleb. They had both given a positive report and had urged the people to have faith and courage.

God made them all wait for 38 years, while everybody who was over 20 years old at the time of the Exodus died in the Wilderness. Note also that God referred to them as "*this evil generation.*" He plainly took their ingratitude, complaining, cowardice and lack of faith very seriously. That needs to chasten us, and make us rethink very carefully our definition of the word 'wicked' and our assessment of ourselves. Many of us are far too easily satisfied with our own performance, attitude and character and assume that God is as pleased with us as we are with ourselves.

For many of us the thought would not enter our minds that our own ingratitude, faithlessness, indifference, cowardice, disobedience and lack of motivation might be viewed by God as wickedness. But why wouldn't they be? God judges us by reference to how much we know, how much we have seen, or been given, and how many privileges and opportunities we have had. That explains why He was so severe with the Exodus generation, and the people who lived in the towns around Lake Galilee during Jesus' earthly ministry. They were given enormous advantages and got to see and hear things which went far beyond what others had had.

Therefore, they were held more strictly accountable. Their indifference, ingratitude and lack of faith were seen as wickedness even though the same sins, when displayed by earlier or later generations, would have been judged less strictly. So, when you consider all the advantages and privileges that our generation has, at least in the West, you may start to reassess how well you are doing. You may even tremble at the prospect of hearing Jesus' assessment of you, either at the Judgment Seat for the saved, or the Great White Throne for the unsaved. Some very robust and critical things may be said to us, as they were to the Exodus generation, when God refused to let them enter the land.

Is there a gender imbalance in the proportions of wicked people?

Of all the examples I have given of wicked behaviour, more than half relate to women. However, that's not because women are any wicked than men. I see no reason to think that either gender is any more or less wicked than the other. The first reason why I give a disproportionate number of examples involving women is simply that churches in the UK have more women than men. The second is that I used to run a law firm with a disproportionately high number of women. It was probably 80:20 in their favour most of the time and therefore many of my stories relate to them.

That gender imbalance was partly because a majority of those becoming lawyers today are women. In addition, the vast majority of support staff, such as secretaries, cashiers, clerks and cleaners etc, were women. At its peak, my firm employed over 80 people at any one time, and I was in business for a total of 17 years, not counting the years when I was an employee myself. So I had a lot of people to choose from when selecting examples of wicked conduct, scheming and deceitfulness. It so happens that most of them were women.

However, if I had employed exactly the same numbers of men as women, I think I would have had broadly equal numbers of problems from men as from women. Having said all that, I do think that the types of wicked behaviour differ. Men and women are equally wicked, but they go about things in

different ways and use different methods and techniques. Broadly speaking, women are more likely to use softer or more indirect methods, such as lying, gossiping and manipulation.

That is mainly because they don't often have the power, authority or physical strength to dominate people in more direct ways. They are less likely to occupy positions of authority which they can use to dominate people directly. So, they choose the next best thing, which is to operate indirectly and to manipulate those who do occupy the positions of authority. Then they can control other people through them. Men tend to be more direct and obvious in their wickedness. It will frequently involve bullying and intimidating others and general domination, rather than indirect manipulation.

The overall objective is still the same. Both men and women want to control other people, get their own way and protect their own position. It is just that, instead of pushing their weight around, women will generally seek to get what they want indirectly, by deception and manipulation, not by force. Perhaps the clearest argument for there being equal numbers of wicked people in both sexes is that, in the Flood, men and women were wiped out equally. An equal number were also spared. Then again, centuries later, at Sodom and Gomorrah, all the men and all the women were destroyed, except for Lot and his two daughters.

What then might the percentage figure be for the number of wise people?

Let's now consider what percentage of the population are wise. I believe most Christians seriously over-estimate the figure, even if we define 'the wise' very broadly. For one thing, most people automatically include themselves within this category, despite having no valid basis for doing so. Secondly, they forget that to be wise at all, a person must first be a *genuine Christian*. That drastically reduces the numbers who are even potentially eligible to be classified as wise. However, let's assume 5% of the UK population are real Christians, as opposed to the high percentage who call themselves Christian in the census.

If so, we are limited to a maximum of 5% of people even being saved, let alone wise. However even that figure must then be reduced heavily because only a small proportion of even genuine Christians are wise. The majority of Christians, even genuine ones, are what the Bible calls simple, or naïve. That is they are not wicked, but they are not fools either. The key point is that they lack discernment. They also don't know the Bible properly and don't know how God thinks or what His plans are. More to the point, they don't understand the world, or other people.

Then how numerous are the simple and the fools?

The simple are frequently to be found within churches. They may be saved, but are not yet wise and may never become so. However, there are also simple people amongst the unsaved. Indeed, it is primarily from the ranks of the simple that future Christians are drawn. They are more likely to be searching for God and more willing to listen to the Gospel. I would guess that 10 to 15% of the UK population are simple. Thus, if you are looking for good employees, it is in this group that you will find them. That explains why it is so difficult to find faithful, honest staff. There are very few of them, because the vast majority of the population are not simple. They are either wicked or fools.

Don't assume that just because a person is stupid, they can't possibly form a cunning plan. They can, but they get it from a demon, not their own mind.

Many wrongly assume that a stupid person can't form a wicked scheme, because they aren't clever enough to do so. If you think like that you will misjudge situations and under-estimate what people are capable of. Although the wicked may not be able to do maths, write good essays, or pass exams, they can come up with extremely devious plans to deceive and manipulate others. That is because the

real source of those schemes is often not their own mind, but the demon who is within them or alongside them. It is as if they were cheating in an exam by getting help from someone else.

That explains why the stupidest, least qualified, people can outwit others who have far greater natural ability. Bear this in mind when dealing with people or you will make very serious misjudgements. Such people are like a puppet, doing what the demon instructs them to do. They may be unaware of the source of their ideas or why they are more skilled at being devious than at passing exams. But you at least can now be aware of where they get it all from. That will help you to stop under-estimating them, which is vital if you want to defeat them.

Don't assume that just because a person has done something nice, or helped you in some way, they therefore can't be wicked.

Another error is to assume that just because a person has done something nice or helped you out, or supported some charity, then they can't be wicked. They most certainly can. To judge the character of another person accurately you need to examine their fruit on a regular basis, over a sustained period of time. A single incident, or even a few incidents in quick succession, don't prove that a person is wise, faithful or trustworthy. You need to see a *consistent* pattern and for *long enough* to be able to conclude that their behaviour is both genuine and typical.

It is easy for a person to do things purely to impress you, especially if they know you are on the lookout for such things. My wife was once travelling on an aeroplane from England to Scotland and had our kids with her. It so happened that on the same plane was one of the salaried partners in my law firm. She offered to change seats so that one of our children could sit near my wife. That was a nice gesture, but it proved nothing. The lady in question was actually a nasty piece of work.

She had been disloyal and unfaithful to me and had lost me a lot of money through her neglect and laziness. So, the kind deed was not a valid basis upon which to conclude that she could be trusted. However, if it had been the other way round, then a single incident *could* suffice. If a person behaves spitefully, dishonestly or manipulatively, even if it is only once, you can conclude that they are *not* to be trusted. You don't need to see a sustained pattern of behaviour to form that conclusion.

Don't assume that just because a person is a hard worker, or good at their job, then they can't be wicked, unfaithful or disloyal.

I have misjudged workers, and assumed they were loyal and trustworthy, simply because they were excellent at their jobs and worked hard. That does not follow, as I have found to my cost. Admittedly a wise, godly person who loves the truth and fears God will be a good worker. But it doesn't work in both directions. Therefore merely being a hard worker doesn't mean that a person will also be wise, faithful or trustworthy.

I can think of quite a few employees who came into this category. They fooled me for a while, and got me to drop my guard. I automatically assumed that anyone who worked as hard as they did, and at such a high standard, must be faithful. Yet a number of them later proved to be unfaithful, not necessarily in their work, or the quality of their files, but in their treatment of me, the firm, or their colleagues.

One reason why God lets wicked people attack you is so that you can grow in character. You learn to be an overcomer through your battles with them.

One of God's main aims for His people is to learn how to '*conquer*'. This is a regular theme in the Bible and we hear of it repeatedly, especially in the book of Revelation:

¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.'

Revelation 2:17 (RSV)

⁵ He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Revelation 3:5 (RSV)

²¹ He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Revelation 3:21 (RSV)

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Revelation 12:10-11 (RSV)

² And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.

Revelation 15:2 (RSV)

⁷ He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son.

Revelation 21:7 (RSV)

God also wants us to learn how to be 'overcomers'. That has to involve regularly coming up against opponents as there is no other way of achieving this. We have to face them, and gradually learn how to overcome them:

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:21 (RSV)

⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:4-5 (RSV)

It has always been part of God's purpose for His people to learn how to fight. When the Israelites went into Canaan, God did not let them just walk into an empty land. He required them to fight to occupy every part of it, albeit with His assistance. He could have handed the land to them on a plate. But He chose not to, because the process of fighting for it was *necessary*, in itself, as a means of turning the people into overcomers who knew how to fight.

That could not have been done without opponents, including some really vicious ones. They therefore needed their enemies, just as we need ours, in order to develop the character-qualities that God wants us to have. The same applied to the next generation of Israelites. God ensured that their children also had some enemies left to fight, so that they too could learn from the experience of conflict:

Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan; ² it was only that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, that he might teach war to such at least as had not known it before.

Judges 3:1-2 (RSV)

King David could not have become the great man that he was without the ‘benefit’ of having had many wicked opponents.

The same applied when King David was on the run from King Saul’s army, and also afterwards, when he became King in Hebron and had to deal with continual conflict. That went on for years, so the ordeals must have seemed very long and drawn out to David while he was going through them. Yet, the hardships and battles that he endured during those years made him stronger, not weaker:

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

2 Samuel 3:1 (RSV)

David had to go through all of those years on the run. Then he had six and a half years when there were two kings and he only reigned in Hebron, not in Jerusalem. Without the many things he went through, he would never have become the man he turned into. He would not have learned how to fight, how to lead, or how to overcome the wicked. He had earlier battles too, while he was in Saul’s army and when he fought Goliath. Indeed, he had even earlier battles than those, when he fought with lions and bears while defending his father’s sheep, while he was still only a boy:

³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth; and if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him and killed him. ³⁶ Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ And David said, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!”

1 Samuel 17:34-37 (RSV)

There is no use asking God to remove all opponents, difficulties and trials from our lives. He won’t do it, even if we keep asking Him. Therefore, forget about asking God to keep you away from all difficult people and circumstances. He will answer those prayers, from time to time, and give us temporary periods of respite. But we must face the reality that we all need opponents and struggles if we are going to learn how to conquer and overcome. That being so, we should set our minds to learn how to become overcomers, rather than seeking for a permanent ‘leave of absence’ from the battles of life.

CHAPTER 3

THE DAMAGE THAT DECEPTION CAN CAUSE

*¹⁴ Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands afar off;
for truth has fallen in the public squares,
and uprightness cannot enter.*

*¹⁵ Truth is lacking,
and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.
The Lord saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.*

Isaiah 59:14-15 (RSV)

¹⁶ Take heed lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them,

Deuteronomy 11:16 (RSV)

*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.*

Psalms 140:5 (RSV)

*Their tongue is a deadly arrow;
it speaks deceitfully;
with his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor,
but in his heart he plans an ambush for him.*

Jeremiah 9:8 (ESV)

*There are those who hate the one who upholds justice in court
and detest the one who tells the truth.*

Amos 5:10 (NIV)

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.

Romans 16:18 (RSV)

“.....and all nations were deceived by the sorcery”

Revelations 18:23 (b) (RSV)

¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 25:16 (RSV)

*The godless besmear me with lies,
but with my whole heart I keep thy precepts;*

Psalms 119:69 (RSV)

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

1 Peter 2:1 (ESV)

The extent of people's capacity to lie is enormous.

People have an astonishing capacity to lie, either directly, with express words, or indirectly, by being phoney, two-faced, and seeming to be something they aren't. As a result of managing so many staff, I have detailed written records of the many different ways in which people have deceived me or others. A lot of these emerged in my own investigations and disciplinary meetings at work.

But they also come from clients' files, where my firm acted for the employer or employee. Therefore I have been able to see the devious things that people do in many other businesses, not just my own. I can also give examples of such lies, hypocrisy and phoniness within churches. Whatever view you have as to the amount of deception in the world, it is probably an under-estimate. See how strongly Jeremiah puts it:

*⁴ Let everyone beware of his neighbor,
and put no trust in any brother,
for every brother is a deceiver,
and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer.*

*⁵ Everyone deceives his neighbor,
and no one speaks the truth;
they have taught their tongue to speak lies;
they weary themselves committing iniquity.*

Jeremiah 9:4-5 (ESV)

*Their tongue is a deadly arrow;
it speaks deceitfully;
with his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor,
but in his heart he plans an ambush for him.*

Jeremiah 9:8 (ESV)

The dreadful damage that lies can cause

Lies cause far more damage than most of us imagine. Lives are blighted, careers harmed, and relationships ruined. Lies are powerful weapons, especially for those who know how to use them skilfully. A person who lies regularly is either wicked or well on the way to becoming so, especially if they claim to be a Christian. Lying is one of the main identifying features of those who are *already* wicked. It is also one of the main things that makes a person *become* wicked. In other words, lying is both *evidence* of, and a *cause* of, wickedness. Therefore, God hates lies and He says He will destroy those who lie:

*Thou destroyest those who speak lies;
the Lord abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men.*

Psalms 5:6 (RSV)

The example of a secretary called Tracey, and the damage her lies did

An example of the terrible damage that lies can cause is 'Tracey', a former secretary of mine, who was an habitual and skillful liar. She was also a Christian, or at least she *said she was*, but her lying was extensive. She caused colleagues to fall out by saying things to get them to suspect or resent one another. She achieved this by means of what she *told them* about each other. She created a web of lies about people in the office with the aim of destroying relationships.

One reason why she convinced people so easily was that she *looked so innocent*. She seemed a weak, vulnerable, shy, introverted little person and not the least bit aggressive. That is partly why nobody

realised she was lying at all, let alone how much damage she was causing. Then, one day, she went too far and a chain of events began which caused her wickedness to be exposed. ‘Susan’, who had worked with me for many years, and with whom I had an excellent relationship, suddenly became sour towards her work and to me in particular.

Susan changed overnight and became silent, unresponsive and resentful, though without saying why. It affected her productivity too. She did less work than she had always done before and suddenly lacked enthusiasm. She no longer went the extra mile or volunteered for tasks. She also started avoiding me, which was a major problem, as I was her boss and she had a key role in the firm. It got so bad that I called her in and asked her what was wrong. She was stony-faced, but denied that anything was wrong. She refused to open up, though it was obvious there was a problem.

Things continued to get worse and I was at a loss as to how to handle it. I would be a lot wiser today if I was faced with a situation like that. I would immediately suspect that lies were involved somewhere and would start to search for them. However, this was years ago and I understood far less about the art of deception than I do now. It all came out when I called Susan in to give her a written warning about her dramatic decline in performance, motivation and output.

She sat in front of me with a sullen face and I told her my concerns, especially that she was avoiding me. I said we couldn’t go on like that. Perhaps it was the gravity of the situation, or perhaps God prompted her to open up. Whatever it was, Susan then said: *“But I feel upset about what you’ve said about* (the name of her step-daughter). I was confused and asked what she meant, as I had no idea what she was talking about. She was reluctant to say at first, because she thought I was just pretending not to know what she meant.

She was also trying to protect Tracey who had told Susan, *“in confidence”*, that I had been critical of her step-daughter. We spent a few minutes going to and fro, with me urging her to spell out what she was saying. Susan eventually said that she *“had been told”* (she wouldn’t say by whom) that I had said insulting things about her step-daughter. After staring at her blankly for a moment, in amazement, I reassured her that I had never criticised her step-daughter. Indeed I barely knew her.

I urged her to tell me where she had got this strange idea from and was amazed when she said it came from Tracey! I had to ask her to repeat herself and to explain exactly what had been said. It then all tumbled out and Susan told me the details of some insulting things I had supposedly said. Because this had been told to her by my own PA, she had believed it. Most would say she had good reason to believe Tracey. It is also very significant that Tracey had said to her: *“I am telling you this in strict confidence”*.

She had then asked Susan *never to tell me anything about what had been told to her*, in case Tracey might *“get into trouble”* for disclosing it. She had told Susan that she was only revealing these things to help her, *“as a friend”* and claimed *“I am putting my own neck on the line to help you.”* Take careful note of all those words in italics. I have learned, by repeated experience, that such phrases are frequently used by people who use lies as a tool of their trade. The lie is presented as if they were doing you a *“favour”* and *“taking a risk”* in disclosing the information.

That makes the victim feel beholden to the person who is lying to them. They feel they owe a debt of gratitude, and a duty of care, to the very person who is doing them harm. That being so, they are much less likely to check the truth of what is being said. Any checking up would betray the confidence and let down the person who had taken such a risk to help them. However, the story Tracey told was a lie. More precisely, it was a distortion of a conversation which had taken place, in which *Tracey, not I*, had made comments about Susan’s step-daughter.

Tracey had falsely attributed her own words to me. She saw Susan as a rival and wanted her to believe the lies and then act to her own detriment by becoming resentful and ineffective at work. Ideally, she wanted Susan to leave the firm completely, so as to reduce the competition amongst those who worked for me in managing the business. It was calculating and cold, yet it was done by a little mouse of a woman who seemed pathetically weak. She was the last person I would have suspected (at the time) of being such a wicked liar.

Today, I would be much more on my guard for this kind of deception from someone like her. In fact I would be *especially* expecting it from someone as timid and introverted as she was. Such a person is actually a prime candidate for the role of office manipulator and liar. They can't get their own way by talent, or strength, as they don't have any. I called Tracey in afterwards and she was already anxious, because she knew I had previously called Susan in. She knew something was wrong and must have been wondering whether the '*confidentiality*' of her lies to Susan had held.

When I confronted her she saw that her plan had failed and that there was no way of getting away with it. Therefore she quickly admitted it all and even wrote a letter of apology to Susan and others. However, she only wrote it because I asked her to and also because she had been caught and the game was up anyway. Tracey had intentionally tried to get Susan to resign, so as to make herself more senior within the firm after her departure. When her plan failed, Tracey realised her best policy would be to limit the damage by owning up to it and *appearing* to apologise.

There was nothing genuine about her apology, and no real remorse, so far as I could tell. Her sudden openness was not an indicator of conviction. She just thought it would be the best tactic when dealing with a Christian boss like me. There *had* actually been a conversation, many weeks before, between Tracey and me, and it had concerned Susan's step-daughter. But it was entirely different from how it had been portrayed to Susan. Tracey had been chattering away to me about Susan's step-daughter and I had simply listened to her.

However I had not made the statements which Tracey said I made, or said anything at all. There is an important point here. Liars will often twist *real* events and conversations and use them as their subject matter, rather than completely invent them from nothing, like a novelist. To invent an entire story, with all the associated little facts and peripheral details is very difficult. It is also easier for people to see through, so that they detect the lies, because the details are unlikely to fit perfectly at every point.

Deceivers know that. They also prefer to make life easier for themselves, and avoid unnecessary effort. Therefore they take real life events and conversations, which actually happened, but *amend the facts* by adding, removing or altering little details. They end up with a story which is 80%, 90%, or even 99% true. Yet it is still a lie. Moreover, that lie is all the more believable, and damaging, *precisely because most of it is true*. Thus, in the story which Tracey had told Susan, the following parts were true:

- a) Tracey *had* been in my room
- b) She and I *had* discussed Susan's step-daughter
- c) The step-daughter *had* been criticised
- d) Susan's difficulties with her step-daughter *had* been spoken about

Tracey had profoundly altered the meaning, nature and significance of that conversation by saying that *I had made* these negative remarks rather than *hearing her making* them. Therefore, the entire meaning was reversed. Instead of being an account of *Tracey* speaking about of the step-daughter, it

became an account of *me* doing so. It was spiced up as well, though not too much. She added and exaggerated just enough to make it hurtful, but not too much, in case it became incredible.

Therefore when you are told a story, do not assume that just because many of its component parts are true, even 90% or 99%, that that must mean the story as a *whole* is true. That does not follow. Therefore your cross checks, and also your cross examination of parties and witnesses must be very thorough. That is especially so if you are considering taking legal or disciplinary action against someone, or even altering your view of them, based on what someone has said. Therefore, before believing or acting upon anything you are told, do ten times as much investigating and cross-checking as you might otherwise have done.

While telling all these lies, Tracey was, or at least claimed to be, a Christian.

I can't be certain that Tracey's repentance was false, but I believe it was. That is for God to decide, not me. But her story illustrates the kind of lies which are told in churches, workplaces and families every day. Remember also that Tracey *claimed to be a Christian*. She had genuine Christian parents and had been brought up in the church. I knew her Dad and he was undoubtedly a real Christian. So, never think that just because someone claims to be a Christian, or *even if they really are one*, that they would never lie to you or about you.

There are many people in churches, both ordinary members and leaders, who will do so and think nothing of it. One of the difficulties of dealing with lies is that, until the lie is exposed, you don't know you are being lied to. Therefore you don't know what you are up against. I recall a previous occasion when Tracey succeeded in getting another secretary to resign and got away with it completely. I had no idea at the time what was going on and only understood it later, after her deceptive ways came to light in relation to the Susan incident.

Harriet's story - driven from her job by a colleague's lies

This is the earlier incident, in which Tracey's lie succeeded. An experienced secretary, 'Harriet' joined us. She was a Christian and had been the PA to the Chief Executive of a major organisation. She joined us as my new PA, with Tracey working under her as my secretary. Harriet and I knew each other very slightly from church connections and I also knew of her track record, which is why I appointed her. However, within a few weeks of joining us, Harriet started to be reluctant to have any dealings with me, despite being my own PA.

She became really scared of me and seemed to be under the impression that I disapproved of her, which I didn't. I never managed to get Harriet to open up and tell me what the problem was. She became very nervous and stressed, quite unlike her usual self. She got to the point where she couldn't function as a PA. So, she resigned, after only two months. At the time I was very puzzled, but let her go, thinking she must have complicated emotional problems. It never occurred to me that Tracey had anything to do with her paranoid behaviour.

If it happened today I would know that if a person is refusing to say what is worrying them, they have probably been lied to by somebody about something. I only realised later, after the 'Susan' episode, that Tracey had been behind it all and had whispered lies into Harriet's ear, on the same '*confidential*' basis. She had deliberately lied to Harriet to unsettle her and get her to resign, so that she could get her job. Her scheme was 100% successful that time. Harriet's resignation left the way clear for Tracey, my secretary, to step straight into Harriet's job and become my PA.

So, she created a vacancy and a promotion for herself, simply by telling lies to get a more talented colleague to leave. It really was that cold and calculated and yet that simple. One of the points I am trying to get across in this book is that this kind of deception is wickedness, even though it does not involve famous or powerful people doing spectacular things that make the TV news. Most of us would not even realise it is going on, let alone classify it as wickedness. Yet we need to see it as such, and deal with it accordingly.

If we don't, we will never identify and overcome the people who act in these devious ways. But the problem is there are very many of them. There is nothing unusual about any of the examples I have given. Similar things are going on in families, workplaces and churches all the time, and those affected by it are usually entirely unaware. Also, although I am writing from the perspective of a boss and employer, these stories are equally applicable whether you are a boss or not.

Even if you are in a junior position, you still need to know about the things that people do, and the techniques they use. Then you can be on the alert, on your own behalf, to protect yourself from being used, manipulated and lied to. However, it is of wider relevance as well. Whatever job you do, however lowly, you can help the boss and also the other managers within that business. In particular, you can protect them from being lied about and undermined.

That's not just an opportunity. It is a responsibility and a duty. If you are an employee you owe your boss, and the company as a whole, your full loyalty. That includes helping them to avoid being deceived. So, you have a duty to act in the utmost good faith towards your own boss, the managers in general, and the wider business. That includes watching out for people who are seeking to harm that business, or anybody who owns it or works in it. When such things arise, you may need to report what you've seen and heard to the management.

That may be a new idea to you, and may sound alien if you are not thinking biblically about what it means to be an employee, or a colleague, and the duties implied by those roles. At any rate, the examples given in this book are of relevance to everybody, not just bosses. That being so, please read them with a view to seeing their wider relevance to your own situation and to how they can help you to protect yourself, your boss, your colleagues and the firm as a whole.

The story of Belinda and the dishonesty and malice she showed, despite claiming to be a Christian

This story occurred in a church, and shows how devious and nasty some Christians can be. We have to come to terms with the fact that wickedness really is a problem in churches, not only amongst unbelievers. This story concerns 'Belinda' who was in a church that I was part of. It used to organise monthly teaching days, with invited speakers, to which large numbers would come from many other churches. A problem arose concerning one particular speaker, due to some things he had been teaching elsewhere, which were felt to be unsound.

Therefore the organisers decided, at short notice, to withdraw his invitation to speak. That meant the forthcoming teaching day had no speaker. So, they asked me to step in, at the last minute, as a replacement speaker. However, Belinda liked the speaker who had been cancelled, and didn't approve of the invitation being withdrawn. So she decided to sabotage it. She rang around the people on the mailing list for the teaching days and told them that the advertised speaker wasn't coming and that instead "*They have invited some student to come and speak*".

Belinda knew when she rang those people that she was lying. She knew me, and knew perfectly well that I was not a "*student*". She said it because she wanted to hit back at the organisers for cancelling the previous speaker and to punish me for being the replacement. Moreover, she succeeded. She persuaded many people not to come by disparaging me, albeit without naming me. The attendance on that day was lower than usual, due to those who stayed away because of what she told them.

You might think it is going too far to classify Belinda as ‘wicked, but consider what she did. Firstly, she was an old lady, with many decades in the church. So she must have been fully aware at all times of the wrongness of what she was doing. Secondly, she was deliberately causing people to miss a teaching day, from which they would have benefitted. Thirdly, she did it purely out of spite, to satisfy her desire for vengeance. Fourthly, she was intentionally lying to those people in pretending that she didn’t know who the new speaker was, and that I was “*some student*”.

Fifthly, she was also doing it out of a desire for control. She had, in the past, been in charge of organising the teaching days but had to give it up due to ill health and she wanted that feeling of being in command. Lastly, it was not the first, or the only, devious, spiteful thing she had ever done. She was well known for behaving in those ways. Accordingly, given all that she knew, having been a Christian, or at least a ‘churchgoer’, for decades, I would say Belinda was wicked.

In fact, she may well have been more wicked than many of the non-Christians about whom I write in this book. For an unbeliever to act deviously is bad enough. He knows nothing, has never read the Bible, and does not have the Holy Spirit. But for a believer, with an abundance of knowledge, to do those same things is a far more serious sin. That is one reason why I believe that many Christians will be shocked and disappointed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Some will be astonished to find that Jesus has some severe words of rebuke to say to them, which they had not been expecting at all.

The wicked behaviour of Julie, my former PA

An ex-employee of mine called Julie began as a secretary but worked her way up until she became my PA. In the end, she was effectively the office manager. She was an expert in the art of deception and was probably the most skilful and convincing liar I have ever come across. She wasn’t a Christian but, towards the end, she even pretended to have become one, as she thought that would impress me. Her account of her supposed conversion seemed odd, and I didn’t think it was real, but I didn’t realise it was a lie either. I assumed she was sincere but confused.

I had previously explained the Gospel to her and invited her to Bible studies that I ran. She came along, but I always knew something wasn’t right about her allegedly having become a Christian. It just didn’t feel genuine to me. Even so, I never suspected that it was all a complete act. However, things developed and she was eventually exposed as an all-round liar. It came out because another member of staff, ‘Terry’, was beginning to see through her. She realised that he was on to her and sensed the danger to her own position.

Julie therefore tried to cause Terry to lose his job, before he could get a chance to expose her. She deliberately damaged a valuable boardroom table and then tried to get me to think that Terry had done it through carelessness, while moving it from one office to another. It was a risky tactic, but she had got away with so many things by then, that she had become over-confident and thought she could achieve anything. Such people usually do become over-confident in the end, and go too far.

On top of that, she was also getting desperate. Therefore she took a major risk, as desperate times call for desperate measures. The snag was that, on this occasion, she didn’t do it quite cleverly enough. I am an ex-police officer and also a commercial litigation lawyer, so I have an eye for detail. I sensed that something wasn’t quite right about the logistics or ‘forensics’ of this damaged table, or how it was discovered. I also felt something was odd about the things Julie told me about Terry. A number of details didn’t fit.

Accordingly, having employed her for five years, my eyes began to open. I started to wonder whether Julie was yet another false person, on top of all those who had gone before her. I therefore investigated the table incident very closely, which she had not expected. When I did, the evidence came together quickly and it all pointed to Julie having deliberately scratched the table herself with

some sharp instrument. She had pressed on hard enough to cause the varnish to scrape off, forming a neat little mound of dust.

Yet that little mound of dust had *not* been there when I had looked at the table, earlier. Julie wasn't aware that I had briefly been in to my office and had seen the table already. That was *after* Terry had brought it over to my new office, but *before* Julie had vandalised it. She had banked on my not having seen it beforehand. But God had specifically drawn my eye to the table. He wanted me to notice that it was perfect on the first occasion, but was scratched on the second. He often does that when He wants me to see things.

Julie had scratched the table at a place where it would be right alongside the path I would take to walk to my desk. She had wanted to make sure that I saw it. That neat little pile of dust was one of the small forensic details that later caused her story to unravel. You have got to take careful note of the little details and tiny inconsistencies which most of us brush aside and assume to be insignificant. They can turn out to be crucial and can often expose a deceiver. Julie had damaged the table to make it appear that Terry had been careless with it. She had hoped that might provoke me to get angry with him and create a fall-out which might lead to his departure.

That may sound incredible to you if you are a sincere, naïve person. But I assure you such devious tactics are entirely normal. They come very naturally to the mind of a wicked person, no matter how unthinkable they may be to others. Many of the unexplained mishaps, where important papers 'go missing', things are damaged, or events are not arranged properly, are not random accidents. They have been sabotaged deliberately, but covertly, by a malicious colleague, without you ever discovering it was them. This happens far more often than most of us realise.

The wicked don't just do one wicked thing. Therefore, once you discover something wrong, or suspicious, start to dig and to ask a lot of questions, because you will find more.

After I had made that initial discovery about the damage to the boardroom table I began to ask lots more questions to staff about several other issues, to investigate Julie more fully. When I did, a series of other deceptions emerged. Here are just a few of them. The first was that she had been running a small business of her own while working for me. She regularly stayed late at the office, supposedly doing work for me on overtime rates. In fact, she was making greeting cards for her own little sideline business. I had not authorised her to do any of that, and she knew that I never would.

However, she had been clever enough to get me to agree to her *storing* her card-making materials at the office on the basis that there wasn't enough room for them at home. That was all that had ever been agreed with me - that she could *store* the materials, not that she could make cards at the office, especially while being paid to work for me. Because I had agreed to let her store the materials at the office, I myself never saw anything suspicious about the materials *being there*. Obviously I would have, if she had not *asked me*. She knew that, which is why she told me about some, but not *all*, of her plans.

So, the fact that she had *asked permission* to store the material was actually a devious act, not an honest one. It was the exact opposite of what it appeared to be. She also needed to find a way to have the whole office to herself, so that she could make the cards without being seen. Therefore she also told other staff to go home as soon as it was 5.30pm, even though some of them actually wanted to stay late to catch up with their work. She herded them out, telling them that they needed to get a "healthy work and leisure balance."

Yet she didn't mean any of that. She only said it to get them out of the way, so that she could make cards, not for their sake. She had the opportunity to clear the office in this way whenever I was not

present. That was quite often, because I would be away doing other things, or travelling or working from home. So, she sent the staff home and spoke as if she was their mother and as if she was concerned for them not to work too hard.

To add further deceit, at the same time, she was also presenting herself as a martyr for staying late, falsely telling them that she was doing things for me. Accordingly, in addition to stealing her own overtime pay while not actually doing any work for me, she was also stopping others from working. That reduced the efficiency and output of the firm, and its profit, simply so that she could ensure the coast was clear to make cards.

The wicked are remarkably clever, and quick-thinking, when it comes to lying their way out of a tight corner.

One evening ‘Neville’, an outdoor clerk, whose job required him to spend most of his time driving round the country, came in to the office unexpectedly. He arrived at about 6.30pm, after we were closed, while Julie was on her own, supposedly working overtime for me. He saw her busily making cards and spoke to her about it, simply out of curiosity. However, she feared that he would then report that to me because it was suspicious, or that he might innocently mention it to me in conversation. She could not afford for that to happen, whether he suspected her or not.

Julie then took a cleverly calculated risk. She knew that Neville was out on the road 90% of the time and that he would probably not see me for a week or more. She therefore came to see me the *next morning*, and asked if it would be alright for her to work at the office “*tonight, in my own time, to make cards*”. She correctly estimated that Neville wouldn’t see me for several more days. Therefore, even if he did mention, at that point, that he’d seen her making cards in the office, it would seem to me that he was referring to *that* evening, not the evening before.

It would then appear to have been authorised in advance, as I would naturally assume he must be referring to the one off card-making exercise in the office that I had previously agreed to. In fact, she sought the supposedly ‘prior’ approval the morning *after* Neville saw her, not the morning *before*. Her little scheme worked perfectly. When Neville did mention it, a week or more later, it looked exactly as she had intended it to look. I therefore brushed it aside, thinking he was only telling me something I already knew about.

That trick could have gone disastrously wrong. Neville could have texted me that very night, or come to see me the next morning. But she took a calculated gamble that he would probably be delayed in speaking to me, and she was right, as the wicked so often are. However, it was even cleverer than it seemed. She was actually sounding me out that morning, even before she made her ‘request’. She waited a little while when we spoke, to see whether I would raise the subject of Neville having seen her *last night* making cards in the office.

She knew it was possible that he could have already told me the night before, or even early that morning. The outdoor clerks were often out on the road very early, as well as late. She also knew that Neville and I were close, having known each other through church for many years, long before he worked for me. Therefore she needed to know whether or not he had spoken to me before she made her ‘request’. So she subtly fished for information, and eventually concluded that he almost certainly hadn’t contacted me, because I would have mentioned it by now if he had.

She was working to a kind of flow chart. If I had told her that Neville *had* rung me the night before, she would have admitted it, made an excuse and given an apology. She would have presented it as a

one-off incident and claimed no overtime pay for the night before. It would have been made to look entirely innocent. However if, as she expected, Neville had *not* told me, then she would have proceeded with Plan A and asked me if it was OK for her to make cards '*tonight*'.

So, I still didn't realise what she was doing, even after she had been caught *red-handed*, making cards in the office, and even after that was reported to me. It illustrates how ingenious the wicked are at covering their tracks and talking their way out of trouble. Julie showed remarkable guile and initiative. She could think on her feet and concoct schemes and plots of which even MI5 or the CIA would have been proud. Yet, in her standards of general education, she was nothing special, had passed very few exams, and had left school at 15. Indeed, in academic terms, she was rather a dunce.

Nevertheless, she had this tremendous craftiness. It came partly from her own wicked mind, and partly from the demons who were guiding her. Just as with Tracey, I realised, though only at the end, that Julie had also kept out, or got rid of, a number of job applicants whom she had seen as a threat to herself. She was more senior, and more confident and resourceful, than Tracey. Therefore she was able to devise many more ways to achieve that. She would do it either by causing them to be rejected at interview, or later at trial stage, or at some point during their probationary period.

I had a long and careful selection process and had also arranged a sensible system of making all newcomers work a probationary period. I did all that to protect the firm from bad staff. However, the system was being used by Julie to protect *herself from good staff*, who might one day become a threat to her. She had developed a remarkably accurate nose for detecting anyone who had natural talent, honesty or discernment. She knew that such people might, one day, become either a rival or a threat to herself. Either way, she took steps to prevent it by sabotaging their applications.

Those who practice witchcraft have the ability to plant thoughts into your mind.

Julie also had an uncanny ability to *plant thoughts into my mind*. She did it very subtly, so as to make me think they were my own ideas. She was therefore able to get me to do things that she wanted me to do, yet without me ever realising that I was being manipulated. You really do need to note this trait, as it is one of the main hallmarks of witchcraft. I mean the ability to *control other people's minds* by planting thoughts into their heads, which they then wrongly assume to be their own thoughts.

Something very similar is done by hypnotists, because hypnosis is itself an aspect of witchcraft. For that reason, and many others, no person, least of all a Christian, should ever let themselves be hypnotised. It is very dangerous in itself and it puts you under the control of another person, which is always wrong. Even worse, it opens you up to demonic influence. I say all that as an aside. My main point, for the moment, is that you need to be aware that mind control is real, and that it is widely practiced by ordinary people, not just stage hypnotists.

Julie also deceived me, and others, by claiming the credit for their work.

Julie also gave the false impression that she was doing a huge amount of work. She got a series of different members of staff to do things for her and then presented their work to me as if it was her own. I had no idea that any of this was going on, because nobody ever said a word about it. The main reason for their silence was that the staff themselves had no idea that I didn't know they were doing the work for her. They all assumed that it was I who had asked Julie to get them to do these things, and that I knew it was their work.

It never occurred to them to suspect that she was deceiving us all, by deleting their initials on screen, inserting her own, printing off their typing or research, and presenting it to me as if it was her work. However, she was very clever, and careful, in how she went about this and also when, and with whom. She wouldn't over-do it with any one individual, in case it may be noticed. By 'stealing' only 5-10% of each person's work she was much less likely to be found out. Yet, when combined, it added up to a lot of work that she had apparently done.

This went on for about two or three years, on an ever larger scale, without me, or the staff, realising what she was doing. All the time she worked for me I thought Julie was super-efficient and hugely productive, and I never doubted her. Yet it was all an illusion. I am embarrassed now to admit to having been so thoroughly duped. However, I include the story because it may help you to grasp how devious and daring the wicked can be, and how easily they can deceive just about anybody. My being candid may also make it easier for you to admit it to yourself, and others, when you are deceived.

By the way, if you are going to try to argue that you never get tricked, then you are already badly deceived. The only exception is if you are a deceiver yourself, in which case this book isn't meant for you. The reality is that no sincere, decent person can entirely avoid being deceived, especially if they aren't even looking out for such behaviour. Only the wicked are immune to it, because they are doing the deceiving themselves. Therefore, when others try to do it to them, they can spot it a mile off.

Keira's story - a deceitful, manipulative supervisor

Another wicked person I employed was 'Keira', a solicitor (lawyer). I appointed her as a supervisor in my law firm. She had left her previous firm with her files in a mess. However, because I needed more staff urgently, and because she was so convincing at interview, I didn't take up any references before employing her. So I didn't discover that until later. That was a major error. If I had taken references I could have avoided a lot of grief. I let my guard down because I was in a hurry, and was short-staffed.

Moreover, she did seem impressive, had a lot of charm, and was extrovert and engaging. I have learned that careful checking of references and other background checks are essential, especially if the candidate has charm and the 'gift of the gab', as Keira did. The better they 'seem' to be, the more you need to check them out. To make matters worse, not long after she had joined us, I promoted her to the role of salaried partner. I did this prematurely, before I had had time to check her out and see what warning signs emerged. Instead, I gave her a larger team and more responsibilities.

She then began a long series of manipulative schemes. I will just give brief details of some of them. She started her campaign of deception immediately after she joined us, by persuading me to recruit three new members of staff who were friends of hers. She misled me by portraying them as excellent staff and hard workers. So I appointed all three, but it turned out later that they were incompetent and had terrible attitudes. Keira had tricked me into taking them on in order to bring her friends in to the firm.

That said, her motive was not to help them, but to *control them*. They would be her 'eyes and ears' in the office, as they would each owe their jobs to her. She banked on the assumption that, like most bosses, I would never get rid of them, even after finding out how useless they were. She thought I would not have the nerve to sack them, and would let them stay on, no matter how bad they were. That was one point where she was very wrong about me. I was entirely willing to sack staff when necessary and I never shrank from doing so.

However she would be right to assume that about most other bosses in the UK. The majority have an aversion to sacking anybody, and a great fear of doing so. I was so naïve at the time I never realised I was being lied to by Keira. I thought she had merely made an error of judgement and given me poor

advice about the appointments. Even so, I quickly got rid of all three of them. That was a shock to her, but she quickly learned from it and changed her method from then on.

If they get caught, or their way is blocked, the wicked will alter their approach and find other ways to deceive you.

Keira never again *openly* tried to get me to appoint anybody else that she knew. She realised that, after those three recruitment disasters, I would be wary of any recommendation from her. Therefore she completely changed her technique and started getting people to apply to me for jobs *as if they didn't know her*. She told them to make no mention of her and to pretend not to know her. In that way, she managed to get me to appoint 'Mavis', another friend of hers. Because I was so naïve and undiscerning at the time, I even made her a salaried partner.

Mavis later got the sack for being useless, but then sued me and told lies about me to national newspapers. It was all very disturbing and unsettling but I never gave in to Mavis. In the end, she abandoned her case and got paid nothing. I never had any idea that she and Keira already knew each other. I only discovered that much later. God must have intervened to open my eyes, because I happened to meet another person who knew them both. I found out from him that they had *already known each other*, long before working for me. They had both carefully hidden that from me.

However, before that fact came out, there was another strange incident, when a young man came for a job interview with me. He applied to us to be a solicitor (lawyer) and turned up in reception for an interview. For some reason, Keira forgot to tell this applicant that he needed to pretend not to know her. She had intended to meet him in reception, by herself, before I saw him. Then she would have told him of her little trick and briefed him on what *not* to say. But she came unstuck because I went to reception by myself, and unexpectedly early.

Therefore I met him on my own, just before she got there. As I was greeting the young man, Keira rushed in and joined us in reception, looking very flustered. The job applicant looked at her with obvious recognition in his face, but she looked at him with panic in her eyes, as if she was trying to convey a message. Then she said, in a strange tone of voice, "*Good morning Mr..... . I understand you work in Birmingham, although we've never met*". As she said this odd remark, with an expression of panic on her face, the applicant couldn't help looking deeply confused.

He didn't seem to know what to say to her in reply because, of course, *he knew her very well*. I could see that it was all very peculiar, but even so, the penny didn't drop immediately. I only realised the position later, when I interviewed him again, without Keira present. I then asked him directly whether he knew her. He was obviously very uncomfortable, and unsure what to say, but his panic-stricken pauses spoke volumes. That was when I realised what Keira was up to. She had been getting people whom she already knew to apply to me, whilst she pretended not to know them.

Her motive in trying to bring in her friends was the same as it was before - the desire for control. She wanted to build a power base for herself within the firm by bringing in staff whom she knew and who would also owe their positions to her. Then she could more easily use them from then on, to gain greater influence over the firm as a whole. To her, having control over other people was all important, as it is for most wicked people.

Another way Keira tried to achieve that was to get junior staff to believe that I was a monster and that she could 'protect' them from me. She would then offer to cover up their mistakes and wrongdoings and keep it from me, as if she was doing them a favour. That harmed the firm, and our clients, as it prevented me from seeing what staff were doing wrongly and from dealing with those problems. It also meant I could not provide training and advice at the earliest possible time.

It was actually also harmful to those staff, because it caused them to be needlessly wary of me as their boss, even when they hadn't done anything wrong. Therefore they lost out on the chance to receive my advice and input, which reduced the quality of their training. That didn't bother Keira because she didn't care a jot about them. All she wanted was to have control over them, for her *own* benefit, not theirs. This kind of deceit and manipulation goes on in businesses and churches all the time, but simple/naïve people are usually oblivious to it.

Years ago, such tricks and schemes were beyond my ability to detect or understand. Now I can see them much faster. I also realise that there is nothing unusual about them and that *most people* do these devious things, to one extent or another. I am therefore on the lookout for it, whereas previously I wasn't on the lookout for anything, so I didn't see anything. You tend only to see things if you expect to see them and are actively looking for them. What you don't expect, you won't see, even when it happens right in front of you.

A deceiver will cause even good people to behave badly when they believe the lies they are told and act upon them.

The damage caused by a liar can spread far and wide and the impact can be felt not only by the person who is lied to, but by the whole business, organisation or church. It goes far beyond the original lie itself, because of what deceived people do once they have believed a lie. They will often begin to act in disruptive, divisive, damaging ways, almost as if they were wicked themselves, as the overall effect looks very similar. One of the objectives of a liar is to get the deceived person to act in ways which will harm their own interests and destroy relationships, and even for them to commit 'career suicide'.

The person who has been lied to believes something which, *if it was true*, would make their own actions seem reasonable and rational. But the problem is the information which they, *and only they*, have been told is *not* true. More importantly, nobody else, except the deceiver, is even aware of the lie. To everyone else, the deceived person's actions, and his suspicious, hostile manner, will seem unreasonable, and even inexplicable.

But, to the deceived person himself, his responses make perfect sense, as he is acting in self-defence. Furthermore, the deceived person very rarely ever *checks* any of the things that they believe to be facts. In their own minds, there is no need to check, because those things are already fully accepted as absolute 'facts'. On top of that, a skilled deceiver will usually cause their victim to think that they cannot, or should not, check the 'facts' with anybody else.

They present the information in a "*confidential*" way, or "*as a favour*". They will also suggest that they have "*taken a risk*" in disclosing it and that they, or the victim, could "*get into trouble*" if it becomes known that they have discussed this matter, or revealed this information. So, the victim then feels obliged to keep quiet and makes no checks or enquiries. Therefore nobody around him ever gets the chance to challenge or correct any of these lies that he has been told.

A person who has been deceived will act to their own detriment, and even commit 'career suicide', as a result of believing the lies they are told.

The person who believes the lie is acting rationally, in what they believe to be self-defence. They are reacting to the perceived threat which, to them, is utterly real. The point is it is real *only* to them. It is false, and probably not known about at all, so far as *everybody else* is concerned. The deceived person usually also compounds the problem by acting in the flesh and thus over-reacting and acting badly, and even dishonestly. He can begin to do and say things which are wrong, and even wicked, purely because he is trying to protect himself from the imaginary, non-existent threat which the liar has convinced him is real.

Deceived people react in these ways because, in their own 'parallel universe', the lie is a fact and also because they feel angry, or even violated. Therefore, to them, their own misbehaviour is justified in the circumstances, especially as they were not the one who '*started it*'. The problem is that so far as everybody else is concerned, except for the liar, there have *not been* any prior events or circumstances. The victim's actions, and carnal reactions, are the only things they know about. So he seems to be the one who is starting things and causing all the problems.

To the people around them, the victim looks and sounds unreasonable and difficult to handle, and he seems to be the cause of the conflict. This may sound far-fetched if you have never come across this technique within a business, church or group of friends. But I assure you it is very real and extremely common. The only reason it doesn't sound common is because most deception is *never discovered*, even afterwards. Therefore it goes completely unnoticed. We assume it is just somebody being irrational, hostile, or ill-tempered.

It does not occur to us that they are acting in response to some lie, known only to them, that they have believed. Thus, relationships are broken, jobs are lost, marriages are destroyed, and churches are undermined or split, without anybody ever realising what the lies were, or even that there were any lies. All of the parties, except for the liar, fully assume that they are dealing with settled facts and that they understand all of those facts correctly. Accordingly, we need to be continually on our guard for hidden lies and to at least recognise the possibility that some may have been told to us.

We also need to be alert to the possibility that lies may have been told to someone else, whom we are investigating, or tackling, or upon whom we are relying as a witness. Therefore we need to be very careful to weigh up, *and check*, anything that we are told about other people, whether directly or indirectly, especially if it amounts to an accusation or criticism. We also need to be alert to this kind of problem, and remain open-minded, when dealing with any irrational, unexplained or unexpected hostility or misbehaviour.

Be willing to question, check, and reconsider everything. There is a distinct possibility that such strange conduct could be due to that person having believed a lie told to them by somebody else. That could explain their peculiar behaviour or unnecessary defensiveness. The same applies where we ourselves have become angry or hostile towards another person, or where we are called upon to tackle their misconduct. Always be open to consider the possibility that you may have been lied to and that the person you are dealing with could actually be the innocent victim of a deceiver.

If so, he will also be totally unaware of what has been alleged against him. Therefore, your very anger and suspicion towards him will be seen by him as evidence of your hostility, or at least of your unreasonableness. Remember, he has no idea what has been said about him, or why you are acting as you are, or asking questions. Indeed, he may well assume that *you* are wicked. Having said all that, one must also avoid making the equal and opposite mistake of assuming that all allegations, accusations and rumours are always automatically *untrue*. They might well be true.

In short, don't assume anything at all, *in either direction*, either to believe everything you are told, or to believe nothing you are told. Be willing to believe that things *may* be true, but also be willing to accept that they might not be. We should not rule things either out or in, at least not at the outset. Then we should check, double check, and even triple check, everything we are told before believing it, but also before *disbelieving* it.

One reason why lies do so much harm is that they are so appealing. People like lies and enjoy hearing them. They are also eager to believe them and to pass them on.

The sad fact is that lies are more attractive to most people than the truth is. Therefore a lie tends to be believed instantly, and without question, whereas the truth has to work very hard to be heard at all, let alone believed. Moreover, even if the truth is eventually accepted, people feel far less inclined to pass

it on to others than when repeating a lie. The truth just doesn't have the same delicious aroma and taste that lies have:

*The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.
Proverbs 18:8 (RSV)*

Thus it is an uphill battle to get the truth to be heard and believed, whereas lies are actively self-propagating. They send out their seeds on the wind and reproduce themselves all over the place, faster than anybody can remove them, because lies are inherently more interesting than the dull, dependable truth. Lies appeal to our flesh and go with the grain of our sin nature, rather than against it. Jeremiah certainly thought so:

*the prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule at their direction;
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?
Jeremiah 5:31 (RSV)*

*An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.
Proverbs 17:4 (RSV)*

Another reason is that, whenever a lie is told or heard, the demons are doing all they can to ensure it is believed and acted upon. Conversely, when the truth is told, the demons do all they can to close our ears and minds so that it is not heard or accepted. Therefore the demons accentuate the problem, in both directions.

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.*

Psalms 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, Caucesesus 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.

CHAPTER 5

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

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

John 2:24-25 (ESV)

¹⁸ *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)

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

⁴ *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)

⁹ *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:

⁹The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, ¹²so 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:

² *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.

CHAPTER 6

RECOGNISE HOW CAPABLE THE WICKED ARE OF INFLUENCING YOU AND TRY HARD TO AVOID THEM

*⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray
Matthew 24:4 (ESV)*

*Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”
1 Corinthians 15:33 (RSV)*

*The wicked watches the righteous,
and seeks to slay him.
Psalm 37:32 (RSV)*

*Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
Psalm 25:19 (RSV)*

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
Matthew 7:15 (RSV)*

*⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.
Luke 12:51-52 (ESV)*

Consider the ways in which the wicked tried to oppose and undermine Zerubbabel. If they would try to do that to him, they will do it to you.

Zerubbabel was seeking to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem but his enemies were determined to stop him. Consider the techniques they used, all of which are standard. Every real Christian will come up against these schemes repeatedly and must learn to recognise them. They include infiltration, discouragement, intimidation, obstruction, lies and false accusations. The wicked began by trying to *infiltrate* Zerubbabel’s team to undermine him, and his work, from within. However, he saw through their trick and refused to let them join in:

*¹ Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, ² they approached Zerub’babel and the heads of fathers’ houses and said to them, “Let us build with you; for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of E’sar-had’don king of Assyria who brought us here.”
³ But Zerub’babel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers’ houses in Israel said to them, “You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.”
Ezra 4:1-3 (RSV)*

When infiltration failed, they tried *discouragement*. They also tried to *intimidate* the workers, so they would stop work or do less. They also hired people to *obstruct* the work and delay it, so as to frustrate Zerubbabel’s purposes:

*⁴ Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, ⁵ and hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.
Ezra 4:4 (RSV)*

They then moved on to making *false allegations* about the people of Judah and Jerusalem so that the King would be wary of them and withdraw his support:

And in the reign of Ahasu-e'rus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezra 4:5 (RSV)

They even wrote a deceitful letter to King Artaxerxes, saying that the people of Judah and Jerusalem were rebellious and were rebuilding the Temple for seditious purposes:

¹¹ this is a copy of the letter that they sent—"To Ar-ta-xerx'es the king: Your servants, the men of the province Beyond the River, send greeting. And now ¹² be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. ¹³ Now be it known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired.

Ezra 4:11-13 (RSV)

For a time the King believed their lies and sent a letter of his own giving orders for the work to cease:

²³ Then, when the copy of King Ar-ta-xerx'es' letter was read before Rehum and Shim'shai the scribe and their associates, they went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease. ²⁴ Then the work on the house of God which is in Jerusalem stopped; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Ezra 4:23-24 (RSV)

The effect of their lies was that the work was stopped for a number of years, until a new King came to the throne, called Darius. Then the work was resumed, due to the intervention of Haggai, Zechariah and Ezra. As a result of what they did, the truth eventually came out. It began when Ezra called a fast and also got others to join with him in prayer, seeking for God's help and protection:

²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Aha'va, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a straight way for ourselves, our children, and all our goods.

Ezra 8:21 (RSV)

God answered their prayers and protected Ezra, and those with him, from the wicked and delivered them from the dangers they faced:

Then we departed from the river Aha'va on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem; the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.

Ezra 8:31 (RSV)

Note how seriously Ezra took the threat posed by the wicked. He was under no illusions as to how much harm they could do. It would therefore be naïve for you to imagine they can't influence or harm you. They certainly can, and all the more so if you underestimate them, or don't even realise who they are. I can speak from first-hand experience. I was once in a business partnership with a very dishonest man who was also a skilled manipulator. In the end, I decided that I had to get out of that firm. If I had not left when I did, his influence would have rubbed off on me.

Sooner or later, associating with him would have caused me to compromise my integrity. In fact, he was already starting to have an unhealthy influence on me. That is what inevitably happens when you become closely involved with bad people. For example, when you are with the wicked, conversations frequently become vulgar. Unless you remove yourself, or remove them, you will be affected by the

way they speak and act. Moreover, you will only ever move in *their* direction and become worse. They won't move in *your* direction and get better.

It's true that a godly person can act as 'salt' in a workplace or other group and prevent bad things from happening, or at least reduce the effect of those things. However, your being salt will not cause the wicked people around you to become good. The godly person acts as a preservative, slowing down the rate of advance of evil, just as salt slows down the process of decay. But it can't *reverse* it. In the same way, a refrigerator can slow down the rate of decay in food, but it cannot make rotten food get better, or become fresh again.

The problems caused by 'Chloe', a deceitful, manipulative supervisor

If they are allowed to remain in place the wicked will also influence your colleagues and staff, not only yourself. Just one wicked person in a church or workplace will have a disproportionately large influence. 'Chloe', a supervisor I employed in the past, had a poisonous influence on my staff by conducting a malicious whispering campaign behind my back. She also bullied junior staff so that they began to see her as having power over their careers. That was not an illusion. She really did have power, so they feared her and did as she told them.

In my naivety I had also allowed Chloe to conduct first interviews on my behalf, to save me time. But anybody with talent and integrity, whom she saw as a threat to herself, was rejected by her at the outset and never got to a second interview with me. She also told lies about me to get junior staff to fear me and avoid coming to me. They believed her and would then go to her for 'protection' from me. The irony is they ought to have come to me for protection from her, but none of them ever did.

Chloe also had a huge influence over the revenue of the firm as I had, very unwisely, put her in charge of the costs department. They did the bills and negotiated our charges with insurance companies after we had won cases. Because she was lazy and dishonest, she made life easier for herself by deliberately 'under-settling' hundreds of bills, over two years. After I sacked her and replaced her with 'Carla', her deputy, the revenue of the firm rose dramatically, because we began to settle our claims for costs at the correct level, rather than under-settling them.

However, Carla learned to act just like her former boss and ended up doing all the same things after Chloe was sacked.

The influence of the wicked does not end, even after you get rid of them. Carla took over the Costs Department from Chloe but went on to do all the same things. It was partly because Carla was already wicked to begin with, but also because she learned a lot of devious techniques from Chloe. For both these reasons, she went on to repeat the very same tactics. She became lazy and dishonest and under-settled bills, exactly as before, and the firm's revenue declined again. So I fell for the same trick twice and paid heavily for my error until I took steps to investigate Carla too.

As is often the case, she already knew what I was going to find so she resigned voluntarily, before my investigation really got started. The wicked can be surprisingly weak and cowardly when they are eventually caught. Instead of fighting you openly, they will often just flee without a fight. They know they can only defeat you while you are *unaware* of their real nature. Once your eyes are open the chances are they won't be willing to meet you in a head-on collision because manipulators often lack the courage to take part in a fair fight, where war is openly declared.

We are responsible for our decisions as to which people we allow to influence us.

Being influenced by other people is not just a possibility. It is inevitable. Spending time with wicked people and fools is bound to affect you, just as being with wise people will. Therefore be very selective about the people you allow to be a part of your life, because we can be ruined by the influence of the people with whom we spend our time:

***Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."
1 Corinthians 15:33 (RSV)***

Like the Psalmist, seek for wise, godly friends, or at least for people who *want* to be wise and godly. Work hard at building relationships with them:

***I am a companion of all who fear thee,
of those who keep thy precepts.
Psalm 119:63 (RSV)***

Some might say that deciding who to spend time with seems calculating, like a social climber who only wants to be with people who are useful. That is how worldly people think. They seek out those who can help them to get on in life. But by 'getting on,' they mean something very different from what a Christian should be seeking. The relationship decisions we need to make are not about social climbing but to help us to pursue the aims that God has set for us. Given the eternal consequences that will result from success or failure, we need to take this seriously and choose very carefully the people with whom we spend our time.

When I was a police officer I was perplexed by some of the appalling criminals whom women found attractive. Despite being dishonest and violent, even towards them, their girlfriends would stay with them, and even chase after them. There is something about the wicked that is attractive to other wicked people and also to fools, as with the deceitful Mr Wyckham from *Pride and Prejudice*. However, no matter how charming, amusing or popular the wicked may be, we must not desire to be with them:

***¹Be not envious of evil men,
nor desire to be with them;
Proverbs 24:1 (RSV)***

Avoid people who are sexually promiscuous or provocative.

Sexual sin is extremely damaging. Therefore avoid any provocative person who could ensnare you. It is one of the fastest ways to ruin, because it is a sin against our own body. That is made in the image of God and is far more significant than many people realise. Greek philosophy has had a big impact on Western culture. It focused on the spirit and soul and taught that sins committed in the body were of little significance. Therefore many Christians, even today, underestimate the importance of their body and assume it does not matter much to God. But Paul points out its sacredness as a '*temple of the Holy Spirit*':

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (ESV)

Paul expands further on this point in his letter to the Ephesians:

³*But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.* ⁴*Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.* ⁵*For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

Ephesians 5:3-5(ESV)

Any person who commits adultery or fornication is a fool. He is actually destroying himself:

³²*He who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself.*

Proverbs 6:32 (RSV)

Solomon describes a loose woman as a temptation to sin, but it works equally in reverse. Many women are pressured into sexual sin by men, with the same deadly results:

²⁶*And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.*

Ecclesiastes 7:26 (ESV)

The whole of chapter 7 of Proverbs is devoted to this one issue. It speaks of a young man who is tempted into sexual sin by a seductive young woman and we are told it will cost him his life. Sexual sin probably has more power to end our walk as disciples than any other sin:

²¹*With her many persuasions she entices him;*

With her flattering lips she seduces him.

²²*Suddenly he follows her*

As an ox goes to the slaughter,

Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,

²³*Until an arrow pierces through his liver;*

As a bird hastens to the snare,

So he does not know that it will cost him his life.

²⁴*Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,*

And pay attention to the words of my mouth.

²⁵*Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,*

Do not stray into her paths.

²⁶*For many are the victims she has cast down,*

And numerous are all her slain.

²⁷*Her house is the way to Sheol,*

Descending to the chambers of death.

Proverbs 7:21-27 (NASB)

Avoid worldly people.

We are commanded to live in the world but not to share its values or to behave as it does. There are many worldly people that we cannot avoid being with. We have to work alongside them and live on the same street. With them all we can do is be on our guard. But it is a bad idea to spend time *voluntarily* with worldly people. They aren't seeking to do God's will and they won't help you to do so. They are preoccupied with earthly things, so avoid them and do not love the things they love:

¹⁵*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.* ¹⁶*For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.*

1 John 2:15-16 (NIV)

You won't influence worldly people if you meet them on their territory, for example by going out to night clubs with them, like someone I once knew. Neither will you ever help anyone to believe the Gospel by using swear words, dirty jokes or crude speech to prove how 'relevant' you are. You will never persuade worldly people to become Christians by being like them. However, they will inevitably influence you and to drag you down to their level. It may be counter-intuitive, but our only hope of influencing such people is by being *different from them*.

Merely by being with worldly people and going to the places they go to you are more likely to get into the problems and hazards that arise in such places. I remember speaking to a young man who told me he had been in a bar which is frequented by young people. It was also late at night and was the sort of place where people go to get drunk, rather than to have a drink. While he was there a fight broke out because some drunken young men threw beer over him and his friends. He began to point out that he was not at fault and had not started or wanted any of this.

I said that if he had been wiser he would not have gone to that bar in the first place because of the kind of people who go there and how they are likely to behave. By avoiding the Town Centre, and by going out earlier rather than later, a lot of the hazards can be so easily avoided. So it is not a question of whether you wanted to get into fights and other such hazards. The issue is whether you are putting yourself into close proximity with the kind of people who are likely to cause them.

Avoid proud, haughty people.

Pride is closely correlated with opposition to God, so the proud will oppose you if you are trying to do God's will. Pride is also an indicator of overall wickedness. Therefore a proud person will inevitably go on to sin in other ways as well. So the fact that someone is proud is, by itself, a useful early warning sign. It suggests that they are likely to be wicked in other ways too and is another of the 'litmus' tests that you can use to spot the wicked.

Avoid negative, resentful or embittered people and those who complain a lot.

Also avoid negative, resentful, bitter people. They will transmit their sourness to you far more effectively than you can ever hope to influence them. That doesn't mean we should avoid those who are hurting or who have been wronged. They need our support and we should, of course, spend time with them. It is the *habitual* moaners, grumblers and resentful people we must avoid. They are not seeking help. They just want an outlet for the festering reservoir of bitterness inside them. Don't allow yourself to become such an outlet for them. Firstly it won't help them anyway but, more importantly, it will damage you.

Avoid stingy people - meanness is a strong sign of general badness in a person.

Meanness with money and property is another of the litmus tests which reveals what a person's heart is really like. I have never met a stingy person who wasn't also hard-hearted. There is a consistent correlation, such that stinginess is only present in people whose hearts are already hard. Thus it is more of a *symptom* of hard-heartedness than a cause of it. A stingy person will never be a good friend to you, as they care very little for anybody else. Therefore you are not losing much anyway if you do avoid them, as their heart is not with you:

***6Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy;
do not desire his delicacies;
7for he is like one who is inwardly reckoning.
"Eat and drink!" he says to you;
but his heart is not with you. Proverbs 23:6-7 (RSV)***

Watch out for evidence of stinginess in other people and treat it as a test of their general, overall character. It will improve the accuracy of your discernment. It is harder to discern more complex features, such as falseness, cruelty or dishonesty, as those are more easily hidden. However, because wicked people are usually also stingy, it follows that stingy people are usually also wicked. If you see stinginess, you are probably dealing with a wicked person, or at least they are heading towards being wicked. Therefore they are likely to have *other* wicked features which you have not yet discerned.

Thus stinginess is another warning sign which can help you to identify wicked people earlier. However, do not confuse stinginess with the sensible frugality shown by those who are careful about what they spend. That is *thrift* and has nothing to do with meanness. Thrift is a quality, not a fault, whereas meanness is a sinful heart-attitude. It causes a person not to give or share when they ought to. It is easy for a person to hide their general wickedness from you, but meanness is hard to disguise. They could only hide it by showing generosity, which they would find difficult.

Even if they tried, the chances are they wouldn't be able to be generous in any consistent or convincing way. A wicked person can therefore be identified and exposed much earlier if you test their attitude to money and possessions. It could be in a small everyday situation such as sharing a bill, buying drinks or making a contribution to petrol costs. If you see evidence of stinginess, *as opposed to sensible thrift*, then take note. From then on, be on the lookout for other forms of wickedness in that person as well, because you are very likely to find more.

Create little tests of meanness or generosity, without telling anybody what you are doing. Don't give your methods away. See how people react where a bill needs to be shared. Take careful note of whatever you see or hear. You may be surprised at the relaxed, spontaneous generosity of some, and the hard-hearted tight-fistedness of others. However, don't then waste that information by failing to act upon it. Begin to watch the mean person much more closely from then on, in all his other dealings, not just with money.

Having been alerted to their meanness, you will then begin to see other negative aspects of their character emerge, which you probably would not have discovered if you had not been consciously looking out for such things. When I was a police officer, there was a young man who joined the station as a probationer. If we went out for a drink after work he would let other people buy rounds, but then head off home before it was his turn to buy a round. This was not just on a one off occasion. It was his consistent policy, each time we went out.

Moreover, if we went out for dinner as a shift he would ask at the outset whether we would each be paying for ourselves or splitting the bill equally. If we decided to split it equally, he would then order fillet steak, a starter and expensive drinks. But if we said we would each pay for ourselves he would have the cheapest item on the menu and drink very little. In the end, if he was with us, we would pay for ourselves because we knew what he would do. We would only split the bill if he wasn't there.

We also began to buy rounds at the police bar without including him, or we would each get our own drink, so as to stop his tactics. However, none of that embarrassed him. He felt no shame, as any right-thinking person would. He just accepted that he had been thwarted and then got his own drink. If others had ever excluded me from a round because they thought I was a sponger I would have been mortified. But he wasn't bothered, because his overall character was also bad. He was proud, arrogant and selfish and the sort of officer who does not enhance the reputation of the police.

The 'stinginess test' is reliable, because it is one which most wicked people will fail. Their stinginess is so ingrained that they would actually find it hard to hide it, even if they wanted to. They don't actually notice when they are being mean. It seems so normal to them that they don't see it as wrong or expect you to attach any significance to it. So beware of anybody who is mean. Of all the people I have ever met, I cannot think of even one stingy person who was not *also* selfish, uncaring and hard-hearted in other ways as well. Can you?

Avoid crude or foul-mouthed people.

Persistent foul language is a clear sign that a person's heart is corrupt. The Bible says "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks*". That means whatever is already in your heart, or whatever your heart is *full of*, will automatically flow out in your speech, without you even realising it. Again, it's really a *symptom* of the existing corruption within that person, not a *cause* of it. In addition, the persistent use of foul language also suggests that the person is being influenced by demons. (See Books 7 and 9).

When a person becomes a real Christian, one of the first things that tends to disappear is foul language, and especially blasphemy. However, that is not so with apostates, or with phoney or nominal Christians who are mere 'churchgoers'. I have come across many such people who used bad language, and even took God's name in vain, without feeling any qualms about it. Therefore, watch out for swearing and blaspheming. It is another warning sign that something is wrong, especially if the person is claiming to be a Christian.

Real Christians who have the Holy Spirit within them, would feel uncomfortable even hearing blasphemy, let alone speaking it. Thus, if a person is swearing regularly, and especially if they are blaspheming, it is a clear indicator that they are corrupt, unless they are a brand new convert, for whom some temporary allowances may need to be made. However, with the possible exception of brand new believers, blaspheming is a strong indicator that the person is not a genuine Christian.

Avoid scoffers and mockers.

We hear a lot in the book of Proverbs about *scoffers* and *mockers*. They are flippant and disrespectful about the things that God values. They are unlikely to listen to you and will mock what you value, so avoid them. Also avoid comedians who mock people, values or institutions which God wants us to honour. At the very least, He does not want us to revile them. Therefore, Christians should avoid comedy shows where politicians are being mocked.

It may not be blasphemous or crude, but cruel sarcasm aimed at politicians is still wrong, because it is based on contempt. God wants us to honour, and pray for, the political leaders He has put in place. Even if they are unbelievers, they were all put there by Him. We are to pray for such leaders, not to ridicule them. There is nothing constructive or edifying in mockery. It is a base form of humour and if we engage in it, or listen to it, it will harden our hearts.

That said, there is a place for the intelligent and constructive use of irony, and even satire, if the motive is to reveal the truth about a politician or government. Some cartoons or other comments on social media are entirely proper in my view, such as where Mr Obama is revealed for what he really is. It depends on how it is done and on the heart-attitude and motives of those doing it. Intelligent satire is therefore alright, but gratuitous insults, mockery and contempt are not.

Do not marry, or even go out with a non-Christian.

For some, this will mean making painful decisions, but there is no getting away from the fact that God does not want a Christian to marry a non-Christian. We should not even go out with them, or 'date' them, but should wait for the unbeliever to be genuinely converted. Until then, there should not be any romantic relationship. Moreover, if we don't see marriage as at least a potential outcome, we should not be going out with members of the opposite sex at all. If the possibility of eventual marriage is excluded, there isn't any biblical basis for what our society calls dating.

It creates all kinds of temptations, not only to sexual sin, but also to compromise by marrying an unbeliever. The safest way to ensure you don't marry an unsaved person is to refuse even to go out

with one. If a Christian disobeys God and marries a non-Christian, it will almost certainly end in disaster and the unbelieving party is unlikely ever to be converted. Instead, they are much more likely to drag the Christian down to their level and wreck their spiritual condition. That is exactly what happened to Solomon as a result of his marrying pagan women who worshipped idols:

¹ Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ² from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love.

1 Kings 11:1-2 (ESV)

Solomon was the wisest man ever. He had also personally met with the LORD, at least twice, i.e. a pre-appearance of the Son of God. But even Solomon's faith could not survive the corrosive influence of being married to unbelieving wives. They ruined him for many years, until he eventually recovered his faith in his old age.

Don't form any kind of significant partnerships or alliances with non-Christians.

Consider what apostle Paul says about entering into any kind of intimate or significant relationships with unbelievers:

¹⁴Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ¹⁷"Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you.

2 Corinthians 6:14-17 (NASB)

Paul is frank about the reality of being closely tied up together with unbelievers. Marriage, business partnership, or anything which requires us to be tied together in a very close relationship with mutual trust and obligations will never work between a believer and an unbeliever. Consider this example involving the godly King Jehoshaphat of Judah. Contrary to God's wishes, he formed a military alliance with the ungodly King Ahaziah of the Northern Kingdom. God strongly disapproved of King Jehoshaphat forming that alliance with an ungodly man and brought judgment on him because of it:

³⁵After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel. He acted wickedly in so doing. ³⁶So he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. ³⁷Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has destroyed your works." So the ships were broken and could not go to Tarshish.

2 Chronicles 20:35-37(NASB)

I went into a business partnership with two unbelievers, one of whom was wicked. In the end, the other became wicked too, because of the influence of the first one. But I should never have gone into partnership in the first place, with either of them. It would be alright to work for them, as an employee, or to do business with them as a customer or supplier, but not to join their business *as a full equity partner*. When I did that I went too far and became "*bound together with unbelievers*", which Paul warned against. It was asking for trouble and ended in disaster, which I wrote about in Book 2.

Be realistic about the extent of human wickedness, and suitably alert, yet without over-reacting or becoming paranoid.

We need to be balanced about the likelihood of encountering wickedness in other people. If we assume that *nobody* is wicked, then we're naïve and will be damaged by people. But if, on the other hand, we assume *everybody* is wicked, we'll become cynical and even paranoid. Therefore aim to be realistic about the number of wicked people as a proportion of the population and also the likely extent of their wickedness. Neither over-estimate nor under-estimate those things. Instead, keep an open mind about other people, whether you have only just met them, or have known them for years.

Having an 'open mind' means we form no judgement at all until we have sufficient information to give us a reliable basis for forming one. It doesn't mean we assume all people are wicked until they're proved not to be. Neither does it mean assuming everybody is sincere until they're proved to be false. Both assumptions are wrong, because the population is made up of a wide range of types of person. Having an open mind means not assuming anything at all and forming no judgement, in either direction, until sufficient facts become known to enable you to make one properly.

Don't take any significant action, form any alliance, or join any group or project without seeking God's guidance first.

To a gung-ho, enthusiastic person like me, caution and restraint do not come naturally. My instinct is to press ahead, make quick decisions and get things moving. Therefore, I have often got involved too hastily in groups, committees and other projects. Or I have joined a church or some other group without ever asking God whether He actually *wanted* me to do so. I have been headstrong and wilful at times, like a dog that pulls on its lead. I have therefore made many painful errors, and wasted a lot of time.

I would have been much better off asking God first, preferably at the very outset, what He wants me to do. I could have done so by praying along these lines: "*Lord, I am considering joining church X, or committee Y, or starting project Z. Please tell me what your will is and whether this is something you want me to do, or just my own headstrong idea. Please help me not to 'pull on the lead'. Instead, help me only to do what you want, nothing else and nothing more*".

If we don't pray in that way, and just press on without asking God first, we will end up doing things which displease Him. That is not necessarily because they are *inherently bad* things, but because they were the wrong things for us to be doing. They could even be the right things, but done at the wrong time, in the wrong way, with the wrong people, or to the wrong extent. So if we don't ask God first we are highly likely to make mistakes, waste time and get into unhealthy relationships:

¹ "*Woe to the rebellious children," says the LORD, "who carry out a plan, but not mine; and who make a league, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin; ² who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my counsel, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh, and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! ³ Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation.*

Isaiah 30:1-3 (RSV)

Isaiah told the people of Judah that forming an alliance with Egypt, which seemed a good military idea to them, was not from God and would only end in disaster. On that occasion God did not want them to form any alliance, but to rely solely on Him. However, it is equally wrong to go in the other direction and *oppose* someone or something without asking God first. In the next example the godly King Josiah, probably the best King that Judah ever had, made a decision to confront Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. His armies were passing through, on their way to do battle with the King of Assyria.

King Josiah of Judah decided that he would not allow this. So he went with his army to do battle with the Egyptian army, even though Pharaoh Neco had told Josiah that he had no quarrel with him. The Egyptians just wanted to pass through and had no desire to fight against Judah. Neco was an Egyptian, not an Israelite, but he claimed he had been commanded by God to go to war with Assyria. Evidently, King Josiah did not think it was possible that God could really want to use Neco:

²⁰After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to meet him. ²¹ But he sent envoys to him, saying, "What have we to do with each other, king of Judah? I am not coming against you this day, but against the house with which I am at war. And God has commanded me to hurry. Cease opposing God, who is with me, lest he destroy you.

2 Chronicles 35:20-21 (ESV)

King Josiah either did not listen to Pharaoh Neco or he did not believe him. He just made up his own mind and decided to stop him. We are not told explicitly that he did not pray for guidance, before opposing Pharaoh Neco. However, there is nothing in the text of 2 Chronicles (or 2 Kings) to suggest that King Josiah did ever pray about it or seek the advice of Jeremiah. It is possible that he just made his own decision, there and then, and set off. Then when King Josiah misguidedly joined the battle he was killed by an Egyptian archer:

²² Nevertheless, Josiah did not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to fight in the plain of Megiddo. ²³ And the archers shot King Josiah. And the king said to his servants, "Take me away, for I am badly wounded." ²⁴ So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.

2 Chronicles 35:22-24 (ESV)

Presumably, King Josiah just assumed that Pharaoh, who was an Egyptian, cannot possibly have heard from the God of Israel and cannot, therefore, have been doing God's will. Yet we see, from verse 22 above, that what Pharaoh said was actually *true*. He had been commanded to attack Assyria. The Bible says Josiah "did not listen to the words of Neco *from the mouth of God*....." What Pharaoh had said to Josiah really was from God. He had given Josiah a genuine warning and it had been ignored through haste, presumption or thoughtlessness.

Perhaps it was just prejudice on Josiah's part or a feeling of superiority? At any rate, Josiah made the mistake of getting involved in opposing something without asking God first. I can't point my finger at King Josiah though, because I have made the same error myself many times and have paid the price for doing so. To ignore God's guidance and warnings is a grave error, even if they come from a person like Pharaoh, for whom we don't have much regard. In this case Josiah paid for it with his life. The people of Judah also paid, because evil Kings then took over from him.

Tragically, Josiah's godly reign was cut short when he was only 38. His place was taken by his son, Jehoahaz, who only managed to reign for three months before he was deposed by Pharaoh Neco and replaced by his brother Eliakim. Pharaoh then changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim and he reigned for 25 years, but in an evil way. He sowed the seeds for the subsequent invasion and destruction of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon:

⁵ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. ⁶ Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. ⁷ Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon

2 Chronicles 36:5-7 (ESV)

All of this flowed from one impulsive act. Yet, despite all his previous good conduct, God did not spare Josiah, or his sons, or the people of Judah, from the bitter consequences of his hasty decision. It shows what problems can result when we act wilfully without waiting to pray first, or to seek God's instruction from the Bible, or from godly advisers. We have a duty to listen to God and not to act independently of Him whatever position we may hold. Nobody is so wise, senior or experienced that they are above needing God's instruction and nobody is free to ignore it when it is given.

It is your responsibility not to allow yourself to be deceived by other people. You are answerable if you fail to avoid such deception. Therefore you must be on your guard.

Many assume that if they have been deceived by somebody else then they carry no responsibility for their own subsequent actions. There is an element of truth in that. We will not be *fully* responsible if we have been lied to, without realising it. But, we are still blameworthy for allowing ourselves to be deceived in the first place, if proper caution, prayer, study of God's Word, or time spent pursuing wisdom, would have prevented it.

God holds us accountable to know His Word and to learn it, memorise it and apply it. If we do all of that, we will be better able to see deception coming and to avoid falling for it. We are to take note of all the Bible's warnings, such as where Jesus tells us not to follow false Christs who are claiming to be Him:

⁵And Jesus began to say to them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.

Mark 13:5-6 (RSV)

He also expects us to be vigilant in every other area where we might be deceived, for example through bogus miracles or counterfeit spiritual gifts:

²¹"And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; ²²for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect.²³"But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

Mark 13:21-23 (NASB)

Sadly, you must also be on your guard when dealing with other Christians, or those who *claim* to be, even when the person really is a *Christian*, not only where they are bogus. People who claim to be Christians cause you to lower your guard. You are more likely to believe that they have heard from God, and are saying something genuine that can be relied upon. Such complacent assumptions will bring you into all sorts of danger. No matter who the other person is, you must always check everything they say, to make sure it does not go against God's Word.

You must do that yourself, as you can never rely on anybody else to be the interpreter of God's Word on your behalf. You can't ever delegate that duty. The task is always yours, no matter who you are dealing with, or listening to. Secondly, don't accept anything if it jars with your own conscience. Never do a thing merely because another man says it is right, if *you* feel it isn't, no matter who he is. Your conscience always comes ahead of other men's teaching or advice. If you feel a thing is wrong, but they say it's right, always go with your own conscience, not theirs.

A classic example of this is the unnamed prophet who appears in 1 Kings chapter 13. He was a genuine prophet who went to see King Jeroboam and made a powerful prophecy about the altar at Bethel (in the Northern Kingdom). He said that one day a king called Josiah would arise who would burn on that altar the bones of the men who had offered false offerings upon it. King Jeroboam, was angered by what the prophet was saying, and tried to seize him. When he did that, the King's hand withered because of the power of God which accompanied the man of God's prophetic ministry.

So, this unnamed prophet whom we'll call 'the first prophet', was no minor figure. He obviously had God's anointing on him. However, even he went wrong by believing a lie told to him by another prophet, whom we'll call 'the second prophet'. When the King's hand was healed he wanted to reward the first prophet. But he refused to accept anything because he already knew that God wanted him to leave immediately and also that he had to go by a particular route. He had been very clearly told that he must not go back by the same route that he had used to get there:

⁷And the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me, and refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward." ⁸And the man of God said to the king, "If you give me half your house, I will not go in with you. And I will not eat bread or drink water in this place; ⁹for so was it commanded me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'You shall neither eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way that you came.'" ¹⁰So he went another way, and did not return by the way that he came to Bethel.

1 Kings 13:7-10 (RSV)

The first prophet then set off, as instructed by God, but was met on the way by the second prophet, who wanted to spend time with him. The second prophet had heard the news of what had happened and wanted to hear more about it. He wanted that so much that he was *willing to lie* to the first prophet to get him to change his plans. He even claimed that God had told him that the first prophet should stop and stay with him, which was an outright lie. Nevertheless, we are clearly told, despite him telling such a lie, that he was a *real prophet*:

¹¹Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel. And his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; the words also which he had spoken to the king, they told to their father. ¹²And their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him the way which the man of God who came from Judah had gone. ¹³And he said to his sons, "Saddle the ass for me." So they saddled the ass for him and he mounted it. ¹⁴And he went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak; and he said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" And he said, "I am." ¹⁵Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." ¹⁶And he said, "I may not return with you, or go in with you; neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place; ¹⁷for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.'" ¹⁸And he said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him. ¹⁹So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water.

1 Kings 13:11-19 (RSV)

Strangely the second prophet, despite having lied to the first prophet, then received a genuine word from God. He told the first prophet that because he had disobeyed God's instruction to him, by delaying, then he (the first prophet) would come under God's judgment:

²⁰And as they sat at the table, the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back; ²¹and he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord, and have not kept the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, ²²but have come back, and have eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, "Eat no bread, and drink no water"; your body shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.'" ²³And after he had eaten bread and drunk, he saddled the ass for the prophet whom he had brought back. ²⁴And as he went away a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his body was thrown in the road, and the ass stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body

1 Kings 13:20-24 (RSV)

The point is that the first prophet had already been instructed by God. Therefore he should never have allowed any other person, not even a fellow prophet, to persuade him to disobey what he already knew God had told him. What the second prophet did was wicked. He told a deliberate lie. Even worse, he pretended it was an instruction from God. Sadly, there is nothing exceptional about any of

this. People lie regularly, even in churches, and that includes some leaders. They also misrepresent God so as to get what they want. That is simply a fact and we must deal with it.

We need to weigh up everything we are told, *even if it is said by a church leader or Bible teacher*. Then we must decide for ourselves whether it is from God. Never assume it is from God just because of the identity, role, ministry or seniority of the person who says it. In 1 Kings, it may be that the second prophet was deliberately lying. Or he could have been deceived by a demon. Perhaps it was both. Whatever it was, the answer is the same. The first prophet should have followed his own conscience, and obeyed what he already knew God had said, irrespective of what any other man might say.

If Eve could be deceived by Satan, despite being a perfect person, with no sin nature, why would any of us assume that we aren't likely to be deceived?

The average Christian spends little or no time thinking about whether he has been deceived or is in danger of being deceived in future. This hazard is not on their agenda. They don't see it as an issue that might arise, partly because they under-estimate the problem. Many think they are immune as they are too good a judge of character ever to be deceived. Such people are sitting ducks. However, why do they imagine they can't be deceived when Eve, who had a perfect mind, no sin nature, and knew God face to face, was deceived? Indeed, Satan found it easy to trick her:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

Genesis 3:1-7 (RSV)

The key point to note about how Eve was deceived is that the same thing can happen to us. God didn't put that passage in the Bible to show us how foolish Eve was, and how clever we are in comparison. It is there to warn us that we are exactly like her, indeed more so. Therefore, if she can be deceived, then so can we. If you can't see that, you really are in danger of being deceived. Indeed, you already have been, because you have believed the very lie that you're unlikely to be deceived. So, if you do believe that, you need to think again.

It is not only other human beings that deceive us. Demons also do it. They whisper into our minds every day, whether we are Christians or not, seeking to tempt, divert, distract, confuse, mislead, deceive, demoralise and alienate us. Remember, it was Satan who deceived Eve, not a human being. Therefore, don't think that it is only human beings who can deceive you. The demons will do it too and if you think they don't exist, or are no longer active, or can't affect Christians, then you've already been lied to.

CHAPTER 7

HANDLING THE WICKED IN YOUR WORKPLACE OR BUSINESS – PART ONE

⁴ *The Lord is in his holy temple,
the Lord's throne is in heaven;
his eyes behold, his eyelids test, the children of men.*

⁵ *The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked,
and his soul hates him that loves violence.*

⁶ *On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and brimstone;
a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.*

⁷ *For the Lord is righteous, he loves righteous deeds;
the upright shall behold his face.*

Psalm 11:4-7 (RSV)

²⁴ *He who says to the wicked, "You are innocent,"
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations;*

²⁵ *but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight,
and a good blessing will be upon them.*

Proverbs 24:24-25 (RSV)

*If favor is shown to the wicked,
he does not learn righteousness;
in the land of uprightness he deals perversely
and does not see the majesty of the Lord.*

Isaiah 26:10 (RSV)

What if you have no choice but to be with certain foolish or wicked people?

We should not enter into relationships whereby we are “*bound together*” with fools and with the wicked, such as in marriage or business partnerships. It is not possible to avoid such people entirely. They are all around us, which is why the Bible says we have to be *in the world but not of it*. At times we have no choice but to mix with people whom we would not choose as friends. They may be our colleagues, bosses, staff, clients, customers or neighbours. God will ensure you come across a lot of these, as they provide valuable training for you. In any case, He has little option, since the world is full of them.

You need to be on your guard to ensure you don't join in with their malicious gossip, swearing or dishonesty. It is not easy but the struggle involved in living alongside them does have its advantages. You will learn what the wicked are like and how they operate. The pressures and difficulties will also help to mature you and you will develop resilience, endurance and patience. You will also grow in wisdom and shrewdness from having to identify and respond to their schemes. The practice you get from resisting small pressures now will help you to resist larger pressures later.

What about work relationships?

Your job is the main situation where you can't choose whom you spend time with. Your colleagues are largely chosen for you, and even imposed on you. You should make the best of it and be friendly, but reserve your close friendships for that minority of staff who share your values. It may be that there are none at all who come into that category, even at the lower end. If so you may be better off seeking another job. In the meantime, avoid the wicked people at your workplace and the fools too.

Don't be drawn into their toxic conversations where people are attacked and undermined. Many go the other way and fear to be *absent from* such conversations. They worry that if they did not take part those savage remarks and lies would be spoken about them instead of someone else. That may be true but it still doesn't justify your joining in. If your absence from such conversations means you are the one criticised then so be it. You should still stay out of them. It is better to be undermined yourself than to participate in doing that to others, even if only as a passive listener.

This isn't easy. Taking a stand and distancing yourself from the evil cliques at your workplace will cost you. They will soon notice that you are not with them. Even if you say nothing, they will quickly sense your disapproval from your silence. Such people often demand your express approval and if you won't give them that they may attack you. But that is still better than joining in and becoming like them. I can speak from personal experience of many such situations when I was younger and had no power or seniority within my workplaces.

At times it was a real struggle not to conform, but it was worth it. In fact it was character-forming and helped to mould me into the person I became. Therefore when you are at work, especially when starting a new job, be careful about which staff you mix with socially or sit with at break times. Avoid anyone who is hostile to the boss, the supervisors, or the firm. If you don't keep out of their conversations, you will quickly become a scoffer like them. Sit at break times with those who are contented, sincere and loyal, if you can find any.

That said, I fully accept that it may not always be possible. Also such positive people will rarely be the loudest, most popular or best-known members of staff. Even so seek them out and avoid the negative cliques and 'in crowds'. In particular, avoid bullies and those who exert illegitimate control over the firm or its employees by manipulation or by creating alternative power-structures. Don't be part of what they are doing, no matter how much power they have, or what threats they make.

If you are an employer or manager and have the power to choose your staff, then confront and dismiss *all* wicked employees. Don't delay or hesitate.

If you are a manager or own your own business, never tolerate wicked people. If any staff are false, dishonest, cruel, unfaithful, lazy or manipulative get rid of them. Don't try to change them. I can assure you they won't. Just let them go and work for someone else. If you consistently remove the wicked from your team or business, it will eventually be transformed. But don't expect it overnight. Indeed, in the early stages, things will actually get more troublesome as they and their poisonous friends will resist you. But if you keep on removing them the eventual results will be remarkable:

***take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.
Proverbs 25:5 (RSV)***

Due to the culture in Great Britain, many bosses think it is inherently wrong to sack anyone, almost regardless of what they do. It is assumed that an employer ought to tolerate bad attitudes, misconduct, laziness and poor performance. They think dismissal should be a last resort and that a boss should go to great lengths to avoid it. If that is what you believe you only have two options. Firstly you could try to get the wicked people to change by managing them better, in the hope that they will become more motivated and better behaved.

I have heard it said that "*All staff problems are ultimately down to poor management*". That may sound clever to some, but it is not true, and certainly not of the wicked. They cannot be '*managed*', at least not by a sincere and godly person, because they have so much malice. They would perform better if they were working for another wicked person, who isn't trying to get them to change. Therefore you are actually doing them a favour by sending them on their way. They can then find another boss elsewhere on their own wavelength.

Your second option, if you aren't willing to sack people, is to let the wicked stay and merely try to contain the problems they cause. But I promise you, from many years of experience, that that won't work. The most you can hope for is to keep the lid on the situation, to stop it boiling over, but their malice will never go away. An appeasement-based approach to management, whereby you tolerate staff whom you ought to get rid of, is an abdication of your responsibility. As the owner, or even the manager, you have both the *right* and the *duty* to ensure that you only employ good staff.

It is actually better to have no staff at all than to have bad staff. That may be hard to believe, but it really is literally true. If you resolve only ever to employ good staff, and always to get rid of the wicked and the fools, you will have to make a big effort to recruit effectively and to discern each applicant's real nature. Even if you try really hard, you will never get it right all the time, or even most of the time. One reason is that, as a percentage of the population, the number of wicked people and fools is very high. The odds are therefore stacked firmly against you from the start.

Nevertheless, if you want to succeed in the long term, there is no alternative but to remove all the wicked, and preferably all the fools, from your team, department or business. Moreover, you must do it as quickly as you can, and *keep on* doing it, because there are so many of them. Also bear in mind that some people may not necessarily be wicked at the time when they are appointed, but they can degenerate and *become* wicked as the years go by. Therefore, you have to prune out the bad staff, *on an ongoing basis*, as soon as you become aware of them. The need to do this will never end.

It is like cutting diseased leaves or branches from your plants. It would be folly to delay doing that, because it will only spread and get worse. The same applies in a business. Unless you act decisively, and remove all the bad staff on an ongoing basis, your business or organisation will never be fully healthy or successful. There will never be any real peace either. Too many people will be wishing harm on you and on the business and obstructing your wishes rather than implementing them. Moreover, they will be doing all of that *from the inside*.

That causes far more damage and disruption than opposition which comes from outside. Therefore, if you are a manager, you have a duty to get the wicked out, not just for your own sake, but for the benefit of the whole *workforce*, especially the junior staff. The innocent, well-behaved staff would suffer the most by continuing to work under or alongside them. A manager has a similar duty to that of a King, though you will not find this in any management books, at least not in the UK. The boss must confront the wicked and remove them, *for the sake of all the others*:

***¹⁰ Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out,
and quarrelling and abuse will cease.
Proverbs 22:10 (ESV)***

***A wise king winnows the wicked,
And drives the threshing wheel over them.
Proverbs 20:26 (NASB)***

King David went further than that. In Psalm 101 he sets out his attitude towards the wicked. He refused to tolerate them in any way and was determined to confront them head on. This is his managerial approach:

***⁴ A perverse heart shall depart from me;
I will know no evil.***

***⁵ Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy;
No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I endure.***

***⁶ My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me;
He who walks in a blameless way is the one who will minister to me.***

***⁷ He who practices deceit shall not dwell within my house;
He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before me.***

⁸ *Every morning I will destroy all the wicked of the land,
So as to cut off from the city of the Lord all those who do iniquity.
Psalm 101:4-8 (NASB)*

Even if you just *confront* a wicked person, in circumstances where you can't remove them, it can still improve conditions for everyone else. The normal state of affairs in a workforce is for the naive or simple staff to be influenced by the wicked. However, if a manager is brave enough to tackle the wicked firmly, *even if he doesn't have the power to remove them*, it opens the eyes of the naive staff. They may then choose other people to follow, instead of the wicked:

*When a scoffer is punished the simple becomes wise;
Proverbs 21:11 (a) (ESV)*

If a manager is willing to stand up to the wicked at work and to impose justice from above, rather than allowing the strong to rule the workplace, it brings joy to the decent staff:

*When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous
but terror to evildoers.
Proverbs 21:15 (ESV)*

Whether you waste your time trying to improve the attitudes of the wicked, or just do nothing and let them have their own way, the end result will be the same. Your best staff will eventually leave because the bad ones will always drive out the good ones. It is never the other way round. Bad staff don't leave a job unless they're forced out by those above them. They don't go voluntarily, unless you are willing to wait a long time, especially if you treat them well. Therefore weak managers who won't dismiss wicked staff simply end up causing the *good staff* to leave instead.

Just as many people will lose their jobs in the end, but it is the *good ones* who go rather than the bad ones. Those good staff may resign voluntarily and seek jobs elsewhere, but the reality is they have been *driven out* as the unintended result of the weak manager's failure to drive out the wicked. Sometimes that failure is due to misplaced kindness. More often it is just cowardice and selfishness on the manager's part. He chooses to do whatever *is easiest for himself*, not what is right for the business, its staff and its customers. The net effect is he lets all of them pay the price for his own neglect of duty.

A disproportionate amount of harm is caused by wicked staff and a great deal of time and money is wasted in trying, forlornly, to deal with them.

A vastly disproportionate amount of time is spent dealing with the problems caused by the worst employees. They therefore cost their employer a lot of money and it would actually be better if they all left, *even without being replaced*, than if they continued to work for the company. In the average business, 80% of customer complaints arise out of the worst 20% of the staff and 1% of the complaints will relate to the best 20% of the staff. The other 19% of complaints will come from the 'middle' 60% of staff.

You will probably also find that the best 20% of the staff produce 40-50% of the profit and the next 60% of the staff might produce the other 50-60% of the profit. However, the worst 20% of the staff usually produce no profit at all. Indeed, it is likely that they would produce an actual *loss* if the management accounts were properly calculated, taking into account the true cost of absenteeism, fake sick-leave, customer refunds, shoddily produced goods and other wasted resources.

There is also the management time spent on handling complaints, extra supervision and wearisome investigatory and disciplinary procedures. Finally, there is the harm, disruption and demoralisation

caused to the other 80% of staff by the bullying, lies, gossip and negative speech of the wicked ones. So if we drew a picture of a typical firm it might be like this:

The best 20% of staff	These produce 1% of the problems, complaints, misconduct and negligence claims. But they produce 40-50% of the profit
The middle 60% of staff	These produce 19% of the problems, complaints, misconduct and negligence claims. And they produce 50-60% of the profit
The worst 20% of staff	These produce 80% of the problems, complaints, misconduct, and negligence claims. But they produce zero % of the profit. In fact, they probably produce a loss in absolute terms. That is they actually lose you money.

The average business would therefore be better off, in every sense, and make more profit, if it sacked the worst 20% of its staff. Little or no profit ever comes from that bottom layer, whereas the vast majority of the problems, losses, write-offs and managerial headaches are due to them. The problem is very few managers know this, let alone have the courage to act on it. It seems to them that it can't possibly be true and that if that 'bottom layer' were taken away the business would be short-staffed. The reality is it wouldn't. The business would actually thrive and prosper more without them.

I grasped this truth, and began to act on it, when I was in business. That was one of the reasons why, in 20 years as a manager or owner, neither I, nor anybody working for me, ever generated a negligence claim from any client. It never happened, even though we acted for thousands of people. Whereas almost all law firms have to report a number of actual or potential negligence claims to their insurers each year, I never did. My firm's professional indemnity insurance renewal application was always accompanied by a certificate which read "*No claims notified against this firm*".

Even of the tiny number of client complaints that were made to the Solicitors' Regulation Authority, none were ever upheld. We were always exonerated. Those statistics were not a coincidence. They were partly due to our close supervision procedures, but mainly to my policy of getting rid of all *negligent, careless or dishonest* staff, before they could do any more harm. I strongly recommend that approach to you. As a manager, you will never be praised for firing wicked staff. Those looking on from the sidelines will mainly disapprove of you and misunderstand your motives.

Even the few who privately approve will be too afraid to support you openly. Nevertheless, grit your teeth and do your duty, even if you are misunderstood and criticised for doing it, as you certainly will be. My law firm, as it was in the end, was very different from how it was at first, when it had a large majority of wicked people. The change was due to my policy of consistently driving out the wicked. In the early years my firm was a cauldron of malice. However, after I began to remove the wicked, that reduced drastically.

It is a manager's duty to distinguish between the good and bad staff so you must learn how to tell them apart. Until you can do that you can't do anything. Therefore developing discernment is the starting point. However, you must also become sufficiently courageous to take action and *remove* the wicked where it is in your power to do so. A weak manager treats all staff the same whether they are good or bad. God does not. He distinguishes between different types of people and handles them very differently according to what they are:

²⁰ ***The Lord preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy. Psalm 145:20 (ESV)***

*The Lord lifts up the humble;
he casts the wicked to the ground.
Psalm 147:6 (ESV)*

When you are unsure whether to sack a person, ask yourself this simple question: “If when I appointed this person I had known then what I know now, would I have appointed them?”

I advise every employer to be bold and uncompromising and to get rid of *all* their bad staff. Although I did that for many years, I still hated sacking people. It felt like pulling out one of my own teeth, every time. I therefore had to *make* myself do it, because I never wanted to. I would urge you to do the same, no matter how difficult you find it. When feeling unsure whether or not to sack a person simply ask yourself: “*If instead of deciding whether to sack them, I was now choosing whether to appoint them, would I set them on as an employee today, given all that I now know?*”

Another way of phrasing the same question would be: “*If, on the day I appointed this person, I had known what I know now, would I still have appointed them?*” If you put that frank question to yourself your confusion will vanish and you will suddenly know what you have to do. Asking that question has helped me many times when I have felt unsure whether I was being “*unfair*” or “*too harsh*”. I would agonise over whether I really ought to sack them, given that they weren’t “*absolutely terrible*”. The very fact that you are agonising over it shows that the person is a dud and needs to go.

What is the point of keeping an employee merely because he isn’t “*absolutely terrible*”? It is hardly a resounding endorsement. You need to set the bar much higher than that if you want your business to survive, let alone prosper. So, asking yourself whether you would have appointed them if you had known what you know now is one important test, but it’s not the only one. Ask it *in addition to* doing all the other enquiries and assessments, *not instead of* them. Nevertheless, it can be a very useful ‘clincher’. It concentrates your mind and can get you back to reality when you are feeling too indecisive, afraid or soft-hearted to sack the person.

Even if you aren’t a boss or manager yourself, you still need to know about the wicked, and understand their methods. Then you can help those who are in positions of authority.

Many of the things I am saying presuppose that you have enough authority to discipline and remove wicked staff. But you may not actually have such power. You might be in a large company, with layer upon layer of management, such that you can’t do what you’d like to. Therefore the wicked staff remain in place. If so, you will have to apply the same general principles, but also recognise where your limits are. Even so, you can still do a lot to protect yourself and your team and you can restrain the wicked, even from an intermediate position in the company.

The key is to be aware of how the wicked operate and to get in the way of their schemes. Therefore, even if you don’t have complete authority, you still need to know the methods of the wicked so that you can resist them. You can also give valuable help to those who are in authority because the people at the top generally know the least about the wrongdoing of the employees. They see the least, and are told the least, precisely *because* of their senior positions, not despite them.

It is actually the people lower down who get to see what really goes on. Therefore if you are a sincere person you could be of great value to a godly manager. Bosses may want to do what’s best, but they lack accurate information from trustworthy people who are courageous enough to tell them the real truth about what’s going on. Such a person is a great asset but they are very rare, whereas there are plenty of liars and manipulators seeking to benefit themselves or to harm others.

There is also no shortage of sycophantic ‘groupies’ who love to be around bosses and lie to them. But sensible, incorruptible truth-tellers are hard to find. Most bosses therefore have nobody who is willing and able to tell them the real facts, without hiding or exaggerating anything, and who has no selfish private agenda. So they have to make their decisions as best they can, based on a mixture of half-truths, rumours and lies.

Such managers therefore make many needless mistakes and misjudge people and situations. When they do so, it is mainly the good staff who suffer from it. You could therefore make a valuable contribution in the company you work in if you put the true facts into the hands of the right person. However, that can’t be just any boss chosen at random. It needs to be one who is trustworthy and sensible himself, because just as many bosses are malicious and dishonest as junior staff are.

He must also be senior enough to be able to do something about it and discreet enough to guard the information you give, to make sure you are not persecuted for speaking up. That is important because providing information to managers is dangerous. Therefore, you need to spend time weighing up the character of that boss before you tell him what you know. If he is devious himself he will tell others what you have said, so they can attack you. Or, if he’s just careless or insensitive, he may disclose it accidentally.

Either way the same vengeance will be taken by those whose wrongdoings you have reported, or against whom you have given evidence. So make sure you speak to the right boss. Spend time beforehand observing and listening to him, especially when he’s talking to others rather than to you. Does he say one thing to one person and something else to another? Does he keep his word, even when it costs him? Does he care about people? Does he have a strong conscience? With whom does he mix? Does he enjoy the company of fools, or even the wicked? Or does he shun such people?

Those questions will help you to assess that boss’s integrity, discretion and trustworthiness. However, you also need to form a view of the *other people* who work *under him*? It’s one thing for that boss to keep what you say confidential and protect you, but if his secretary or assistant is careless or untrustworthy and leaks it, you are no better off. The next question is whether he has sufficient strength of will and courage to *do* anything about it. If he doesn’t he will not succeed anyway, so you will have taken a major personal risk for no purpose, because he won’t tackle the wicked people adequately, or at all. They will then remain in place without getting sacked, disciplined or demoted.

However, if all these conditions are met, and you are willing to take the *risk*, go to that boss and tell him what you know about any wrongdoing, bullying, dishonesty, neglect of clients/patients, unsafe practices, corruption, etc. If you do, some really nasty people could be removed from that business because of you, even though you may not be a boss. Imagine what good could have been done if even one Christian had managed to get a job at FIFA and had been brave enough to speak up about the appalling corruption in that organisation. Those wicked men at the top of FIFA could have been removed years ago.

Most employers are far too afraid of being sued for unfair dismissal.

My experience is that most employers are far too afraid of Employment Tribunals and of a finding of ‘unfair dismissal’. In reality, in the UK, the damages that are usually awarded are modest, even assuming you lose the case. There are many reasons for that. Firstly, a redundant employee will already have received his redundancy payment. That sum is equal to the ‘*basic award*’ that a Tribunal orders where a dismissal is held to be unfair. So, much of the sum that may be awarded to him has been paid already, by another name, and doesn’t have to be paid twice.

Secondly, the ‘*compensatory award*’, which is ordered over and above the basic award, to reflect actual and anticipated losses, is usually limited to about six or, at most, 12 months net pay. Plus the compensatory award is also subject to a “duty to mitigate”. That means the Claimant must prove he

has taken, and is still taking, reasonable steps to seek a new job and is accepting lower-paid, less attractive jobs if they are available. So they will struggle to justify a loss of earnings claim of more than a few months, especially in a generally buoyant economic climate where jobs can be found.

Lastly, most claims are settled or abandoned anyway. If so, you pay the Claimant nothing, or only some lesser figure by way of a compromise, usually for commercial reasons. Therefore, on average, there is far too much fear about the prospect of being held to have unfairly dismissed someone. A wise employer will not make any decisions based on the fear of being sued. He will even see the 'silver lining' in a redundancy situation. It is actually an opportunity to get rid of those staff who don't come up to the required standard.

By that I mean *all* of the bad staff, not just the very worst. That needs to include all those who ought never to have been employed in the first place, and whom he would have sacked earlier, if he'd only had more courage and/or been better advised. Another reason why employers over-state the dangers of a finding of unfair dismissal and, even more so, of discrimination, is that legal advisers and HR departments tend to exaggerate the risk of losing at a Tribunal. They often also over-state the likely damages that would have to be paid out even if you do lose.

One reason for this is that a blanket policy of advising extreme caution makes sure that very few cases ever go to Tribunal. Advisors expect to be judged by that measurement so it suits them to urge you to be overly cautious. If so, hardly any staff will ever get the sack anyway. Then the advisor can never be blamed because, if nobody is dismissed at all, it can't be said that they were unfairly dismissed. The advisor himself may also be politically correct, left wing, or 'anti-employer' in his instincts and values.

If so, that can heavily prejudice their advice. I remember once speaking to a Solicitor, who was also a Christian, and who worked in a law firm which did a lot of work for trade unions. Over the years he became so one-sided in his thinking that he basically thought that all employers were automatically bad and that all employees were good. He sounded like the sheep in 'Animal Farm' who chanted: "*Four legs good, two legs bad*".

Advisors also tend to be risk-averse and blame-averse themselves, and so are the law firms they work for. They conclude that they won't be blamed if you do nothing about wrongdoers and get rid of nobody. On the whole, they would be right to assume that. Lastly, it creates additional work in HR departments, and therefore more jobs for HR staff, if employment law and its procedures can be portrayed to managers as being more complex and dangerous than they really are. Therefore, if you do face a redundancy situation, be bold and decisive.

See it as an opportunity to clear out the bad staff and to improve your business. Do what you *want* to do, rather than what other people, *who don't have to live with the consequences*, think you should do. Remind yourself also that paying out a few thousand pounds, or even several thousand, is far better than allowing the wrong employees to continue working in your business. The average sum awarded at actual tribunals in the UK, as opposed to out of court settlements, is about £8,000. At least it was in 2012 when I last practised. If you pay that, or even a lot more, it is still worth it.

Even one bad employee can cost you a fortune in complaints, problems, unrest, bullying, inefficiency, wasted management-time and so on. Moreover, the cost of continuing to employ them goes on *year after year*, whereas the payment of damages for being held to have dismissed them 'unfairly' is a *one off* cost. Therefore parting with one or more of your bad staff will dramatically increase the success and harmony of your business. It will also save you a lot of wasted time and emotional stress and aggravation in the years that follow, because they won't be there to cause any headaches later on.

Many staff are wrongly classified as *incapable* or *incompetent* when the truth is they are lazy, indifferent or malicious. Those are *misconduct* issues and must be viewed as such.

There is a profound difference between incompetence and misconduct. The former is a matter of *ability*, whereas the latter is one of *character and attitude*. A man is not wicked, and may not be at fault at all, if he is simply incapable of doing something, or unable to do it well enough, due to lack of knowledge, skill or experience. His lack of those things could not, ordinarily, be blamed on him, as it is not 'wrongdoing'. However, many employees are wrongly classified as being incompetent when the real issue is misconduct.

Imagine something has gone wrong and a client, patient or project has been harmed or let down as a result. That may not have been because the employee lacked knowledge or ability. It may have been because he simply *didn't care*. If so, you are dealing with misconduct and you must treat it as such. That may sound obvious, but it is not the way that a high proportion of managers think, at least in the UK. They are so blinded by political correctness and liberal ideology that they don't see indifference, neglect or carelessness as "conduct issues".

That matters because there are many employees in all sectors, and at every level, who just don't care. Such staff aren't interested and don't want to become better at their job. The needs of the client or patient, and the interests of their employer, are of little or no importance to them. If you are the employer, supervisor or senior colleague of such a person, you must begin to realise that "*not caring*" or "*not being interested*" are issues of misconduct, not incompetence or incapability.

When a person doesn't care whether a task is done well or can't be bothered to learn how to do his job properly, it is not ability that he lacks - it is character. You need to treat these two situations entirely differently or you will never succeed in even identifying, let alone tackling, the wrongdoers. Indifference, neglect and laziness need to be seen as misconduct, for which *no tolerance at all* should be shown. The person doesn't need more training, as they would if they lacked skill, ability, experience or qualifications.

Training is of no use at all to a person who doesn't care. The only remedy is dismissal, and it needs to be done straightaway, because they won't change. You will only cause further damage to clients, colleagues and the business, if you delay. Therefore, identify the real nature of the problem. Don't try to 'cure' bad attitude, laziness, indifference or malice by giving more training. No amount of coaching or counselling will do any good. It will only make things worse, by turning their disrespect for you into outright contempt.

When a person is sacked don't let them work out any of their notice period. Also, when a wicked person or a fool resigns voluntarily, remove them from the building immediately.

I spoke in chapter two about Tracey, a deceitful secretary, who lied about her colleagues. If she had not resigned I would have sacked her immediately for gross misconduct. On that basis she would not have been entitled to any notice period. However, if I could not justify summary dismissal on the evidence, I would still sack her. The only difference is she would be entitled to notice. Nevertheless, even if I had done that, I would just have *paid her* for her notice period in cash, *without allowing her to actually work it*. I would have just sent her straight home that day.

Then she would still be paid for her notice period, but she would not be allowed back into the building. That is essential when you discover such a person is working for you. Get them straight out, that very minute, before they can spread any more lies or do any further damage to your staff and to the files, clients, computers and equipment. Don't even let them return to their desk to log off. You never know what they might hide, send, alter or delete, even in a few minutes, if given the chance. Send them straight home, whatever the reason may be for the dismissal, not just in cases of misconduct.

Even if a person is dismissed for reasons of redundancy, incapability or “some other substantial reason”, they still need to go straightaway. Whatever your reasons were, and no matter how justified the dismissal is, they will still feel resentful and may seek for vengeance during their notice period. Don’t give anybody that opportunity because a resentful employee is a danger to any business. Even if he was not previously guilty of any misconduct, there will probably be plenty of it during his notice period, whether you ever discover it or not.

Bad staff usually do their worst damage to a business, and neglect clients the most, *during their notice period*. That is when their resentment, justified or not, is at its highest. It is also a time when they feel they have nothing to lose, so they will do things they may not previously have dared to do. One would imagine that all of this would be obvious to employers, but it isn’t. Many let staff work their full notice period as a standard policy. Some even *require* it, in the misguided belief that they are saving money, even where the person has been dismissed for misconduct.

The same point applies when an employee resigns voluntarily but, in your view, they may be wicked, or even a fool. (See Book 5). Even where a wicked person, or a fool, resigns of their own free choice, you still must not let them serve out their notice period. Those who resign are just as capable of doing harm to your firm and to the clients and other staff as they would if they had been sacked. Indeed, they might well have been sacked in the end anyway, if you had known the full facts about their character and conduct.

Also, although it may technically be voluntary, their resignation may actually be because they knew you were on to them. Or it could be that they knew that customer complaints were about to be made. So, the very fact that a person resigns should cause you to ask yourself whether they are really doing so because other problems are about to emerge that *you* don’t currently know about, but which *they* do. Often, after a person resigns, you discover that if you had only known the full facts, you would have had every reason to sack them.

Besides all that, a person who is resigning is likely to be feeling almost as resentful as one who has been sacked. If so, they may use their notice period in the same way. They could well see it as an opportunity to hit back at you or at other supervisors and to settle scores, even where you aren’t aware that there are any ‘scores’. Or it is just a chance to sow discord and discontent generally. Try to look at it from the perspective of a person who has just resigned, and is about to go to a new job elsewhere.

Even if they are not wicked, they may be feeling a lot of inner turmoil and uncertainty as to whether they have done the right thing in resigning. One of the coping mechanisms that people have is to persuade themselves that they made the right decision. They need reassurance that they are better off leaving rather than staying. It is known as “sour grapes”, from the children’s story, where a person told himself that the grapes that he wasn’t able to reach were probably sour anyway and thus no real loss.

They will therefore talk themselves into seeing all that is negative about their current workplace. That’s unhealthy for them, but it’s even more unhealthy for you and for your *other employees*. They will hear him ‘bad-mouthing’ the firm for a month, or even three months, while he serves his notice. All of that moaning, criticism, and very often lies, can do real harm by lowering morale but also by inducing others to leave.

Thus you have a lot to lose by letting anybody work their notice period, even if they have not been guilty of any misconduct beforehand, *or any that you know about*. Moreover, it is more than just a ‘potential’ outcome. It is a likelihood. On the other hand, you have little to gain by letting them stay anyway. Even if they are not malicious, people who are serving out their notice tend to reduce their work-rate, and their motivation levels go down drastically. Even for that reason, it is wise to send them straight home, immediately after handing in their resignation letter.

There is a reluctance to sack bad employees in the UK. It is thought to be wrong. Overcome that feeling in yourself and disregard it when others criticise you.

To dismiss the secretary, Tracey, for her lies would have been entirely justified, both legally and morally. However, not many people would share that view and even fewer would act as decisively as I now would. Most would not classify such lies as being sufficiently serious to warrant dismissal. They just give a long series of warnings, send the person on training courses, alter their role, or put them in a new team. Weak managers will do just about anything to avoid sacking a person. Sometimes that is due to strong trade unions or because the organisation is publicly owned.

That is part of the reason why the National Health Service in the UK hardly ever sacks anybody, despite having over a million employees. That is the case almost regardless of what their staff do, even if they endanger the lives of patients through wilful neglect. However, it is not only the public sector which operates like that. Many employers, even in the private sector, would not dismiss someone until the misconduct had occurred repeatedly, if even then. For example, a friend of mine who owns a medium sized firm caught a member of staff in the act of stealing goods.

The items were worth about £60 and she was caught red-handed with them in her bag, as she was leaving the office. Indeed, she even admitted stealing them, but he let her off and did nothing about it. That was partly because he didn't realise the seriousness of having a thief and a liar working for him and how much damage she could cause. But it was mainly because he simply lacked the courage to sack her. Although he was the owner, *he* actually feared *her*. I told him he would regret that decision one day and that he must get such people out of his business or they would do him great damage.

Sadly, I was proved right. His business declined and was on the brink of closure before he eventually took some long-overdue steps to deal with her, and a number of others, and sacked them all. One reason for the decline of his business was that he seriously under-estimated the damage such people can do and how vital it is to tackle them head on and immediately. If you catch a person lying, stealing or bullying others, but let them off with a mere warning, they will not be grateful for your mercy. Neither will they change their ways.

On the contrary, they will despise you all the more for what they can only see as your weakness or indecision in failing to tackle them. They will then do even bigger things to cause harm from then on and more often than before. The very fact that they got away with it emboldens them and makes them feel they can do whatever they want. They therefore lose their fear of you and 'cast off restraint' as the Bible says. They will even feel that you deserve it for having rebuked them and also for being so weak and naïve. Those are characteristics that the wicked despise and of which they will take full advantage.

When interviewing someone for a job, or a position in a church, get them to tell you about themselves before you reveal your own nature and values to them.

I have learned from interviewing job applicants, over two decades, that it isn't wise to let them know about *your* values, principles and priorities before you find out what *theirs* are. It's best to ask them questions, and even to set little tests and traps for them, to find out what they are really like, before revealing what characteristics and values you are looking for. If you tell them what you want and expect they will just change their answers to match whatever you have told them. Thus you will learn nothing because they will pretend to be whatever you say is important to you.

Therefore, do it the other way round. Find out about *their* opinions, values, methods and standards first, before telling them what you want or believe. For example, if you say that honesty is crucial to you, they will claim it is very important to them as well. But if you had said nothing about honesty, neither would they. Indeed, they may have tripped themselves up by indicating that they are willing

to ‘cut corners’ if need be. That is not as unlikely as it might sound because people come from all sorts of other firms which may have totally different values from yours.

For instance, during interviews, many people have offered to call in sick at their present employers so as to be available for a second interview with me. They thought that making suggestion would impress me because it shows they are keen, have initiative and are willing to do what is needed to get results. With many employers, such proposals would go down very well and would match their own approach to business. Many dishonest managers prefer to have ‘dodgy’ people in their team because they will do whatever is needed and won’t object if asked to lie on behalf of the firm.

If said to one of those managers, such a comment could get the applicant the job. With me, it always brought the interview to a swift end and I cancelled any second interview that may have been offered. But it’s not just in the interview itself that you need to be careful about what you disclose. Afterwards a job applicant will begin to relax and let their guard down and their real character may start to emerge. I remember a young woman who had had an interview with me and I had asked her to stay for the rest of the day on a paid trial. She could do that because she wasn’t in a job at the time.

At lunchtime she was with several other staff in the staff room and she suggested that the female staff ought to organise a night out with a male stripper. The staff looked at each other and smiled. They knew that would be the end of her application and it was. I paid her for the day and did not ask her to return because her values didn’t match mine. If she had stayed she would have been a disaster. But the point is I wouldn’t have found out about her real nature until much later if, during the interview, I had told her all about what I stand for and what matters to me.

If I had told her those things, she would then have kept her own very different values hidden, at least until she had got through her probationary period. So don’t tell people what you are looking for in a member of staff if they are still at interview stage, or if they are on a trial day or trial week with you. We used to offer many such trials to young graduates who hadn’t yet got any job. However, it is different if you have done all that and are at the stage where you are going to offer them a job, especially if that will mean them leaving a job elsewhere.

At that stage it really is your duty to spell out *exactly what you require* and what your values are. Otherwise, they could give up a job to join you, only to find out later that your standards are totally different from theirs. That would be unfair if you’d never told them about your requirements. Therefore, I changed tack and became very frank indeed with those to whom I was *actually offering a job*. I went through a detailed list of my requirements and told them they must show total integrity, put the clients’ interests ahead of their own and never bully, manipulate or control any of their colleagues.

I also said I had sacked many people for doing such things and would not hesitate to do so again. I also emphasised that I really meant it. Having laboured all those things, my conscience was clear if they later turned out to be lazy, malicious or dishonest because I had spelled it all out for them. Strangely, in all those years, nobody ever declined a job offer when I told them of my stringent criteria and requirements. They must have assumed, despite all I said, that I didn’t really mean it. Many found out later, to their cost, that I absolutely did mean it.

Don’t tell job applicants that you are a Christian or discuss your beliefs, or theirs, when interviewing them. It could be used against you at a Tribunal if you then reject them, or if they don’t get through their trial period.

Due to modern ‘equality’ legislation, it is very unwise to tell any job applicant at an interview, or during their trial period, that you are a Christian or to discuss faith or morals at all. Also, when setting out your requirements do not use any ‘Christian’ phrases. Use neutral words like honesty, integrity, unselfishness etc. Then it cannot be said that you are requiring people to be Christians or

‘discriminating’ against non-Christians. If you are too open about what you believe people may use the things you say as a basis for a Tribunal claim, if they aren’t given the job.

Even if an applicant spontaneously makes some unsolicited comment about *their own* beliefs or lifestyle, don’t respond to it. Don’t pass any comment, or be critical, and don’t argue with them. Just listen quietly, without responding in any way. Simply take careful note inwardly, *without writing anything down*, and steer the conversation on to other things. But don’t bring the interview to an abrupt halt at the point when they tell you something you don’t like. For example, they may say they are involved in witchcraft or perform séances or are a transvestite. Or they may say something which reveals they are promiscuous.

It is surprising what people say in interviews as our generation is ashamed of virtually nothing. If they do, then say nothing at all to criticise or contradict them, even if what they have said means that you would never want to employ them. Just keep a straight face and give no impression at all of being concerned. Then carry on with other questions, at least for a while, as if nothing significant had been said. You could otherwise give them a basis to make an application to a Tribunal at which they might allege: “*As soon as I said that I am a practising witch, he ended the interview*”.

That would then be portrayed as ‘discrimination’, which it is, by the world’s definition. The law says you must not treat them differently because of their religious beliefs, sexual orientation etc. If you reject them, or even react adversely, when they reveal what they are, or what they believe, or when they say something you don’t like, that is how it is likely to be seen by a Tribunal. To illustrate that this is not a purely hypothetical scenario, I will tell you of a conversation I had with a man recently. He told me of a “close escape” he had had when interviewing a job applicant.

‘James’ was an accountant and a strong Christian and it emerged in the interview that the applicant was a psychic. James told me of this and explained how he then spent some time explaining to the lady that he was a Christian and would be very concerned at employing a person who was involved in the occult. Then he told her what was wrong with being a psychic. He told me all about this very calmly, having no idea that he had made himself liable to be sued for religious discrimination. Do also bear in mind that the damages for any form of *discrimination* are *unlimited*, whereas there is an upper limit for *unfair dismissal*.

I asked if he had any knowledge of equality legislation, and that he could be taken to a Tribunal for what he had said. His jaw dropped in amazement because he had been totally unaware. He had been pleased with himself for avoiding employing her, and had even seen it as an opportunity to witness to her. Yet he had had no idea at all about the legal implications of speaking so openly. I advised him as to his future conduct and urged him to say nothing and to show no reaction if such a situation ever arose again, but just to quietly reject the candidate *for other reasons*.

You don’t need to employ every witch or transvestite who applies to you for a job. If you don’t want somebody to work for you, then don’t have them. Just don’t be so naïve and unwise as to *reveal* by your reactions, facial expression, tone of voice or, worst of all, your express words, that you are rejecting them *because* of that factor to which you object. Do nothing. Say nothing. Express nothing. Reveal nothing. Imply nothing. As I told James, *keep all your private thoughts entirely to yourself*. Do not even confide in any of your colleagues or fellow managers.

Then simply find some other *legitimate* reason to reject them, based on non-contentious issues, such as their qualifications, experience, personal skills or attitude. It could even be about spelling errors or grammatical mistakes in their CV. There are always plenty of such things, if you look for them. So, take another close look at their CV and covering letter or at any written test you might set and highlight any deficiencies you can find. That will give the impression, if you are subsequently challenged, and if your handwritten notes are examined by a Tribunal, that those must have been your reasons for rejecting them.

Indeed, those may well be genuine *additional* reasons for your having rejected them. Those other factors may well have caused you to reject them anyway, even if they hadn't been a witch, psychic, transvestite, or whatever else. You can then simply decide, in your own mind, that you *are* rejecting them *for those other reasons*, not because of any feature which is protected by equality legislation. Do also bear in mind that there may have been dozens of applicants. Therefore one or more of those others may have been better in all sorts of other ways.

You don't actually need to have a specific reason to reject a person. You can simply reach the subjective conclusion that they aren't good enough. Why you came to that view is entirely up to you, *provided* the Tribunal doesn't conclude that you did so for some 'discriminatory' reason. Even if that was the case, they probably can't make such a finding unless you speak or act unguardedly. So make sure that you never do and that your stated reasons are always valid and uncontroversial. It could be because they lack skills or experience or that they aren't eloquent enough or don't write well enough and so on.

You can even conclude that there was nothing wrong with them, but that some other candidate was just better, for any number of reasons, including your own intuition. You can also decide that none of the applicants were good enough and you are not going to recruit any of them. All of those things are perfectly OK. The only thing the law prohibits is for you reject or discriminate against the person on a basis, or for reasons, or because of characteristics, beliefs or practices, *which are protected*. If you reject them for characteristics or deficiencies *which aren't protected* by the laws of discrimination, then you have no problem.

As long as you steer clear of saying or writing anything which refers to any of those things, people will struggle to bring any claim against you. So far, there are no laws to protect people who lack skill, education, qualifications, experience, charm and who perform badly in interviews. Until such features become protected, make sure your official reasons for not choosing a person had to do with some of those things. So, to be clear, discriminating on the basis of a person's skill, ability, knowledge personality etc is allowed because the law doesn't call that discrimination, even though that's effectively what it is.

We discriminate every day in favour of talented and energetic people and against untalented, lazy people. But the law, at the moment, is content for us to do so. Having said all that, you are not actually required to state the *reasons* why you didn't appoint a particular job applicant. The only time you might need to do so is if a Tribunal claim is actually made, or if a discrimination questionnaire is sent to you as a prelude to making such a claim. Therefore I strongly advise that you should never explain to candidates why you didn't select them, even if they ask why they didn't get the job.

They refer to it as seeking "*feedback*". However, the wisest thing to do, in all cases, is to say "*It's not the policy of the firm to give feedback to applicants*". That is a shame, because it means genuine people, who just want advice on how to do better next time, or where they are going wrong in their interview technique, will not be able to get help. The problem is it just isn't safe nowadays to engage in such a conversation. Even if you weren't discriminating against them on the basis of some protected characteristic, or at all, your words could still be twisted to make it look as if you were.

That is especially likely if you are speaking to them on the phone, purely from memory, and don't have their CV and details in front of you. Do also bear in mind that any such phone call, or even a face to face meeting, is possibly being *taped*. Modern technology makes that extremely easy for anybody to do. You are therefore best to assume that every conversation or meeting you ever have is being recorded. Even if it isn't, the point is *it could be*. But you'll never know which conversations are, and which aren't, until it is too late.

An acute awareness at all times of the possibility that you could be being taped will make you much more careful about what you say. That is all to the good, because we live in dangerous times. There are even people who will seek to entrap you by applying for a job, or asking for feedback, when their

only objective is to bring a claim against you. One such person whom I read about had made dozens of Tribunal claims, against firms he'd never worked for, simply because they had not offered him a job when he applied to them. But he only applied in order to entrap them.

His CV deliberately drew attention to features such as his race or religion or sexual orientation. He then claimed, when not appointed, that he had been rejected for that reason. Yet, in most cases, those factors played no part in the decision. Dozens of companies just settled out of court and paid him agreed damages, to avoid the costs of a hearing. He was eventually exposed and declared to be a 'vexatious litigant' and prohibited from making any further claims without prior permission from a Tribunal. So remember that such people do exist and handle every conversation as though you were speaking to one of them.

CHAPTER 8

HANDLING THE WICKED IN YOUR WORKPLACE OR BUSINESS - PART TWO

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

Matthew 10:16 (NASB)

*O you who love the Lord, hate evil!
He preserves the lives of his saints;
he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
Psalm 97:10 (ESV)*

*Through thy precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.
Psalm 119:104 (RSV)*

⁶ Thus Ab'salom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Ab'salom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:6 (RSV)

¹² And while Ab'salom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahith'ophel the Gi'lonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Ab'salom kept increasing.

2 Samuel 15:12 (RSV)

⁶ And David said to Abi'shail, “Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Ab'salom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself fortified cities, and cause us trouble.”

2 Samuel 20:6 (RSV)

*¹⁰ fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*¹¹ Behold, all who are incensed against you
shall be put to shame and confounded;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.*

*¹² You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.*

*¹³ For I, the Lord your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, “Fear not,
I am the one who helps you.”*

Isaiah 41:10-13 (ESV)

Resolve now, ahead of time, that you will never change your course of action as a result of any intimidation, no matter what people threaten to do.

Many people, even leaders and managers, make decisions on the basis of fear. They fear to take a particular step, even if they know it is the right thing to do. You can't prevent yourself feeling fear. It

is a natural reaction to a threat, and can even be beneficial. But you can decide that you will never let fear *influence you* or cause you to alter your actions or choices. What you do is a matter of choice and should be decided solely by your *will*, not by your feelings.

Irrespective of how afraid you may *feel* you can always choose, as an exercise of your will, not to *act* on your fear. Then, no matter what people threaten to do to you, or to your business, you can press ahead regardless, if you believe that to be right. You can do exactly what you think is the right thing to do, even if you feel afraid. I stress this because I have often heard people speak as if it is reasonable, and even inevitable, that they should alter their plans if something frightens them. That is not valid. We should never let ourselves be controlled, or even influenced, by our fears.

Fear is never a legitimate basis on which to act, or react, or to refrain from acting. Even if the threat is entirely real, it is still not a valid basis for buckling and giving in. That said, most threats are actually lies anyway and the person threatening us cannot carry it out. For example, I had a PA called Julie who was very devious and manipulative. That had always been so, but I did not discover it until the end, when she was caught fabricating evidence to falsely accuse another employee of damaging a board room table. In fact, she had damaged it herself, and on purpose.

When I confronted her she tried to resist the investigation by attempting to intimidate me into taking no further action. She denied the charges and told a pack of lies. I told her I was suspending her and would be interviewing her again as part of our investigatory/disciplinary process. I also said that one of the outcomes could, potentially, be her dismissal. One is obliged by law to point that out. When I said that, she adopted a sinister facial expression and tone of voice and said: "*It would be such a shame if it comes to that, because of all the things that will come out that will damage other people.*"

She was suggesting that she knew things about me, and about others working for me, that would be embarrassing if made public at an Employment Tribunal. For a few seconds her words alarmed me, as they were meant to. However, I reminded myself that I had resolved, years before, that I would never, *under any circumstances*, be guided by fear, especially by fear of other people or the threats they may make. I then began to think clearly again and asked myself: "*What things? What people? What damage?*" Even as I asked myself those basic questions, I realised she was bluffing.

There were no "*things*" that might "*come out*". It was all nonsense. All she could do was lie about me. The truth could do me no harm. I also resolved that even if she was willing to tell lies, and even if those lies damaged the firm, I would not give way to her. I was determined never to be influenced, in any way at all, by her threats. So I braced myself and said: "*You can say whatever you like, truthfully or otherwise. Nothing you can ever say will prevent me investigating your conduct and then moving to a disciplinary hearing, and even contacting the police, if the evidence supports it*".

As I said that, she maintained a defiant face, but I ignored that and gave her a date and a time to return to the office to continue the investigatory procedure. It quickly emerged that her bold face, and her threats were a bluff. She went straight out to her car in the firm's car park and came back *immediately* with a letter of resignation! There was no time to write or print that. She had *already typed it, even before she came to see me*, and before she made her threats. I realised that her whole stance had been a bluff from the outset. She never had any intention of carrying out her threats.

It was just an attempt to intimidate me, but with no substance. In any event, I had already made that decision, long before, that I would never bow to any threat, *real or otherwise*, so I did not need any time to think it over. My policy had already been settled in my own mind long beforehand. Therefore, from the moment her threats were made, I set my face like flint and resolved to press ahead with the investigation, regardless of what she might do or say. That said, I was under no illusions and was fully aware that she could easily invent something and harm me because lies are often believed.

It also takes a lot of time and effort to disprove lies, which costs money in itself. Nevertheless, those potential costs and dangers had no bearing on my *decisions* because I was adamant that I wasn't

willing to be manipulated or intimidated by her, *no matter what the cost might be of standing up to her*. It has to be that absolute. If not, people will discern that your resolve has limits and that all they have to do is to keep the pressure on you, until you reach the limits of your endurance and give way to them. If you give them any basis to think that you have a limit, beyond which you won't go, they will make certain to take you up to that limit and beyond it.

Never negotiate with 'terrorists'.

I recommend that you adopt the same policy and confront wrongdoers head on. Do it firmly, decisively, and without ever paying any attention to their threats. If you are consistent, word will get around that you "*never negotiate with terrorists*". That is a useful reputation to have and you should do all you can to develop it. Julie used to be my PA so she had seen me at first hand dealing with other wrongdoers. She knew that, once I have realised I am being deceived or manipulated, I leave no stone unturned in investigating them.

Therefore she knew I would eventually be able to prove that she had deliberately damaged the boardroom table. She also knew that I would not hesitate to sack her, and even go to the police to report her actions as a crime. But she still felt that intimidation was worth a try, even as a bluff. However, once she saw that I was not going to budge she gave up immediately and resigned in order to avoid being sacked and even prosecuted. Wicked people are very calculating.

They tend not to launch suicide missions in which they themselves will also be damaged. They may *threaten* to destroy themselves and you, but they will usually pull out, at the last minute, if they see that you are not scared. They need to be shown that you are completely willing to suffer any amount of loss and damage rather than give in to them, and that you won't alter your course, no matter what they may say or do. The wicked are rational and they know when they are beaten.

They also know when their own self-interest is best served by retreat, or even by fleeing from the fight. At first they won't *expect* you to be courageous in resisting them because so few people are brave. They are well aware that most managers will give in to threats. But the position changes once they realise you are an exception to that general rule and that you will never 'blink'. They will then give up, just as demons will when you wake up, resist them, and show genuine resolve.

The threats I faced from 'Mavis', a lawyer who was sacked and then sued me and also tried to intimidate me via the media

This story arose when I appointed a solicitor without knowing that she was a friend of 'Keira', to whom I referred earlier. I made Mavis a salaried partner and put her in charge of a team of lawyers and support staff. However, Mavis was a major disappointment in her abilities, attitude and character. So after only five months she was sacked because she was a 'dud' and would never make the grade. She had not given up any job to come to us. She had been out of work at the time we appointed her, so she was not made any worse off by our decision.

Mavis then brought a claim in an Employment Tribunal. She couldn't claim unfair dismissal because she had not got the necessary length of service. So she tried to be clever by inventing a way of turning her case into one of sex discrimination, rather than unfair dismissal. She did that by alleging that our real reason for dismissing her was not her incompetence but that I had objected to her wearing a short skirt in the office! That was nonsense and had nothing whatever to do with her dismissal. I didn't even know she had worn a short skirt, if indeed she ever had.

At any rate, I had never seen it. Nevertheless, her scheme worked for a while and she was allowed to issue her claim, even though it was pure fiction. She then began a weird media campaign. She contacted the national newspapers and they printed articles with photographs of her wearing the short

skirt, to which I had supposedly objected. I felt it reflected more badly on her than on me, but that wasn't how she saw it. In any case, she had no sense of shame and didn't mind making a spectacle of herself. However, she thought I would be mortified by it, which I was.

It was very upsetting to me, and also to my wife, to have all this bad publicity, especially as it was all invented. I wouldn't have minded so much if she had been criticising something I had actually said or done. On one occasion a journalist came to our house, while I was out, and tried to interview my wife. She was upset, but made no comment. Then, when that newspaper article came out, it was an attack on me personally and said that I “*give money to support anti-abortion groups*”. That was presented as a fault on my part.

The aim was to discredit me, at least in the eyes of the wrong-thinking element of the community, which is a sizeable group. So my being referred to as “anti-abortion” provoked more antagonism. The tactics which Mavis was using were designed to put me under personal pressure. She also imagined that I would fear going to a tribunal hearing at which she might make any number of equally weird allegations. She was an exhibitionist herself, but she knew that I wasn't one.

Therefore, she hoped that by keeping up a stream of adverse publicity I would eventually give in and pay her a lot of money. Moreover, her claim was not small, because there is no upper limit on the damages in discrimination cases. Therefore she was claiming over £100,000 (\$150,000) and perhaps even more. However, I had decided that I would never bow to her tactics so I appointed a barrister to represent me and let it go all the way to trial. That was a surprise to Mavis. She had expected me to buckle and to settle the claim with a large payment.

How Mavis abandoned her case and received nothing when I stood up to her

Because I did not cave in the first day of the hearing actually arrived. Her lawyer began his opening submissions and was asked some questions by the Chairman. It was Mavis who then began to panic, not me. She had fully expected that I would make her an offer, even in the corridor outside the hearing. When I didn't, she had to do some rapid recalculations, because she suddenly realised I was not bluffing and would never give in. The turning point was a verbal exchange between her lawyer and the Tribunal Chairman (they are now referred to as Employment Judges).

Her lawyer made a snide reference to me and told the Chairman that I was “*an evangelical Christian*”. This was said in a scathing tone, in the context of explaining why it was that I had ‘discriminated’ against Mavis. There is a growing animosity towards Christians, especially in the legal profession, which is very politically correct. Mavis' lawyer had hoped that this would turn the Tribunal against me, as if he had said that I was a drug dealer. However, it backfired. The Chairman began to shoot questions at her lawyer about the insinuations that were being made.

At this point I saw Mavis looking panic-stricken. She had assumed that the Tribunal would be instinctively hostile to me, due to my being a Christian, but she suddenly saw that they weren't. Mavis then instructed her lawyer to request a brief recess so that she could discuss the position with him. That was granted and we all went out. Then her lawyer came back asking for the whole hearing to be adjourned. They cobbled together some bogus reasons why they needed this, but I knew it was because Mavis had realised that her plan had not worked.

Shortly afterwards I got a phone call from her lawyer who was now speaking in the most charming tone, as if I was an old friend of his. He asked if I would agree to Mavis dropping her claim in its entirety, on condition that I would not apply for any costs order against her. Although I deserved a costs order, because her claim was not brought in good faith, I knew I was unlikely to get one. Therefore I agreed to the offer and allowed her to abandon her claim, with no damages being paid to her whatsoever. In other words, she had completely failed.

There was one final twist to the story which shows how malicious Mavis's claim had been. Her lawyer asked me to agree to a 'confidentiality clause', whereby neither party is allowed to speak about the case to the media. Mavis wanted that because she herself had spoken to the media from the outset. She did not want me to turn the tables on her by telling them that she had dropped her case and received nothing. I refused the standard confidentiality clause because I was not willing to be gagged. But I did offer a compromise.

I said I would not *approach* the media but that *if they approached me*, then I would be free, from then on, to speak openly. He said he would take instructions on that, but he was obviously unsure whether I could be trusted to keep to that deal. He knew I could very easily break that agreement and approach the media covertly, or get someone else to do so on my behalf. Nevertheless, he took instructions from his client and I was stunned by what he said when he rang me back.

He actually read out what Mavis had said to him, which was broadly as follows: "Yes, I will agree to that proposal, because Mr Kehoe is absolutely honest and we can totally rely on him to abide by any agreement he makes." I thought that was ironic, and somewhat galling, given that she had issued proceedings against me, making bogus allegations, and had effectively accused me of lying to the Tribunal when I denied that we had sacked her for wearing a short skirt.

Yet, here she was now, telling her solicitor that I was totally trustworthy and that my word could be absolutely relied on etc. She had known that all along, and was fully aware at all times, that I was telling the truth and that she wasn't. But those minor technicalities had not stopped her from pursuing her claim for all those months. She was then able to say all that at the end without a trace of shame at how she had tried to extort money out of me by intimidation. That was all water under the bridge from her perspective.

I had perceived that Keira was seeking to gather information to help Mavis. Therefore I fed her what I wanted her to pass on.

In chapter 4, I told the story of how Janet passed on information about how I was dealing with Yolanda's tribunal claim. I was naïve on that occasion and thought Janet was on my side when she was actually helping Yolanda. However, when I was handling the claim made by Mavis, I was more astute. I could tell that Keira was on Mavis's side. Therefore, whenever Keira sidled up to me, purporting to make conversation about how Mavis's case was getting on, I was ready for her. I didn't tell Keira that I knew she was disloyal, and that she was only seeking information to pass it to Mavis.

I let Keira think I was speaking freely in front of her, as if I trusted her, and as if I thought she was on my side. Keira was a salaried partner in my law firm, as Mavis had been. Therefore she ought to have been supportive of me as her boss. In fact she wasn't, but I saw no point in letting her know that I knew that. I felt I could gain more by letting her 'fish' for information about my thoughts and intentions and how I felt the case was going. I then fed her the information that I *wanted* her to pass on. So Keira effectively became a channel through whom I could present my own PR.

Handling devious, treacherous people who are intent on undermining you or your organisations

A classic example of a devious person who seeks to undermine from within is Absalom, the son of King David. He nursed a grudge for years, and had a growing ambition to seize the throne by undermining and then replacing his own father. We shall set out the account of Absalom's disloyalty and how badly King David mishandled the situation and made it worse for himself and for Israel. God wants us to learn from David's mistakes and to avoid being destroyed by the 'Absaloms' in our own lives. We are all bound to come across them in our families, workplaces and churches.

The mistakes that King David made in handling the rebellion of his son, Absalom

King David had many enemies but Absalom probably caused him the most grief. The origins of his rebellion were complicated. Absalom arranged for one of his half-brothers, Amnon, to be killed because he had raped Absalom's full sister, Tamar. King David made a series of mistakes in handling Absalom. He did not have him executed for Amnon's murder, or even prosecuted. But he didn't forgive or rehabilitate him either. He was merely exiled from Israel. Yet there was a lot of support for Absalom because, in some ways, his cause was just. Many felt he had good reason to kill Amnon.

Amnon should have been prosecuted for rape in the first place. Instead, David did nothing, which is why Absalom took matters into his own hands. That response was obviously wrong. But it was understandable to some extent, which is why there was so much public support for Absalom. It led to calls for him to be allowed to return to Israel rather than remain in exile. That request was even made by Joab, the head of David's army. David unwisely agreed to this, but without arranging for Absalom to be rehabilitated. He was not even allowed to be in the King's presence:

²³ So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. ²⁴ And the king said, "Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence." So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence.

2 Samuel 14:23-24 (ESV)

Absalom was now in a kind of internal exile with no role and no means of relating normally with David. Even his supporter, Joab, would not see him, in accordance with David's orders. After two years of this, Absalom became so frustrated he took matters into his own hands to gain access to King David again. He arranged for Joab's field to be set on fire:

²⁸ So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. ²⁹ Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. ³⁰ Then he said to his servants, "See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. ³¹ Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" ³² Absalom answered Joab, "Behold, I sent word to you, 'Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still." Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.'" ³³ Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

2 Samuel 14:28-33 (ESV)

Absalom was eventually able to see David but there was still no reconciliation. Therefore the resentment continued, due to King David's mishandling of the situation.

When dealing with Absalom, David made the mistake of compromising and seeking a middle path, such that he did neither one thing nor the other.

David had already had to cope with the murder of one of his own sons and the fact that it had been arranged by another of his sons. Any father would find it all excruciatingly difficult to handle, both personally and professionally. That helps to explain why David adopted such a muddled policy, doing neither one thing nor the other. All the available options were unattractive, so David chose none of them. He went instead for a messy compromise which satisfied nobody. Many managers do the same when faced with a range of options, all of which are unpleasant.

David's approach achieved nothing, other than to create an even greater sense of grievance and resentment within Absalom. It also put him in a position to promote discontent and build a rebellion

against David. He was at large in the city of Jerusalem, with access to all the key people, plus the general population. To be in Jerusalem and yet to be excluded from the King's court must have eaten away at Absalom and given him added reasons to seize the throne. Absalom also saw himself as the rightful heir to the throne, as he was the third born son, after Amnon and Chileab.

Amnon was now dead and the implication is that Chileab was also dead because later, when King David was dying, it was Adomijah, the fourth son, who put himself forward as the next in line. It would appear that, at that point, Adonijah was the eldest surviving son. Thus, at the time of hatching his rebellion, Absalom must have been the next in line to the throne. Therefore he would not have found it difficult to convince himself that he was entitled to seize it now, as a pre-emptive strike, before David could promote one of his younger brothers, or even exile him again.

He was probably also aware that David had promised the Kingdom to Bathsheba's son, Solomon, who was younger than him. We know that, at some point, David publicly announced his intentions for the succession. If that was done before Absalom's revolt, then he would have known of it. The fact that Solomon had been publicly announced as the chosen successor may well have caused Absalom to conclude that he must strike quickly to seize the throne or it would go to Solomon.

The prospect of a younger half-brother being made king would have felt unjust and would seem to him to justify his plans. Therefore, Absalom started building a following to aid him when the moment came to seize the throne. He ingratiated himself with a wide range of people and gave them reasons to wish he could be king now, rather than in the future. The Bible says he "*stole the hearts of the men of Israel*". I have seen this done by many 'Absaloms' in churches and work places:

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ² And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," ³ Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." ⁴ Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." ⁵ And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶ Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.
2 Samuel 15:1-6 (ESV)

One would imagine David would have acted decisively at this point. He must have known what Absalom was doing. Yet this policy of muddle and drift went on for at least four years, during which David appears to have done nothing. That inactivity gave Absalom time to gather followers and also confirmed his impression that David would continue to do nothing, or too little. Eventually, Absalom felt the right moment had come to strike and he gave orders for the revolt to begin when he gave the signal:

⁷ And at the end of four years Ab'salom said to the king, "Pray let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. ⁸ For your servant vowed a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord.'" ⁹ The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose, and went to Hebron. ¹⁰ But Ab'salom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Ab'salom is king at Hebron!'" ¹¹ With Ab'salom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their simplicity, and knew nothing. ¹² And while Ab'salom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahith'ophel the Gi'lonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Ab'salom kept increasing.

2 Samuel 15:7-12 (ESV)

Due to four years of neglect and passivity, David was in a weak position. Therefore he had to flee from Absalom and his supporters when the rebellion began in earnest:

¹³ And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom."¹⁴ Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."¹⁵ And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides."¹⁶ So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house.

2 Samuel 15:13-16 (ESV)

It was only when the situation had reached this grave crisis that David at last woke up and began to deal with the threat. But, even now, David was in two minds. He mobilised his army, splitting it into three groups, and even proposed to go into battle himself. But he was still ambivalent about how to handle *Absalom personally*. He had told his commanders that they should "*Deal gently...with.....Absalom...*". That was understandable, from a personal perspective. But, as a matter of military tactics, in the crisis of a civil war, it was a totally unworkable instruction:

⁵ And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom.

2 Samuel 18:5 (ESV)

David's army defeated the rebels and Absalom was captured, but Joab's men did not kill him, because of what they had heard David say. However, Joab knew it was vital for Absalom to die or the civil war would continue. So he killed him himself:

¹² But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king's son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake protect the young man Absalom.'¹³ On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof."¹⁴ Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak.¹⁵ And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him.

2 Samuel 18:12-15 (ESV)

When King David heard the news of the defeat of Absalom's forces and the death of Absalom, instead of being pleased, he grieved for his son:

²⁸ Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king."²⁹ And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was."³⁰ And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.

³¹ And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Good news for my lord the king! For the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you."³² The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man."³³ And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

2 Samuel 18:28-33 (ESV)

King David's focus was not on winning the civil war, but on the personal fate of Absalom. He let his feelings as a father come before his duties as King. That is understandable, but it is no way to deal with 'an Absalom' who is undermining you from the inside. One needs absolute resolve, and even ruthlessness, or they will defeat you, because an 'Absalom' will destroy you if you give them any opportunity. David's reaction also dishonoured the men who had remained loyal to him. David could not see this so Joab had to point it out, and he did so forthrightly, given the urgency and gravity of the situation:

It was told Joab, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." ² So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for the people heard that day, "The king is grieving for his son." ³ And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle. ⁴ The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" ⁵ Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and your concubines, ⁶ because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. ⁷ Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night, and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." ⁸ Then the king arose and took his seat in the gate. And the people were all told, "Behold, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king.

2 Samuel 19:1-8 (ESV)

I have been undermined and betrayed by people whom I had *assumed* to be my friends and with whom I had worked for years. So I know a little of how David felt and how difficult it is to strike quickly and decisively when confronting such a person. Sentiment gets in the way and one can feel an ongoing loyalty to that person, even after discovering that they are malicious and are having a harmful effect on one's business, ministry or family.

Consequently, one can be slow to act and reluctant to fight as vigorously as one needs to. That reticence not only renders you ineffective in the battle. It can also lose you the support of those who are loyal to you. Their own resolve melts away when they see that you don't have the stomach for the fight, or the will to strike hard and to do what is needed to win.

When David later faced another revolt by a man called Sheba, he was far more swift and decisive in his response.

King David learned a lesson from the Absalom situation. When he later faced another rebellion led by a man called Sheba, he reacted much faster and there was no hesitation or indecision. This story begins as Sheba gathers supporters by whipping up discontent in Israel:

Now there happened to be there a worthless fellow, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite; and he blew the trumpet, and said,

*"We have no portion in David,
and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse;
every man to his tents, O Israel!"*

² So all the men of Israel withdrew from David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 20:1-2 (RSV)

On this occasion, David takes immediate action to put down the revolt and sends out his best men to pursue Sheba:

*⁶ And David said to Abi'shail, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Ab'salom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he get himself fortified cities, and cause us trouble."
⁷ And there went out after Abi'shail, Jo'ab and the Cher'ethites and the Pel'ethites, and all the mighty men; they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.*

2 Samuel 20:6-7 (RSV)

As soon as David's men found Sheba they laid siege to the city where he was hiding and began to batter a way through the city wall. They were determined to get him and there was no longer any indecision or lack of resolve:

¹⁴ And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-ma'acah; and all the Bichrites assembled, and followed him in. ¹⁵ And all the men who were with Jo'ab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-ma'acah; they cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart; and they were battering the wall, to throw it down. ¹⁶ Then a wise woman called from the city, "Hear! Hear! Tell Jo'ab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'" ¹⁷ And he came near her; and the woman said, "Are you Jo'ab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening." ¹⁸ Then she said, "They were wont to say in old time, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel'; and so they settled a matter. ¹⁹ I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel; you seek to destroy a city which is a mother in Israel; why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?"

2 Samuel 20:14-19 (RSV)

When the people of the city saw how determined David was to get Sheba, they agreed to cooperate, for the sake of the city. They killed Sheba and threw his head over the wall to David's men:

²⁰ Jo'ab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! ²¹ That is not true. But a man of the hill country of E'phraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David; give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city." And the woman said to Jo'ab, "Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall." ²² Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Jo'ab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Jo'ab returned to Jerusalem to the king.

2 Samuel 20:20-22 (RSV)

Compare the way this rebellion was so rapidly crushed with the slow, inadequate handling of Absalom's revolt. David had clearly learned how dangerous it is to give a rebel any time or space to gather support. The same applies in your own workplace or church. You must tackle agitators and rebels as firmly, and as early, as possible.

Solomon also learned from David's indecisive handling of Absalom. He and King David therefore acted very decisively when they faced the later crisis of Adonijah's rebellion.

When King David was dying one of the last things he faced was a rebellion by another of his sons, Adonijah. He attempted to seize the throne before it could be given to Solomon. David had learned from his incompetent handling of Absalom's revolt and his much faster handling of Sheba's revolt. So, on this third occasion, he acted swiftly and got the key people to publicly declare themselves to be on Solomon's side. David also had Solomon anointed as King, even while he was still alive. Adonijah knew the succession had been promised to Solomon, not to himself. David had announced that many years earlier, when he gathered his officials and told them plainly:

David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the officials of the tribes, the officers of the divisions that served the king, the commanders of thousands, the commanders of hundreds, the stewards of all the property and cattle of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the mighty men, and all the seasoned warriors.

1 Chronicles 28:1 (RSV)

⁵ *And of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel.*⁶ *He said to me, 'It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.*

1 Chronicles 28:5-6 (RSV)

Therefore, when Adonijah knew that David was about to die, he acted swiftly, together with his supporters. He seized the throne and made himself the de facto king, in direct rebellion against what he already knew was the King's will, and God's will:

⁵ *Now Adoni'jah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king"; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.* ⁶ *His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, "Why have you done thus and so?" He was also a very handsome man; and he was born next after Ab'salom.* ⁷ *He conferred with Jo'ab the son of Zeru'iah and with Abi'athar the priest; and they followed Adoni'jah and helped him.* ⁸ *But Zadok the priest, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shim'e-i, and Re'i, and David's mighty men were not with Adoni'jah.* ⁹ *Adoni'jah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fatlings by the Serpent's Stone, which is beside En-ro'gel, and he invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah,*

1 Kings 1:5-9 (RSV)

When this third rebellion arose David had the help of the prophet Nathan and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, who went and told King David of it. Despite his frailty, David was swift and decisive in his response. He had Solomon very publicly anointed as the new King, so that the followers of Adonijah would see they had backed the wrong horse. David did not want to leave anything unclear, as he had when he mishandled Absalom's rebellion:

²⁸ *Then King David answered, "Call Bathshe'ba to me." So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king.* ²⁹ *And the king swore, saying, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity,* ³⁰ *as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead'; even so will I do this day."* ³¹ *Then Bathshe'ba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, "May my lord King David live for ever!"* ³² *King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada." So they came before the king.* ³³ *And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon;* ³⁴ *and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!'* ³⁵ *You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead; and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah."*

1 Kings 1:28-35 (RSV)

David's instructions were implemented immediately by Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah, the chief of David's bodyguard. These were the key men in the Kingdom and David wisely made sure that he had them all on board. He knew that their public support for Solomon would be decisive in causing the supporters of Adonijah to switch sides:

³⁸ *So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, and the Cher'ethites and the Pel'ethites, went down and caused Solomon to ride on King David's mule, and brought him to Gihon.* ³⁹ *There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent, and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet; and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!"* ⁴⁰ *And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.*

1 Kings 1:38-40 (RSV)

David's tactic had the desired effect. The public honouring of Solomon was quickly brought to the attention of Adonijah's followers, unlike the confusion that persisted for years in the build up to Absalom's revolt. This time there was no doubt as to where King David stood, or who was going to win this battle over the succession:

⁴¹ Adoni'jah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Jo'ab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, "What does this uproar in the city mean?" ⁴² While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abi'athar the priest came; and Adoni'jah said, "Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news." ⁴³ Jonathan answered Adoni'jah, "No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king; ⁴⁴ and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, and the Cher'ethites and the Pel'ethites; and they have caused him to ride on the king's mule; ⁴⁵ and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard. ⁴⁶ Solomon sits upon the royal throne.

1 Kings 1:41-46 (RSV)

The people therefore realised very quickly, as David had intended, that Adonijah's coup had failed. They knew they needed to change sides immediately, before they got into trouble:

⁴⁹ Then all the guests of Adoni'jah trembled, and rose, and each went his own way.

1 Kings 1:49 (RSV)

Adonijah himself was also afraid so he fled to the Tabernacle and clung to the horns of the altar. This was, by convention, the way that a person could avoid retribution, as they would not be killed while taking sanctuary in the Tabernacle. Adonijah then asked Solomon to swear that he would not have him put to death. Otherwise he could not have left the Tabernacle:

⁵⁰ And Adoni'jah feared Solomon; and he arose, and went, and caught hold of the horns of the altar. ⁵¹ And it was told Solomon, "Behold, Adoni'jah fears King Solomon; for lo, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not slay his servant with the sword.'"

1 Kings 1:50-51 (RSV)

However, Solomon had learned a vital lesson from David's earlier mishandling of Absalom and was careful in what he now promised. He did not commit himself to granting a full, unconditional amnesty to Adonijah. He wanted first to find out whether he had genuinely given up all claims to the throne or whether he was still secretly harbouring an ambition. If he was, he could try to seize the throne later, at a more opportune moment:

⁵² And Solomon said, "If he prove to be a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." ⁵³ So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and did obeisance to King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."

1 Kings 1:52-53 (RSV)

Solomon was right to be cautious and his misgivings were well-founded. Adonijah went to see Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, and asked her to intervene with Solomon so that one of David's youngest wives, Abishag, who had nursed him at the end, could be given to him as a wife. Bathsheba did not discern anything sinister in this, so she agreed to make the request on Adonijah's behalf:

¹³ Then Adoni'jah the son of Haggith came to Bathshe'ba the mother of Solomon. And she said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably." ¹⁴ Then he said, "I have something to say to you." She said, "Say on." ¹⁵ He said, "You know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel fully expected me to reign; however the kingdom has turned about and become my brother's, for it

was his from the Lord. ¹⁶ And now I have one request to make of you; do not refuse me.” She said to him, “Say on.” ¹⁷ And he said, “Pray ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Ab'ishag the Shu'nammite as my wife.” ¹⁸ Bathshe'ba said, “Very well; I will speak for you to the king.”

1 Kings 2:13-18 (RSV)

Unlike his mother, Solomon was not naïve. He saw that the request was a trick. Adonijah wanted it to be known that he had married David's widow. This would have been viewed by the public as significant and would have strengthened Adonijah's position if he later made a second attempt to seize the throne. The request showed he was still scheming and trying to strengthen his claim.

Solomon was decisive in his response, as he had said he would be if any ongoing wickedness was found in Adonijah. He had him executed immediately and gave him no further time to re-gather his supporters. Solomon was determined not to make the same mistakes that David had made in dealing with Absalom during his long plotting and preparing phase:

¹⁹ So Bathshe'ba went to King Solomon, to speak to him on behalf of Adoni'jah. And the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her; then he sat on his throne, and had a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right. ²⁰ Then she said, “I have one small request to make of you; do not refuse me.” And the king said to her, “Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you.” ²¹ She said, “Let Ab'ishag the Shu'nammite be given to Adoni'jah your brother as his wife.” ²² King Solomon answered his mother, “And why do you ask Ab'ishag the Shu'nammite for Adoni'jah? Ask for him the kingdom also; for he is my elder brother, and on his side are Abi'athar the priest and Jo'ab the son of Zeru'iah.” ²³ Then King Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, “God do so to me and more also if this word does not cost Adoni'jah his life! ²⁴ Now therefore as the Lord lives, who has established me, and placed me on the throne of David my father, and who has made me a house, as he promised, Adoni'jah shall be put to death this day.” ²⁵ So King Solomon sent Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada; and he struck him down, and he died.

1 Kings 2:19-25 (RSV)

Solomon did not leave it at that. He also removed Abiathar from his office as priest. He had supported Adonijah and Solomon did not feel able to rely on his loyalty. So he removed him there and then, rather than wait and see how things might develop. Solomon knew the rebellion had to be completely and unmistakably extinguished:

²⁶ And to Abi'athar the priest the king said, “Go to An'athoth, to your estate; for you deserve death. But I will not at this time put you to death, because you bore the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because you shared in all the affliction of my father.” ²⁷ So Solomon expelled Abi'athar from being priest to the Lord, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord which he had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

1 Kings 2:26-27 (RSV)

At the same time Solomon took swift action against Joab, the commander of the army, who had also sided with Adonijah. He had Joab put to death, despite the fact that Joab had fled to the Tabernacle and clung to the horns of the altar. This time Solomon was not going to take any chances at all, or rely on any promises of allegiance:

²⁸ When the news came to Jo'ab—for Jo'ab had supported Adoni'jah although he had not supported Ab'salom—Jo'ab fled to the tent of the Lord and caught hold of the horns of the altar. ²⁹ And when it was told King Solomon, “Jo'ab has fled to the tent of the Lord, and behold, he is beside the altar,” Solomon sent Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada, saying, “Go, strike him down.” ³⁰ So Benai'ah came to the tent of the Lord, and said to him, “The king commands, ‘Come forth.’” But he said, “No, I will die here.” Then Benai'ah brought the king word again, saying, “Thus said Jo'ab, and thus he answered me.” ³¹ The king replied to him, “Do as he has said, strike him down and bury him; and thus take away from me and from my father's house the guilt for the blood

which Jo'ab shed without cause.³² *The Lord will bring back his bloody deeds upon his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and slew with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself, Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army of Israel, and Ama'sa the son of Jether, commander of the army of Judah.*³³ *So shall their blood come back upon the head of Jo'ab and upon the head of his descendants for ever; but to David, and to his descendants, and to his house, and to his throne, there shall be peace from the Lord for evermore.*³⁴ *Then Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada went up, and struck him down and killed him; and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.*

1 Kings 2:28-34 (RSV)

Finally, Solomon secured the position even more solidly by appointing Benaiah, who had supported him, to be head of the army in place of Joab. He also appointed Zadok to be priest in place of Abiathar. He wanted to be sure that he had absolutely faithful men in both of those key positions:

³⁵ *The king put Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada over the army in place of Jo'ab, and the king put Zadok the priest in the place of Abi'athar.*

1 Kings 2:35 (RSV)

I am not suggesting that we should have our enemies put to death as Solomon did. Nevertheless, the underlying principle still applies that *swift* and *decisive action* is needed whenever we are dealing with rebels, plotters and schemers. We may not be kings, but we still encounter such people within our workplaces and in churches in particular. One cannot over-state the importance of appointing faithful, trustworthy people to work for you. The more senior they are, the more vital it is that they be fully honest and trustworthy, and that they be removed swiftly if they aren't.

How to handle Absaloms, Shebas and Adonijahs in your own workplace or church

In the light of King David's experiences, what can we learn about how best to deal with an Absalom, a Sheba or an Adonijah? By that I mean a person who ought to be loyal to you but is actually working against you and seeking to usurp your position. You must be clear-minded, bold and decisive from the outset. Your approach needs to be like that of David when he tackled Sheba, or of Solomon in his handling of Adonijah and his supporters, not like David's misguided handling of Absalom. Resolve to do one thing or the other, and be willing to face unpleasant decisions, rather than trying to pursue some painless, uncontroversial middle path.

Provided one acts quickly enough and early enough it might, conceivably, be possible to win over a disgruntled or resentful employee or team member and achieve a genuine reconciliation. Actually, that is extremely unlikely, because resentful, embittered people very rarely change. However, it is a remote possibility, so the option does at least need to be borne in mind. Alternatively, if that is not possible, or has already been tried and has failed, then you must act with even greater swiftness to remove that person from your workforce or team.

The one thing which you must never do is to try to do *a bit of both*, whereby you rebuke or discipline the 'Absalom' or the 'Adonijah', but let them continue working for you. As David found, when he unwisely allowed Absalom to remain in Jerusalem, they will use that opportunity to undermine you, defy your instructions, and poison people's minds against you. I speak with experience here. I have seen it happen many times, when I have warned a wrongdoer but then let him carry on working for me, rather than dismiss him.

The Bible tells us "*If you rebuke a fool he will hate you.*" Therefore, given that every 'Absalom' is wicked, and also a fool, they will not accept any rebuke or correction. They will only become more resentful and try even harder to hit back at you. That will usually be done covertly and it will happen no matter what assurances they give you as to their loyalty or their determination to change. In two

decades I never once saw a person be rebuked for misconduct and then go on to behave well and become loyal. It just doesn't happen.

The only people who respond well to rebuke and correction are the wise and the simple, who are *already loyal* to you and to your business. However, 'Absaloms' and 'Adonijahs' do not come from either of those groups. Therefore you have to discern at the earliest possible stage whether they are hostile. If in doubt, it would be wise to assume that they are. The very fact that you are asking yourself such questions suggests you are under-estimating, rather than over-estimating, their malice.

I personally have never over-estimated the harm that a resentful person might do, or the likelihood of their behaving disloyally. They have always gone on to behave in even worse ways than I feared they might. However if you are *completely sure* that the person can be won back, don't rebuke them at all. Instead, seek only to be reconciled with them and to resolve any differences amicably. Or, if rebuke is absolutely necessary, then only use it with those whom you already *know for sure* to be sincere, humble people. If they are not, your rebuke will only make them even more hostile.

You can only get rid of an Absalom if you are legitimately in charge of a team or business.

You can't deal with an 'Absalom' unless you have enough authority and power to make the necessary decisions, or at least to strongly influence the decisions that are made. If not, you won't be able to tackle an Absalom successfully. That type of person is well aware of how much real authority and power you have. They can also sense how willing you are to use it. They know that they can only be tackled and removed by the determined, decisive use of real authority. Hopefully you have such authority, or are part of a management or leadership team which does, and which will listen to you.

But if you don't have such authority, or if you aren't bold enough to use it, you will never defeat or remove an Absalom. The fact that they work in the shadows, behind closed doors, on the basis of whisperings and lies, means they have a major advantage from the outset. For a long time they will already have been fighting against you, while you weren't *aware* of that fact, and were thus not fighting back, or even on your guard. That is another reason why you need to act so swiftly when you do eventually discover what they are doing, or even when you first *suspect* it.

By that stage, they will already have been active with their campaign of sabotage for some time, while you were blissfully unaware. When you eventually discover their disloyalty you have a lot of catching up to do and cannot afford to waste any time in sentimental hand-wringing. You obviously need to investigate carefully and be sure of the facts before you act. However, you must also be quick about doing so, as the 'Absalom' will use every moment of delay on your part to further undermine you or obstruct your enquiries. Bear all of that in mind as it will help to prevent you from delaying for too long while you check facts and interview witnesses.

When you do get around to questioning those people, you need to be aware that an 'Absalom' will always be ahead of the game. They will have "*got to*" the witnesses long before you do and will have already influenced or intimidated them in some way. Whenever I spoke to staff, especially junior ones, about the wrongdoings of one of their colleagues, I always bore in mind that such witnesses were likely to have been lied to and/or threatened already. Therefore I fully expected them to be reluctant to speak about what they had seen and heard and I did not let their reluctance put me off.

The chances are they will be much more afraid of the illegitimate 'Absalom' than of your legitimate authority. Even worse, if those witnesses or colleagues are insincere or disloyal themselves, they may even approve of the 'Absalom' and support him against you. Whatever kind of people they are, they will doubt your ability to tackle the wrongdoer, or your resolve to fight to the bitter end. Therefore it is usually the 'Absalom' who emerges as the final winner because most leaders, managers or even owners don't have enough courage or determination to win such a fight.

Most colleagues are pragmatic rather than principled. They just want to be “*on the winning side*”. Therefore if you want witnesses to give you information, you must convince them that you will be the winner and that the ‘Absalom’ won’t succeed. You must also refuse to be fobbed off by their initially evasive responses, when they pretend not to have seen or heard anything. Most will persist in that until they are convinced that you are determined to tackle the wrongdoer and won’t drop the investigation half way through or lose your nerve.

They also need to be reassured that you won’t disclose what they tell you and put them at risk of reprisals. They need to be certain that you will remove the wrongdoer, rather than just slap his wrist and send him back to work. They are keenly aware that if that is all you do, then anybody who has helped you will have to face the wrongdoer’s vengeance. That fact doesn’t matter to many managers, but it needs to be at the forefront of your mind if you are serious about getting nervous witnesses to give you the evidence you need.

In urging people to be swift and decisive in dealing with the wicked, I am speaking only to people who are *sincere*, with a strong sense of justice. Such characteristics can make them too cautious in identifying and confronting the wicked. Accordingly, such people need to be much more bold and they can afford to be without any risk of injustice, because they are already leaning too far in the direction of being merciful. However, if you are instead ruthless and harsh, then the need to act more swiftly would not apply to you.

Indeed, if you are such a person, I am actually speaking *about* you, not *to* you. None of what I am saying should be taken as advocating any injustice. When dealing with the wicked you must not act wickedly yourself. You do, however, have to realise that you will be up against wickedness from others. Therefore fully expect devious tactics to be used against you and your witnesses. But never use them yourself, either in retaliation or pre-emptively.

The time when I was the Chairman of a Conservative Association and had to tackle ‘Marjorie’, a very unpleasant Parliamentary Candidate

Some years ago I was a Borough Councillor and also the Chairman of a Conservative Association. That means I helped to run the party within that constituency. One of my responsibilities was to chair the committee which ran the election campaign for our prospective Parliamentary candidate (“PPC”) whom I will call ‘Marjorie’. I shall share a little about her here because it is a story of a wicked person, where the context was neither the workplace nor the Church. It took place within a political party where I was in an *elected* capacity and was not the owner of the organisation.

Therefore I did not have complete power and could not make unilateral decisions as to how to handle her, as I could if these things had happened within my law firm. That made a major difference to how much power I had and how decisive I could be. I could only inform others about her and try to persuade them to take action. Marjorie was manipulative, arrogant and controlling, all of which features are normal amongst the wicked. However, one feature she had which is unusual in a woman is that she liked to directly *dominate* others.

She was not content just to manipulate them indirectly. She used head-on confrontation to bully and intimidate people into silence and to get her own way. She was a ‘bruiser’, or ‘battle-axe’, whereas most women, if they are wicked, will seek to gain control indirectly and covertly by deception and manipulation. That makes them harder to detect or tackle, as people are not even aware of what they do or how they do it. Marjorie was therefore an interesting case, as she was a woman who acted more like a man and used traditionally male techniques for getting control.

She was chosen as the PPC shortly before I was elected as Chairman, so I wasn’t involved in her appointment. However, I quickly realised what a dragon she was and she became an ongoing headache for me and my fellow officers within the Executive Committee of the Association. Matters

came to a head one day when 'Henry', the agent, a full time paid worker for the Conservative Association, came to see me with a resignation letter. He said he could not endure working with Marjorie any longer as she was "*such an appalling person*". He told me how she acted towards him in their one to one dealings and of the imperious way in which she spoke to him.

It was more than he could endure and he had no idea how to address it, because he was a timid person. That was partly why she was so domineering towards him. She could see that he could be bullied and she exploited that. She also felt contempt for him, for the very reason that he was easy to push around. When I got Henry's resignation letter I called a meeting of the Officers, which is a committee made up of the Secretary, Treasurer, President, Women's Officer etc. We discussed how we could tackle Marjorie without the media finding out what was going on. If they had it would have ruined the Party's chances of winning the seat back at the next election.

So the constraints within which we had to operate were tight, which made it more complicated. The Officers agreed that Marjorie was every bit as "appalling" as Henry had said. We had more dealings with her than the wider membership had, so we knew what she was really like, whereas most of them didn't. They only knew her public image. But she was a lot more polite with them than with the people she saw regularly, and especially those who got in her way. We were greatly helped by the advice of 'Arthur', one of the committee members, who was exceptionally astute. He was a retired Managing Director of a large company.

His advice was to keep everything very secret and to take confidential soundings from a committee which rarely met called the 'Vice Presidents of the Association'. These were local figures of distinction who had worked hard for the Association in the past. They could give us an indication of how the problem would be viewed by the wider membership. We needed to know that in case we had to go to the full Executive Committee to decide whether to de-select Marjorie or to keep her and let her fight the election. Arthur also advised that we should liaise with the Conservative Central Office in London, to seek their input on the handling of the problem.

We needed that because it could have an impact on the reputation of the Party, both locally and nationally, if the facts became known, quite apart from ruining our prospects of winning back that seat. Subject to what was said by our own Vice-Presidents and also by Conservative Central Office, we could then decide whether to call a full meeting of the whole Executive Committee of which we, as the Officers, were only a part. It was this whole committee, not just we as officers, who would have to decide whether to deselect Marjorie or to keep her and make the best of a bad job.

So, we had a meeting of the Vice-Presidents and I handed each of them a *numbered* copy of my confidential report setting out the facts of Henry's resignation and the Officers' concerns about Marjorie. At the end of the meeting I carefully gathered all of these numbered reports back in. I counted them to make sure none ever left the room and that none could be copied and leaked. We also travelled to London to have a meeting with the Chairman of the Conservative Party, an MP. He was concerned, but also anxious to avoid any of this being made public.

He then asked 'Oswald', the regional agent for the party, to liaise with us and to assist us in handling the next meeting. The main concern of Central Office was avoiding bad publicity. They did not worry much about the problems we faced locally of having such a monster for a PPC - and potentially as an MP. The unanimous advice of the Vice-Presidents was to escalate the situation and call a meeting of the full Executive Committee of the local party. So we called that meeting, a much larger one, though still only a fraction of the whole membership.

As before, I then handed out written reports and counted them all back in. The situation was then discussed in detail. We also had to deal with several interventions from supporters of Marjorie who had, quite obviously, been primed by Marjorie to speak up on her behalf. In doing that, she had breached the strict confidentiality rules to which the rest of us had adhered. We could have lobbied

against her, but we did not. By contrast, Marjorie had been actively drumming up support and briefing her supporters on what to say.

Therefore several of them asked to speak in her support, whereas every other person came to the meeting having no idea what it was even going to be about. If we had told people that it was about whether to deselect Marjorie, more members may have cancelled other engagements in order to attend. But we never said a word. Therefore, we did not get as many supporters for her deselection as there may have been if we too had engaged in lobbying. However, it is more important to do right than to win.

The final decision of the Executive Committee was that it was too close to the General Election to deselect our PPC and choose another one. So, very reluctantly, and with a heavy heart, it was decided to keep her. But we were asked to put in place strict safeguards to limit her future conduct and to warn her sternly against any further misbehaviour. From then on we managed to keep the show on the road. The agent withdrew his resignation and we planned and fought the election campaign, which Marjorie duly lost, but we had no major problems from then on.

Coming within an inch of deselection had chastened her. So although her resentment and bitterness were great, she restrained herself and moderated her conduct. I tell this story as a counter-balance to those I have told about how I handled the wicked when I was their employer and the 100% owner of a business. With them, I had virtually unlimited power and freedom of manoeuvre, subject only to obeying the law and behaving honestly. However, in my role as Association Chairman, I did not have such freedom or power.

I was obliged to work with others and had to persuade rather than give orders. Accordingly, the best I could do was to contain Marjorie, rather than remove her. Nevertheless, it was still an achievement, up to a point. We were able to put a stop to the worst of her antics and we made her much more careful. I believe God put me through that difficult situation as He wanted to extend the range of my experience beyond that of an owner-manager and to give me another perspective to write about in this book. He knew I would write about it one day, though I had no idea at the time.

The way in which ‘Oswald’ swapped sides in the dispute, according to whichever way the wind was blowing

‘Oswald’ was asked by Conservative Central Office to work alongside us to handle the Marjorie situation. He was a regional agent who worked with many different constituencies. He was not in charge of us and had no actual authority. But it was right that we should involve him and gain his input and the benefit of his experience. I mention him because I thought it was interesting how unprincipled he was. In particular, he switched sides during the dispute, solely on the basis of which way the wind was blowing.

He was not bothered about who was right or wrong. He just wanted to be on the winning side. Therefore when he attended the meeting with the Officers, and later with the Vice Presidents, he was critical of Marjorie and supportive of those who wished to remove her, because he could see they were very much in the majority. However, at the final meeting of the whole Executive, at which it was decided, reluctantly, to keep Marjorie, Oswald changed sides when he saw that the mood of that larger meeting was against deselecting her.

There was actually a look of triumph in his face as he saw that it was looking like the committee was going to keep her on. That was what he had really wanted all along, even when he was being critical of Marjorie, when he thought she was going to be deselected. So he took his mask off at that point and worked for her and against the Officers. But why hadn’t he done that previously, when it looked as though she would be removed? Both then and later he was behaving insincerely. It brought home to me just how two-faced and unprincipled people can be.

CHAPTER 9

DEALING WITH DECEPTION AND DECEIVERS – PART ONE

*⁴ And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray.
Matthew 24:4 (ESV)*

*“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way.....”
2 Thessalonians 2:3(a) (NIV)*

*²⁶ These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.
1 John 2:26 (NASB)*

*On every side the wicked prowl,
as vileness is exalted among the children of man.
Psalm 12:8 (ESV)*

*⁴ No one enters suit justly;
no one goes to law honestly;
they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies,
they conceive mischief and give birth to iniquity.
Isaiah 59:4 (ESV)*

Recognise the possibility, or rather the likelihood, that people may be lying to you.

One of the first steps in becoming a discerning person is to accept the fact that some people act in really devious ways. If you don't recognise the possibility, or rather the likelihood, of encountering such craftiness you will not be looking out for it. Then, what you don't expect you won't see, even if it is under your nose. So don't rule out the idea that a particular person, or people in general, could be lying to you. Keep an entirely open mind, not only when you first meet people, but on an ongoing basis thereafter, until you have learned enough to have a proper basis for trusting them.

Do not assume that you are a good judge of character - most of us aren't.

I've heard people boast of being a good judge of character, but I've never heard anybody, apart from me, admit to being a poor judge of character. There seems to be a stigma attached to being easily deceived. Therefore few will admit to it, even when it is obviously the case. However, it is actually the norm to lack discernment, at least amongst those who are not wicked themselves. Conversely, the wicked are usually accurate judges of character, partly because they know what to look for. It is also because they are well aware of how devious and false people can be.

They are also under no illusions to begin with, so nothing surprises them. At any rate, you should be absolutely frank and openly admit that you can be, and have been, deceived by people. Also accept that you need to be on the alert for this in the future. Even to admit those obvious things to yourself will be a major step forward. It will bring you within that small minority of people who admit the truth to themselves about their own current level of discernment. You can then begin the slow process of learning how to discern, which you can't even start doing until you realise that you *need to*.

For various reasons, we all find lies much more believable than the truth. Recognise this fact and be even more vigilant.

Our sinful nature, which finds lies appealing, plus the involvement of demons, means we believe lies more readily than truth. When faced with a choice between the truth and a lie, most of us will believe the lie. Moreover, lies are accepted quickly, whereas the truth is accepted slowly, if at all. One sees this with malicious rumours, false accusations and slander. These are accepted instantly, without any checking. Yet, if you tell the truth, people will reject what you say, or be slow to accept it. Basically, lies are much more appetising than truth, and they always have been:

*The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.*
Proverbs 26:22 (RSV)

When a lie is presented as a *secret*, or as something that has been *leaked*, it is even more readily accepted. The very fact that something is whispered to us appeals to our flesh and makes it all the more enticing. Such things are rarely scrutinised properly, or at all. Whenever the *truth* is told the demons speak into your mind to persuade you *not to believe* it. But when a *lie* is told to you those same demons will urge you to believe it and *not to check* it. That is why, when deciding whether a thing is true or false, we opt for the wrong answer far more than 50% of the time.

Demons don't often do spectacular things. Their preference, at least in the sceptical West, is not to be noticed at all. They whisper into our minds every day to lie to us themselves and also to get us to believe the lies told by people. The demons work hard to make all lies seem more convincing, while making the truth seem implausible. Their task is made easier by our flesh nature and by the fact that we live in a fallen world. Those two things mean we are already drawn towards lies, and away from truth, even without the demons' involvement.

Develop the technique of checking, double-checking, and even triple checking, the things you are told.

One of the most effective things you can do to become more discerning is to start, as a matter of *routine*, to check, double-check, and sometimes triple check, the things you are told. Make that your standard policy all the time, not just when you feel suspicious or think something can't be true. Get into the habit of automatically checking things, as a matter of course, even when you think the thing that has been said is true and you see no reason why it should be untrue. Never assume that a thing must be true just because someone says it. Nothing can be taken at face value.

What a person says could be true, but it could also be a lie, and it often is. Or they could be innocently repeating a lie which was told to them and which they did not check. It therefore needs to be your standard working assumption that the person speaking to you has not checked any of the facts themselves and that you must do so yourself. This is especially important if you are told something negative about another person, which diminishes them in your estimation. People have all sorts of reasons for making false, and even malicious, allegations.

I reached the point in my law firm where I told staff that they were welcome to report any concerns to me, but that I would never take any *action* on what they said about another person until I had checked, double-checked and even triple-checked whatever they alleged. Saying that, and making sure that everyone knows you mean it, acts as an important safeguard. It creates a disincentive against making false allegations in the first place. The people around you know that any lies they tell would probably be revealed, so they tell fewer lies.

Precautions like that are also necessary for your own sake to prevent you acting hastily, in reliance on false information or on an exaggerated, or even a mistaken, account. The fact that you have promised

others, and yourself, that you will always check everything has the effect of slowing *you* down and prevents you making rash decisions. Very few people adopt these safety measures to guard themselves against being lied to. Many of us believe things far too quickly and accept negative allegations about other people without question, even when they are based on only one person's word.

If people get to know that you *don't* check things you are virtually asking to be deceived. They will soon realise that they can easily get you to act hastily in reliance on whatever they tell you, especially if it sounds like a secret that is shared on a "confidential" basis. Therefore staff will deliberately tell you lies about other staff in the hope that you will rashly take unjustified action, based solely on what they say. Their intention is that you will react prematurely, without checking things, and then undermine, or even remove, someone whom they dislike or see as a rival.

However, if they know that you always check all the facts carefully before believing or acting on anything that anybody says, they will think twice before lying to you. Even if they still go ahead and tell lies, you are increasing your chances of exposing the lie and of catching the liars. Having said all that, it is also very important that you should always be willing to at least *listen* to any allegation, however unlikely it may sound, and even if it comes from only one person. My point is simply that you should not *believe it, or act upon it*, without first investigating it.

A Christian's desire to avoid listening to gossip, though well-intentioned, has the disadvantage that it can make him reluctant to listen to the very people he most needs to hear. Those people, if he had allowed them to speak to him, could have provided vital information which may have exposed a deceiver. However, those who try to warn us are often pushed away, and not listened to, on the basis that "*we don't engage in gossip*". I have myself ignored genuine warnings, without looking into them, because what was said seemed unlikely or surprising or had not been proved.

When I took that approach I made a big mistake. I should have looked into such things *every time*, though without acting upon them until they were proved. Never dismiss any allegations out of hand. Investigating an allegation is not the same as *believing gossip*. The sincere determination to avoid the sin of gossip has often led people to refuse to listen to vital information which they desperately needed to hear. We have to see the clear distinction between these things. Weighing everything, (*diakrino*) and checking whether it is true or false, *is not gossip*.

Use the technique which the police use of looking at the suspect's eyes while he's talking. At the moments when he breaks eye contact he is probably lying.

I was a police constable for three years in the mid-1980s and gained experience in interviewing suspects and witnesses and assessing whether their evidence was true or false. You can learn how to do that more effectively and there are practical methods which you can use to help you identify where the lies are in a story. One good technique, which is useful for all but the most accomplished liars, is to watch the person's eyes closely while they are speaking.

At each of the moments in their story when they are telling a lie, they tend to look down at the table or momentarily break eye contact in some way. That is true for most people, not all. In particular it doesn't apply to really hard-core liars, whose conscience has long since evaporated away. So it is a general guide, but not an absolutely reliable one. You also need to be careful to distinguish this from the way in which even innocent people may break eye contact when speaking of some trauma, such as a sexual assault, about which they feel a sense of *shame*.

Victims of such traumas, who feel violated or degraded, will also look away. But they do so due to shame, not guilt. For practised, habitual liars, lying has become so normal that it no longer makes them feel uncomfortable. Such people will look you straight in the eye and lie to your face, without blinking or flinching at all. Nevertheless, when you are dealing with an ordinary person who isn't

traumatised, and who isn't yet completely dishonest, this technique can help you to spot where the lies are in their story.

Another technique is to ask the person to tell their story repeatedly. Liars will tell it slightly differently each time.

Another technique which is slower and requires more effort is to ask the person the same questions repeatedly, preferably in slightly different ways. When interviewing him, go through the story again and again. Get him to tell it two or three times, or even more. A truthful witness will be consistent each time, but with a liar there will be little discrepancies because they can't remember all the tiny *details* of the lies they have told. You need not go through it again immediately the moment he finishes each telling of the story. A time delay can sometimes help you, as it makes it even harder for him to remember what he said before.

Also ask him additional questions about specific points of detail or draw him back to some other part of the story. That makes it more difficult for him because he has to deal with the story out of sequence. He will also struggle with the sudden changes of subject. Also ask him to tell particular parts of the story again or to clarify or expand on them. If the person is honest, and is talking about actual events or conversations which *really happened*, they will tell you the same story every time and will include the same small details.

They will also be able to expand and go into further detail, to the full extent of their knowledge. They will do all this no matter how many times you ask them to, and regardless of the sequence in which the story has to be told. Even if new or additional details are brought up by a truthful person they will be *consistent* with everything else he has said. That is because they are accessing their *real memory* which records actual events. Those kind of memories are retrievable at any time and they always come out the same way.

However, if a person is telling a false story which involves things which never really happened, or were never really said, the details will change slightly with each re-telling of the story. They can't help it unless they are a really skilled, professional confidence-trickster or spy who has done his homework and learned his cover-story meticulously. Such people make a great effort to memorise the whole story flawlessly. However, for the average person, if the things they are speaking of never really happened and are just made up, they have got to retrieve the small details from a different part of their memory.

That is the part that deals with short term recall of the things that he himself has merely *said*, rather than real events that actually *happened*. The person's own words, including the lies they tell, are much less deeply carved into their memory than real events are. Therefore they quickly fade, such that the liar finds it difficult to be absolutely consistent when they are telling the story for the second, third or fourth time. That is especially so if parts of the story are asked for individually, or out of chronological order, or where he is unexpectedly asked to zoom in and suddenly provide a lot of fine detail about one single aspect of the story.

That is because they are actually telling a new story each time and making it up as they go along, rather than retrieving actual facts from a database in the real memory, as when talking about genuine events that actually happened. Another feature of unskilled liars, as distinct from professionals, is that they can't resist adding little bits to the story each time, even where it hasn't been asked for. I call it 'embroidering' their account. They insert small and totally unnecessary details from their imagination because they think it adds authenticity to their story if they go into fine detail.

It's also because they are such habitual liars that extra lies pour out of them automatically, as they do from Hillary Clinton, even when they aren't needed. Be on the lookout for these tiny *additional* details on each re-telling of the story. Instead of thinking they don't matter, focus in on them and

remember them. Ideally, make written notes or, better still, record the interview. Then your recollection of those apparently unimportant details will be much better than theirs. Indeed, your recollection can be 100% verbatim, because you have got a full transcript on tape, or on paper, of exactly what they said.

You will then be able to compare each re-telling of the story with the previous ones. Then, instead of focusing on the obviously important issues or events, which they are better able to remember, focus on the tiniest details, which they won't be making as much effort to remember. It is in these areas that they are most likely to trip themselves up. By looking for these little discrepancies you will often find whether a person is lying and what about. When you point out the inconsistency they may then dig a deeper hole for themselves as they elaborate even further to try to explain it away.

In doing so they may create yet more contradictions with other things that they have said, but forgotten, or remembered wrongly. Of course, not everyone can interrogate people while taking notes and even recording them. Nevertheless, in a workplace investigation or disciplinary hearing, or even within a church, when dealing with complaints or allegations, you can use these methods up to a point. I would advise you to try to do so as much as you can and whenever possible as it will greatly increase your ability to identify and expose liars.

Truthful people also make errors, or have gaps in their evidence, or points on which they are hazy, but it sounds different. They openly admit that they are unsure of certain facts, or the precise sequence of events, and will just say what they do know, without pretence, bluster or embroidering. They will also freely say "*I don't know*" when they don't know, even when that harms their case, and they won't try to fill up the gaps. By contrast, when a liar tells his story slightly differently each time, he does so without realising it, while purporting to be confident of his facts, and without expressing any doubts.

Look out for momentary panic in people's eyes when particular things are said or asked. That tells you to dig deeper to find what is bothering them, or what they are hiding.

Another technique which you can use to alert you to problems is to take careful note whenever you see a sudden look of *fear or panic* in a person's eyes. This could arise when you are questioning them and you mention some sensitive issue or event. There ought not to be panic, or at least not without some reasonable cause. Therefore if you do see such a sudden look of fear, with no apparent explanation, you need to register it and remember it. Then take steps to find out what it signified. Sometimes the cause will be obvious, as where a person is given bad news.

If so their reaction is as you would expect, so there is nothing to investigate. However, that is not always the case. Sometimes there will be a sudden unexplained flash of fear or alarm when, so far as you can tell, nothing significant has been said. If that occurs the chances are something is happening that you don't yet know about, but which that person does know about, and which causes them alarm. That could be for any number of reasons, some of which may be entirely innocent. But there are times when it is not innocent.

If you take note you can gain a valuable insight as to how that person really feels about the issue, event or person, which made them feel afraid when it was mentioned. In chapter 12 below, I tell the story of 'Fergus' and 'Malcolm', who were ex-employees of mine. Malcolm had many problems and I had asked Fergus to mentor him. The point is Fergus was meant to be helping and supporting Malcolm. One day Malcolm was going through some severe difficulties and I advised him to spend more time with Fergus.

To my surprise, Malcolm's face suddenly froze with panic and it was evident that that idea alarmed him. I did not question him immediately but I took note of his reaction and asked him later how he was getting on with Fergus. Initially Malcolm acted as if all was well and said things were fine. But, because I had seen the panic in his eyes, I knew he was hiding something from me. So I kept pressing

gently for more information and tried to be reassuring. Eventually Malcolm revealed that Fergus, his supposed mentor, was actually a real problem to him.

He dreaded having to spend even more time with him than he already was. Instead of helping Malcolm, Fergus was using and exploiting him. So the real situation was the exact opposite of what I had assumed it to be. But I only came to learn of that due to the momentary look of alarm in Malcolm's eyes. If I had ignored that flash of fear, or assumed it meant nothing, or that I was mistaken, I would not have learned of Malcolm's ordeal or of Fergus' real nature. Therefore make full use of this warning sign whenever the situation arises and don't dismiss it.

I used the technique of watching closely for panic in people's eyes when I was in the police to catch a disproportionately high number of car drivers who were committing offences.

Let me give another example which shows how useful this technique can be. When I was a police constable in the 1980s I discovered a useful way to identify guilty motorists before I had even stopped their cars. I stood in uniform by a 'zebra' crossing, just around a sharp corner in the road in the town centre. I then watched the drivers' eyes as they turned the corner, for which they had to slow right down. As they drove slowly towards me I could discern which of them I ought to stop and pull over, merely by watching carefully for any panic or fear in their eyes.

They would all make eye contact with me because I was staring directly at their faces as they turned the corner and approached me. Most of them remained calm and there was no reaction of panic. But if I did see that momentary flash of fear I immediately raised my arm to stop them. Then I spoke to them, taking care to smell for any alcohol on their breath, as well as asking for their driving licence, insurance, MOT certificate and checking their car for defects. I found that this simple method worked extraordinarily well. I could let twenty or thirty cars go by, because I saw no look of fear.

But I would then get a huge number of convictions from the one in twenty or one in thirty that I did stop. In fact, I gained a reputation for catching a disproportionate number of drunk drivers. I caught more than the rest of my shift put together. That ranged from 10-15 officers, depending on the numbers on duty, so it shows the scale. Admittedly, it was partly because I simply stopped more cars than anybody else, but the main reason was the technique I used. It really does work, not only in that very specific situation, but in your general dealings with people.

Pay close attention to people's facial expressions and tone of voice, and place more reliance on those than on the literal words people say. If these don't match up, trust your impression, not their words.

God designed the human body and face, and especially the eyes, to be a means of communicating what we feel and think. They are directly 'wired up' to our thoughts and, even more so, to our emotions. This linkage operates completely unconsciously and thus only a trained actor or a skilled fraudster can override it in order to 'lie with their face'. That being so, a person's face, tone of voice and body language are a more reliable guide to what they are really thinking and feeling than the actual words they say.

People lie with their words on a regular basis. The wicked find it easy to do so. But very few know how to lie with their *faces* or their *bodies* because the signals and indicators which those convey are all transmitted automatically. People have no conscious part to play in controlling the dozens of little muscles in their face as they speak. It is rather like the blinking instinct, which God has also programmed into our 'software'. Nobody needs to decide to blink or to put out their hand when they fall. You do such things without any conscious thought.

Accordingly, when a person is speaking to you they will give conscious thought to what *words* to use, including what lies to tell. But they have little or no control over their faces, eyes, posture, hand movements or other mannerisms. So if they are feeling embarrassed, happy, angry, resentful, envious, afraid, confused, hateful etc, or even if they are in love, their faces, eyes, bodies and hands will operate automatically to convey their *real* feelings and thoughts. That signalling process continues, even when they are lying, and will contradict their words.

Tone of voice also helps us to interpret the real meaning of people's words and any underlying feelings and attitudes which they choose not to say, but which are nevertheless there. I once heard a piece on radio in which an actor spoke a short phrase in various tones of voice, each of which conveyed a radically different meaning, even though the words he said were exactly the same each time.

I am also reminded of something Churchill said. He was discussing how, unless there are special reasons, a soldier must instantly obey orders, whether he agrees with them or not. He then said that in the Grenadier Guards, with whom he served for a time, there is a tradition that all orders are to be responded to with the single word "*Sir*". However, he said that whereas the soldier has to obey, he does not necessarily have to express enthusiasm and that "*....all kinds of inflections may be given to this monosyllable*".

You will have found many times that you are picking up an impression or 'vibes' that a person is angry, anxious, reluctant etc, but when you ask them if that is how they are feeling, they immediately deny it, even emphatically. That can be bewildering if you choose to believe that person's express words rather than what you are reading on their face or picking up in their tone. Therefore do the opposite. Where there is a contradiction you should generally trust your instinct and believe your own impression, not what they say.

A person will lie to you with their words, but their face and body can't easily join in and be consistent with their words unless they have been trained as an actor or they are a professional confidence-trickster. When an ordinary person tries to pretend to be happy or friendly when they aren't really so, they will smile with their *mouth*, which they can control, but not with their *eyes*, which they can't. You may pick up this mismatch instinctively, and probably unconsciously. You will then be confused because you can sense that something doesn't fit, even if you can't quite put your finger on it.

You might even ask the person to clarify how they feel and they may repeat their words, but it still doesn't ring true. It is not only that our faces and eyes have been programmed by God to *express* our feelings. He has also given us the software to *interpret* other people's eyes, faces, tones, postures, and hand mannerisms etc. He programmed that ability into all of us in just the same way. This software for interpreting other people's faces is highly effective and works just as automatically as that which creates our own facial expressions. That is why it is more reliable than what people say.

God has done a similar thing with dogs. They 'read' other dogs by observing their postures and especially the position and movements of their tails. That is why a dog which has had its tail docked will tend to get into more fights. It is less able to communicate to other dogs that it is not being aggressive. The way God made humans is vastly more sophisticated. Yet, most people pay little or no attention to all of this as part of their overall discernment. In particular, they routinely accept what people say and ignore or override their own 'face-interpretation software'.

When we do that we are far more likely to be deceived and to misjudge people and situations. Therefore be on the lookout for any inconsistency between the express words and the instinctive impression you are picking up from their faces, tone of voice or body language. If these don't tally, you should generally trust your own impressions that you are picking up. Believe your own instinct, not what they say. At the very least, even if you don't make any final decision, let that inconsistency cause you to look into matters more closely and to make other enquiries.

No system is infallible and you can also make errors in interpreting people's faces or tones of voice. That is particularly so given that the demons will do all they can to get you to see things which aren't really there and to get the wrong end of the stick. For example, you might be correct in sensing that the person is angry, but it could be they are angry with someone else, not you. However, where such errors or misinterpretations occur, it is usually due to some other intervening factor, rather than to any deficiency in the face/tone interpretation 'software' which God has put into us.

However, even if your instincts do guide you wrongly at times, such that you pick up 'vibes' which are not really there, you will still make fewer errors by taking your instinctive impressions into account than by refusing to do so. If you rely solely on the literal, plain meaning of the actual words people say you will be a sitting duck for deceivers because you have 'switched off' one of the God-given mechanisms which is designed to help us to discern. The point is it is meant to be used *alongside* other tests. God did not intend for us to rely *solely* on this mechanism. If we do that we may well misinterpret things. But neither does He want us to switch it off entirely and to refuse to use it as *one of* the tests we take account of.

Don't allow your wish to avoid engaging in gossip to prevent you from listening to people and then evaluating, and checking, what they allege.

It is obviously right that we should avoid the sin of gossip, because the Bible clearly forbids us to gossip or to slander other people:

Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

James 4:11 (RSV)

This prohibition against gossip presents no difficulties for the wicked as they pay no attention to it anyway. Therefore it does not limit their actions, even in churches. They just carry on regardless. It is only the sincere and godly people, who earnestly want to obey God, who pay any attention to the command to avoid *engaging in* gossip. I put those words in italics because it is important to distinguish the sin of gossip from merely *hearing and evaluating* what other people say. The former is obviously sin, but the latter is not, or at least not necessarily.

There are people, and I used to be one, who are so earnest about not gossiping that they will not even allow themselves to *hear* negative or accusing things being said. They fear that even to listen to such things may be gossip. That is a mistake and will prevent you hearing things that you really need to hear. For example, a friend of mine, 'Martin', once tried to warn me about a church leader called 'Rick' who had become corrupt and carnal in a number of ways. I describe some of the things Rick did in other books in this series, especially Book 1.

The point is that, about *five years* before I discovered for myself that Rick was a liar and a manipulator, Martin had tried to warn me of those very facts. But I refused even to let him finish what he wished to say. I felt, *at that time*, that even hearing him would be gossip. I gently corrected Martin and urged him not to make any accusations against Rick, or even to criticise him. I said we should do all we can to support Rick and to protect his reputation and that the Devil would dearly love to see us tearing Rick down, when we ought to be building him up.

That was how I spoke at the time and there was actually some truth, and sense, in what I said. But I had a wrong definition of gossip and was seriously misunderstanding what God did, and did not, want us to do. Martin didn't argue with me. He just let the subject drop and it was not mentioned again between us for five years. By then I had had a number of eye-opening experiences of my own and had realised for myself that Rick was carnal and dishonest and was causing damage to God's people. For about two years I tried to tackle Rick and to urge him to repent and change.

I had every right to do all of that because I was a member of that church and also the Chairman of the Trustees. However, I got nowhere and Rick blocked me at every turn. He also told blatant lies, to me and about me, to avoid being held accountable. It was only at this stage that I rang Martin and, very belatedly, said to him “*Do you remember that time, five years ago, when you tried to warn me about ‘Rick’? Could you tell me now what it was that you were trying to tell me back then?*” He then told me about a long list of problems and wrongdoings, about which he too had tried to tackle Rick.

Like me, he got nowhere, which is why he left the church years before. I was struck by how remarkably similar his experiences were to my own. They showed that Rick was wicked, and had been so for years, without me realising it. I felt frustrated that, if only I had listened to Martin five years earlier, I could have avoided a lot of stress and conflict. Instead, for about two years, I had tried, forlornly, to tackle Rick, without realising he was wicked. I had naively treated Rick as if he simply needed help and advice whereas he actually needed to be exposed and resisted.

I had meant well and was sincere but I was mistaken. I also failed to see the difference between *engaging in gossip* and merely *listening to people*. Therefore I denied myself the chance to learn vital facts about Rick which I desperately needed. That was naïve and misguided. In refusing to hear Martin warning me about Rick I had not pleased God, except perhaps in the sincerity of my *motives*. My policy of refusing to listen to any accusation against a leader, before even knowing what it was about, was wrong and unwise. I would urge you not to make the same mistake.

Pay attention to the smallest fragments of evidence about someone’s character. Open your eyes and ask many more questions as soon as you begin to sense something may be wrong.

It is unlikely that you will ever be given any evidence about another person’s character that is totally clear, complete and unmistakable. At least you won’t get it all in one go, or all at the outset. Most of the time in real life evidence comes in small, incomplete, and even contradictory, fragments. That is regrettable but it is how it is and there is no use expecting it to be otherwise. Thus if you will only listen to people if they can give you absolute proof or comprehensive, unmistakable evidence you will never get anywhere. Most of the evidence you will ever get will be in the form of small clues and puzzling little inconsistencies.

The full picture will only emerge afterwards, when you have completed your enquiries, not while you are still doing them, and certainly not before you even begin. You can’t expect completeness, consistency and total clarity at the outset, when the first warning signs are being given to you. So it is essential that you take note of those small clues when they arise. Instead of ignoring them, just because they are confusing, inconsistent or incomplete, look diligently for other evidence to prove, or disprove, what you have heard so far. I liken it to pulling on a loose thread from a cardigan. If you see those little indicators then ‘pull on them’ by looking into the situation further.

It is surprising how much more information will then come to light. But it won’t materialise if you don’t actively look for it. Sometimes a person wants to warn you about some problem, of which they know you are unaware. That is difficult for them as they feel vulnerable and with good reason. It could cost them a lot if they go out on a limb by warning you, only to find that they are ignored, disbelieved, or even resented for doing so. Most people don’t like receiving bad news or being alerted to problems that they then have to deal with. A common response is to “shoot the messenger”.

The person raising the concern may also be left alone to deal with the reprisals from those wrongdoers, about whom he has given evidence or made allegations. It could involve bullying, victimisation or even the loss of their job if those people get to know what he has said about them. Realise therefore, if you are in a position of power, that people will not come straight out with a warning and tell you exactly what they know. They need to sound you out first, to find out what you already know about the wrongdoer and what you think of him.

They may start a conversation in which they raise a mild concern indirectly, or through little hints. It may even be done in a jocular tone, so they can back off if it isn't well received and pretend they didn't mean anything by it. It is done as a test. They need to find out whether you are open-minded or are likely to be defensive, or even resentful, about what they are trying to say. They will fear that you could even be supportive of the wrongdoer. If you immediately defend the person about whom they are warning you, they will clam up.

Then you will never get to hear the rest of their story. You will have scared them off before they really got going, while they were still dropping hints and testing your allegiances. For example I once appointed a lady called Caroline to work as a secretary at my law firm. Then suddenly, within a week, she wanted to leave. I questioned her and she began, very tentatively, to raise some concerns. But she spoke in a nervous and cryptic way, as if she was dancing around to see how I would react. She said her concern was "*about someone close to you*".

She skirted around the topic anxiously but wouldn't spell out what she was trying to say. I learned later that she was actually trying to warn me about my PA, Julie, whom I have described above. In less than a week Caroline had already seen through her and recognised her falseness. She was therefore dropping hints and hoping that I would pick them up. If I had been receptive, she would have opened up and been much more explicit. But Caroline saw that I had no idea what was going on or how sinister and manipulative Julie was.

She backed off and said no more because I immediately began to reassure her that Julie was a "very nice person". Caroline gave up because she realised I was closed-minded and unable to see what she had already seen, even in her first week. Of course her vantage point, as a junior employee, was very different from mine. In some ways she had a much clearer view. She was looking at Julie from below, as a colleague, whereas I only ever saw her from above, as a boss. From that angle Julie looked very different. Caroline saw the reality but I only saw the illusions, as Julie acted out her part.

The problem is it can be difficult to know where the boundary is and how to achieve balance. It is wrong to be unwilling to hear any criticism at all of a person, because of a reluctance to engage in gossip. On the other hand, it is also wrong to believe and act upon every allegation that people make, such that innocent people's reputations are harmed. These are the two extreme ends of the spectrum and both need to be avoided.

The right approach is to be willing to *listen and investigate* from the outset, but not to *believe or act upon* anything until you have all the facts and have *verified* them. So when people raise complaints or make accusations pay attention and show empathy. Don't ignore or dismiss anything. Also hear them out fully, *right to the very end* and take all their comments seriously. Don't say anything to 'reassure' them or to defend or excuse the person about whom they are complaining. That is premature and inappropriate at this stage.

If you do any of those things before they have *completely finished* telling their story they will conclude that you aren't really listening. Even worse, they will think you don't believe them or that you are resistant to their point. Listen sympathetically to the very end and don't form any conclusions whatsoever at this stage. Also don't make any assumptions as to what the informant's motives might be. Find that out as you go along as part of the investigatory process. There is plenty of time later on to work out whether the complainant, and their complaint, are genuine.

Wait until the conversation is over, when you have fully heard them and proved that you really were listening open-mindedly. Only then should you even begin to answer them. It is probably still best not to give any response, even at that point, because your understanding of the real position can change dramatically during an investigation. In particular, don't say anything to defend the person being complained about. If you do it implies that you are prejudiced in their favour and even that you have a closed mind. If you give that impression it puts a witness off saying any more.

Remember they are already nervous and therefore likely to misunderstand and over-react to the things you say. Also saying such things can actually *create* a closed mind in you, even if you hadn't got one before. As you hear yourself defending the person you may start to be persuaded by your own words. Then you will begin, unconsciously, to form conclusions prematurely, even before the enquiry has begun. If so your mind will tend to close automatically without you knowing that it has. Then you will not investigate matters with the requisite vigour or thoroughness.

It also increases the chances of you misconstruing the evidence. You will look at the case through the lens of your own words, by which you have already declared the person innocent, even before you investigated the complaint. You must also realise that people are so wary they will feed you information *in stages*, to see what you do with the first batch before telling you any more. So don't be quick to assume they have finished telling their story, *even if they say they have finished*. The chances are they are still holding back additional information, and perhaps the most crucial facts, until they are absolutely convinced that you can be trusted.

If the Caroline episode happened today, I would immediately reassure her that anything she said would be kept confidential and used as the basis to start a discreet investigation, in which she would not be named or exposed. At that time I was too insensitive, and naïve, to realise what was going on, or to pick up what Caroline was hinting at. My mistake was I expected her to come out into the open immediately and clearly say what she wanted to say. That might be a reasonable expectation when dealing with strong, confident, senior people, though probably not even then.

However, it certainly isn't realistic when one is dealing with weak, timid, junior staff, which is what most victims are. I therefore missed a helpful early warning about Julie which would have saved me, and my staff, a lot of grief. About a year later I found out for myself what Caroline had been concerned about and what she had been trying to say to me. However, I could have found out back then if only I had been alert enough, and sensitive enough, to have "*pulled on the woollen thread*" that Caroline was offering me and found out what emerged from it.

How to tell when a woman is genuinely crying or is just faking it, in order to manipulate you or to get you to back off when tackling her, or conducting an investigation

This next point may sound like an odd piece of advice, but it can be very useful, and it arises quite often. You might be in a situation where you have got to interview a woman about her misconduct or incompetence. Or she could be making an allegation or complaint about someone else. Either way, you may have to question her, and perhaps even cross-examine her, either at church or at work. While you are dealing with her you may find the woman will begin to cry. If so you have to work out whether her sobbing is genuine or phoney.

If your assumption is that all such crying is obviously genuine, then think again. Fake sobbing is routinely used by deceitful women as a manipulative device. They may want to get you to stop a particular line of questioning as you are getting too close to the truth and they are finding it hard to think of convincing answers. Starting to cry at such a key moment may cause you to stop the questioning altogether, or at least to adjourn for a while. If so, they hope you will get distracted and forget what the unanswered question was, when the interview eventually resumes.

Or they may just want to manipulate you into feeling sorry for them so that you go easy on them and believe what they say. Or they hope you might abandon the investigation or let them off or give them some minor sanction such as a warning. Sometimes the reason they want you to adjourn the meeting is to gain more time to think of invented answers, tamper with documents, hide evidence or delete emails before the meeting resumes. They may also try to intimidate the witnesses to get them to amend or withdraw their evidence prior to the next meeting/hearing.

It could also be that they want you to adjourn for procedural or tactical purposes to get past some qualifying date at which they then have enough length of employment to go to a Tribunal. Or it could be to cause some previous verbal or written warning to become older than say 6 or 12 months and thus to 'expire', so it no longer counts against them. You might be blind to such tricks, but they aren't. Also if they can get you to adjourn a meeting, they may then pretend to be sick. Then, even more time can be lost, during which they might be entitled to sick pay. This could be spun out for weeks or even months.

When I was dealing with 'Chloe' I suspended her from her job as a supervisor and began an investigatory process into her conduct. While I was interviewing her and asking some searching questions she played this very trick. She pretended to cry and got me to adjourn. Then she went off sick, saying she was suffering from "stress" and unable to come back to resume the investigatory meeting. This gap in the proceedings went on for exactly two months, during which she was on full pay.

Then on the very day when her contractual entitlement to sick pay ran out, and she was no longer going to receive any wages, she suddenly returned to work! Her stress-related illness had evidently gone away at the exact moment when the sick pay ended. We resumed the investigation and went into a disciplinary hearing and I dismissed her for gross misconduct. However, her devious manoeuvres got her three months of extra pay before she was eventually sacked. She was fully expecting dismissal because she had been made aware of how much evidence I'd got.

Indeed, that was the very reason why she resorted to those tactics. She knew it would have been futile to stand and fight. She knew I was going to win because I had told her how much I'd already found out about her conduct and what the other staff had revealed. So, moving back to the original point, sometimes (not always) a woman's crying is fake and is being contrived to deceive you. Therefore, if a woman does start crying, let me now give you a test, to see whether it is genuine. You will need to do the very opposite of what the woman (if she's false) is trying to get you to do.

Instead of stopping, even for a few seconds, force yourself to continue your line of questioning, *without any break*. It will go against all your instincts and upbringing, because you'll feel it's not gentlemanly to ignore a woman's tears. Even so, make yourself do it. Ask her another difficult question and do it in a calm, dispassionate tone of voice, as if you hadn't even noticed she is sobbing. At this point, the crying woman will probably do one of two very different things.

She might continue crying uncontrollably, being unable to stop, despite the provocation of your continued questioning and your failure to pay any attention to her tears. If she does this the chances are she is genuinely crying and is not faking it. Alternatively, she might suddenly stop crying and become hostile, or even abusive. If she does this you can be quite sure her tears were phoney from the outset. No woman who is genuinely upset is capable of bringing her crying to an immediate stop and displaying some other emotion instead, such as anger.

They simply can't do an 'emergency stop'. They are even less capable of suddenly becoming calm so as to answer your questions, or put their own questions to you, in a resentful tone. In addition to this, take a close look at the woman's *face*. Check to see whether any *actual tears*, in the literal liquid sense, are being produced by her eyes. If they are, that is an indicator that the crying is likely to be real. However, if her face is dry, and her eyes are not producing any actual tears, you can be even more certain she is a fake.

I first learned this lesson about how to test whether crying is real when I was in an investigatory hearing with 'Charlotte'. She wanted to become a solicitor (lawyer) and was doing a fully paid trial year with us first, as a legal clerk, to see how she performed. She was actually a Christian, or claimed to be, but I doubt whether she truly was saved because she was so thoroughly dishonest. Indeed it was because of her devious ways, her neglect of files, and the lies she'd told to cover it all up, that she was being investigated in the first place.

So I was not well-disposed towards her anyway and already considered her an unreliable and dishonest witness. I was part way through an interview in which I had been putting a series of probing questions to her about her neglect of various files. She was giving really feeble answers, which were plainly lies. At this point, when she could see it wasn't going well, and that I wasn't believing her lies, she tried the crying trick. She suddenly started crying, from nowhere. Even the way in which she did it was odd.

It came while she was pausing, trying to think of yet another phoney answer. All of a sudden, away she went, sobbing and sobbing. Perhaps God prompted me, or maybe I just saw through her, but I decided to continue my questioning *as if nothing had happened* and as if she wasn't crying. When I did she instantly stopped crying, like a car going from 70 miles per hour to a complete halt in less than a yard. She also looked at me with an expression of surprise and then anger and resentment in her eyes. But the point is the crying had completely gone, all of a sudden.

Moreover, in a single second she was able to speak normally again and with a defiant tone and her face was quite dry. The 'tears' were only metaphorical, not literal liquid ones. That episode with Charlotte taught me a valuable lesson, which I have since used to good effect. The key point is that a woman who is genuinely crying *can't stop instantly* like a car doing an emergency stop on a dry road. Women aren't wired up that way. They are more like a car driving at 70 mph on a wet road and have an extremely long 'stopping-distance'.

Therefore, in a work context, or a church, and whether you're dealing with the accused or a witness, allow yourself to use this little test. It will help to improve your discernment and to identify deceivers and manipulators. By the way, you must also realise that if the woman is willing to deceive you in this way by pretending to cry, then she will already have been deceiving you *in other ways too* and for a long time. Therefore it is more significant than it may appear to be, just in itself.

It is wrong to be sceptical about the Bible, but it is right to be sceptical about everything, and everyone, else until the facts are fully known.

In Book 3 we looked at the danger of having a sceptical attitude when dealing with the Bible. However, in virtually every other context in life, healthy scepticism, and seeking clear evidence before taking any action, is essential. So being dubious about the Bible, creation, the supernatural, demons, healing etc. is the sin of unbelief, because we are dealing with God's Word.

That comes from God Himself, and we are commanded to believe Him and the Bible. By contrast, we are *not* commanded to believe *other people* or the things they allege or teach. Indeed, far from being under any duty to believe people, we are positively told *not to believe them* until what they say is verified by hard evidence, preferably from a number of other witnesses:

If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses; but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness:

Numbers 35:30 (RSV)

Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

1 Timothy 5:19 (RSV)

This is the third time I am coming to you. Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

2 Corinthians 13:1 (RSV)

The wicked will often appear to be sweetness and light, whereas honest people can seem to be prickly and difficult to handle.

If we are to learn to recognise wicked people we must realise that they will not usually *appear* to be wicked, at least to begin with. On the contrary, to the untrained eye, the wicked will often appear to be sweetness and light, until you learn otherwise. Indeed, in my experience, the wicked have seemed nicer at the outset than those whom I later discovered to be faithful and trustworthy. That is partly because the genuine people were not putting on any act, whereas the wicked were. Accordingly, you must *positively expect* there to be phoney people in your life who are not what they seem to be.

Don't view that possibility as a remote contingency, but as something that is to be fully expected. So, if you work with 50 people, don't ask yourself *whether* any of them might be phoney. The right question would be *which of them* are phoney? Also *positively expect* to be lied to and for it to happen regularly. Reconcile yourself to the fact that it is your duty to identify those lies and the liars who tell them. Your expectations are crucial, as they will either open your mind and assist you in your enquiries, or close your mind and make it harder to see what is going on.

CHAPTER 10

DEALING WITH DECEPTION AND DECEIVERS - PART TWO

*Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they breathe out violence.*

Psalm 27:12 (ESV)

¹² *For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips,
let them be trapped in their pride.*

For the cursing and lies which they utter,

¹³ *consume them in wrath,*

consume them till they are no more,

*that men may know that God rules over Jacob
to the ends of the earth.*

Psalm 59:12-13 (RSV)

¹⁸ *But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"*

Matthew 22:18 (ESV)

Seek God's help to discern when you are being lied to.

Praying for help and guidance may sound like an obvious thing to do. However have you ever actually *asked* God to help you to know whether you are being lied to and if so *where, how and by whom?* Most of us never make any such prayers. I never did so myself before the last 10 years or so. I never knew that I needed to pray in that way, but I have since realised it is essential. Why not try it? You may be surprised by the results. Ask God to open your eyes, to expose any lies of which you are currently unaware, and to prevent you from being deceived by any other liars:

¹ *In my distress I cry to the LORD,
that he may answer me:*

² *"Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue."*

Psalm 120:1-2 (RSV)

Here is an example of how God has exposed a liar to me as the direct answer to my prayer. I was baffled some years ago because a number of things just didn't add up at the office and I was confused by it. I sensed that somebody somewhere was deceiving me and being disloyal. But I had no idea who, or how. Then one day I prayed about it, in desperation, and said "*Lord, what is the source of all this? Is somebody somewhere deceiving me? If so, who? Please enable me to see what is really going on.*" To my amazement, God answered me immediately. I heard, in my head, an almost audible voice saying a person's name.

It was the name of a senior employee. I would never have dreamed that that person could be deceiving me. It would have seemed unthinkable. Therefore I had never even considered it as a possibility and I had never asked myself whether they were trustworthy. The very fact that it was so *unthinkable* meant that I had never thought about it at all, let alone prayed for guidance. At first I was reluctant to believe that what I had just heard could even be true, let alone a warning from God. But I then began to check it all out extremely carefully.

As I did so I discovered many irregularities about that person and instances where I had been deceived, manipulated and used by them. When I later confronted the person they immediately asked

if they could just resign rather than be interviewed! That panic reaction, in itself, spoke volumes. They knew the game was up and that I had opened my eyes at long last. After they had gone, more examples of their disloyalty emerged. They obviously knew it would all come out once I started looking into things carefully.

The moral of the story is to make it your regular practice to ask God to *reveal* any deception or treachery to you. Consider that to be a perfectly proper and necessary thing to pray for. Although all of that ought to be completely obvious, the fact is very few of us ever make such a prayer at all, let alone regularly. It is not the done-thing, but it ought to be as it is not wise to rely solely on yourself, or on your own investigations, however thorough those may be. There are bound to be some things that you just can't see for yourself, even if you are looking, which most of us aren't.

If you can't learn to detect lies you will end up surrounded by liars, but without knowing it. If so, evil will be done in your name by people whom you misguidedly trust.

Most of us are not in senior positions in businesses or churches. But many of us do have some junior or intermediate managerial responsibilities. We may have to look after some project, task or group and manage some other people, however small or few they may be. If we don't learn to identify and tackle liars we will end up surrounded by them, whether we realise it or not. Also the more unaware we are, the more we will believe their lies. The proportion of liars in our lives will increase because we aren't weeding them out and because they will come looking for us, wanting to work for us:

*If a ruler listens to falsehood,
all his officials will be wicked.
Proverbs 29:12 (RSV)*

You might feel squeamish about being on your guard against deceivers or that it is 'judgmental' to think of people in such ways. However, you actually owe it to the other people who work under you, or alongside you, or to the people in your church, not to be naïve. Otherwise you will make it easy for manipulators and bullies to take over that organisation and to harm them, not just you.

Don't be put off when people emphatically deny things, even when their denials sound very convincing. It is entirely normal for them to do so and it doesn't mean you've got it wrong.

It can cause you to doubt yourself, and your evidence, when people emphatically deny what is being alleged. They can look you straight in the eye, or even become tearful, and plead with you to believe that they are innocent. Of course, they could be, but the mere fact that they *say* so is no reason for thinking that they are. If you are a sincere person yourself it is hard to imagine how someone could be so emphatic in their denial if they were actually guilty. Thus you have to try to come to terms with the fact that bare-faced denial is entirely normal, even when the person is guilty.

Therefore expect denials and never be diverted from your purpose *merely* because the person is denying what you put to them. You can bear their denial in mind as a relevant factor. But you can't do any more than that until you investigate matters to find out whether it is credible. It cannot be treated as such merely because they say so. The person's credibility is the very thing you are seeking to gauge, so to take their word for it is to put the cart before the horse. You can't form any conclusion based solely on their denial.

It needs to be based on an assessment of the overall evidence, which will include all other factors, such as witnesses, circumstantial evidence and the presence, or absence, of inconsistencies. However, the denial, in itself, tells you nothing conclusive. It just means you need to look into the wider facts more thoroughly in order to be able to form a view. Therefore when a person denies something, however impassioned or tearful they may be, do not be bewildered by it.

Do not let it deter you from investigating further. Above all do not let it cause you to doubt yourself, or to ignore the things which you have seen or heard so far, or that you have deduced from documents or from other people's evidence. Continue to weigh everything, calmly and thoroughly, without ever allowing yourself to be deflected from your purpose or to consider your own enquiries to be inappropriate.

The mere fact that somebody has apologised does not mean you can't take their misconduct into account when assessing their character or deciding how to deal with them.

In the right circumstances, and if they are sincere, then apologies are obviously good. However, they can also be used to throw you off course, confuse you and cause you to lower your guard. People should of course apologise for wrong things they have done. But the mere fact that they have done so does not mean you cannot then take that event into account. You must still bear it in mind when assessing their credibility or their suitability to do a particular task or to have a particular role. I am reminded of 'Philip and Sonia', of whom I speak in other chapters.

I was once in a situation where we needed to decide whether or not they could be trusted. We drew up a long list of things they had said and done which we felt were wrong or unacceptable. We drafted this list together with two other highly trusted couples. Later we met with Philip and Sonia and told them of our concerns and said we were leaving to start a new church, partly due to our misgivings about them. We went through some of our concerns about their misconduct and at one point Sonia said "*But we've apologised for that.*"

In her mind, the fact that she had apologised meant we were not entitled to place any reliance upon those incidents when deciding what to make of her and Philip. She felt we were obliged to forget all about those events and not take them into account when forming a view of their credibility or trustworthiness. It is true that when sins are repented of and forgiven God removes them from us as far as the East is from the West. However, that does not mean that *we* must disregard those incidents or actions *when forming a judgment (diakrino) of that person.*

Discerning the real nature of a person's character and the extent to which they can be trusted has nothing to do with whether or not they have apologised to you. Their apology changes nothing in that regard. Neither does your assessment of the person have anything to do with whether God has forgiven them, or even whether you have. Those are entirely unrelated concepts and have no bearing on the evidential value of the events in question or on your decisions as to *what to do* about the person, or their conduct.

Beware of people who do or say showy, pretentious things, even when they seem to be good things. Public apologies or displays of repentance may not be real.

Be very wary of a person whose apologies are showy or pretentious. Manipulators know that apologies can be disarming and an effective device in getting other people to lower their guard. It can imply that the one making the apology must be a sincere, godly person who can be trusted. That tactic was repeatedly used by Philip and Sonia. We saw, over a period of time, that they both had a tendency to make regular public apologies and in the most noticeable way possible. Of course, making public apologies, in itself, is not wrong, if it is done sincerely and on a one off basis.

However, if it *keeps on* happening and if the things being apologised for seem to be *trivial, irrelevant, or even invented*, then you should be alarmed. Such pretentiousness is sinister and should put you even more on your guard. I noticed this happening repeatedly with Philip and Sonia and concluded that it was a mixture of exhibitionism and an attempt to convey a false impression of being spiritual. However, genuinely mature and spiritual people don't try to convey any image or impression. They are just themselves, without needing to make any effort.

Anybody who is trying to project any kind of image or to look as if they are something, or have certain characteristics, is phoney. Genuine people don't do that. It is also a reliable general rule that where you see any kind of pretentiousness or exhibitionism you will probably also find wickedness of other kinds. A showy person will never only possess that one fault. They will also be false and untrustworthy in other ways too. So wherever you see such behaviour take note and be on the lookout for other forms of wickedness within the same person.

Beware of people who are 'sugary sweet'. If it feels excessive then it is probably an act. If so, that is a sign of something sinister.

Beware of anyone who is 'sugary sweet'. All the people I have ever known who were sickly sweet have turned out to be false. Of course, telling the difference between being merely sweet and *sickly* sweet, requires discernment. However, as a rule of thumb, if a person's 'sweetness' seems excessive, or too frequent, then it is probably an act. If so then, like all people who put on any kind of act, it tells you they are false. Nobody puts on an act, of any kind, unless they want you to believe something false, or to prevent you seeing something true.

By presenting a false image, or hiding their real one, they are already being dishonest. That alone should trouble you. However, a person's dishonesty is never limited to one single issue or to only one part of their lives. Therefore they will be false and untrustworthy across the board, not only in this particular area. A prime example of this was Sonia. She was the most sugary-sweet person in that church. On the face of it, some of the things she did seemed good. She would always make a bee line for any visitor and welcome them. In itself, that is a good thing.

However, the point is she was 'over the top'. Sometimes you can only see that later, as you look back and re-examine events, after some other issue causes you to wonder about the person. In Sonia's case, other such issues did arise and, as I re-assessed her, it seemed that she fell into this category of being sickly-sweet. Her aim was not just to welcome people and be hospitable. She went far beyond that, in both intensity and frequency. She was always trying to ingratiate herself with people and to win them over in ways which went way beyond what any other church member did.

The others were also welcoming and friendly, but when they spoke to visitors, or invited church members to their homes, they weren't trying too hard. They were natural, whereas Sonia was unnatural. They were real, but she was unreal. The question is how do we tell the difference between a person who is *genuinely* sweet and someone who is *sickly* sweet and therefore false? It's not easy, but there are a number of things we can bear in mind to help us measure and assess people. The first is that a person whose sweetness is false will be over the top.

This is not easy to see immediately but if you watch them closely, over time, they will go too far. It is like in amateur dramatics where unskilled actors try to play a role, but over-do it. For example where someone is playing the part of a police inspector they are usually a bit too 'inspectorish' and more like an inspector than real ones are. I have worked with many police inspectors and none of them were as 'inspector-like' as some of the ones I have seen on stage. An amateur actor tends to over-do it and can become a caricature when trying to create the impression they are seeking to convey.

A real police inspector is more relaxed and ordinary, uses fewer 'inspector-like' expressions and behaves normally, without any caricatured features. The people who are pretending to be sweet, or pretending to be any other thing, are performing a role, as in amateur dramatics. Unless they are really skilled fraudsters they too will over-do it, or over-act, in order to convey the intended impression. If you are alert you will notice when they go too far or over-do it, thereby giving themselves away.

They also give themselves away in that they cannot manage to be consistent. People who are genuinely sweet-natured will be like that all the time, whoever they are with, because it is what they

really are. They don't need to remember to keep up the act because they aren't acting. A person who is only pretending will give themselves away when they don't get their own way or where you challenge or question them. They will then 'bare their teeth' at you, if only for a moment. You need to be alert to notice such flashes of temper.

In particular you will spot the people who are only pretending to be sweet when you *cross them*. Then they will show their true colours. Some weeks before we left that church, there was a minor incident involving Sonia. We were clearing away chairs after a meeting and I came across a chair with a coat and a Bible on it. So I took the coat, placed it on the carpet with the Bible on top of it, and then stacked the chair away. As I did so Sonia rushed over and picked up her coat and Bible. There was a flash of extreme anger on her face, especially in her eyes. It was brief, but unmistakable.

I could understand why a person might be mildly annoyed at this situation. But I couldn't see why anyone would be *that angry*. It seemed way over the top. The flash of anger was significant because it was so different from the *image* which Sonia ordinarily projected. There was a contradiction. Either the anger or the sugary sweetness, reflected the real Sonia, because she couldn't be both. Given that the flash of anger was *instantaneous*, and burst out of her before she had any time to think, I took the view that the temper was real and the sweetness was false.

People often say, when things happen unexpectedly and they lose their temper, that they are acting "*out of character*" and it is "*not how they really are*". I don't agree. Whatever bursts out of a person, when they have no time to plan or compose themselves, or put on an act, *is* their real nature. I therefore began to wonder *why* Sonia would feel such animosity towards me and also why she would, ordinarily, choose to hide it. I also felt that it was a very significant incident, despite its apparent trivialness and the fact that it was so brief.

It seemed to me that Sonia had actually, for once, acted *in character*. She had confirmed what she was really like when she wasn't putting on an act. If a person really was sweet-natured, they would respond graciously and gently when you get in their way, tread on their toes, or fail to do what they want. However, if someone who is ordinarily sickly-sweet suddenly gives you a flash of anger in their eyes, or in their tone of voice, then something is wrong, or rather something is false.

You cannot afford to overlook or excuse such flashes of temper or rage or to explain them away. Even in itself such an outburst is a cause for concern, but where it occurs in the case of a person who is ordinarily sickly-sweet, it is even more significant. It shows they not only have a temper problem, but that they are also keeping up a pretence as well. We found that on a few other occasions with Sonia. She was gushing with sweetness most of the time, but if you ever crossed her, you would soon discover a very different side to her.

There is a time and a place to "name names" and to publicly identify deceivers and wrongdoers. Apostle Paul did so on many occasions.

One difficult issue is whether to speak openly about a person's wrongdoing or false teaching and, in particular, whether to *name* them. Many assume that can never be right, as it would be 'judgemental'. Others think it is not wrong in principle, but is just too risky, in case you accuse someone falsely. Clearly, we must be very careful when criticising someone publicly, especially if they are a leader. It should only be done after a meticulous checking of the facts. Nevertheless, public criticism is not inherently wrong. There are times when people simply must be named, as where Paul warned Timothy about Hymenaeus and Philetus:

¹⁶ Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenae'us and Phile'tus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some.
2 Timothy 2:16-18 (RSV)

Hymenaeus and Philetus had “*swerved from the truth.*” and were teaching false doctrine by saying that the resurrection (of Christians) had already happened, i.e. that the ‘rapture’ had already taken place and was not a future event. Paul was very concerned about this and warned Timothy in plain terms. Later in the same letter Paul also warns Timothy about Demas, who had deserted him, and also Alexander the Coppersmith, who had done him great harm and opposed his message:

⁹Do your best to come to me soon.¹⁰For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.¹¹Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you; for he is very useful in serving me.¹²Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.¹³When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.¹⁴Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will requite him for his deeds.¹⁵Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

2 Timothy 4:9-15 (RSV)

One could argue that Paul was only speaking *privately* to Timothy himself, not to the wider church. That would be a fair point, except that the letters Paul wrote were all shared with the whole church, and with other churches too. Multiple copies were circulated, which is why we have so many today. There are also other letters where Paul is speaking to a much wider audience. Yet he still names names, as in Galatians, where Paul tells all the people in Galatia that he had opposed Peter. He says, quite openly, that Peter had behaved wrongly in failing to stand up to the ‘circumcision party’. He also publicly criticises Barnabas for the same reasons:

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.¹²For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.¹³And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity.¹⁴But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Galatians 2:11-14 (RSV)

In other letters, and also in the book of Acts, there are instances where Paul publicly criticised, rebuked or contradicted people, or where he warned churches about individuals or groups. A classic example would be the way Paul confronted Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas. He was a Jewish false prophet who was causing trouble in Cyprus by resisting Paul. He was also involved in the occult. Note how boldly, and publicly, Paul confronted him:

⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus.⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.⁶When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus.⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.⁸But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith.⁹But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him¹⁰ and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.¹²Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Acts 13:4-12 (RSV)

Paul not only opposed and exposed Elymas. He was also used by God to strike him blind, albeit temporarily, and to stop him in his tracks. Another example is the way Paul publicly confronted and rebuked Ananias, the High priest when he was on trial before the Sanhedrin:

³⁰ *But on the morrow, desiring to know the real reason why the Jews accused him, he unbound him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. ¹And Paul, looking intently at the council, said, “Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day.” ² And the high priest Anani'as commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, “God shall strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” ⁴ Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” ⁵ And Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”*

Acts 22:30-23:5 (RSV)

It is widely assumed that Paul was confused, and did not know who Ananias was. But that is absurd. Ananias was the High Priest. He held the highest office in Israel and the meeting was taking place within the Sanhedrin itself, in front of all the other members of the Council. Not knowing who he was would be like not recognising the Archbishop of Canterbury as he chairs a meeting of all the Anglican bishops inside Canterbury Cathedral. Whether or not Ananias was wearing his full robes, anyone would still know who and what he was from the setting alone.

Paul would already know who the High Priest was anyway. He had risen very high within the party of the Pharisees and must have personally known most of those men, even from his schooldays in Jerusalem, where he was educated. Many would previously have been his friends. Paul’s words may sound odd, but the explanation is quite simple. When Paul said “*I did not know, brethren, that he was the High Priest,*” he was being ironic, or even sarcastic. That would have been plain to those present and to most first century Jewish believers.

Paul’s point was that Ananias wasn’t the *legitimate* High Priest, because he had usurped the office unlawfully. Therefore Paul was not only rebuking Ananias for having him struck, contrary to the law. He was also publicly drawing attention to the fact that Ananias was a usurper and not really the High Priest at all. Ananias’ illegitimacy was an ‘elephant in the room’, which they would all have known about, but were too afraid to speak of. The point is that Paul was not afraid, or unwilling, to publicly criticise anyone who needed to be publicly criticised - even the High Priest.

The prophet Jeremiah also named names, such as when he publicly identified Shemaiah as a false prophet and rebuked him.

Chapters 28 and 29 of Jeremiah contain some very direct statements by Jeremiah about a number of false prophets whom he publicly contradicts and calls false prophets. He does this to them personally, but it was also in the presence of others. Jeremiah does not leave it to the people to work out for themselves who he might be referring to. He makes it unmistakably clear. To begin with, he publicly disagrees with the prophet Hananiah. He had been telling the King, and the people, that they would have victory over the invader, Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah spells out that those prophecies are false and we are told, in chapter 28 verse 5, that he does this in the Temple, “*in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord*”. So, Jeremiah confronts them in the most public way possible. Later he also goes to see the prophet Hananiah and tells him, to his face, that God has not sent him and that his prophecy is false:

¹⁵ *And Jeremiah the prophet said to the prophet Hananiah, “Listen, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. ¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord.’ ¹⁷ In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died.*

Jeremiah 28:15-17 (ESV)

Admittedly, this second confrontation with Hananiah may possibly have been in private. We are not told whether anybody else was present on that occasion. However, even if it was in private, the point is Jeremiah was utterly frank with him, in a way which most church leaders today would not be willing to be, even in private, no matter how serious the issues were. In chapter 29 we see Jeremiah in action again. He begins by sending a letter in a very public manner. We are even told of the many and varied people to whom it was sent:

These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Jeremiah 29:1 (ESV)

In that letter Jeremiah is again unmistakably clear and frank about the falseness of the prophecies being given by Hananiah, Shemaiah, and others. He goes so far as to say:

⁸ For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹ for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:8-9 (ESV)

Later Jeremiah hears a letter read out which Shemaiah had sent to the King, in which further false prophecies are made. He responds to that very directly and says God will punish Shemaiah:

²⁹ Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. ³⁰ Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ³¹ “Send to all the exiles, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord concerning Shemaiah of Nehelam: Because Shemaiah had prophesied to you when I did not send him, and has made you trust in a lie, ³² therefore thus says the Lord: Behold, I will punish Shemaiah of Nehelam and his descendants. He shall not have anyone living among this people, and he shall not see the good that I will do to my people, declares the Lord, for he has spoken rebellion against the Lord.’”

Jeremiah 29:29-32 (ESV)

Although these men were false prophets, they were still prophets. They are referred to as “prophets” in chapter 28 verse 5, which refers to “...Hananiah the prophet...” The point is they really had been called to the office of prophet, and had perhaps given genuine prophecies in the past. But they were now giving false prophecies. Accordingly we must not pick up the impression that it is alright to publicly rebuke people who never were genuine prophets or teachers, but not men who really are, or at least used to be, leaders, teachers, prophets etc.

That would be a big mistake. The need to publicly contradict false prophecies and false teachings always applies, whether or not the person is a leader, prophet, teacher etc. Indeed, most false prophets and false teachers are leaders. Many have been ‘ordained’, because they are to be found in vast numbers within the denominational churches. So, when we speak of a ‘false prophet’ we really mean “a person giving a false prophecy”, usually on a regular basis. They may, or may not, be in an official leadership position.

Apostle John also ‘named names’ and publicly criticised, rebuked or warned about individuals. So did Jesus, when He rebuked various Pharisees in front of the crowds.

John’s third letter warns of a man called ‘Diotrephes’, whom John felt had behaved badly. He also says that when he next visits he will “bring up” these matters. Presumably he means he will do so publicly with the whole church, because, in the first century, all serious matters were decided by each local church *as a whole*, not just by a leader or group of leaders. Besides that, the letter was sent to the church as a whole, not just to the leaders:

⁹ *I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.*

3 John 1:9-10 (ESV)

Also, in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation, which are dictated by Jesus Himself, some very blunt things are said. Individuals' names are not given, except in the letter to Thyatira, but whole local churches are criticised, sometimes very severely. See chapters 2-3 of Revelation for the full details of what Jesus says, publicly, about each of them. There are also several instances in the gospels in which Jesus publicly rebuked or criticised Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the Law, often in front of large crowds. His disciples were present, right alongside, but there was also the wider public milling around.

The audiences must often have been very large. Yet Jesus spoke openly in front of them and rebuked, corrected and warned people and groups wherever necessary. He did not hold back. The classic example was when He rebuked the money-changers in the Temple, turning over their tables and driving them out. Rebuke doesn't get much more public than that. Consider also the occasion in Matthew 15 when Jesus was approached by Pharisees and Scribes who objected to what He was doing. Jesus contradicted them publicly, in front of the crowd, and even called them "hypocrites".

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." ³ He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' ⁵ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," ⁶ he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. ⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

⁸ *"This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁹ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

Matthew 15:1-9 (ESV)

Later Jesus spoke to a large crowd in Matthew 23. He criticised the Scribes and Pharisees as a group and warned the people not to imitate them:

¹*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, ³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.*

Matthew 23:1-7 (ESV)

Shortly after that Jesus speaks directly to the Scribes and Pharisees in front of the large crowd and criticises them very severely, with no concession made for the fact that it was all being said in public:

¹³ *"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. ¹⁴ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.*

¹⁵ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*

¹⁶ *“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’¹⁷ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?¹⁸ And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’¹⁹ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?²⁰ Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it.²¹ He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it.²² And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.*

²³ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.²⁴ Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!*

²⁵ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.²⁶ Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*

²⁹ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous,³⁰ and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’*

³¹ *“Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt.³³ Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*

Matthew 23:13-33 (NKJV)

General guidance and instruction that the Bible gives about watching out for, avoiding and confronting those who behave badly or are false teachers

Let’s move away from the theme of specific warnings about named individuals. We shall now look at more general instruction about watching out for, avoiding, and even confronting, those who do wrong or teach false doctrine. There are many verses which address these points and urge us to be vigilant and bold in tackling those concerned. For example, see what apostle John says:

¹⁸ *Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour.¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us. .*

1 John 2:18-19 (RSV)

²⁶ *I write this to you about those who would deceive you;*
1 John 2:26 (RSV)

⁷ *Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as he is righteous.*
1 John 3:7 (RSV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.
1 John 4:1 (RSV)

⁹ Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

2 John 1:9-11 (RSV)

Apostle John repeatedly warns us about false prophets, deceivers and antichrists and tells us to watch out for them. He would hardly tell us to identify them if he did not also want us to point them out to others when we do recognise them. He describes them in the general, but they materialise in the particular, as individuals. So it is as individuals that they have to be identified. John would hardly want us to identify such a deceiver for ourselves, so that we can avoid his teaching, but then tell nobody else about them.

If we did, we would be denying those around us the benefit of our discernment and leaving them to the mercy of men whom we know to be wolves and deceivers. Many of us are called to be elders and pastors. If so, one of our primary duties is to guard the flock. To do that one of the most important tasks is to *warn those we care for*. The point of the Bible using the metaphor of sheep and shepherds is that people are *vulnerable* because most of them can't discern for themselves. Therefore, quite often, it needs to be done for them, by a faithful shepherd, or it won't be done at all.

So if we unwilling to identify such wolves how could the flock ever be warned in any meaningful, effective way? It is no use faithful leaders giving generic warnings about broad categories or types of deceivers, because the reality is that most people can't tell the difference between true and false teachers or prophets. Therefore, unless the names of those men are identified for them, by faithful leaders, most Christians would be none the wiser. They would not know which specific leaders or teachers come within the general category they are being warned against.

It would be like telling people to avoid negligent doctors or unqualified electricians but without saying *who* those are. Apostle Paul also warns us in general terms about wicked people within churches and also false teachers. He urges us to watch out for them and to confront them. It is implicit within these warnings, as with the warnings from John, that in tackling such people there has to be at least some degree of public discussion and naming of the people concerned. Otherwise, how could they even be identified, let alone avoided or expelled?

Therefore, it is right and necessary to publicly name false teachers and wolves such as Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Rick Warren, Creflo Dollar, the Popes, and many others.

It causes consternation when genuine Christians openly name false teachers and abusive leaders. Many assume it is inherently wrong to do so because it is 'divisive' and 'judgemental' and that we should all stay silent. That is plainly misguided. We have no realistic alternative but to name these people if naïve undiscerning Christians are to be forewarned and put on their guard. So the Church needs to be warned about people like Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Rick Warren and Creflo Dollar. They are all false teachers and wolves, each in their own way.

Likewise, we need to say openly that the Popes are all false teachers who pervert genuine Christianity. They undermine the Bible, present a false gospel, control and exploit people and promote their own man-made ideas and traditions. It is no use just hinting at these things indirectly or speaking in merely general terms. The people in the churches won't understand us. We have a solemn duty to warn others, but such warnings are of little use if they aren't explicit and don't clearly identify those to whom we are referring.

However, ‘naming names’ must be done with great care. Only do it you are very sure of your facts and have checked them thoroughly.

There is a time and a place to judge (*diakrino*) other men’s teaching and character and to “name names” and identify individual leaders, teachers and churches. However, we need to be extremely careful in doing so. If we do not check all the facts thoroughly, for ourselves, we would be likely to end up making false accusations against good people. The demons would notice your willingness to publicly identify false teachers. Then, all the demons need to do is to trick you by feeding you false information to pass on. If so, you will cause great damage to a leader who is not actually false at all.

Some make the mistake of never being willing to identify any false teacher publicly. Others make the equal and opposite mistake of being too willing to speak out and they do so too quickly, without carefully checking all the facts first. We need to avoid both of those errors. You should therefore always check everything thoroughly before acting on, or repeating, anything you are told about a teacher. Ideally do so by reading a whole book of his or by personally listening to a whole sermon on MP3 or online before speaking out against it.

Don’t just rely on a small extract from it, as it may possibly have been taken out of context. Likewise, don’t rely solely on what another person *tells you* about a leader or teacher. Take note of it, by all means. But don’t *repeat* the warning until you have checked at least some of that man’s preaching or writing, first hand, for yourself. If you are hasty or ‘trigger-happy’ you could be used by the demons as their tool to do a terrible injustice. So, be very slow and careful about speaking against one another in general, but especially leaders and teachers:

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?

James 4:11-12 (RSV)

There are many Christian leaders and teachers about whom I have misgivings, ranging from mild to severe. However, my practice is only to condemn a man’s teaching publicly if I have personally read, or listened to, a substantial amount of his teaching. That would mean a whole book, or at least a whole chapter, or whole sermon, not just a little extract or ‘soundbite’. It is important to make sure that the context is properly understood and taken into account. The teaching or practice to which I am objecting would also need to be about a *major* issue of doctrine or practice.

That means that a false teaching on that issue would lead people astray, perhaps even to the extent of not receiving salvation. The issue over which we publicly criticise a man, must not merely be a difference of opinion on a secondary issue, even if the other man is plainly wrong. A classic example of a secondary issue would be ‘eschatology’ i.e. the study of the last things or end times. If a man disagrees with me about the details of the Rapture, Tribulation, Second Coming, Millennium and so forth that, in itself, does not make either him, or me, a false teacher.

CHAPTER 11

COME TO TERMS WITH THE FACT THAT THERE ARE MANY WICKED PEOPLE INSIDE CHURCHES AND START TO SEE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT

¹⁷ I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.

Ecclesiastes 3:17 (RSV)

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 (RSV)

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; ¹⁰ not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (RSV)

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. ¹⁸ A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:15-20 (RSV)

For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

2 Corinthians 11:20 (RSV)

*Your wickedness will chasten you,
and your apostasy will reprove you.
Know and see that it is evil and bitter
for you to forsake the Lord your God;
the fear of me is not in you,
says the Lord God of hosts.*

Jeremiah 2:19 (RSV)

¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 (RSV)

Be willing to accept the shocking fact that there are many wicked people in the churches, even in leadership positions.

It would never occur to most of us that there are *any* wicked people in the churches, let alone large numbers of them. We tend to assume that wicked people are only found *outside* of the churches. If you want to begin to discern accurately what is going on, you need to come to terms with the fact that some of the most wicked people you'll ever meet are inside churches. Indeed, the bitterest opposition to the real Gospel, and to genuine Christians, usually comes from false Christians, not atheists or

secularists. Outright unbelievers can be hostile, but they rarely match the level of contempt that is shown by apostates.

Many falsely religious people have lied to me and about me. On one occasion I was writing on Facebook about the need for honesty amongst church leaders and avoiding the love of money. I also criticised the “*prosperity gospel*” whereby corrupt leaders focus on acquiring money and possessions and see those as the primary evidence of God’s blessing. They exploit gullible Christians and make a fortune by urging naïve people to give money to them in return for God’s blessing. I spoke about this and, as a result, a prosperity preacher, who was also a woman, became agitated.

She then sent out posts about me making false accusations, for which she had no conceivable basis. She warned people not to listen to me as I was a “*heretic*”. She then specifically said that I was teaching that *Jesus never rose from the dead!* That was a complete fabrication, which she had simply made up. She must have known that her words were false. Yet she still went ahead and sent it out. Her cage had been rattled because her own income was being threatened. She then said whatever she needed to say to protect that, regardless of whether it was true.

She must have been fully aware that it was all lies but that did not bother her. I would say she came within the category of the wicked, given that she was claiming to be a Christian and was acting as a church leader, though she was female. All over the world the wicked are active in churches, as full members and even as leaders, and they are alarmingly numerous. I could give many examples just from those I have personally met, not to mention those I have only heard of or read about. It was the same in Jeremiah’s day. He had to contend with many religious people who were false:

***26 For wicked men are found among my people;
they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.
They set a trap;
they catch men.***

Jeremiah 5:26 (ESV)

***“Both prophet and priest are ungodly;
even in my house I have found their wickedness,
says the Lord.***

Jeremiah 23:11 (RSV)

***14 But in the prophets of Jerusalem
I have seen a horrible thing:
they commit adultery and walk in lies;
they strengthen the hands of evildoers,
so that no one turns from his wickedness;
all of them have become like Sodom to me,
and its inhabitants like Gomor'rah.”***

Jeremiah 23:14 (RSV)

31 Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, ‘Says the Lord.’

32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord.

Jeremiah 23:31-32 (RSV)

If there were no wicked people inside churches, why would Paul tell us to “remove the wicked man from among yourselves”?

It could be that you are reluctant to accept that there could be any wicked people inside churches, or at least in any significant numbers. If so ask yourself why apostle Paul raises this issue and why he urges the Christians in Corinth to “*remove the wicked man from among yourselves*”. For that to be done, the wicked plainly have to be *inside* the churches to begin with:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NASB)

The sin focused on in 1 Corinthians was sexual immorality but Paul does not limit this instruction about the wicked to such cases. His list includes the immoral, the covetous, idolaters, revilers, drunkards and swindlers and there is no reason to assume that is a comprehensive list. Those are really just headings and could be broken down into many other areas of sin. It is also important to make clear that Paul isn't speaking about visitors to the church, or enquirers. So he doesn't mean the unsaved people whom we invite to our church meetings.

Such people, who are on the fringes of churches, may have all sorts of chaotic lifestyles and be committing terrible sins, but they are not the people to whom Paul is referring. He means people who have become Christians, or have claimed to do so, and who have joined the church as members, but are still engaging in sinful practices or lifestyles. They are in a completely different position from mere enquirers or visitors who should be welcomed to our meetings, regardless of how sinfully they live. Indeed, how else can we reach the lost if we don't mix with them or let them mix with us?

Paul is speaking about those who ought to know better because they are members of the church and profess to be Christians. When they behave badly they not only harm other people in the church but the reputation of Jesus Christ too. That is not the case when an enquirer, or even a new convert, acts badly. Nobody expects anything from them in the first place. If anything, we expect the unsaved to have messed up lives and to be living immorally until they get themselves sorted out. Paul's concern is about established church members who are *within churches*.

Wickedness on their part can do terrible damage and needs to be taken very seriously. What Paul says proves that such phoney people and deceivers do exist within churches, as members and even leaders. So this is not a hypothetical discussion about people whom we're never likely to meet. Such behaviour is found in almost every church, even those *which Paul had attended* and in which he taught. How much more likely is it that they will be found in today's churches, which Paul has never visited or taught at, and where his letters are rarely, if ever, preached on?

You may recall 'Imelda' whose workplace story I told earlier. She was amazed to discover that church leaders could be dishonest and malicious. She learned that lesson, in her fifties when she was deceived and treated abusively by a leader. It came as a complete shock to her because she had assumed that *all* church leaders were trustworthy. However, after discovering that some can be devious, she then went to the other extreme. Instead of trusting *all* leaders without question, as she had been doing, she became phobic, like a wild animal, and would not trust *any* of them.

Why might God view a wicked ‘churchgoer’ as being even worse than a wicked unbeliever?

It makes sense why God might view the wickedness of a religious person as worse than that of an unbeliever. A man who knows what God has said about lying, but still lies, is more blameworthy than one who has never heard what the Bible says. An unbeliever who lies is going against his own conscience and doing something which he knows to be wrong. That is bad enough. However, a ‘religious’ person who knows something of the Bible is sinning directly against God's *known commandments*. His transgression is therefore even worse. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of someone continuing to sin after knowing the truth of the Gospel:

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God

Hebrews 10:26-31 (ESV)

I once heard someone pose the question “*Which age or dispensation in the whole history of mankind is the most wicked?*” Some suggested the time of the Flood or the Crucifixion, but the speaker disagreed. He felt that sinfulness would reach its peak in the Millennium, the 1000 year reign of Jesus over the whole Earth after His Second Coming. Jesus will then be visibly present, reigning on the Earth, and providing the best circumstances for a person to live in since the Garden of Eden. The people alive then will have His direct rule over them and also perfect laws and government.

They will be able to hear Jesus speak on the TV or even see Him in person. Yet, despite all of that, the Book of Revelation says that, at the end of the Millennium, there will be a rebellion. Multitudes of people will openly defy Jesus and even join with Satan to fight against Him. So despite all the advantages of being able to see and hear Jesus in person, they will still rebel against Him. The people of that dispensation will also have a greater knowledge and understanding than we have. Therefore they will surely be even more accountable than us.

The more a person knows, the greater their sin is when they resist God and the more appropriate it is to describe them as wicked. That will be true of the people who will live during the Millennium, but the same principle also applies to us today. We have the Bible, plus the help of preachers, teachers, churches, and so on. Yet a huge percentage of us are shallow and insincere. If a man calls himself a Christian, but does what he knows to be wrong, he is not only a wrongdoer but a *hypocrite*. That hypocrisy is even worse than the original misconduct as there is the added falseness of acting contrary to what one claims to believe. Consider what Jesus says:

²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! ²⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. ²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Matthew 23:23-28 (RSV)

If you think Jesus is being blunt look at what He says next. He is not exactly taking the so called ‘*seeker-sensitive*’ approach advocated by so many churches today:

²⁹ *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'* ³¹ *Thus you witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. ³³You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? ³⁴Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, ³⁵ that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechari'ah the son of Barachi'ah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.*

Matthew 23:29-35 (RSV)

Jesus uses extremely strong words which ought to make us tremble. Instead of assuming that when Jesus refers to hypocrites He must mean someone else, let us begin to recognise that He could be referring to us. We must examine our own hearts and question ourselves about our own conduct, attitudes and motives. If we do, we may discover that we are often hypocrites. If so, we need to admit it. Then we need to humble ourselves, confess our hypocrisy, and repent of it. One reason why we must do so is that every Christian is an ambassador for Jesus Christ.

That is how Jesus views His genuine followers. It is also how the unbelieving world looks at Christians, and those who claim to be. To purport to represent Jesus Christ but to bring disgrace on His name by the way we live is to insult Him. Imagine you were an ambassador representing the Queen in a foreign country. To get drunk at a formal dinner and use foul language would be far worse than if you did those things in your own name in a private capacity. We must therefore remember *whom* we represent and take our ambassadorial role very seriously:

¹⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (RSV)

A false Christian also puts people off becoming Christians. The harm caused is worse than that done by those who openly oppose the Gospel. Phoney Christians cause others to say *"If that's what being a Christian is about, I don't want anything to do with it"*. We all have a duty to ask whether the way we live is a credit to the name of Jesus or diminishes Him in the eyes of others. To harm Jesus' reputation is bad enough in itself. But what about the eternal fate of those who reject Jesus Christ, and lose their salvation, *because of us?* We must ensure that nobody is ever put off becoming a Christian by the way we live. Consider what Jesus said:

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.

Matthew 23:13 (RSV)

¹*And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come! ²It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.*

Luke 17:1-2 (RSV)

Note the severity of God’s judgment on the priests, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, because of how much they knew.

God was particularly severe in his judgment on the priests Nadab and Abihu, two of the sons of Aaron, because they disrespected God when serving in the Tabernacle. They were in a privileged position and were in the very presence of God. Yet we are told that they “*offered unholy fire before the Lord.*” We are not told exactly what they did, or failed to do. But it was unholy and it offended God. He therefore moved decisively in judgment and took their lives, there and then:

¹ Now Nadab and Abi’hu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, and put fire in it, and laid incense on it, and offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. ² And fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

Leviticus 10:1-2 (RSV)

Some of us might consider their actions to be a minor infringement but God did not. Their greater knowledge and responsibility, and their being in God’s very presence, meant their behaviour was seen as far more serious. Again, that has to make us tremble and fear the LORD if we are leaders or if we know the Bible well, or have been entrusted with responsibilities for God’s people. We cannot treat God lightly or mock Him or take advantage of our positions. If we do we may find that God takes our sins far more seriously than we had expected. That thought should sober us.

God was also very severe in His judgment on Korah and his followers. They were classified as wicked men even though Korah was a leader, whose descendants wrote some of the psalms.

In case anyone thinks God’s severity towards Nadab and Abihu was a one-off situation, He acted similarly with the sons of Korah and classified them as wicked. They were Levites, but not descendants of Aaron, so they could not be priests. Yet they still had important roles and served in the Tabernacle. Their sin was to exalt themselves and to rebel against Moses. It would seem that they wanted to act as priests, even though God had reserved that role for descendants of Aaron. Moses was appalled, for their sake, as he knew God would judge them.

Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, ² and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. ³ They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

⁴ When Moses heard this, he fell on his face; ⁵ and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring him near to Himself; even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself. ⁶ Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all your company, ⁷ and put fire in them, and lay incense upon them in the presence of the Lord tomorrow; and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!”

⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi, ⁹ is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; ¹⁰ and that He has brought you near, Korah, and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also? ¹¹ Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord; but as for Aaron, who is he that you grumble against him?”

Numbers 16:4-11 (NASB)

Moses rebuked them and told them to take a firepan, with incense, and to stand outside the tent of meeting:

¹² Then Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, “We will not come up. ¹³ Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us? ¹⁴ Indeed, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!”

¹⁵ Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, “Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them.” ¹⁶ Moses said to Korah, “You and all your company be present before the Lord tomorrow, both you and they along with Aaron. ¹⁷ Each of you take his firepan and put incense on it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty firepans; also you and Aaron shall each bring his firepan.”

¹⁸ So they each took his own censer and put fire on it, and laid incense on it; and they stood at the doorway of the tent of meeting, with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ Thus Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the doorway of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

Numbers 16:12-19 (NASB)

Moses knew the judgment of God would fall on these rebels. Therefore he warned everybody to get away from the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, or they would suffer the same judgment. Some moved away, but others did not, even though Moses had made it clear that the ground would open and swallow them up:

²⁰ Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” ²² But they fell on their faces and said, “O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?” ²³ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ “Speak to the congregation, saying, ‘Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.’”

²⁵ Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him, ²⁶ and he spoke to the congregation, saying, “Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin.” ²⁷ So they got back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the doorway of their tents, along with their wives and their sons and their little ones. ²⁸ Moses said, “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing. ²⁹ If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the Lord.”

Number 16:20-30 (NASB)

That was exactly what then happened. The ground split open and all who had followed Korah in his rebellion against Moses were swallowed up and went down alive into Sheol:

³¹ As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ All Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, “The earth may swallow us up!” ³⁵ Fire also came forth from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.

Numbers 16:31-35 (NASB)

Then God told Moses to tell Aaron to take the censers of the men who had been swallowed up and to hammer them out as plating for the altar. This was a reminder to the people of what happened to Korah and his followers and how seriously God takes holiness and unholiness:

³⁶ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁷ “Say to Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, that he shall take up the censers out of the midst of the blaze, for they are holy; and you scatter the burning coals abroad. ³⁸ As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered sheets for a plating of the altar, since they did present them before the Lord and they are holy; and they shall be for a sign to the sons of Israel.” ³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as a plating for the altar, ⁴⁰ as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before the Lord; so that he will not become like Korah and his company—just as the Lord had spoken to him through Moses.

Numbers 16:36-40 (NASB)

Even after this, many of the people continued to grumble against Moses and Aaron, blaming them for the deaths of Korah and his followers. God’s response to this was even more dramatic. In his wrath, He sent a plague which consumed 14,700 of the people. It only stopped when Aaron, on Moses’ instructions, took fire from the altar, put it in a censer with incense, and ran into the midst of the plague to make atonement for the people:

⁴¹ But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord’s people.” ⁴² It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. ⁴³ Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, ⁴⁴ and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces. ⁴⁶ Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the Lord, the plague has begun!” ⁴⁷ Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. ⁴⁸ He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked. ⁴⁹ But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah. ⁵⁰ Then Aaron returned to Moses at the doorway of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been checked.

Numbers 16:41-50 (NASB)

This incident shows how seriously God views sin and unholiness by those who should know better, because they have more knowledge or have witnessed more of God’s power. This generation, which came out of Egypt, had seen God’s miraculous dealings with Moses, plus the giving of the Law. So they were held to a much higher standard and their behaviour was judged more severely. The same principle applies to us today and should cause us to fear God and obey His Word because we have been given so much compared to almost every other generation.

A liar inside a church causes more damage than a liar who is outside in the world.

Whether a deceiver can be a real Christian is a complex question but to the unsaved people who are deceived by them it is largely academic. They will assume the liar was a real Christian anyway, whether he was or not. Then they are likely to conclude that Christianity itself, and the Church as a whole, is no good. Therefore, when assessing the damage caused by a deceiver in a church, we need to see it from two angles. Firstly there is the lie itself and the harm that causes. Secondly there is the underlying objective which caused them to lie in the first place.

Most people don’t lie purely for the sake of it. There is usually a deeper motivation. It could be they want to control other people in the church. If so, the lie is a tool to help them achieve that even wicked objective, rather than a goal in itself. Therefore, when a person lies, that is a serious problem in itself. But we also need to consider what the underlying motive may be. If we don’t, we

are only dealing with the smaller of the two issues, the deception itself, but ignoring what lies behind it, such as the desire for control. That needs to concern us even more.

The difference between people in churches who are wicked, and those who behave badly, but are only immature or simple

Amongst those who claim to be Christians there are people of every conceivable type and level. We need to distinguish between the wicked and the merely immature, whose behaviour has not yet changed since they were converted. Those people are not wicked, or at least not yet. They just need to abandon their carnal ways and become mature disciples. Hopefully they will do so, over time. There are various explanations for why someone can act and speak sinfully and yet still be a real Christian. The church at Corinth contained many appallingly carnal people but they were still recognised by Paul as being real Christians:

¹ And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (NASB)

Some were engaging in sexual sins which even the people of our own depraved generation would regard as wrong:

¹ It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ² You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. ³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 (NASB)

Apostle Paul distinguished between sins committed by unbelievers and those committed by people who were Christians, or claimed to be. Those *within* the Church who acted in these ways were viewed by Paul as wicked. Their greater knowledge made them more accountable and more blameworthy for their sins than unbelievers are for theirs. Their sins were also more capable of damaging others. Paul therefore instructed that they be “*removed*” from their local church, i.e. put out of fellowship. Paul also goes on to say that such people will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NASB)

Paul would not have warned genuine Christians against such immorality unless he thought we were capable of it. Even amongst *real* Christians, carnality can reach very high levels. Thus we can't assume that doing these things *necessarily* proves that a person isn't a Christian, on the basis that no genuine Christian would ever do so. Sadly, they can, and they do, and we need to recognise that or we will misjudge people and situations. It is hardly ever easy to gauge what another person really is.

He could be a deliberate deceiver and a charlatan. Or he could just be a spiritual baby, who is still behaving like an unbeliever, but will eventually change. We need discernment to distinguish the different types of person and the alternative reasons why people in churches act as they do. Some really are wicked, whereas others may just appear to be. They may be uninformed, immature Christians who don't yet know how to behave properly and who still operate in the flesh much of the time. It depends on all the facts of each individual case.

Consider how the apostles Peter and John dealt with an ex-occult practitioner called Simon. He seems to have become a real Christian, albeit one whose heart was not yet right. He offered them money if they would lay hands on him so that he could have the power to enable others to receive the Holy Spirit. He was still thinking in the same worldly, self-centred way as he did when he was an unbeliever and a magician. Yet, despite being a recent convert, which would ordinarily make us more tolerant, Peter still described him as wicked:

¹⁴Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.

Acts 8:14-24 (ESV)

It seems Simon really was a Christian and had been born again. Yet there was still such a lot of pride and self-importance left in him that Peter classified him as wicked. So, Simon was a real believer, but he needed to repent and change. However, there are also people who behave wickedly who are not, and never were, real Christians. It can be very hard to tell the difference. We cannot do it solely in our own wisdom. It may require the gift of the discerning of spirits, whereby God enables us to know what someone really is, or where an idea comes from.

We need that because we can never be absolutely sure what is going on in the mind or spirit of another person. At an individual level it is difficult to reach conclusions such as "*This man is a fool, and this man is wicked, but this other man is just immature and misinformed*". One can't reliably discern such things by oneself, in the absence of God revealing the truth to us. It can often be very complex and so we need to be cautious about labelling individuals. However, at a macro level, it is possible to state the wider position much more confidently.

Accordingly, it is undeniable that a high percentage of people in British churches have no real repentance and no fear of God. Likewise, most people in Western churches today have little or no understanding of God's judgment and no expectation of being judged when they die. There is also serious sexual sin and involvement in the occult, even whilst continuing to go to church. There is often no discernible change in people's behaviour following their alleged conversion. Many do not even claim to have had any 'conversion' and never *speak* of having 'repented'.

They just attend church, as if that was all there is to being a Christian. Only God knows those who are saved and those who are not. You and I don't really know for sure. We can have a view as to the *likelihood* of whether a person is saved (justified). However, we can't be absolutely certain because only God really knows the heart of any person, exactly what their background is, and why they do what they do. Also only God knows what traumatic experiences they have suffered which might still be affecting them, and which might explain some or all of what they do.

There is an urgent need for the Church to be taught about God's judgment because very few know about it.

Many 'churchgoers' have never heard of God's impending judgment, mainly because they have been so badly taught. Many deny that God will ever judge anybody, not even unbelievers. Some accept that God may judge unbelievers, but deny that God will ever judge *Christians*. Even more hold no view at all and have never even considered the subject of judgment, or heard any teaching on it. I was once at a men's event with about 30 men from a large Evangelical church. The subject of God's judgment came up and I mentioned the Judgment Seat of Christ (the judgment for believers).

It was in a small discussion group of about six or seven men, all committed Evangelicals. Yet only one had ever even heard of it! One of them looked at me as if it was me who was confused rather than himself. What I had said about Christians facing God's judgment was so completely new to him he thought I meant that Christians will face the *same* judgment as unbelievers, i.e. the *Great White Throne*, which leads to condemnation and the Lake of Fire. He couldn't understand, or cope with, the idea of there being any form of judgment at all for *saved believers*.

That was because he had never heard of it, which was because he had never been taught about it. Neither had any of the others in the group, except one older man who was taught about the Judgment Seat of Christ by a previous pastor 30 years before. However, no other leader had ever taught on it since then, despite it being such a major theme in the Bible. I later told 'Carl', one of the leaders, that only one man in my group had ever heard of the Judgment Seat and suggested we have some teaching on it. However, he just stared at me uncomfortably for a moment and changed the subject.

The concept of God's judgment was almost as new to him as it was to them, so he had no idea what to say. The men in my group were not deliberately rejecting the concept of judgment. They were just totally unaware of it, the blame for which is mainly on those leaders who failed to teach them. However, the men were also partly at fault themselves because every individual, at least in the West, has virtually unlimited access to the Bible. Therefore, when they read those passages which speak of God's judgment of Christians, why do they pass over them with their eyes closed and their minds asleep? Why don't they ask themselves the obvious questions which any reasonable person would ask?

If you were reading any other document you would ask questions if you came across words which you did not understand. So why do so few people ask any questions when they see God's Judgment spoken about in the Bible? Not enquiring into this makes them blameworthy, firstly for failing to take seriously what the Bible says and, secondly, for relying on what their *teachers* say, without looking into it for themselves. The lack of knowledge about God's impending judgment is one of the main reasons why there is so much wickedness in churches, so little conviction about it, and so little repentance.

Some of the most wicked people you'll ever meet are false Christians, operating within churches.

I cannot offer any statistically reliable evidence, but my view is that the number of false Christians and false leaders is vastly higher than it was when I was saved in 1981. Paul spoke of such people in his second letter to Timothy and said that they would come "in the last days":

¹But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. ²For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, ⁴treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵holding the form of religion but denying the power of it. Avoid such people.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (RSV)

Jeremiah also had to contend with many such people in his day, including leaders. The apostates and false prophets were just as popular then as they are now:

³⁰ ***“An appalling and horrible thing
Has happened in the land:
³¹ The prophets prophesy falsely,
And the priests rule on their own authority;
And My people love it so!
But what will you do at the end of it?
Jeremiah 5:30-31 (NASB)***

¹⁴ ***And the Lord said to me, “The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart.
Jeremiah 14:14 (NKJV)***

Consider also this verse from Proverbs:

⁸***The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
but the prayer of the upright is his delight.
Proverbs 15:8 (RSV)***

Note that Solomon says the *sacrifice* offered by a wicked man is an abomination to God. But that wicked man would not be offering a sacrifice to God in the first place unless he was, or was pretending to be, a believer. As well as the wicked, fools are also active in churches, as some were once active in the Temple, offering sacrifices when their hearts were not right. Some were actually doing evil even though, to undiscerning observers, they may have looked alright:

***Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil.
Ecclesiastes 5:1 (RSV)***

Amos said their religious ceremonies were odious to God because they were empty rituals conducted by shallow, insecure people who had no real concern for justice or righteousness:

²¹ ***“I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts
I will not look upon.
²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will not listen.
²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.
Amos 5:21-24 (RSV)***

In Psalm 50 the wicked recite God’s statutes and take His covenant on their lips. But God is not impressed, because He knows they are insincere, hate discipline and cast His words behind them. Although such people are classed by God as being ‘*wicked*’, they still look and act like real believers. They read God’s Word, and even quote from it, but without really believing or honouring it. Yet they also claim to be part of God’s people. The appearance of ‘religiosity’ and regular ‘churchgoing’ do not mean that a person is a genuine believer. On the contrary, when it is combined with falseness and hypocrisy, it only makes the person’s wickedness *more* intense in God’s eyes:

¹⁶ ***But to the wicked God says:
“What right have you to recite my statutes,***

or take my covenant on your lips?

¹⁷ *For you hate discipline,
and you cast my words behind you.*

¹⁸ *If you see a thief, you are a friend of his;
and you keep company with adulterers.*

¹⁹ *“You give your mouth free rein for evil,
and your tongue frames deceit.*

Psalm 50:16-19 (RSV)

Eli the High Priest ministered in the Tabernacle and trained up the young prophet Samuel. Eli's sons were also priests, but they were wicked men. The fact that they were wicked didn't stop them continuing in their roles as priests, and for many years. On the contrary, they intentionally used their positions as priests to benefit themselves through dishonesty and they had no respect for God:

¹² *Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.* ¹³ *The custom of the priests with the people was that when any man offered sacrifice, the priest's servant would come, while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand,* ¹⁴ *and he would thrust it into the pan or kettle or cauldron or pot. All that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is what they did at Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there.* ¹⁵ *Moreover, before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, “Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you but only raw.”* ¹⁶ *And if the man said to him, “Let them burn the fat first, and then take as much as you wish,” he would say, “No, you must give it now, and if not, I will take it by force.”* ¹⁷ *Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the LORD, for the men treated the offering of the LORD with contempt.*

1 Samuel 2:12-17 (ESV)

The sons of Eli continued in their wickedness, even after their father confronted them about their behaviour. They brazenly ignored him, and God's Word, and carried on as before:

²² *Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.* ²³ *And he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people.”* ²⁴ *No, my sons; it is no good report that I hear the people of the LORD spreading abroad.* ²⁵ *If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him, but if someone sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?”* *But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the LORD to put them to death.*

1 Samuel 2:22-25 (ESV)

In the end God said, through the young prophet Samuel, that He was going to bring judgment on the whole house of Eli, because of his sons' wickedness and Eli's failure to restrain them:

¹² *On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end.* ¹³ *And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.*

1 Samuel 3:12-13 (ESV)

Despite what happened to Eli's sons, both of whom died on the same day, Samuel's own sons later became corrupt. He appointed two of his sons to be judges over Israel, but they both became wicked and took bribes:

¹ *When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel.* ² *The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba.* ³ *Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice.*

1 Samuel 8:1-3 (ESV)

The same applies today in our churches which have such a lot of wicked people, many of whom are in leadership. Whatever their own private motives may be, Satan has a plan for these false Christians. He uses them to discredit the name of Jesus and to undermine the real Christians in those churches. But you are unlikely ever to hear a sermon about wicked people within churches. Their behaviour, and even their existence, is not mentioned. You will hear even less about wickedness within the *leadership* of churches. It is a taboo subject which is not taught about, even by honest leaders.

I have met a lot of wicked churchgoers and there are many others I have been told about. I have also tackled at least three wicked church leaders, not counting their assistants and fellow elders, who covered up their wrongdoing. I believe those men knew themselves to be false. I can't imagine how they could have been unaware of it, unless their consciences were so badly seared they had ceased to function. They continued to lead churches, and to teach and preach, without showing any trace of the fear of the LORD, or concern about His Judgment.

The hostility and contempt that a real Christian receives from the religious wicked can be worse than that which comes from the non-religious wicked.

One is likely to get worse opposition from compromised, insincere, apostate churchgoers than from outright unbelievers who make no claim to be Christians. In my case, it has been the wicked people *within* churches who have treated me with the most contempt, probably because they felt threatened. Liberal churchgoers, more so than unbelievers, have despised my readiness to take the Bible at face value and to believe it literally. They really don't like my approach to Scripture and can be very hostile in response. I have also had such reactions from 'high' and liberal Anglicans and from Roman Catholics, who have very little knowledge of the Bible.

If you know the Bible well and take it seriously such people will feel threatened. They don't know how to answer you, so they will lash out at you personally, or close the argument down. They know that in any open debate their ignorance would be exposed and they won't allow that. However, it can get a lot worse than that. If such men can get themselves into positions of sufficient power they will even use violence to silence you properly, as successive Popes did over many centuries, and as Jesus warned us would happen:

I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ² They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴ But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

John 16:1-4 (ESV)

Falsely religious people have always opposed the truth. They hold to man-made beliefs and traditions and oppose the real Gospel. I have encountered such opposition myself, especially from leaders. They can't argue their case from the Bible itself or show why it ought not to be taken literally. Neither can they explain why my doing so is so objectionable. They usually end up engaging in '*ad hominem*' arguments, attacking the *person* rather than debating the *issue* itself. They feel threatened, so they prevent the expression of any contrary view. For example, note how hysterical people can become if you stand up for Israel.

The Roman Catholic church has always persecuted real Christians, not just the reformers of the 16th century. Also, both before and after the Reformation, the Catholic church banned the translation of the Bible into any other language. Indeed, they forbade lay people to read it at all, even in Latin. They knew that if ordinary people were allowed to read the Bible they would soon see that it does not support Catholic practices or beliefs, because the contrast is so stark. They also murdered countless genuine Bible-believing Christians over the centuries, most notably John Hus and William Tyndale.

They were burned at the stake for preaching the truth about the Bible and the many ways in which Roman Catholicism is the opposite of what the Bible says. If the Popes and bishops who put them to death were not wicked, who could ever be classified as wicked? However, in case anybody imagines I am singling out the Roman Catholic church for criticism, please be assured that I am not. There were, and still are, many leaders in Reformed, Orthodox, Protestant, Charismatic, Pentecostal and other churches who have also behaved dishonestly, manipulatively and oppressively.

Some have been almost as bad as the Popes, though on a far smaller scale. But that was only because they lacked the political and military power that the Popes had. If they had had equivalent powers they would have persecuted, and even murdered, their opponents in exactly the same way. Indeed, John Calvin and his supporters created a 'police state' in Geneva persecuting, and even executing, those who did not accept Calvin's teaching or did not obey their rules. I believe many of those abusers were not innocently misguided, but were wicked men and 'Nicolaitans'. (See Chapter 18)

If a person understands the Gospel, but still chooses not to repent, that makes them even worse than they were to begin with, and liable to a stricter judgment.

If you're not convinced that there are wicked people in virtually all churches, consider the series of warnings in the letter to the Hebrews about unrepentance and hardness of heart. Remember also that the letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were *already in churches*. They were plainly believers, not mere 'enquirers'. We are even told that they had begun to be *sanctified*, which can only occur in the life of a real believer after they have been born again. (See chapter 23 of my Book 1 for an explanation of what sanctification is.)

Nevertheless, the people to whom the letter was written turned their backs on God and hardened their hearts. Exposure to the Gospel and knowing who Jesus Christ is, and what He taught, either makes a person better or worse. It does not leave them unchanged. Any person who hears the real Gospel will inevitably do one of two things. They may accept it and believe, repent and follow Jesus. If so they will steadily change and become more like Him and their hearts will become more soft and 'tenderised'. Or they may hear it but reject it, or accept it for a time, but then reject it.

If so their hearts will become increasingly hardened. Those are the only two directions you can go in when you hear the real Gospel. With that in mind, let us examine the warnings in the letter to the Hebrews and remember that these are aimed at people who are already *within* churches, not at those outside. They were given primarily to saved Jewish Christians to warn them not to return to non-Messianic Judaism. Some of them were doing that in order to avoid the persecution that the Romans were giving to Christians and Messianic Jews, but not to non-Messianic Jews.

That persecution arose because the Romans had declared that Judaism was lawful, i.e. '*religio licita*', whereas Christianity was '*religio illicita*', i.e. a forbidden religion. However, the letter to the Hebrews applies to us all, not just to first century Jewish Christians. It is a warning to all of us not to fall away and not to abandon our faith in Jesus, or cease to follow Him. Accordingly, the warnings are aimed at *real Christians*, not merely at phoney believers who were never saved in the first place. If they had never been truly saved they would have nothing to fall away from.

Warnings against drifting away from faith and neglecting our salvation

This first passage makes clear that, at the very least, it is possible for us to "*drift away from*" what we have heard and to "*neglect....(our) salvation*". Otherwise, these warnings would be meaningless:

¹Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ²For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just

retribution, ³how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him

Hebrews 2:1-3 (RSV)

The warning cannot be referring to people who are not really saved. How can they “neglect (their) salvation” unless they have got salvation? It is plainly referring to real Christians.

Warnings against hardening our hearts, going astray or falling away

This next passage is even more explicit. It shows that it is possible for us to “harden (our) hearts”, “go astray in (our) hearts” and/or “fall away from the living God”:

¹² Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, ¹⁵ while it is said, "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

Hebrews 3:12-15 (RSV)

Again, these warnings would not be needed if these things could not happen to real Christians. If that was so, the warnings would be purely hypothetical and God does not engage in academic discussions.

Warning against disobedience

In the next passage we see that it is also possible for us to “fall” as a result of “*disobedience*”:

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:11 (RSV)

Warning against apostasy

The next warning is against “*apostasy*” itself. That is where a person has been a real believer but then ceases to be one. Again, logic demands that one has to have been a genuine believer, at least for a short period of time, in order to be able to *cease* being one:

⁴For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt. ⁷ For land which has drunk the rain that often falls upon it, and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed; its end is to be burned.

Hebrews 6:4-8 (RSV)

Note also the sobering words that those who degenerate into such apostasy cannot be restored to repentance. So, their position is dire indeed. But again, we have to conclude that they were, at least for a time, real Christians because they are described as having been “*partakers of the Holy Spirit*”, which no unsaved person can be.

Warning against sinning deliberately after knowing the truth

This next passage is especially grim. It speaks of such people facing a “*fearful prospect of judgment*” and a “*fury of fire*”. That implies that their punishment will be worse than what will be given to a complete unbeliever. What can that possibly mean other than that they will go to the Lake of Fire?

²⁶For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.²⁸ A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses.²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people."³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 10:26-31 (RSV)

Warning against rejecting or refusing Jesus

Lastly, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews warns us against “*refusing*” or “*rejecting*” Jesus:

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.²⁵ See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven

Hebrews 12:22-25 (RSV)

These warnings don’t mean that every person who ever stumbles or sins in any way at all is an apostate. If that was true we would *all* have to be classed as apostates, because we all stumble, disobey God and let people down. These verses are aimed at people who go beyond that, in that *they fail to repent* when they fall into such sin. They do not fear God and they harden their hearts by *ongoing unrepentance and disregard for His Word* until it becomes habitual. Such a person, if he continues to act in those ways, can eventually reach a point where his heart has become so hard and so indifferent to God that he can be said to have ‘*fallen away*’.

Nevertheless, even after reaching that stage he may still go through the motions of an apparently religious life, including church attendance and even leadership. On the surface he may still look and sound like a believer. Indeed, he may even be a leader, and remain for years in a leadership position. However, despite all outward appearances, his heart is cold, hard and unresponsive. If he hardens his heart for long enough, and persistently refuses to listen to God’s voice, then a catastrophic tipping point will eventually be reached at which God will refuse to listen to him:

¹¹ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear.¹² They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts.¹³ “As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear,” says the Lord of hosts,

Zechariah 7:11-13 (ESV)

If a person reaches that severely hardened condition then he has become an ‘*apostate*’. That is a person who once knew and believed the truth, but has then turned his back on it. Or at least he has abandoned it in his heart, even if in his outward actions or role he appears still to be in the Church.

Such a person, having reached this stage, can properly be described as wicked because he has known the truth and even the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. His turning away is classed as wicked because he has knowingly “..... *spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace.....*”

In God’s eyes, to turn one’s back on Jesus after having known Him, and to dishonour Him by our lives as we harden our hearts, is as bad a sin as it is possible to imagine. It would appear to be worse than if an unbeliever, who knows nothing of the Gospel, was to reject God or even to commit a serious crime. That unbeliever who commits a crime will be judged as an unbeliever, and as one who knew very little of the Gospel, or perhaps nothing at all. He may have had nothing more than his own conscience to indicate that his actions were wrong.

However, if a man knows the truth much more clearly because he actually *knows the Bible*, and even *knows Jesus*, then to betray or reject Him is an act of the utmost seriousness. Sadly it is within churches that many of those apostates are to be found, even as leaders. They have long since abandoned any real faith or repentance and have no real allegiance to Jesus. Whatever it is that they are now pursuing, it is not Him, or obedience to His commands. We must therefore examine ourselves and ask whether we are still ‘*in the faith*’ or have grown so cold and hard as to have ‘fallen away’, or to be in danger of doing so.

It is vitally important to ensure we don’t descend to that condition, or if we have done so already, then to repent. Knowing God’s Word does not sanctify you or make you holy unless you actually *obey it*. If instead you ignore it or despise it then your greater knowledge of what God had wanted you to do only *adds to your guilt*. It makes your rejection of Him, and of His Word, all the more wicked. Therefore it is a heavy warning and needs to cause all of us to examine ourselves closely, and with sincere repentance, wherever it is needed:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? --unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

2 Corinthians 13:5 (RSV)

CHAPTER 12

SOME EXAMPLES OF WICKED CHRISTIANS FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE

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

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

John 18:37 (b) (NASB)

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

¹³ So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance,¹⁴ and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

1 Chronicles 10:13-14 (RSV)

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

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NASB)

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

Galatians 2:4-5 (NASB)

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

Ephesians 4:14 (NASB)

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

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

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

He had had a very difficult past and needed a lot of spiritual, emotional and practical support. He was badly damaged by life and would have struggled to get, or keep, such a job in any other firm. But I felt God wanted me to help him to rebuild his confidence and give him a fresh start in supportive surroundings. I therefore asked Fergus to help Malcolm and to encourage, support and pray with him and he assured me that he would. Therefore I fully believed he was already doing so. I saw no problems and was totally unaware of what was actually happening.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His supposed apology and repentance had vanished. He could see it had not achieved its intended purpose, which was to try to induce me to let him off. Instead of doing that, I told him his misconduct had been so serious that I needed to commence a formal disciplinary procedure. When he heard that, and realised he was not going to get away with it, he asked if he could just resign instead and halt the disciplinary procedure. I agreed to that, which was entirely his idea, and let him go.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They showed no sign of even being uncomfortable, let alone under God's conviction. I am now used to seeing such carnal behaviour in churches and even expect it. I recall an episode where 'Rick', a church leader, was in a meeting with myself and two other leaders. I was the chairman of the Trustees of that church and had challenged him about his misconduct. The four of us were meeting to discuss my allegations about him. Rick then told a series of blatant lies about what he had been doing. There

was no possibility of there being any misunderstanding. I wish that could have been the explanation, but it wasn't.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rhoda refused to meet up and purported to feel ‘outraged’ at being questioned. A guilty person rarely wants to meet up to discuss their behaviour or what they have said. So Rhoda’s reluctance to meet up was an important indicator that she had been telling lies. If what she had been saying was true, or even if she had sincerely *believed* it to be true, she would have wanted to discuss it. Indeed, she would have been eager. But she knew perfectly well it was not true and she didn’t want to be exposed, or even challenged.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Charles had a responsible job, which would require him to be carefully security checked for criminal convictions. Thus it would be obvious to anybody, if they gave it even a moment’s thought, that he could not possibly have any convictions, for violence or otherwise, and could not ever have been in prison. When I pointed this out Gareth said, “*That’s a good point. I’d never thought of that.*” His

failure to check what he had been told, or even to wonder whether it was true, was a typical response. Liars know that most people don't check anything and they take full advantage of that fact.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As I teased her in this way Rhoda felt embarrassed. She hadn't intended to say any more and hadn't expected to be pressed to do so. In particular, she had not expected to be made fun of. She was therefore caught in the headlights, not knowing what to say and pondering how to get out of the situation without losing face. In the end she decided she was going to have to say something or else I would keep on making fun of her. So, she said, in a much less confident tone of voice, "*Well, you were moaning about how Sean was making you cut all the grass.*"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Matthew 18:15-17 (RSV)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I was less concerned about the room because it did not cost the hotel anything for her to stay that night. That said, the fact remains that she was meant to pay, and would have had to pay, if she had stayed anywhere else. So the hotel lost the payment that she should have made. What concerned me

far more was that he sneaked her into the restaurant in the evening, and again the next morning, as if she was part of our large tour group. The hotel staff did not check each of our identities and just operated on trust.

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 13

SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE OF WICKED BELIEVERS WHO WERE FALSE AND DID GREAT HARM

¹⁴ And the Lord said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.

Jeremiah 14:14 (RSV)

⁹ My hand will be against the prophets who see delusive visions and who give lying divinations; they shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord God.

Ezekiel 13:9 (RSV)

³⁸ And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

Mark 12:38-40 (ESV)

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (RSV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1 (RSV)

The prophet Jeremiah's experiences of false and wicked leaders

Jeremiah was a prophet to the Kingdom of Judah at a low point in its history when the people had been ignoring God for years. Therefore God was about to judge them by causing the Babylonians to invade and take the people into captivity. Note that the key things God focused upon were the falseness and apostasy of the *religious leaders*. They were corrupt and opposed Jeremiah because he exposed what they were. These extracts show how Jeremiah described the religious leaders of his day. Do they remind you of most churches today, where God's Word is ignored, and the values of the world are embraced?

*The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?'
Those who handle the law did not know me;
the rulers transgressed against me;
the prophets prophesied by Ba'al, and went after things that do not profit.*

Jeremiah 2:8 (RSV)

Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 6:15 (RSV)

For the shepherds are stupid, and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered.

Jeremiah 10:21 (RSV)

And the LORD said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.

Jeremiah 14:14 (RSV)

³²*Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the LORD.*

Jeremiah 23:32 (RSV)

Ezekiel's experiences of false and wicked religious leaders

Ezekiel came a little later and was also called to confront the religious leaders of his day. God gave him a series of visions of what they were doing behind closed doors, when they thought nobody could see. Note how similar they were to the men whom Jeremiah had described:

¹⁰*So I went in and saw; and there, portrayed upon the wall round about, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel. ¹¹ And before them stood seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, with Ja-azani'ah the son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the smoke of the cloud of incense went up. ¹² Then he said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every man in his room of pictures? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'" ¹³ He said also to me, "You will see still greater abominations which they commit."*

Ezekiel 8:10-13 (RSV)

My hand will be against the prophets who see delusive visions and who give lying divinations; they shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 13:9 (RSV)

¹*The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.*

Ezekiel 34:1-4 (RSV)

In addressing these issues of corruption, apostasy and idolatry, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are not just speaking of a few exceptional people whose wickedness stood out in contrast to the goodness of the majority. On the contrary, the false apostate leaders were in the *majority* in their day and my own experience suggests they are in the majority in the leadership of today's churches too. I wish I could say otherwise, but I don't think I can.

The apostles' experience of false teachers and false leaders, even within the churches of the first century

The series of passages below are from the New Testament and show that such corruption was also found, even in the first century. That was when the Church was in the best condition it has ever been

in and still had the influence of the apostles. Such wickedness is even worse today, when the average Western church is vastly inferior to those which the apostles wrote to. They were more wholesome, and better led, than most of our churches today. Even so, the apostles met many false people in the churches, including those in leadership and teaching roles.

Moreover, they thought this was really important. Indeed, much of the New Testament was written to correct the errors and lies that such people taught and to address their wrong behaviour and carnality, including sexual sin, false teaching and malice. I have included a long series of passages to show that these things were not at all exceptional. They arose in all sorts of churches and places, even in the 'golden age' of the Church from the AD 50s, when Galatians was written, right through to about AD 100, when John wrote Revelation. Consider this list of examples:

¹*It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife.* ²*And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (RSV)

⁶*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel--* ⁷*not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

Galatians 1:6-7 (RSV)

⁴*But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage* ⁵*to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*

Galatians 2:4-5 (RSV)

¹³*until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;* ¹⁴*so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.*

Ephesians 4:13-14 (RSV)

holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith,

1 Timothy 1:19 (RSV)

⁹*Do your best to come to me soon.* ¹⁰*For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica*

2 Timothy 4:9-10(a) (RSV)

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will requite him for his deeds

2 Timothy 4:14 (RSV)

¹⁰*For there are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially the circumcision party;* ¹¹*they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for base gain what they have no right to teach.*

Titus 1:10-11 (RSV)

¹⁸*Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour.* ¹⁹*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us.*

1 John 2:18-19 (RSV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4: 1(RSV)

for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

2 John 11 (RSV)

"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false

Revelation 2:2 (RSV)

Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicola'itans, which I also hate

Revelation 2: 6 (RSV)

How does a Christian, even a real one, change and become wicked?

People do not change overnight from one category to another, such that a simple person becomes a fool or a fool becomes wicked. The changes we undergo are much more gradual and the boundaries are also blurred. We are all born with a sin nature, but we are not born wicked. The baby son of the wicked King Jeroboam of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the passage below illustrates that. He was part of a very evil family. Yet God said, through the prophet Ahija, that that child, who died in infancy, was “*pleasing*” to Him. Accordingly, that baby was clearly not born wicked:

¹²Arise therefore, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child shall die. ¹³ And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him; for he only of Jerobo'am shall come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to the LORD, the God of Israel, in the house of Jerobo'am. ¹⁴ Moreover the LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jerobo'am today. And henceforth

1 Kings 14:12-14 (RSV)

Wickedness in a Christian, especially in a teacher or leader, rarely shows itself in spectacular acts of criminality or scandal. Very few false Christians rob banks or murder people. Very few non-Christians do those things either. If such acts were required to make a person wicked we could all let out a sigh of relief because we are unlikely to encounter many of them. If we are thinking in those terms we are misunderstanding wickedness and are unlikely to recognise it when we see it.

Wickedness in a Christian is not the ordinary sin, falling short, stumbling and inadequacy to which we are all so prone. Such things prove we are all *sinners*, but not that we are *wicked*. To become wicked requires us to go further than that and to keep doing so. Even a mature Christian sins every day in all sorts of ways. Indeed, even the greatest believers such as Daniel, Job, Samuel, David, Noah and Paul were all sinners. But they were not wicked. ‘*Sin*’ means to fall short of God’s standard, which we all do regularly, but that continual falling short does not mean we are all wicked.

I was discussing this issue with a woman who said “*But isn’t it judgemental to consider anybody else to be wicked? Aren’t we all wicked?*” The answer is we are certainly all sinners, but we are not all wicked. To imagine that we are all wicked will create as much confusion as imagining that nobody is. It will also prevent you recognising those who really are wicked. Likewise, the word ‘*transgression*’ means to break one of God’s known laws or commandments. We all do that regularly, whenever we covet, look upon a woman lustfully, fail to honour our parents and so on.

But doing those things does not necessarily mean we are wicked either. If it did every Christian would have to be classified as wicked and there would be no other categories. What then about ‘*iniquity*’, which means *rebellion*? That is getting closer, but it is still something we all do. Indeed, whenever we operate in our *old man* we are in rebellion because our old man, or flesh, is an incurable

rebel against God. So even going so far as to be guilty of iniquity or rebellion does not necessarily mean that a person is wicked.

Sin, transgression and iniquity (rebellion) are all inevitable in the life of every Christian. However, a person is in danger of eventually becoming wicked if he excuses himself when he sins and justifies what he did, fails to confess it, or hardens his heart about it. Likewise, he is in danger if he calls his sin by some other name such as a *weakness, condition, illness* etc, as when a drunkard calls himself an *alcoholic*. The distinction is important, because to be a drunkard is both a sin and a transgression, because the Bible forbids it.

However, to call oneself an 'alcoholic' is to view oneself as having an *illness* rather than admitting to being a *wrongdoer*. If that was true, one would not necessarily be responsible for one's own actions. That approach is misguided and unbiblical because we are fully responsible for what we drink or eat or for what drugs we take and for all other excesses or abuses. An ordinary sinner is also in danger of becoming wicked if he resists and ignores the voice of the Holy Spirit when He seeks to convict him of the wrongness of what he did. Zechariah speaks of this:

¹¹ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. ¹² They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts. ¹³ "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the Lord of hosts,

Zechariah 7:11-13 (ESV)

An ordinary sinner is likely to become wicked if he lies to himself or others about his own sin, or if he lies to God about it. The same applies if he imagines himself to be immune to, or exempt from, God's judgment. When an ordinary sinner does such things, he eventually becomes so hardened and complacent he no longer thinks about his sin at all, or even notices it. It ceases to register with him or to concern him. In the end he reaches the stage where God completes the hardening process for him by hardening his heart even more, as God did to Pharaoh in Egypt.

If a man has only just started to tell lies he will lie in small ways and do it infrequently. However, if he is casual and fails to deal with his sin, he will progress to the next stage. Then he will lie increasingly frequently, in ever larger ways, and with less and less concern about it. Eventually he will reach a place where he feels no shame or concern about his wrong behaviour, even when he gets caught. Moreover, there will be no concern about the coming judgment, or fear as to how Jesus will deal with it.

He will eventually also lose all love of the truth, such that the truth will cease to matter to him. That is a very dangerous position to get into. Wickedness in the life of a Christian is about sinning in those ways on an *ongoing* basis, *and with those wrong attitudes* listed above. Once you see it this way it is easier to see why there is so much of it, even in churches. Having some knowledge of the truth, and of God's commands, brings greater responsibility and makes our sins a more serious matter than the sins of an unbeliever.

The greater the knowledge, the greater is the responsibility. Accordingly, it is actually within the churches that one would expect to see the *most* wickedness, not the least. The wickedness within churches would be far less common if each church only recognised as Christians those who are genuinely born again, who truly believe and sincerely repent. Instead, most churches do nothing to assess the real spiritual condition of their members, or even of their leaders. Thus the problem of false converts is widespread. They may know some factual information about God, the Gospel and the Bible, but they are not born again or truly repentant.

Nevertheless, it is automatically assumed that they are all saved and part of the real Church. It is rare even to consider such questions, let alone preach about them. It is even rarer for any leader to

challenge anybody about whether they are saved. Though it might sound odd, it may possibly be God's view that there is more wickedness in a particular church than in a prison. When one considers that the men in that prison probably know very little about the Bible, their crimes might well be less severe in God's eyes than the manipulation and lies of Christians, or those who claim to be Christians.

A 'churchgoer' knows that God exists and may also know what He has said about such sins. But the men in the prison may not know any of that. I cannot be sure and I have no clear authority which I could quote to prove that God views things this way. But I do sense that it may be the case and it does fit the overall pattern and principles of God's judgment. For example, we see in the book of James that a teacher of the Bible will be judged with greater strictness than someone who is not a teacher of the Bible:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.

James 3:1 (RSV)

Note also what Jesus says, in the book of Luke, concerning the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants. If a person is aware of his master's will, then more will be expected of him than of someone who knows little or nothing:

⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

Luke 12:47-48 (RSV)

The example of the life of Balaam, a man used by God to give some amazing prophecies, but who became dishonest and greedy for money

Balaam was a mysterious man who was used by God to prophesy. I say it that way because some people don't think he was a prophet. Whatever he was exactly, he gave some important prophecies, such as in Numbers chapter 24. Yet, he became wicked, as he had a lot of knowledge, but behaved appallingly. Due to his high level of understanding, Balaam will surely be judged more strictly than other men for letting the love of money take over his heart. Peter records how his greed drew him into sin. Peter also confirms that Balaam was a prophet. Yet he still acted wickedly:

¹³suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. ¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! ¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness

2 Peter 2:13-16 (ESV)

The account begins with Balak, the King of Moab, offering Balaam money to curse the people of Israel. Initially he refuses, but the temptation takes root. Balak realises that Balaam is tempted and keeps asking him, sensing that Balaam will eventually yield to the desire for money:

⁷ So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. ⁸ And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me." So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. ⁹ And God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" ¹⁰ And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me, saying, ¹¹ 'Behold, a

people has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Now come, curse them for me. Perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.”¹² God said to Balaam, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.”¹³ So Balaam rose in the morning and said to the princes of Balak, “Go to your own land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you.”¹⁴ So the princes of Moab rose and went to Balak and said, “Balaam refuses to come with us.”

Numbers 22:7-14 (ESV)

Balaam again refuses, but his resolve is weakening. The desire for money is beginning to affect him, even though he claims to be determined only to do what God tells him:

¹⁵ Once again Balak sent princes, more in number and more honorable than these. ¹⁶ And they came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: ‘Let nothing hinder you from coming to me, ¹⁷ for I will surely do you great honor, and whatever you say to me I will do. Come, curse this people for me.’” ¹⁸ But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God to do less or more. ¹⁹ So you, too, please stay here tonight, that I may know what more the LORD will say to me.” ²⁰ And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, “If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you.” ²¹ So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

Numbers 22:15-21 (ESV)

Although Balaam never directly cursed God's people, he did harm them indirectly in the end by revealing to King Balak the best way to undermine them. He advised Balak to tempt the people to worship the Canaanite gods. That idolatry and the sexual sin that goes with it brought God's own judgment on Israel, as Balaam knew it would. Thus he indirectly achieved all of what Balak had wanted him to do to harm the people of Israel:

¹While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. ²These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.

Numbers 25:1-3 (ESV)

Balaam helped to undermine Israel despite knowing how much damage would be caused, and it was all because he wanted money. He advised Balak how to put a ‘stumbling block’ in their way to get the Israelites to sin, so that God would then punish them. That suited Balak’s purposes:

¹⁶ Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD.

Numbers 31:16 (ESV)

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

Revelation 2:14 (ESV)

What Balaam did was wicked. Indeed, it would be hard to think of anything more wicked than to deliberately harm God’s chosen people and to help one of Israel’s enemies, just to get money. This therefore brought God's judgment on Balaam personally and he was later killed during a battle. However he will, one day, face God’s final judgment on the Day of Judgment itself:

⁸ They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

Numbers 31:8 (ESV)

False teachers and false prophets in general

Balaam was not unique. There are many false teachers and false prophets like him today who share his love of money and power. Such people creep in to the churches and cause great damage:

⁴ For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jude 4 (ESV)

Jude, the physical half-brother of Jesus, says that such false people come in to the churches and mingle with the real believers. They then engage in all their activities, including eating with them at their 'love feasts'. That is a reference to how the church met in homes to eat a meal together. Jude makes clear that such false Christians will receive a severe judgment from God:

¹⁰ But these people blaspheme all that they do not understand, and they are destroyed by all that they, like unreasoning animals, understand instinctively. ¹¹ Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. ¹² These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, as they feast with you without fear, shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; ¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude 10-13 (ESV)

Jesus also spoke about this problem of false prophets:

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:15-20 (ESV)

Jesus then goes on to say these very troubling words:

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

If you are an insincere, unrepentant person who claims to be a Christian, but without being real, then you are in grave danger. You face God's judgment and an eternity in the Lake of Fire unless you change your direction. But few people in that perilous condition ever do change because they simply do not *choose* to do so. Let that not be true of you. If you are false and unrepentant, and if all you really have is religious tradition, with no real relationship with God, you are already well on your way to becoming wicked. If so, the only solution is genuine, sincere repentance.

How should we relate to wicked people who are inside the church and are apostates?

This is a controversial topic, and it is ignored by most churches. However, the biblical position is that for a person to be recognised as a real believer, and to be allowed to be actively involved in a church,

they have to be a *genuine Christian*. That means someone who really has believed, repented, been baptised in water and received the Holy Spirit. In other words they must be *born again*. That is how the first century church operated. For a person to be treated as a fellow believer in the early Church, they had to *actually be* a Christian, not merely *claim* to be one.

We are not meant to treat unsaved people as if they were real Christians, and therefore our brothers and sisters in the Church, just because they *claim to be*. Look at the way Jesus directly confronted a proud, haughty leader of a synagogue. He did not automatically accept him as a sincere believer. He contradicted him and called him, and others like him, ‘*hypocrites*’. Jesus viewed such false, unrepentant, people as His adversaries, not His friends. He was realistic and was not at all naive:

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. ¹⁴ But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” ¹⁵ Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” ¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

Luke 13:10-17 (ESV)

Today most churches have abandoned the practice of finding out whether new people are genuine believers and thus eligible to be a member of a local church. Virtually anybody is automatically allowed to become part of a church, merely because they wish to join it and claim to be believers. The question of what they really are is rarely raised. Some leaders are afraid to do so in case it causes offence. Others see no need to do it. For many, the issue would not even occur to them. Such a casual or cowardly approach is not biblical. The Church is so immensely important that we must find out whether people are genuine and only treat them as a brother in Christ if they really are one.

We must not treat unbelievers as if they were believers, or permit them to play a full role in a local church, if they are actually *unbelieving, unrepentant and unsaved*. That is even more important if they are *apostate*. That is if someone who used to believe, but has now denied the faith and begun to live in such a way as to discredit the Gospel and the name of Jesus Christ. Either way, such a person is to be classified as what they really are and excluded from fellowship. Consider also what apostle John says about how we should relate, or rather not relate, to those whose doctrine is false:

⁹Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; ¹¹for he who greets him shares his wicked work.

2 John 9-11 (RSV)

See also what apostle Paul says to the Corinthians:

*⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.” *1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (ESV)**

Then look at how strongly Jesus' half-brother, Jude, speaks about false people who say they are Christians, but aren't:

¹⁶These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage. ¹⁷But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; ¹⁸they said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." ¹⁹It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.

Jude 16-19 (RSV)

This does not mean that sincere *unbelievers* who are still searching for the truth, or considering the Gospel, or who are just our relatives or friends, cannot be involved in the local church. Of course they can attend and take part, as long as it is *clearly understood* that they are currently *unbelievers* and are not yet a member of the body of Christ. We must never regard an unbeliever as if he was a believer, or treat a false believer as if they were a genuine one. So, churches should be welcoming to unbelievers who are sincerely enquiring.

However, they must be assertive with those who claim to be believers, but deny the faith or live in blatant sin, for which they are not repenting. Such people need to be challenged and even put out of the local church if they won't repent. That is regrettable but necessary. If they are not they will eventually ruin that church by undermining its integrity and damaging its people. Their malignant influence will grow within that church like a tumour in a person's body. Sadly, the frankness and courage needed to challenge people can only be achieved if the church is operating in a biblical way.

If it isn't, then it is difficult to see how any of this can be done, or how anybody can even be challenged, let alone excluded. At any rate, the fact is that this isn't actually being done today in the vast majority of churches. They end up as a mixture of all kinds of people, including those who are real and unreal, sincere and insincere, true and false, saved and unsaved. Yet no distinction is made between any of them. That is deeply damaging to the church and will render it powerless, compromised and eventually apostate.

We must therefore identify the false, the apostate and the wicked amongst us and, if they won't repent, put them out of fellowship. We must do that to them not for being unbelievers, but for *falsely claiming* to be believers when they aren't, and/or for living in serious and blatant sin *while* claiming to be a Christian. Their falseness and hypocrisy are the main issues, more so than the underlying sins themselves. Instead, we see vicars and bishops in the Church of England who deny every doctrine or live in sinful relationships, even as active homosexuals, without any repentance.

They even appoint homosexuals to positions of leadership, and they boast about it, as if it was something to be proud of. Yet, far from being removed from positions of authority, they are retained and even promoted. Conversely, a godly man like Nick Howard, a Messianic Jewish believer, and the son of the former Leader of the Opposition in the UK, was refused a position as a vicar in the Church of England simply because he opposes homosexual behaviour.

That indicates how upside down and corrupt much of the Church of England has become. A godly and faithful man like Nick Howard was rejected, whereas Rowan Williams, an outright liberal and also a Druid, was made Archbishop of Canterbury! Like so many other churches and denominations today, the leadership of the Church of England refuses to identify and expel those who do wrong. But they have no qualms about obstructing, and even expelling, those who do right. The only people they consider unacceptable are those who tell the straightforward truth about what the Bible says.

CHAPTER 14

HANDLING THE WICKED IN THE CONTEXT OF A CHURCH – PART ONE

¹³ *“For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.
Jeremiah 2:13 (NKJV)*

*“For my people are foolish,
they know me not;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but how to do good they know not.”
Jeremiah 4:22 (RSV)*

⁹ *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; ¹⁰ not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”
1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (RSV)*

*Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?
No, they were not at all ashamed;
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among the fallen;
when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,
says the Lord.*

Jeremiah 8:12 (RSV)

⁷ *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. ⁸ Look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹ Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If any one comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting; ¹¹ for he who greets him shares his wicked work.*

2 John 7-11 (RSV)

In a church ‘Absaloms’ have to be handled by the elders as a whole, or by the whole church. One individual rarely has enough authority, or confidence, to take the necessary action

To tackle an ‘Absalom’ or an ‘Adonijah’ you must have *legitimate* authority and real power, so as to be able to make bold decisions. In a business that isn’t too difficult, provided you are senior enough, or if you own it. However, a church is different because nobody ‘owns’ it. If the church is structured in a biblical way then no single individual will have complete authority, all by himself. The biblical model for church is that authority is *shared* between a number of elders, not just one man, least of all one who thinks and acts as if he is the ruler. Such a man is potentially a kind of Absalom himself.

In a church, as opposed to a business or secular organisation, the only effective way to tackle an Absalom is for all the elders, and ideally the wider membership, to act together. Then there is legitimate authority to make decisions and any disciplinary action, or steps to expel the Absalom, can also be pursued right through to the end. If it isn't done in that way, you are likely to end up with a new illegitimate would-be 'ruler', seeking to usurp the position of the existing one-man leadership.

That said, the current leader himself may have usurped that authority in the first place, or acquired it in some illegitimate way. The traditional one-man model of church leadership is unbiblical and prone to becoming corrupted. Insecure men use it to try to hang on to power and to fend off would-be rivals. If so, they are just one illegitimate leader trying to resist another one. Therefore an Absalom cannot be tackled properly in an unbiblical, traditional church context. The leader dealing with him may well be just as illegitimate as the Absalom he is trying to tackle.

Be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.

Jesus said, at Matthew 10:16, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.*" By contrast, a wicked person is "as shrewd as a *serpent* and as innocent as a *serpent*, and a simple person tends to be "as shrewd as a *dove* and as innocent as a *dove*". Neither of these combinations is any good. We have to be "as shrewd as a *serpent* and as innocent as a *dove*". That is the only combination that will work. We are expected to operate in accordance with God's standards, even though we are surrounded by wicked people who have no regard for right or wrong.

We could match the wicked by becoming like them, but that would mean losing our innocence. Or we could just preserve our innocence, without learning to be shrewd, in which case we will be continually defeated. Alternatively, we can take the right approach, which is to preserve our innocence but to learn how to handle wicked people. This requires us to become as shrewd as the wicked, or even shrewder, yet without acting like them. In other words, we are to seek to achieve the same levels of shrewdness as they have, but without ever imitating their wickedness.

That is the only right option, but it is very difficult to achieve and takes a long time to learn. Nevertheless, it is possible. Having worked for nearly three decades, firstly in the police force and then as a lawyer and business man, I have made a lot of progress. But it took me decades to learn how to deal successfully with wicked people. Jesus was well aware of how hard it would be. He knew that the only way we could ever achieve it is by staying close to Him, studying the Bible thoroughly, and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

We must also be willing to suffer the consequences of many mistakes and failures as we gradually learn, by trial and error, how to handle the wicked. There is no alternative. If you aren't willing to risk failure, or make mistakes, you will never get there. Maybe I have been a slow learner, but I think even apostle Paul would have taken a long time to learn these difficult lessons. Perhaps that is one reason why God kept Paul in Arabia for years before his ministry began in earnest, growing in wisdom and getting prepared. God kept Paul on the side-lines, learning and maturing, before letting him go on his first missionary journey.

The implication is that, despite his huge talent, Paul wasn't yet ready to handle the enormous responsibilities that were going to be entrusted to him. Few of us would keep someone like Paul in obscurity, unused, for such a long time. It would be like a football manager keeping Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo in the reserves for years, without letting them play in the first team. No manager would do it but God is quite willing to, especially if He has a big role in store for that person. God's way is to prepare people thoroughly and He is never in a hurry to do that, even if we are.

The hardest thing I have found in developing discernment was learning how to anticipate the devious actions of wicked people. They are so different in their approach that their thought processes and

ways seem alien to naïve people. It is hard to believe they will do things which it would never occur to us to do. One reason why a simple person cannot naturally identify with the way the wicked think is that he cannot look back at examples of himself having acted in the same way.

The ways of the wicked are so alien to the simple person that he will struggle to get onto their wavelength at all. Nevertheless, that is what we are commanded to do, so as to understand their sinfulness, whilst not being sinful ourselves. God wants us to be thoroughly shrewd, astute and well-informed in everything we do, especially in handling money, power and other people. Here is how Jesus made that point:

¹He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ²And he called him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager." ³And the manager said to himself, "What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses." ⁵So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, "How much do you owe my master?" ⁶He said, "A hundred measures of oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty." ⁷Then he said to another, "And how much do you owe?" He said, "A hundred measures of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill, and write eighty." ⁸The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. ⁹And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

Luke 16:1-9 (ESV)

The above passage confuses a lot of people. They wrongly think that Jesus is telling us to be devious, like this dishonest steward was. Far from it. Jesus isn't praising his *dishonesty* at all. He is merely asking us to reach the same level of *shrewdness*. But He only wants us to be shrewd in an honest and godly way, not as the world is. Moreover, the fact that He commands us to acquire such wisdom and shrewdness means that it must be possible to achieve, albeit very difficult.

The difference between being discerning and judgemental

As we saw in chapter 5, many Christians get confused about the whole subject of 'judging'. It seems, even to genuine believers, that the Bible contradicts itself. It commands us *never* to judge other people, but also commands us *always* to judge other people. It really isn't a contradiction, because it is referring to two entirely different types of judgement. The first kind, which we must *never* do, is to look down on other people with an attitude of superiority and self-righteousness and to condemn them for sins of which we are guilty ourselves. Firstly, that is hypocrisy, but it is also usurping the role that only Jesus can perform, which is to be the Judge of the whole world.

The wrong kind of judging, which we are forbidden to do

Only Jesus is qualified to judge the extent of each man's blameworthiness. Only He knows how to take into account the hundreds of different factors which either compound or mitigate their guilt. We simply can't do that, and must never even try. We are forbidden to do it by Jesus Himself:

¹"Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You

hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Matthew 7:1-5 (RSV)

Apostle Paul also addresses this in his letter to the Romans. He warns us that the judgment of God will come upon us if we judge others in that illegitimate and hypocritical way:

¹Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things. ³Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Romans 2:1-5 (RSV)

Paul then makes it clear that we must never engage in that type of judgment:

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Romans 14:10-13 (RSV)

If we judge others in this *illegitimate* way, (as a 'kree-tace', rather than as a 'diakrino' - see chapter 5) then the same criteria that we use to judge them will later be applied to us when we face the *legitimate* judgment of Jesus. Therefore, if we judge and condemn others now in an unmerciful way, those same standards will be used for our own judgment. The prospect of being judged more strictly at our own future judgment is an added reason not to judge others illegitimately now. Even where we have to assess other people, for legitimate reasons, we would still be wise to be merciful and to allow them the same leeway that we want Jesus to show us.

The right kind of judging, which we are commanded to do

The right type of judging, that we are *commanded* to do, (*diakrino*) does not involve usurping Jesus' role or being a hypocrite. There is no assumption of superiority or of being sinless ourselves. It means weighing, assessing and evaluating other people, so as to avoid being deceived, manipulated or wrongly taught. We are both *entitled and required* to judge the things that men *teach*, plus their use of any *spiritual gift* and also their *character and trustworthiness*. This applies to everybody, no matter who they are. In the passages below we are not merely permitted, but commanded by Jesus, and also by Paul, Luke and John, to assess other people's doctrine, gifts, and characters. Firstly, this is what Jesus said:

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

John 7:24 (RSV)

Next Paul tells us that we need to assess the nature and character of fellow believers and even to avoid contact with those who are insincere. He uses very strong words:

⁹I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; ¹⁰not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But rather I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he

is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber--not even to eat with such a one. ¹²For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? ¹³God judges those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you."

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (RSV)

In this next passage, Luke praises the people of Berea because they carefully checked the Scriptures to see whether apostle Paul's teaching was sound. Far from being offended, Paul was really pleased. Luke even describes the Bereans as 'noble' for being so vigilant:

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Acts 17:11 (RSV)

When it comes to other people's exercise of spiritual gifts, we are told to be equally careful and to "test everything". The responsibility for doing this testing is not solely with leaders, but on every individual believer. None of us can delegate to anybody else this duty to be vigilant and discerning:

¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit, ²⁰do not despise prophesying, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good,

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 (RSV)

Apostle John also backs this up and warns the people of the late first century AD that there were already false prophets active in the Church. There must be a great many more of them today:

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

1 John 4:1-3 (RSV)

When John refers to testing the 'spirits' he is not only referring to evil spirits or demons, but also the human spirit of each person we meet. So we are also to test what kind of nature or character people have. Jesus expresses a similar point and so does Paul:

¹⁵"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. ¹⁸A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Matthew 7:15-20 (RSV)

²Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, matters pertaining to this life!

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 (RSV)

Never assume that people are wise - begin by holding no view at all.

There are four main categories of people, the wicked, the fool, the simple and the wise. The wise are also, by definition, good and trustworthy. We are repeatedly warned about the first two groups and told to be on the alert. How can it make any sense to assume that everybody we meet is wise, as if there is only one category of person, when the Bible plainly tells us that there are four? If that was the

case, and everybody was the same, it would negate the need for us to be vigilant, or even to assess people at all.

We know that people have different blood groups, A, B or O, and that they are also either rhesus positive or negative. It would therefore be absurd to assume that everybody we meet is in blood group B rhesus negative. Doctors make no assumptions about your blood group until tests have been done. We need to do the same when deciding whether the people we meet are wicked, foolish, simple or wise. Begin by having an open mind and make no assumptions, in any direction.

Be slow to trust people.

Be slow to trust people. Also keep an open mind until you have known them long enough, done enough tests, and seen them in enough situations, to be able to form a meaningful and reliable view. Even when you feel there is a basis for trusting a person, that does not mean you should jump overnight to trusting them 100% and for all purposes. We need to have a number of different levels of trust. Each person we deal with should then be moved up gradually, a step at a time, from one grade of trustworthiness to another, not all in one go.

It is like getting a job working for the Foreign Office, MI5 or MI6. They may have made enquiries and taken references, such that they are willing to trust you in a secretarial role. But that does not mean they will trust you with *all* their secret data. Many of their activities, and most of their database, will still be out of bounds to you until you firstly establish yourself at a junior clerical grade and prove that you can be trusted at that level. Only then will they consider going any further.

Even then, they will only move your security rating up by one grade, not straight to the highest level. Trust has to be earned, stage by stage, not all at once. That one point would save us from a lot of trouble if we could only learn to operate that way. Most Christians are far too quick to trust others, even strangers, as a default-setting. Some of us also have only one level of complete 100% trust for everybody, instead of a series of graduated levels or stages.

You can quickly conclude that someone *cannot* be trusted, but you must take your time before concluding that they *can* be.

You must be slow to conclude that you *can* trust a person. However it is legitimate to quickly form the conclusion that a person is *not* to be trusted. That is quite different and there is no contradiction or inconsistency in that. A person can properly be classified as *untrustworthy* based on a single incident, even if it's just a first impression on meeting them. However, to classify them as *trustworthy* requires a long and consistently positive series of incidents and tests, and for them to handle all of those satisfactorily.

Therefore your standard default position should be that nobody is to be trusted at all until and unless, and only to the extent, that it is proved that they can be. Until then, just keep an open mind and reserve judgement. In other words, even if you currently have no evidence to suggest they *cannot* be trusted, you should still assume that they cannot be until it is *proved* that they *can* be. However, if evidence does quickly emerge that a person *cannot* be trusted, you can legitimately speed up the assessment process and conclude that they are not trustworthy.

You do not need to wait until you have got several reasons not to trust them. One reason is quite sufficient when you are travelling in that direction. Moreover, if there is any reason to think they might be *wicked*, then not only avoid telling them important or classified information - don't tell them anything *at all*. Don't even tell them what you had for breakfast, and I mean that literally.

Even a fact as trivial as that is capable of being misused. Therefore a complete news blackout is needed when dealing with the wicked. Furthermore, it is right and proper to go to this stage in one single step, the very *first time* you see any sign of falseness or malice. There's no need to build up to it steadily or to get corroboration beforehand, as is needed when deciding how far somebody *can* be trusted.

Be very careful about whom you speak to or confide in, especially about sensitive matters.

You need to be particularly careful as to whom you confide in about sensitive matters. Some people feel a strong desire to tell their secrets and problems to others. It comforts them to do so. If you are like that, make a big effort to resist that urge. Only confide in anybody at all if it is *essential* that you do so, which will be rare. Don't do it merely to make conversation, or to gain comfort from sharing your troubles.

The people you are confiding in today may be exposed next year as false and untrustworthy, and as having been so from the beginning. I know, as it has happened to me many times. Sometimes you may find that you confide in people without even knowing *why* you are doing it. The information is *drawn* out of you, as if it was being sucked out or siphoned. If that happens you are likely to have been the victim of witchcraft, i.e. mind-control.

The other person was probably using a combination of demonic power, together with their own soulish power and ordinary craftiness, to extract information from you unconsciously, even against your will. That is a standard part of what witchcraft is all about, i.e. the manipulation, domination and control of other people by using either demonic power, or one's own soulish power, or both combined.

If you suspect that someone is wicked, or even that they might be, then don't tell them anything at all, however trivial those facts might seem to you.

If you have gone beyond merely suspecting a person and have concluded they are wicked, or are probably so, then do not merely withhold *sensitive* information from them. Withhold *all* information, whether it is sensitive or not. Tell them nothing at all, even if it appears to be of no conceivable use to anybody. You can be sure they will find some corrupt use for it or they would not bother to extract it from you.

If nothing else, they will use those tiny facts about you to give the false impression to others that they are close friends of yours. Then the lies they tell are more likely to be believed. The very fact that they can refer to small but accurate details about you will give the impression that the lies they tell are also correct. Confidence tricksters use this technique to get you to believe the big lie by providing you with a number of little facts and details which are true. That lowers your guard and makes you feel they must be authentic. Therefore don't give the wicked any such facts or details.

When I ran a law firm certain staff would try to find out trivial little facts about me and then use those to get others to think they knew me well. That gave them power over other staff. It implied that they were in a position to influence me and to affect their colleagues' careers. To a sincere person, that may sound far-fetched, but I can assure you it is a very normal way for wicked people to operate. That is one reason why King David spoke of putting a muzzle on his own mouth when the wicked were present:

*I said, "I will guard my ways,
that I may not sin with my tongue;
I will guard my mouth with a muzzle,
so long as the wicked are in my presence." Psalm 39:1 (ESV)*

Also, when a wicked person can quote little facts about you it will cause others to conclude that if they know you that well, and if you have already disclosed that information to them, they must be a person whom you trust. Therefore others may conclude that they can also trust that person and open up to them, giving yet more information which they would not otherwise have given.

They might also say to themselves that if this person already knows this much, then it cannot do any harm for them to provide additional facts, because he already seems to know some of it anyway. Therefore they will open up to that wicked person and say things which may harm you, or them, or other people, all because you were unguarded at the beginning and said too much in front of the wicked.

To the wicked, no fact is ever too trivial to be useful. They will find a use for anything, because knowledge is power. Therefore wicked people crave for any kind of information. They will want to know what you are doing, how your business is operating, whom you know, how your family is, what church you go to, when you are going on holiday, and anything else under the sun. I remember one occasion, just after I'd left a church due to the wickedness of the leadership, especially Rick, the senior leader. Some months later I went to a barbecue at a friend's house.

Also in attendance was Rick's brother in law, 'Dennis'. He knew that I had left the church and why. Indeed, Dennis was a minor part of the reason why we had left, because he had tried to manipulate me himself, on Rick's behalf. Therefore I also had a low opinion of him and he was well aware of that too. But he didn't allow any of that to stop him from seeking to get as much information from me as he could. On the contrary, he came bounding over to me at the barbecue and began to fire a series of questions at me, as if he was being friendly.

He firstly asked how my family was but I simply replied "*Fine*". He then asked several more questions about my business, what staff we had, how much work we had taken on, etc. I just repeatedly replied "*It's doing fine*". My terse and evasive responses may have sounded odd to a bystander, but I wasn't being rude. I just wasn't willing to tell Dennis anything at all. I also knew that he had no genuine interest in my family, or my business. He just wanted facts that he could use, and also report back to others, for them to use. So it was he who was being rude, not me.

He kept pursuing me, like an investigative journalist, and paid no attention to the obvious fact that I was giving no answers. Moreover, Dennis was not the least bit offended by my non-answers, as you would expect a person to be if his questions were sincere. He was far too thick-skinned and false to be offended, as is usually the case with the wicked. On that occasion I resisted him completely and he got no information whatsoever from me. But I still found it a struggle. While he was questioning me I felt a strange urge to tell him things voluntarily, even when he wasn't asking questions.

It felt as if information was being sucked from me with a siphon. Yet I knew enough by then to realise that if you ever feel *drawn* to reveal things you must immediately *stop yourself*. Force yourself to zip up your mouth and say nothing. That urge to reveal information is probably due to other people's soulish manipulation or mind-control, which is an aspect of witchcraft. You must always resist it. Moreover, if a person seems to have a close interest in the details of your life and *wants* information, or *keeps asking questions*, it should set an alarm bell ringing.

The chances are they are asking those questions for illegitimate and even sinister reasons. Of course they could just be "making conversation" or trying to be friendly. But even if that is the case, there is no harm done by you gently and politely steering the conversation away from yourself and on to other topics. If the person is genuine they won't mind. They will be equally happy to discuss other things. However, if their motives are evil, they will certainly mind and will try hard to bring the conversation back to you and to get as much information from you as they can.

Where you see any such attempts being made to bring the conversation back to asking questions then beware. It is a strong indicator that they are pumping you for information, either to use for

themselves or to pass on to others for them to use. If so, clam up even more firmly. Change the subject, as often as it takes. Or start asking them questions about themselves or their families. Don't worry about whether this might sound impolite. Only sincere people worry about such things. The wicked don't. At any rate, it has to be done, whether it upsets them or not.

Genuine, sincere people will take an interest in you and in what you are doing, but they will never crave for information or make any effort to extract it from you.

You should consider it odd, and sinister, if people crave for information about you. That is not how sincere, wholesome, trustworthy people are. Therefore if a person has an excessive, persistent desire to know about you and your business, family, church, relatives etc, then take note. See it for the problem that it is. Their very questions need to be seen as a warning. Genuine people will take a healthy interest in you, and will ask a moderate number of reasonable questions. But they will be quite relaxed if you choose not to answer all their questions because, although they are interested in you, they have no *craving* for information.

That is one of the features which differentiate the sincere from the insincere. When I have spoken on this theme one question people ask is how they can refuse to answer persistent, probing questions without sounding rude. One woman was concerned about this because some people she knew closely, and could not easily avoid, were regularly asking her for information. I advised her to simply give no answers, or to give evasive answers, or just to change the subject. She then asked: "*But what if they ask me why I am repeatedly avoiding their questions?*"

I replied: "*If they ask that, then simply ask them why they are repeatedly asking the same questions.*" That seemed to be a breakthrough for her. She had, up to then, only been able to see the rudeness of her refusing to answer their questions. She suddenly saw that it is actually far ruder, and even ominous, for them to keep pressing her for answers to intrusive questions which she obviously doesn't want to answer. We should all try hard to avoid rudeness, but it is also important to discern the sinister intentions of other people who keep pressing us for information.

Whilst we might try to avoid the perception of rudeness in stone-walling them, that is far less important than the need to tell them nothing. Besides, their behaviour means they forfeit the right to have their feelings taken into account. That said, you needn't worry in any case. Such people have the skin of a rhinoceros. You can't offend them, even if you wanted to. They are far too hard-faced and thick-skinned for that to be possible. Their only emotion when you refuse to answer them is frustration, or even rage, at being thwarted. They aren't offended or hurt, as sincere people would be if you stone-walled them.

An example of how to refuse to answer questions is Chief Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh from the TV series by PD James. He was a senior police officer played by Roy Marsden and was brilliant at side-stepping questions which he didn't want to answer. Let him be your model. When asked a question by a witness or suspect he would just pause for a second, completely ignore it, without a trace of awkwardness, and then ask a question of his own. They couldn't complain, as they knew their own question to him was inappropriate, and even impertinent.

Learning how to identify the wicked - watch for their fruit.

We all let our flesh rule over our spirit too often. We then behave sinfully, with displays of temper, impatience, lust, envy, greed, selfishness, pride, lack of self-control and so on. Where we see any of that in others, or in ourselves, it is the sinful flesh nature coming to the surface and showing itself. That occurs regularly, even amongst mature Christians, as in the examples given above. But it does not, in itself, mean we are wicked. If it did, we would all be wicked, because we all continue to act in the flesh at times, even after we are saved.

We cannot identify a person's nature just by appearances. The only reliable way to identify a godly person, or a wicked one, is by examining their *fruit*. You can't tell merely by what they say, or even by what others say about them, but only by the fruit produced by their life over a reasonably long period. You need to see how they behave and what their life actually *produces*, not just what they *say*. The wicked can sound impressive and even spiritual, but in the end, they will produce evil fruit. That is there to be seen by those who are looking out for it, but not by those who aren't:

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. ³⁴You 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)

Even in a church, the main method for identifying wicked people is by observing and evaluating their fruit:

¹⁵ *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. ¹⁸ A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits*

Matthew 7:15-20 (RSV)

²⁰ *And he said, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man."*

Mark 7:20-23 (RSV)

We cannot tell much, if anything, merely from a person's observance of rules and regulations. Many wicked people keep all the religious rules and are very respectable, but they are still wicked. Likewise, there are others who are less meticulous about outward forms and procedures, but on the inside their hearts are right with God and they are full of sincerity. Therefore you can't just go by appearances, in either direction, and still less by observance of rules, traditions and liturgy.

However, the fleshly behaviour that we see in others may sometimes just be as a result of their immaturity, not necessarily wickedness.

Not all bad behaviour is necessarily evidence of wickedness, even if it is very severe. In particular we have to make allowances for the immaturity of the other person. A new believer behaving badly, even very badly, may just be showing their spiritual age and allowing their flesh to govern them. That would not be a sign of wickedness in someone who is at that early stage, just as it would not be if we saw bad behaviour in a young child. They may just be operating in the flesh and being self-centred, immature and undisciplined because they have not yet learned self-control:

¹*But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 (ESV)

On the other hand, we might see a mature person, even a leader, who ought to know better, but they are behaving dishonestly, maliciously and in the flesh. What they are doing could well be wicked. The more a man knows the Bible, the more his wrong behaviour should be a cause for concern, and

the less we should make allowances for it. Thus a lie coming from the mouth of a church leader is extremely serious and is a sign of his being wicked, not just immature. But it would not be anywhere near as serious if the same lie came from the mouth of a new believer.

CHAPTER 15

HANDLING THE WICKED IN THE CONTEXT OF A CHURCH – PART TWO

²⁶ *For wicked men are found among my people;
they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.
They set a trap;
they catch men.*

Jeremiah 5:26 (ESV)

¹⁶ *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

Matthew 10:16 (RSV)

¹⁷ *I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them.* ¹⁸ *For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.*

Romans 16:17-18 (RSV)

⁴ *For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.*

2 Corinthians 11:4 (RSV)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,² through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared,

1 Timothy 4:1-2 (RSV)

²⁴ *But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.*

Ezekiel 18:24 (ESV)

The wicked like to be with other wicked people. Therefore you can often identify them by simply looking at the company they keep.

The wicked want to mix with others who are like themselves, as we all do. So they naturally tend to congregate with other wicked people. They quickly recognise each other and they feel comfortable together, and prefer being with their own kind, rather than being with the wise or the simple:

⁴ *An evildoer listens to wicked lips;
and a liar gives heed to a mischievous tongue.*

Proverbs 17:4 (RSV)

*“They band themselves together,
they lurk, they watch my steps.....*

Psalms 56:6(a) (RSV)

This tendency of the wicked to recognise and associate with each other can be turned to your advantage. They instinctively know who the other wicked people are in a workplace or church and

they want to be with their own kind. Therefore, without realising it, they are helping you to identify both themselves and their friends, merely by the company they keep. You can use them as one of your 'carbon monoxide detectors' to reveal who the others are. The saying that "*You can judge a man by the friends he keeps*" is true. You really can, and with surprising accuracy.

Therefore, if you want to know what a man is like, take careful note of those with whom he *habitually* mixes. His friends' wickedness may be easier for you to see than his. They may not bother to hide their true nature from you because you are a stranger to them. However the wicked man himself, whom you do know, has every reason to hide his real nature from you. Therefore if you see wickedness in his companions, whom you *don't* know, look more closely for wickedness *in him*, the person whom you *do* know. An incident some years ago may help to explain this point.

I was managing a large law firm and was struggling to tackle a long running problem with a nest of hostile, embittered employees. Their conduct was bad and they were disloyal. I had managed to identify some of them, but not all. I had a lot of staff and it is not easy to keep an eye on all of them at the same time. I sacked one of them, 'Gary', for neglect of his duties and other misconduct. He was certainly wicked and very arrogant. After he left he went out to a nearby pub with some of his former colleagues, including some who were still working for me.

I knew nothing about them arranging to meet up with Gary but, by pure coincidence, or more probably by God's guidance, I walked into that very pub on the same evening. There was Gary, who had just been sacked, together with a small group of some of my worst staff. In amongst that cluster of sour and discontented people was a young man, whom I will call 'Derek'. I had always felt he was a loyal member of staff, as I had started him off in his legal career and he had always worked hard and was very polite. I had therefore assumed he was happy, and that he was faithful to the firm.

It therefore puzzled me when I saw him there with this toxic little group, all of whom were wicked (in my subjective view). However, I told myself there must be some innocent explanation for Derek being there. He seemed out of place, as far as I could see. I felt he did not belong with such people and assumed he had been roped in somehow, or had been unduly influenced by them. But I was completely wrong. It turned out that he was just as contemptuous as the others, without me having noticed any sign of it. He had the same negative, hostile attitude, despite all I had done for him.

Derek's real nature came out into the open a year or so later when he chose to leave the firm to get another job. As soon as he knew he was leaving, he took his 'mask' off. I then saw a different side to him that I never knew was there, though it had been there all along. He suddenly became openly resentful and showed a sullen ingratitude for all I had done for him. I found the dramatic change in his manner a surprise. But I had already been given a clear warning of his *real nature* a year earlier, when I saw him in the pub with that small group of embittered staff and ex-staff.

However, I missed the significance of him being there with them that night and failed to take the incident seriously enough, or to be guided by it. Although I had not, at that stage, discerned Derek's real nature and attitude, the other wicked staff had had no difficulty in doing so. Indeed, they had never been under any illusions to begin with. They had weighed him up correctly from the outset and he had equally accurately discerned their real nature.

His being with that hostile group at the pub the year before should have been a clear indicator to me of what *he* really was himself. I didn't have enough discernment to see those tell-tale signs at the time, so I missed that warning. If it happened today I would recognise it much faster and would give it far more weight. But back then, I understood the wicked much less thoroughly than I do now. I also underestimated their numbers and the harm they can do.

An objection someone has put to me is that employees are free to associate with whoever they want, especially out of work hours, and that who they choose to mix with is none of my business and ought

not to influence me. An employee, indeed anybody at all, is free to associate with whoever they want. I am not disputing that in the least. However, that is irrelevant.

The issue is not whether *they* are free to associate with whoever they choose. Of course they are. The issue is whether *you* are entitled to *draw adverse inferences* from the choices they make. My belief is that you can, and should, draw such inferences and that you need to act upon them. Indeed, you would be profoundly naïve not to do so.

How Stephen and Rhoda unwittingly identified all the hostile, embittered members of a church for us, by inviting them all to a meeting with them

‘Stephen and Rhoda’ left the church when we asked Rhoda to answer some questions about the gossip she had been spreading and the lies she had told. Some months later they were still very hostile. Therefore they invited some past and present members of the church to meetings that were taking place in someone’s house. We didn’t know anything about these meetings at the time, but learned of them afterwards. The point is that every person who was invited to those meetings was, in one way or another, resentful or embittered.

Rhoda rang round and invited each person herself. She selected them for the very reason that they were so resentful. She didn’t invite even one person who wasn’t sour and hostile towards us. This was plain when we looked at the list of names of those who had gone to the meetings. We were told of these by a couple who had previously been bitter towards us, due to some lies they had been told by Rhoda. They ceased to be so when they learned the truth. They then told us they had been invited to those meetings, who else had gone, and what had been spoken about.

Simply by looking at the list of people whom Rhoda had invited, one could see who all the bitter people were. Their natures were unwittingly revealed to us by Rhoda, because she knew who they all were and what they were really like. It also served to confirm Rhoda’s own malice that they were all willing to go to the meetings. The guidance operated in both directions. Rhoda’s willingness to invite them proved that *they* were false and bitter, and their willingness to attend proved that *she* was.

They *went* because they knew how embittered *she* was, and they were *invited* because Rhoda knew how bitter *they* were. So, her inviting them helped us identify their bitterness and their willingness to attend confirmed hers, and showed that we had not misjudged Rhoda. They were all acting like police ‘sniffer dogs’ on our behalf, finding where the other hostile people were and revealing them to us. Therefore, all we really needed to do was to take careful note of who they each were drawn to.

Our own lack of discernment could then be made up for by taking note of *theirs*. Moreover, Rhoda had also unwittingly confirmed the loyalty and sincerity of those *faithful* members of the church who chose *not* to cleave to her and came with us when we started the new church. Not even one of *them* had been invited to Rhoda’s meetings. Even in that regard, she helped us by confirming their genuineness. She knew, even better than we did, that they were on our side, not hers.

A wicked person can very quickly discern wickedness in others.

A wicked person has a heightened awareness of the wickedness in others and can recognise it far faster than a godly person can. They can also quickly discern if a person is bitter and resentful, and therefore receptive to being recruited to their cause. I have often observed their feral perceptiveness in operation in churches and workplaces. The wicked can also recognise someone else's dishonest intentions. I once had a PA called Julie, to whom I referred earlier. She was very wicked herself and could immediately spot other wicked people and predict their intentions.

On one occasion we had an office Christmas dinner at a hotel and I gave a large cash tip to the proprietor to share between all the staff. Julie told me the next morning that both she and her husband knew, even at the moment I gave the tip, that it would not go to the staff and that the owner would steal it all for himself. They could both see that, but I couldn't. It turned out they were correct. I later discovered that the hotel owner was a very nasty man. However, Julie and her husband had perceived his real nature *instantly*, whereas I only worked it out gradually, and much later on.

Perhaps the main reason for their enhanced discernment, is that the wicked have the *same devious intentions* themselves. Therefore they can recognise the tell-tale signs in others. They can also quickly see the opportunities for theft, or for gaining personal advantage, that they themselves would have seized upon, if they had been in that person's situation. Naïve people, who have no such wicked intentions of their own, do not even notice such opportunities arising in the lives of others.

When trying to work out what is going on, be willing to speak to other sincere people in the church. Exchanging information with them is not necessarily gossip, if your motives are pure.

Some sincere Christians needlessly impose a difficulty on themselves if they are excessively anxious not to gossip. They then find themselves disadvantaged when dealing with the wicked, especially within churches. It can end up in a situation where the godly people say the least and the wicked ones say the most. This also applies in workplaces, where a Christian boss or employee feels unable to speak with others to check things, compare notes or exchange information. They fear that doing so would be gossip. The wicked don't care whether it is right or wrong to gossip.

They press on and get information from work colleagues or church members and use it to great effect. Accordingly, the wicked are far better informed than the righteous. They gather information about you and others, so as to know your plans and to be able to lie more effectively, both to you and about you. Their lack of scruples gives the wicked a major competitive advantage. That is one reason why they so often win the battles in churches and workplaces. They are like professionals fighting amateurs. They know more about what's going on, and they also hunt in packs.

By contrast, the godly tend to operate on their own and are less well informed and receive less help. Sincere people rely on the small amount of knowledge they pick up for themselves, without discussing things with others. They also have nobody to watch their backs or warn them of danger. That is partly because the godly don't feel able to gossip, but also because they are often not even aware that any battle is being fought. Therefore they don't know they are being plotted against and undermined by a group of wicked people who are working together, not singly.

A clear pattern has always emerged when I have tackled wicked church members, wicked church leaders, or wicked employees. I have learned, usually very late in the process, that whereas I was generally acting alone, they were working together with others. They were spying, gathering information and giving each other tip-offs. They were also hiding evidence, intimidating witnesses, egging on other wrongdoers and generally supporting one another. The wicked also combine together to undermine anybody who is asking unwelcome questions.

If you are a *sincere* person who wants to do what is right, make it your policy to work together with at least a few others, whom you can *trust*, and who are also *sincere*. Then you will be able to exchange information about what is going on so that you are not isolated and reliant solely on your own discernment. They can help you to get a better perspective and to work out whether something was a one-off or part of a wider pattern or character trait. It's hard to work out things like that on your own, as you're unlikely to get enough data to be able to "join up the dots" or form any *patterns*.

By pooling your knowledge you are more able to see those things. You get a clearer picture of other people's characters by having more to go on than just your own dealings with them. You can then find out what they have said or done to others, which may not be consistent with what they said or did

to you. If so you will find out more quickly who the liars and hypocrites are. Unlike the godly, the wicked say different things to different people. When you discover they are doing that you have a useful early warning that they are likely to be doing other wicked things too and may be wicked overall.

You and other godly people can also watch out for each other and give a warning if one or other of you is being lied about or undermined. In addition, you can give advice, guidance and a better sense of perspective to each other. Then you can more accurately gauge whether incidents or situations are important. Lastly, you can pool your discernment so you have the benefit of each other's 'carbon monoxide detectors' or 'antennae' as well as your own. This can greatly increase the overall accuracy and reliability of your judgments of other people (*diakrino*) and your assessment of situations.

How six of us pooled our knowledge and discernment to deal with a couple in our church called 'Philip and Sonia' who were behaving badly

The points made in the previous section are illustrated by this story of how a small group of us within a church once got together to share our knowledge. The problems in that church had been going on for some time, but they came to the fore when we had to tackle the problem of 'Rhoda'. She then left the church, taking her family and several other members with her. Their departure helped us greatly and was a major step forward for the church, but we still had problems. You will frequently find that the departure of one wicked person, or even a group, does not bring the problems to an end.

That is because they were not acting alone and there are still other wicked people in that church or business whom you have not yet identified. Therefore the problems in the church, and the unrest, discord and gossip, still carried on. In particular, Philip and Sonia continued to be a hindrance. I felt increasingly unable to trust them. Their loyalty was exclusively to those who had left, not to those of us who had stayed. I also felt that Philip and Sonia were insincere and two-faced. They also only ever spoke up for the wrongdoers, not their victims, or those who did right.

When Rhoda lied about Charles, we had to work hard to get Philip and Sonia to accept that those stories were lies. Even when they reluctantly accepted the plain facts, those lies did not seem important to them. Moreover, being told the true facts did not alter their attitudes, either of Rhoda or Charles. It really mattered to me that Philip and Sonia had held, and continued to hold, such a negative view of Charles. Their stubborn unwillingness to begin to think well of him, or to think badly of Rhoda for lying about him, was a problem in itself, quite apart from other difficulties they were creating.

They also talked behind backs and made critical comments about individuals and the direction in which the church was going, but without openly saying so to anybody's face. In forming these assessments of Philip and Sonia, I only knew the facts that I had personally heard or seen. Those were enough to cause me concern, but I didn't know what anybody else thought, or have access to their separate stockpiles of knowledge and discernment. So I eventually approached two trusted couples, whom I knew to be sincere, and asked them what they thought of Philip and Sonia.

That doesn't necessarily mean they would be right in their opinions, but it did mean I could gain their perspective, alongside my own. That would help me to assess the situation more accurately and with a better chance of forming a reliable overall judgment. Therefore, we met up, as three couples, and discussed Philip and Sonia. We compared notes of our own personal experiences, and listed the things we had each seen and heard. We then set out how we each assessed the nature and gravity of the overall situation, i.e. how big the problem was on a scale of 0-10.

I suggested that we formulate our thoughts by asking ourselves four main questions and gathering all our information and all our discernment under these four headings. The first was our collective, pooled knowledge of all the facts and *causes for concern* that we each knew about. Each couple

might know of five such incidents or problems, but those may not entirely overlap with what the others knew. So, between the three couples, the total number of events or issues identified would be likely to add up to more than five, though less than 15, as there would inevitably be some overlap.

The second heading was whether these combined facts, i.e. all the individual ‘dots’, formed a *pattern* when they were ‘joined up’ and looked at as a whole, rather than one at a time. The third heading was *how serious* were any such patterns or character traits that emerged. That is, how big a problem did we face? This is really important because, if you are a sincere person with a strong sense of mercy, you will tend to doubt yourself and wonder whether you are over-reacting. Lastly we asked ourselves, in the light of all those things, what should we *do* about Philip and Sonia?

I had suggested that we break it all down under these four headings because, otherwise, it can be hard to see the wood for the trees. At any given moment one issue will loom up and become the focal point, but while you focus on that, you find yourself unable to bear all the others in mind. That kind of sequential thinking can prevent you from arriving at a balanced, overall view. Your mind keeps dwelling on one incident at a time, rather than on the whole picture.

Even after you have worked out who the wrongdoers are you still need to work with at least a few trusted people to get support and avoid being overwhelmed by the wicked. They will almost certainly out-manoeuvre you if you remain alone and have nobody cooperating with you and providing support, advice and information. That kind of collaboration between the godly is just as necessary after the wicked have been identified as it was beforehand, while you were still trying to identify them.

Otherwise, a handful of wicked people, or even one, can rule over a church of fifty or a hundred. However, if a few godly, honest, sincere-hearted Christians work together, and pool their knowledge and understanding, the tables can be turned. Those few, by working together, can make themselves into more than a match for the wicked. That is still the case even if all the other sincere people in the church are sound asleep and have no idea what’s going on behind the scenes.

Remember to ask God for guidance, and for the gift of discernment, when trying to decide what a person’s real nature is.

It is surprising how rarely people seek God’s guidance when trying to discern a person’s real nature. We tend to rely on ourselves and it doesn’t occur to us to ask God to help us to see whether people are trustworthy. I learned my lesson, through repeated failures, that my standard default-setting should be to seek God’s guidance about people and not to rely solely on my own understanding. Let me give you an example of an occasion when God answered my prayers and gave me direct guidance. It concerned Sonia, the wife of Philip.

I was increasingly concerned about her behaviour, and spiritual condition and I could tell for myself that there were problems. But I wasn’t sure how serious those problems were, or how concerned I ought to be. One day, as we were preparing to go to a house group meeting at which Sonia would be present, I prayed for God’s guidance. I asked Him to show me what Sonia was really like, how bad the situation was, and how seriously I ought to take it. Later that evening, at the house group meeting, God gave me a vivid vision which starkly revealed Sonia’s spiritual condition.

Her face suddenly mutated as I looked at her and became like a hideous gargoyle on a medieval church building. Her face also became grey and her skin looked like stone. It was also contorted and evil and was covered in pock marks. After about 10 seconds, during which I stared at her face, it suddenly transformed itself back to what it normally looked like. I knew immediately that God had answered my prayer and had allowed me to see Sonia’s real nature and spiritual condition. There was a demon inside her. That explained a lot of the problems we had been having with her.

She and Philip had, many years earlier, been involved in spiritualism. However, so far as I knew, they had never been delivered of any demons, either when they first became Christians, or since. I believe God was showing me that the demon was still inside her, after all those years, and was having a major effect on her character and behaviour. If anybody gets involved in the occult, and especially if they actively engage in things like spiritualism, fortune-telling and séances etc, they are highly likely to have a demon enter into them. It will then stay permanently, until and unless it is expelled.

I did not act on what I had seen, but I took it as my cue to investigate the situation more thoroughly. I started to find out what other information I could gather to help me to assess the true nature and spiritual condition of Philip and Sonia. I also called the meeting I referred to earlier with two couples whom I trusted and shared what I had seen. We then discussed Philip and Sonia openly for the first time, as we had all been totally confidential about our concerns up to that point.

When we shared what we each knew, a host of additional events, issues, problems and concerns came to light, about which each of us had previously only known bits and pieces. It was as if we had each had a few sections of a jigsaw puzzle, but none of us had had all the pieces until then. So, the revelation which God gave me was in answer to a direct prayer for guidance which then galvanised me into calling that meeting.

That, in turn, led to me finding out what the others' concerns were and to us drawing up a detailed catalogue of incidents. When we looked at that long list, in its entirety, the breadth and depth and gravity of the situation became obvious to us all, and some clear patterns emerged. However, we probably wouldn't have reached that stage until much later, or at all, if I hadn't prayed for guidance.

Sincere people also need to keep each other informed of developments, while an on-going situation is being dealt with.

One barrier which prevents good people identifying the wicked earlier, and dealing with them properly, is that they don't feel entitled to talk about their concerns or to share their misgivings with others. They wrongly assume that it would be gossip. However, sharing information, seeking advice, exchanging evidence and identifying patterns of behaviour are not *necessarily* gossip, *if* your sincere intention is to find out the truth, rather than to entertain yourself or others. Honest, faithful people *need* to talk to each other, and far earlier than they normally do.

That is not only true in the early stages, where you are first beginning to wonder about a person and are looking for facts to prove or disprove your suspicions. It also applies at the subsequent stages of investigating and tackling them. That whole process can take a long time, and you need to keep in touch with others throughout it and stay informed about what the wicked are doing. Therefore, whatever stage you are at in tackling the wicked, keep in touch with other godly people, provided you feel sure you can trust them.

Try to keep up to date with what is happening and, in particular, with what the wicked are doing in response to your enquiries or the steps you are taking. Although *you* will hopefully play fair, you can be sure that *the wicked won't*. From the moment you first question them, they will begin to conspire with others to undermine you, obstruct your enquiries, intimidate witnesses and interfere with your actions to tackle them. They rarely operate alone, at least not when they know you are on to them. From then on, if not already, they will operate as a pack.

They will seek to discredit you, lie about you, get you isolated, reduce your credibility and prevent others giving evidence. They do not worry at all about whether it is right to speak to others, or whether it would be gossip, or a breach of confidentiality. They will leave it entirely to you to be constrained by ethical considerations like those. They will just get on with scheming, lying and manipulating, and do whatever it takes to avoid detection and punishment.

So, if you assume they are keeping everything confidential, as you are doing, then you are sadly mistaken. Therefore stay in touch with others, provided you are sure they are *trustworthy*. Gain their perspective and advice and ask them to pray for you. They can also speak up for you and watch out for any evidence of you being undermined behind your back, or of witnesses being ‘got at’ or intimidated in order to silence them. If you don’t take these wise precautions the wicked will run rings around you and obstruct everything you are trying to do.

When a group of sincere, godly people have to mix with, or work alongside, the wicked it’s important to stay together. Don’t leave anyone alone with them.

Even when you are not in the middle of an investigation into the activities of a wicked person, you still need the help of others to avoid being harmed by wicked work colleagues or wicked church members. So if there are malicious colleagues working alongside you, make sure you team up with other sincere people, *if you can find any*. Then you can give one another help and advice and watch each other’s backs. After we tackled Philip and Sonia it resulted in a group of us concluding that we needed to leave and start a new church, mainly because of them.

A week or so later we were all thrown back together with them again at a teaching day at which we and they had previously helped out with catering, bookstalls and clearing away etc. Philip and Sonia, plus another two women, ‘Edna’ and ‘Judith’ who were close to them, and hostile to us, were also helping out. From the start of the day, I could see that trouble was brewing. All four of them were in a foul temper but they were still determined to work alongside us. That was a problem because they were creating a hostile atmosphere, which was uncomfortable, especially for the ladies.

They even staged a flamboyant ‘walkout’ when I stood up to speak at the teaching day. I had been asked to do so at the last minute, as the speaker had been delayed in traffic. Philip and Sonia hoped this little protest would upset me and throw me off track. In fact, to increase the theatrical impact, they each went to separate seats at either side of the hall, and also right at the back, so their walking out (via the front) would be as noticeable as possible. However it didn’t work, at least with me. I was actually very pleased to see them going out.

However, some of the others were upset, not only by that spectacle, but by their unpleasant behaviour in the kitchen. All day long they were seeking to unsettle our people, especially our wives. In particular, they would swoop in whenever one of our members was left alone for a moment. They saw that as an opportunity to be annoying. For example, when one of our ladies was temporarily left on her own in the kitchen, they went straight in and began to speak to her in an oily and insincere way, while the others were absent.

They also approached another lady when she was left on her own, due to someone going out to fetch something. Their brazenness unsettled some of our people, and even made them feel violated. I learned an important lesson that day. We should have taken far more care to ensure that none of us were ever left alone with them. It was at those times that their ‘approaches’ were made and most of the ‘fiery darts’ were fired.

Don’t show grace and mercy while you’re still making your decisions as to what a person is, or how bad their misconduct is. Only do so later, when deciding what to do with them.

I have learned over many years of dealing with misconduct by employees, church members or church leaders that you need to make your decisions dispassionately and be cool and analytical when you consider the facts. That is essential while you are still weighing up the reliability of the evidence, identifying any patterns that emerge, and classifying the seriousness of the issues or character traits. You can’t allow your emotions to enter in at that stage, while you are still trying to work out what the facts are, what they signify, and how much they matter.

In particular you can't, at that stage, allow yourself to extend any grace or mercy towards the people concerned. It must all be factual, objective and logical, based solely on the strength of the evidence and the reliability of the witnesses. 'Grace' means giving people what they don't deserve. 'Mercy' means not giving them what they do deserve. But you can't offer anybody either of those things until *after* you have decided what the facts are. Only later, when all the analysing has been done, and you have formed all your conclusions, can you afford to show any grace or mercy.

You can then allow yourself to show those qualities, while you are deciding *what to do* with, or about, the people concerned, and while you are confronting or removing them. However to show any grace or mercy, or to be influenced by your emotions in any way, prior to this stage, would be premature and inappropriate. Grace and mercy can play a part in how you handle people *after* you have decided what the facts are. But they cannot play any part in the decision-making process itself, while you are still working out what has happened, why it happened, and what the truth is.

If you allow your feelings to enter in during the investigation or assessment process you will make weak, naïve decisions. You might conclude that you "don't have enough evidence" when in fact you do, or that you "can't be sure of things" when actually you can be. I emphasise this because, if you are a sincere, genuine Christian, you are likely to feel sympathetic towards people, even if they have done you harm. The desire to extend grace and mercy to others is natural for a Christian. Indeed, it is highly correlated with being a real Christian.

I can speak with some authority on this because I have, on many occasions, had to make potentially life-changing decisions about other people. I have always hated doing it. I have always felt a strong desire to be merciful, show grace, give the benefit of the doubt, overlook wrongdoing and so on. Moreover, those instincts have never gone away. I have therefore had to learn how to restrain them, in order to make decisions in the right way. That may sound odd, but it is a valid part of what it means to show self-control when you are dealing with the wicked, or those who might be.

Self-control is not only about preventing yourself from over-reacting, but also *under-reacting*. It is not only about avoiding the excessive or premature display of your *anger*, but also of your *mercy, grace and compassion*. Let's give an example in a criminal context. Imagine a magistrate or jury is trying to decide on a man's guilt or innocence by objectively assessing the evidence against him. What if, *at that stage*, they let themselves feel sorry for him, or considered the impact of a guilty verdict on his life, or his children's lives? They could end up making wrong decisions.

If a judge did it, rather than a jury, we would say he had 'misdirected himself'. The right time to allow feelings to play a part, and to extend grace or mercy to the man on trial, is after a verdict has been *delivered*, not while his guilt or innocence is still being decided upon. That is when the court turns its mind, *for the first time*, to the question of what to do about his crime and how to handle him. At that stage, when deciding whether to let him off with community service and probation, or to impose a prison sentence, it is right to ask whether mercy should be shown.

It is also clearly right at that stage, but not before, to consider the impact of a prison sentence on his wife and children, or on his elderly parents and so on. But it would be wholly wrong to be thinking of the impact on such people of a guilty verdict while they are still trying to decide whether or not the defendant is actually *guilty*. Likewise, while you are still at the stage of deciding what has happened, whether or not a person has done something, whether evidence is reliable and so on, force yourself to be purely objective, factual and unemotional.

You'll probably still have to force yourself to do that, even on the twentieth time you handle such a situation, because the desire to show mercy is very strong, and it doesn't go away. At least it hasn't gone away in my case. Therefore I have had to learn how to anticipate it and control it for the sake of the innocent bystanders, whose interests I must also bear in mind, as well as those of the person I am investigating or disciplining. That is what I mean when I say that we must even exercise self-control in how we show grace and mercy and in deciding *not* to punish people.

The delicate question of how much to tell other people when someone has behaved badly. Should you speak openly or keep it confidential?

A vexed problem, with which I have wrestled for years, is how much I can allow myself to say about a wrongdoer after they have been confronted, expelled, sacked or otherwise tackled. For many years, my policy was that I ought to behave like an absolute gentleman and keep it all highly confidential. I felt I had no right to tell others what that person had done, or why I had needed to sack them. I gradually learned that it is neither wise, nor necessary, to operate in that way and that we are not always under a duty to keep everything quiet.

Indeed, such silence frequently plays into the hands of the wrongdoer and leaves the floor entirely to them. Then the only version of events that other people get to hear about at work, or in the church, is what they are told by the wrongdoer, or his friends. They hear nothing from you, because you are keeping your mouth firmly shut, like an officer and a gentleman. The problem is that such dignified silence is only ever understood by other ‘officers and gentlemen’, who have faced the same issues and responsibilities. Your silence will be completely misinterpreted by everyone else.

It may even be seen as evidence of your guilt, or that you are doing something sinister. Those around you will be ‘helped’ to form those conclusions by the wrongdoer, his allies and the demons. They will all whisper those false thoughts into their minds. By misguidedly remaining silent, I allowed many a wrongdoer to multiply the original wrong that he did by leaving the floor free for him and his supporters. They were then the only ones ‘broadcasting’ and were free to tell lies, plant fear and suspicion into people’s minds, and turn them away from me. Very gradually, I began to relax my policy and reveal a little more.

At first I decided, as a concession, that I would not *initiate* any conversation, but would allow myself to answer people’s questions *if they asked me*. That seemed fair to me at the time, but I learned that very few people ever do ask you any questions in such situations. They rely solely on what the wrongdoer, or his allies, have told them. They won’t make any direct enquiries, least of all with you. So I came to the view that that was too restrictive and that I needed to allow myself far more freedom to speak, so as to properly explain and justify my actions.

There are many reasons why even the sincere, decent people, whom you are seeking to protect, will listen only to the wrongdoer and won’t ask you for your version of events. The wrongdoer makes a big effort to put himself around the workplace or church and to lobby people. He gets to them first, without waiting to be asked. Then he gives them a convincing story, laced with fragments of truth or half-truth, to make it sound more credible. Most will immediately believe what he says. Thus, from their perspective, they already have the story, and don’t need to ask you to tell it to them again.

It doesn’t occur to them that what they’ve been told could be a lie. They see no need to check anything because they already ‘know’ it’s true. The wrongdoer will often also plant a further lie into their minds, alongside the main lie, to create a reason why they ought not to check what they’ve been told. Usually it is along the lines that they are sharing it “*in confidence*” or “*as a favour*”, and that it may get them “*into trouble*” if any questions are asked. In addition, the wrongdoer will inject into their minds a basis for fearing that they too will be treated badly if they ask you questions.

Alternatively, the by-standers may feel it is none of their business and that you would approach them directly if you wanted to say anything. They feel it’s not their place to question you. Lastly, lies are inherently more believable than truth, partly due to our sin nature and also because the demons are ‘helping’ people to believe the lies and not to believe the truth. Thus, there is an inbuilt tendency to believe the wrongdoer rather than the innocent party. Therefore, the reality is that most people in the workplace or church will never approach you and say:

“I’ve been hearing some very odd things from Fred Bloggs. He says you mistreated him, and did X,Y,Z to him. Is that true? May I hear your version of events, so that any errors, lies or distortions

can be identified and corrected?” Only the most exceptionally discerning of people would ever go to see you and say that. 99% of people will just sit back and say nothing until you approach them. It ought not to be so, but it is, and you need to recognise that fact or you will let liars be the only people who ever talk to your staff, church members or colleagues about what is going on.

As a result of many bitter experiences, I have discovered that after I have tackled a wrongdoer, I need to speak to all the staff or church members, as a group. I then make a brief statement, giving the basic facts of what the wrongdoer did, why it mattered, what I have done about it, and what has happened to, or been done to, the wrongdoer. I won't necessarily tell them the whole story. That would often be inappropriate and may also take too long. It may even put ideas into other people's minds as to how they could do similar wicked things themselves.

You may think that such imitation is improbable, but I have seen it happen, and have myself put wicked ideas into people's heads, simply by explaining what another wrongdoer did. Having told the people the basic facts, you might close by saying something along these lines: *“That's the basic position. I expect it will be sufficient for most of you. However, if anyone has any questions or anxieties, or if you have heard, or begin to hear, anything different, do feel free to come and see me. You can raise any questions you may have and I will consider what else I can disclose to you.”*

If you do this, you may prevent many problems arising. You will have nipped the problem in the bud, rather than letting it develop. You will also have given people the truth *before they hear the lie*. That will reduce, though not entirely eliminate, the chances of their believing any lies that they then hear. It will also gradually increase their trust and confidence in you, because they will come to see how you act.

In summary, whereas you might see your own silence and confidentiality as very proper, and even noble, that is not how others will see it. Many will see it as *suspicious and sinister* that you haven't said anything. Then, even if the wrongdoer wasn't spreading any lies, which he will be, the people will use their own imaginations. They will invent all the missing facts which you have chosen not to share with them and create all sorts of fanciful ideas which would cause you deep dismay if you ever came to hear of them. That said, you probably won't, because they won't tell you.

CHAPTER 16

DEALING WITH WICKED CHURCH LEADERS – SOME INTRODUCTORY POINTS

¹⁷ *For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*

2 Corinthians 2:17 (ESV)

² *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*

2 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)

³¹ *the prophets prophesy falsely,
and the priests rule at their direction;
my people love to have it so,
but what will you do when the end comes?
Jeremiah 5:31 (ESV)*

*Your prophets have seen for you
false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen for you oracles
that are false and misleading.
Lamentations 2:14 (ESV)*

⁸ *The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?'
And those who handle the law did not know Me;
The rulers also transgressed against Me;
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
And walked after things that do not profit.
Jeremiah 2:8 (NKJV)*

¹ *"If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 (RSV)

¹⁴ *And the Lord said to me: "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds.*

Jeremiah 14:14 (ESV)

¹¹ *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.
Matthew 24:11 (RSV)*

¹² *And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no*

wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

2 Corinthians 11:12-15 (ESV)

What if the wicked are in leadership positions in your own church? Are you to keep away from them even then?

As your eyes begin to open and your discernment increases, you will start to discover wickedness in the church. Actually, it has probably been there all along, without you seeing it. You need to know what to do when you make that discovery, so let's consider some basic principles. Firstly, you must not remain under the leadership of any false or wicked men. Therefore ask yourself whether the person leading your church is false or deceitful, or involved in any sexual sin or financial wrongdoing. Is he manipulative, controlling or domineering?

Ask yourself those questions directly and seriously and don't fudge your answers. Such behaviour can only be described as wickedness if it is done by one who claims to be a Christian, and especially by a leader. At the very least, it is a clear sign that such a leader is heading in that direction. If so, all you can do, realistically, is to come out of that church and go elsewhere. It won't change, regardless of what you may try to say or do to get it to change.

Just leave and seek another church immediately. It is not disloyal or unfaithful to leave a church in such circumstances. You need to be part of a good and genuine church, led by faithful men, and it is your duty to try to find one. Or, if that is not possible, then perhaps you could start one. Use all the discernment you have and never continue to support any church which is apostate, teaches false doctrine, or is led by worldly men who live sinfully:

¹ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³ and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NASB)

A leader cannot be classified as a "false teacher" merely because you disagree with his theology, not even if you can prove he is definitely wrong on some point. He could simply be mistaken, as we all are at times. We need to be careful not to accuse sincere men of being false teachers merely because we disagree with them. A 'false teacher' is not a man who makes a mistake in his theology. If that was the definition, every Bible teacher would be false, because we all make mistakes. We all also have opinions with which other sincere people disagree. A 'false teacher' *deliberately* teaches things which he *knows* to be false.

Or he is *reckless*, or *indifferent*, as to whether it is true, but still teaches it anyway. He might do so to make money, or to keep the peace, or to avoid upsetting people. All of those are wrong motives and would reveal that his heart is false. It hinges on the heart-attitude of that man, i.e. whether he is sincerely seeking for the truth or not. I emphasise this because I have heard people make extremely quick pronouncements, whereby they unfairly condemn honest leaders who are merely mistaken, or with whom they simply disagree. Such things are not what Peter was referring to in his second letter.

It is wrong to adopt a position of 'neutrality' between the wicked and the godly, i.e. between the wrongdoer and his victim.

People often opt out of the duty to discern. They say they are "*not going to take sides*" and will "*remain neutral*" in some dispute within a church. In our dealings with Rhoda and Stephen and then

with Philip and Sonia, this became a live issue. We had been dealing with Rhoda's misconduct, especially the lies she told about Charles. Later on a couple in the church, 'James and Eve', became agitated and asked to speak to Philip about the way Rhoda had been dealt with. They had been lied to by Rhoda, who spoke ill of Charles, and also of me.

Rhoda was enraged that I had asked for a meeting to discuss her gossip and slander. But that wasn't how she described it to James and Eve. They were told that we had mistreated her and, as is usually the case, they believed her, without checking any of her allegations. James did not call me but he did speak to Philip, who was an elder, and asked him for an explanation of how Rhoda had been treated. When he was questioned, Philip didn't explain the situation or criticise Rhoda's misconduct. He also chose not to support me, or to explain what I had done or why it was needed.

He just read out a brief written statement which we had prepared some weeks earlier. That statement said Rhoda had left, but gave no details of her misconduct and did not address any of James' questions. However, when pressed by James for an explanation, Philip refused to say any more and just read it to him again. His refusal to answer questions, and his failure to defend me, caused James to conclude that my actions must have been wrong. To make matters worse, Sonia said she and Philip were "*keeping out of it*" and were "*neutral as between Rhoda and Sean*".

I felt very let down. Philip was an *elder* in the church and had a duty to defend the church and to prevent people being deceived. He also had a duty to defend me, and my reputation. If he felt unable, in good conscience, to approve of my actions, then he had a duty to say so, and to explain why. But he never did that either. He simply decided to "*stay out of it*". That was bad enough, in itself, but in reality he was supporting the wrongdoer, because his very silence was an implicit condemnation of me.

The cowardice shown by 'Gareth', an ineffectual elder, who was afraid to take sides or to speak up openly. He didn't even dare to confront his own wife about her misconduct.

'Gareth' was also an elder in that church, though in name only. He was totally ineffectual due to his weakness and cowardice. When we tackled Rhoda I was deeply unimpressed by Gareth. We had to coax him to disclose what he knew about her gossip, whereas he ought to have come forward with those facts voluntarily. It was his duty, not only to tackle Rhoda, but also to tell us what she had been doing. He did eventually tell us about some of Rhoda's gossip. But when her husband, Stephen, went to see him he was so scared he denied saying the things he had told us.

One can understand Gareth being afraid, as Stephen was younger and bigger than him. But it still doesn't justify him denying what he had said to us. Even if he had been overwhelmed by fear at the time, he should have told us afterwards that he had been bullied into retracting what he'd told us. Instead, he kept quiet, just as he had before we questioned him, because Gareth wanted to avoid all controversy and stress for himself. But that is not acceptable. It is the first duty of an elder to protect the flock, not to protect himself, let alone to avoid hassle.

What Gareth did was wicked in my view, as it was a repeated failure to do his duty. He put himself, his own convenience, and his wish for a quiet life, ahead of the needs of the church. Gareth also failed to tackle his own wife, 'Belinda', whose behaviour was atrocious. She too was a gossip like Rhoda and a controlling and a malevolent influence in the church. It was she who rang round telling people not to come to the monthly teaching day when I was due to speak.

She told them the scheduled speaker had been cancelled and "*some student*" was speaking instead. Belinda told that lie purely from malice. She was fully aware at all times that I was the replacement speaker not "*some student*". Yet she intentionally misled all those people, causing many of them not to attend, while knowing it was all a lie. That incident was bad enough, in itself, but it was by no means the first time she had done such things.

Gareth had a duty to tackle his own wife about that incident and also the many other wicked things she did which harmed the church and individuals within it. Gareth knew more about these things than we did. But he did nothing. Instead, he let his wife rule over him, and kept quiet about her misconduct, rather than risk antagonising her. So, Belinda's behaviour was wicked, but Gareth's was too, for *doing nothing about it*. Some might excuse him on the basis that he acted out of fear, but I don't think that will be accepted as a defence, or even a plea in mitigation, at the Judgment Seat.

Cowardice is a sin, not just a 'weakness'.

Cowardice is an extremely serious sin, not just a little weakness for which we can't be held responsible. It is our fault if we fail to do our duty because of fear. That is why apostle John includes the cowardly in his list of people who are heading to the Lake of Fire:

⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."

Revelation 21:8 (RSV)

The cowardly rightly belong in that list because cowardice is a sin in its own right and is also the cause of other sins. It leads to things being tolerated that should never be. A coward puts his own welfare ahead of his duty and ahead of the needs of others. Therefore cowardice is a form of selfishness. But it is not just about physical danger or death. Most of the time, it is simply about not wanting to be disapproved of or criticised, as with the Jews in John chapter 12, who believed in Jesus but didn't say so publicly, for fear of people's reactions:

⁴³ for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

John 12:43 (RSV)

Cowardice also involves not wanting to risk losing a promotion, or even our job, due to being faithful to God. It is mainly over things like money, job, popularity, reputation and career prospects that most of us buckle and compromise. Therefore, cowardice is a heavy-duty sin. It will cause many to be classified as wicked, either due to the sin of cowardice itself, or the other sins which it *leads us into*. What Gareth failed to do was perhaps worse than the things Rhoda and Belinda did. He was an elder, and a husband, and will therefore be judged more strictly.

The problem of church leaders who are too cowardly, or too indifferent, to tackle other leaders within their church who are acting wrongly

An elder is meant to be a shepherd of the people entrusted to him. That means he needs to watch out for false teaching and false teachers, both outside and inside the Church. By definition, most false teachers, wolves, abusers and deceivers are *within* churches. That is the obvious place for them to be because, if they want to deceive and damage the flock, they have to get close to them. However, a high proportion of church leaders are too cowardly to confront them, especially if the man doing the harm is a fellow leader.

Tackling a fellow leader is stressful and can be costly in personal terms. Therefore most leaders won't do it. They look the other way and let their colleagues get away with things that should never be tolerated. A small example of this is 'Patrick', the leader of a church we were in years ago. He failed to deal with an incident involving 'Rod', one of the junior leaders, who was looking after the work among students. I went to Rod to volunteer for work, as the church had just requested extra helpers. Rod was interested and asked what experience I had.

I told him I had a lot of experience of student evangelism plus Bible studies, mentoring and general discipleship training. As soon as I said all that, Rod's face dropped and he began to make excuses and became flustered. He said they had already had a lot of volunteers and didn't need any more, but that I was welcome to make a financial donation! Rod was newly appointed and felt insecure. He was threatened by the prospect of someone joining his team as a part time helper who had more experience of student ministry than he did.

It showed in the panic in his eyes and voice, in contrast to the calm and eager tone he'd had only a few seconds earlier. But I had no wish to take over his ministry. The 'threat' was just in his imagination. I couldn't take over anyway, as I was running a law firm and was too busy. I only wanted to help part-time like the other volunteers. But Rod saw a threat and couldn't cope with it. Church leaders are probably the most insecure of all professions. Everywhere I have worked, in the Police, law firms, or summer jobs, managers never had the paranoia that so many church leaders feel.

Later Patrick, the senior minister, happened to come over and I told him I felt upset about Rod's response. Patrick just nodded and never contradicted me. He had already seen this trait in Rod for himself, so it was not news to him. Patrick then replied, in a jocular tone, "*Ah yes, he's just feeling threatened - that's what it is*". He spoke as if it was a minor foible, which we just have to put up with. Then he did nothing at all about it. He didn't even apologise on Rod's behalf. Either it never occurred to Patrick to do anything, or he wasn't willing to.

He was meant to be the Senior Minister and had a duty to act, for my sake, the students' sake, and even for Rod's sake, so as to help him to change. Yet he did nothing, which was a serious failure on his part. Yet the sad fact is Patrick only did what most church leaders would do. He didn't want to confront Rod, as it would be a difficult conversation. He knew Rod wouldn't change anyway, even if he was told to, and also that Rod was no different from most other church leaders. He was just more transparent about it, because he was younger and had been taken by surprise.

Rod was also a fellow 'clergyman'. Thus Patrick felt Rod was entitled to his support when in a disagreement with a mere 'lay person'. Quite apart from all that, Patrick probably felt he had more important things to do and couldn't be bothered. Insecurity and paranoia are commonplace amongst leaders. If Patrick tried to tackle such things, it would be a never-ending job, not only dealing with Rod, but with most other leaders. He would sympathise with Rod anyway, since most church leaders regularly feel threatened, including himself.

For Patrick to oppose Rod's behaviour would also set an unfortunate precedent, as it would imply that manipulative or controlling behaviour by other leaders is also wrong. But that would call the whole hierarchical, clergy-based system into question and very few 'clergymen' are willing to do that. This mild example of Patrick and Rod is at the shallow end of the pool when it comes to being cowardly about tackling fellow leaders. There are far more serious examples of blatant abuse, where nothing was done by the other leaders. We shall look at some of those in the following chapters.

The cowardice shown by other church leaders in the town where I lived when they failed to tackle 'Rick', a leader of a church

Another example of cowardice by fellow leaders arose in the case of 'Rick'. I tried to tackle him when I was Chairman of the Trustees of a particular church and he was the Senior Leader. He did some bad things, for which there was clear proof. But the whole senior leadership team backed him, obstructed me, and tried hard to cover it all up. Two other leaders from two separate churches in the town were then brought in to 'mediate'. But it quickly became apparent that they also just wanted to cover it all up. They had no desire to bring anything to light or to tackle anybody.

Their main aim was to protect Rick himself because he was a fellow church leader, albeit of a different church. I told them they were like shop stewards from the "church leaders' trade union" and

were seeking to protect Rick, regardless of what he had done. They just laughed ironically. One admitted that that was, pretty much, what they were doing. The other didn't contradict him. It would have been hard to deny it anyway. It is normal for leaders to cover up the misconduct of other leaders, even in other churches. It is partly because they feel they *need* to, but also because they *want* to.

It's also because it doesn't matter enough to them to do anything about it, or because they are too afraid to do so. Wading into a dispute, telling the truth, and opposing the wrongdoer, would get themselves into hot water. So, covering things up is not done solely to protect each other. It is also about self-preservation and avoiding flak for themselves. Church leaders who turn a blind eye to each other's wrongdoing will face a severe judgment. God will hold them accountable for their failure to act and saying that they were "afraid" will not be accepted as a valid defence.

By contrast, note the boldness with which Jeremiah directly confronted Pashhur, a priest who was prophesying falsely.

Having seen those examples of cowardly leaders who won't confront fellow leaders, note what Jeremiah did when he came up against Pashhur the priest, who had been prophesying falsely. He had also opposed Jeremiah's genuine message and had him imprisoned and beaten:

Now Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. ² Then Pashhur beat Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord.

Jeremiah 20:1-2 (RSV)

Jeremiah is very direct and tells Pashhur exactly what he is and what God is going to do to him:

³ *On the morrow, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord does not call your name Pashhur, but Terror on every side. ⁴ For thus says the Lord: Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends. They shall fall by the sword of their enemies while you look on. And I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon; he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. ⁵ Moreover, I will give all the wealth of the city, all its gains, all its prized belongings, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah into the hand of their enemies, who shall plunder them, and seize them, and carry them to Babylon. ⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity; to Babylon you shall go; and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely."*

Jeremiah 20:3-6 (RSV)

Consider also how direct and bold Jeremiah was when speaking to the people about false prophesy in general.

It was not only with men like Pashhur that Jeremiah was blunt. He also gave clear, direct warnings to the people about false prophets in general, and repeatedly warned them not to listen to them. He evidently did not take the view that it was 'divisive' or 'judgemental' to speak out against false prophets and false teachers, as so many people today claim that it is:

¹⁶ *Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. ¹⁷ They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"*

Jeremiah 23:16-17 (RSV)

²⁵ *I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!'* ²⁶ *How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart,* ²⁷ *who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Ba'al?*

Jeremiah 23:25-27 (RSV)

³² *Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord.* ³³ *"When one of this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you, 'What is the burden of the Lord?' you shall say to them, 'You are the burden, and I will cast you off, says the Lord.'* ³⁴ *And as for the prophet, priest, or one of the people who says, 'The burden of the Lord,' I will punish that man and his household.* ³⁵ *Thus shall you say, everyone to his neighbor and every one to his brother, 'What has the Lord answered?' or 'What has the Lord spoken?'* ³⁶ *But 'the burden of the Lord' you shall mention no more, for the burden is every man's own word, and you pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God.*

Jeremiah 23:32-36 (RSV)

⁹ *So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon.'* ¹⁰ *For it is a lie which they are prophesying to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land, and I will drive you out, and you will perish.* ¹¹ *But any nation which will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, to till it and dwell there, says the Lord."*

¹² *To Zedeki'ah king of Judah I spoke in like manner: "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live.* ¹³ *Why will you and your people die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, as the Lord has spoken concerning any nation which will not serve the king of Babylon?'* ¹⁴ *Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are saying to you, 'You shall not serve the king of Babylon,' for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you.* ¹⁵ *I have not sent them, says the Lord, but they are prophesying falsely in my name, with the result that I will drive you out and you will perish, you and the prophets who are prophesying to you."*

Jeremiah 27:9-15 (RSV)

⁸ *For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream,* ⁹ *for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.* ¹⁰ *"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place.*

Jeremiah 29:8-10 (RSV)

Church leaders who behave immorally and prey on women in the church

Another form of wickedness, which is less widespread, but which occurs more often than many assume, is for leaders to be sexual predators and to take advantage of women in the church. There was a case on social media of a Nigerian pastor who committed adultery with over 50 women. That is at the top end of the spectrum, but there are many leaders who, on a more modest scale, are behaving immorally. The fact that the women are often willing participants, or even throw themselves at these men, does not excuse it. The leaders remain accountable for their own actions and so do the women.

The question of who started it is a side issue. The women may be guilty as well, but that does not excuse the men. I remember a case when I was a student and part of a good fellowship as far as I could then see. The pastor was accused of having an affair with the wife of one of the members. When I first heard of it I couldn't believe it. I assumed it was a lie designed to damage the church. I was very naïve and trusting in those days, so I went round to see the pastor and, without even asking him whether it was true, I told him he had my full support.

I added that I thought it was terrible that people were saying such things about him. As I said this, I felt that his reaction was odd. He didn't seem encouraged at being supported. He actually looked uncomfortable, and even seemed to be squirming. His wife was there too and she was ashen-faced throughout. She stuck by him, at least in public, but there was evidently more to it than I had assumed. Some days later a friend of mine, who knew the pastor far better than I did, and who also knew the other woman and her husband, told me that, actually, the allegations were entirely true.

I was stunned, as I was young and had not seen much of what goes on, either in the world or the Church. Shortly after this the church fell apart and the pastor resigned and got a job as a salesman. That adultery incident opened my eyes a little more to the realities of life and how badly even church leaders can behave. Then, about three years later, when I was a policeman, in another town, another scandal broke involving a leader. He had what seemed to be a successful youth ministry, but it emerged that he had been engaging in sexual activity with some of the girls.

The hostile reaction of 'Peter', an assistant leader in a church, when I tried to tackle the senior leader, 'Rick'

Many years after that I was Chairman of the Trustees of another church and was trying to tackle Rick, the senior leader. I faced bitter opposition from 'Peter', one of the other leaders on the senior leadership team. He led the children's ministry and was aggressive on Rick's behalf when I said that Rick, and the church as a whole, was behaving carnally. He didn't like me saying that and, some months later, I found out why. My comments had touched an exposed nerve-ending in Peter.

Throughout this time he had been having an adulterous affair of his own. When I learned of this it suddenly made sense. It explained why he didn't want me talking about issues of personal holiness and integrity. It was all too close to home and made Peter lash out at me as a reflex reaction, as if someone had tapped him under his knee. He left his wife when the scandal broke and the church reduced drastically in size. Accordingly, those who don't think there is wickedness in the Church need to take sexual misconduct into account. That may alter their view.

That is not to say that all men who fall in that way are necessarily wicked. But many are. They have had a lot of revelation, due to being Christians but, even more so, by being leaders. Those who know more will be judged by a higher standard. The things they do are more serious, and more likely to be classified as wicked, than if the same things were done by unbelievers, or by immature new believers. Many leaders fall into sin because they are pursued, not only because they are the pursuers. If so, the women who entice them are also behaving wickedly, whether the men are leaders or not.

Situations where a church is teaching false doctrine

Let's now consider how wicked it is for leaders to teach false doctrine, or just to fail to teach true doctrine. In either case it could be due to dishonesty, laziness, cowardice or indifference. The absence of true teaching can be just as damaging as the presence of false teaching. More leaders harm God's people by the *truths* they *don't preach about* than by the false things they do say. Let us focus first on the direct preaching of a false gospel or of other false doctrines. What should a Christian do and how false does the teaching need to be in order to leave a church?

It is a matter of individual conscience, and will depend on all the facts of the case, but we can formulate some general guidelines. One question is whether the teaching is of primary importance. That is does it promote sin or relate to the fundamentals of the Gospel, the identity of God, or the status of the Bible? Or is it about secondary issues which are important, but not foundational? A stage may be reached where the error goes too far and your conscience will not let you stay in that church. Take the Church of England as an example, as its errors are in the public domain and well known.

If you were a member and were observing its decline, at what point would you feel you have to leave it? It could be over their stance on women leaders, or women bishops. Or, it may be over gay marriage, homosexuality, Israel or any number of other issues. Perhaps you had felt able to remain in it for many years, despite a succession of increasingly liberal Archbishops, but you had to leave when Rowan Williams was appointed, as he was a druid. He was thus involved in the occult, as well as being more liberal than any of his predecessors.

It can vary from church to church, even within a denomination. Churches can also become gradually more unbiblical in their doctrine and practice, by a series of seemingly small steps, rather than in one sudden collapse. If the decline occurs slowly, it can make it harder to perceive when a line has been crossed that requires you to go. You may have already tolerated previous lines being crossed, yet without leaving. If so, those past compromises can dull your conscience. Then you become less able to recognise subsequent issues.

An example of a particular Anglican church, which had degenerated very badly in its doctrine and practice

A woman in a large Anglican church wrote to me for advice as to whether to leave it. The issues were more to do with the local leadership, rather than the wider Church of England. She listed a number of problems, such as their unbiblical practice of infant baptism and their lack of focus on repentance. They were also running the ‘Alpha’ course, which pays hardly any attention to sin and repentance and even less to God’s judgment, Hell and the Lake of Fire. Those crucial issues are all watered down or removed, so as to make Christianity more attractive and less ‘negative’.

Her church also invited visiting speakers with seriously unbiblical beliefs, such as Rick Warren and even Roman Catholic priests. Catholicism is a blend of paganism, man-made philosophy and traditions mixed up with some elements of Christianity. Lastly, her vicar was encouraging people to engage in ‘meditation’ and ‘contemplative prayer’. Those are unbiblical practices, arising out of Hinduism, and other Eastern religions, and have nothing to do with the biblical concept of meditation.

Biblical meditation is about focusing on a passage of Scripture at length, examining it from many angles, and thinking deeply about God’s Word. It has nothing to do with “*emptying one’s mind*”, let alone filling it with false, occultic ideas from Hinduism, Buddhism or the New Age. This lady was unsure whether to leave and go to a more biblical church, or to stay and try to persuade her vicar to change. She wanted to go to him and recommend good books and point out what was wrong with his teaching and approach.

I advised her that it was much too late for that. Any leader who is promoting, or even permitting, such unbiblical things is too far gone to listen to advice. I also warned her to beware, because false teachers don’t like to be questioned or corrected, let alone rebuked. Thus she might be undermined and attacked if she was to speak up. I said she just ought to leave immediately and try to find a good, honest, biblical church elsewhere. That would be far more realistic than for one person to try to change a church that had degenerated as far as hers had.

CHAPTER 17

THE WICKEDNESS OF 'HIRELINGS' AND OF COWARDLY LEADERS WHO LEAVE THE CONTROVERSIAL PARTS OF THE BIBLE OUT OF THEIR TEACHING

¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.* ¹³ *He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.*

John 10:11-13 (RSV)

*To whom shall I speak and give warning,
that they may hear?
Behold, their ears are closed,
they cannot listen;
behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn,
they take no pleasure in it.*

Jeremiah 6:10 (RSV)

¹³ *“For from the least to the greatest of them,
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
and from prophet to priest,
every one deals falsely.*
¹⁴ *They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
saying, ‘Peace, peace,’
when there is no peace.*

Jeremiah 6:13-14 (RSV)

*For the shepherds are stupid
and do not inquire of the Lord;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.*
Jeremiah 10:21 (ESV)

The word of the LORD came to me: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep.

Ezekiel 34:1-3 (RSV)

*Her prophets are fickle, treacherous men;
her priests profane what is holy;
they do violence to the law.*

Zephaniah 3:4 (ESV)

*Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets
who lead my people astray,
who cry “Peace”
when they have something to eat,
but declare war against him
who puts nothing into their mouths.*

Micah 3:5 (RSV)

*Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe,
Her priests instruct for a price
And her prophets divine for money.
Yet they lean on the Lord saying,
“Is not the Lord in our midst?
Calamity will not come upon us.”*
Micah 3:11 (NASB)

A church leader or teacher can also be wicked because of what he does *not* teach i.e. the things he leaves out, due to his dishonesty or cowardice.

We tend to think of false doctrine and false teachers in terms of an *untrue* message being preached. It is easier to identify that as false, as there is something tangible which you can check against the Bible. However, in listening to the teaching of many leaders over three decades, I have come to the view that most falsehood actually consists of what men *don't say*. In particular, they under-emphasise or ignore the Gospel. Many other parts of the Bible are also left out.

Some leaders might technically mention these topics, but only briefly, or toned down, so as to avoid being controversial. I only realised how numerous these neglected topics are when I set out to write my own books. I wanted to focus on the things that other leaders under-emphasise or ignore. That sounds like a narrow field, but I realised they had actually left me with most of the Bible, because their preaching and teaching is confined to so few areas. It probably covers 10-20%, at most, of what is in the Bible.

I shall set out below a list of just some of the main subjects which most leaders *avoid* or seriously under-emphasise within the traditional, denominational, clergy-led churches. This problem is compounded by the fact that such leaders tend to copy each other. They like to ‘play safe’ by sticking to things that other men preach on. They don’t want to be the first, or the only, man who is saying something. That policy of imitation further reduces the range of topics that are taught, quite apart from their own reluctance to teach on contentious or complicated issues in the first place.

A list of just some of the main issues and subjects which most church leaders avoid, under-emphasise, or trivialise

In no particular order, the subjects that most leaders don’t teach adequately, or don’t teach on at all, include the following:

a) *Anything involving Bible prophecy*

This makes up about 30% of the entire Bible, so avoiding this whole area is a huge omission. It deprives the people of a vast area of knowledge and understanding that God wants us to have. Prophecy is avoided primarily because leaders don’t understand it themselves, due to being taught to use the misguided “*allegorical approach*”. I cover this grievous error in my Book 3. However, prophecy is controversial too, so they also avoid it because they fear arousing antagonism or being criticised. They fear people more than they fear God.

b) *Anything involving Israel*

The word ‘*Israel*’ itself, not to mention ‘*Israelite*’ or ‘*Israelites*’, occurs 2563 times in the Bible. Thus one would imagine that everyone would agree it is a crucial subject which needs to be dealt with thoroughly. Instead, in most churches, it is avoided like the plague, except for the fact that, in liberal churches, the modern State of Israel is heavily criticised. But they avoid speaking about Israel in biblical times, so as not to draw attention to the fact that the Jews have been in the land for 4,000 years.

Modern day Israel is only spoken of for the purpose of condemning it. That hostility is due to their misguided and misinformed views on so called 'Palestine'. Therefore complete silence on the subject of Israel would actually be preferable to the inaccurate things that they do say. However, that misguided political agitation isn't what I mean by teaching on Israel. People need to be told about God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which He fully intends to honour by blessing, preserving and restoring the Jewish people.

Instead, the promises are ignored, mainly because leaders themselves have been taught (wrongly) that the Church has 'replaced' Israel. Therefore they think that the modern State of Israel, and even the Jewish people as a whole, have no biblical significance and are nothing to do with God's promise to Abraham. It is widely assumed that the Jews are no longer part of God's plans at all, or at least no more than any other nation or race.

Such leaders also know that the subject of Israel is controversial and they aren't willing to speak on any topic which might arouse criticism, make them unpopular, or reduce the financial giving to the church. That is especially so, given the bitter hostility that is felt by so many liberal Christians towards Israel. They speak so loudly and aggressively that cowardly leaders are too intimidated to teach the truth about Israel, even if they knew it, which most of them don't.

c) Sin, in all its forms

Cowardly leaders and hirelings know that talking about sin makes you unpopular. It convicts people, if we faithfully teach what the *Bible* says about it, rather than give our own opinions. Congregations don't like hearing the truth about their sinful lifestyles, and will react aggressively if such things are spoken about. Thus, if a man is a hireling rather than a shepherd, and therefore cares more for himself than for the sheep, he will soon learn to avoid speaking about sin. The only exception, which they are willing to speak about, is someone else's sin, such as capitalists and bankers. But they scrupulously avoid mentioning the sins of the congregation.

d) Repentance

Repentance is another forbidden subject, perhaps even more so than sin. No leader who wants to be liked will ever call for it. Yet, "*Repent*" was the very first word spoken in their public ministry by both John the Baptist and Jesus. It was also almost the first word Peter said in his first sermon after the ascension. None of them were seeking to be popular. Their only objective was to tell the truth and to benefit their audience, not to promote themselves, gain popularity, or secure their incomes.

e) God's judgment

God's judgment is even more of a taboo subject. It has two main aspects. The judgment for unsaved people is about condemnation and wrath, and leads to the Lake of Fire. The judgment for Christians is at the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is not about God's wrath and does not result in condemnation. It is about assessing our faithfulness and the fruit produced by our lives from conversion onwards. However, it will still result in rebuke and the loss of rewards for many of us. I examine this in my Book 4 and would urge you to look at that, as it is so badly neglected in most churches.

Both aspects of the judgment are unpopular with Christians and non-Christians alike. Therefore, both are avoided by preachers and are thus badly misunderstood. However, I would say the judgment for Christians is even less understood. Most Christians, even in the better churches, have either never heard of it at all, or have only the most basic knowledge. I know that because I have interviewed many people on this issue, including leaders, and have been shocked by their ignorance. I have also corresponded about it on Twitter.

f) Anything complicated, which requires a lot of effort and study to teach on it

Many church leaders spend an alarmingly small amount of time preparing their sermons. That is partly due to laziness, but it is also because they tend to be a '*jack of all trades*' who has to do

everything else, as well as the preaching and teaching. So, they avoid any topic which is complicated, such that it would take a lot of study to be able to speak about it. They will choose instead something else which is easier, shorter and simpler to explain.

Ideally, they like to copy a sermon by some other man and just download it from the internet. They know that even if they did enough study to speak competently on a complex issue that is still not quite enough. They would probably be asked questions about it afterwards which would require a lot of surplus knowledge, over and above what is said in the sermon. That is because to speak properly on any subject you need to know it so well that you are sharing only a fraction of what you know in total.

You also need to have so thoroughly mastered the subject as to be able to handle the questions people might then ask. If you don't want to put in that much preparatory work, or if you don't have the time because you are doing every other job in the church, you will simply steer clear of such topics. The problem is further compounded by the fact that, in most churches, only one or two men ever preach. Therefore the time available for detailed study is even more limited.

g) Anything to do with the gifts of the Holy Spirit

The avoidance of this huge subject is partly because so many are 'cessationists'. That means they have been taught that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have *ceased*, and that they were only meant for the first century. They have no biblical basis for believing that. The Bible says nothing at all to that effect, even indirectly. Nevertheless, leaders are not necessarily being dishonest in avoiding this topic. Many do what they mistakenly, but sincerely, believe to be right. That said, most never explain *why* they think the gifts have ceased.

Their main reason for not providing authorities from Scripture in support of cessationism is simply that there is nothing in the Bible to support it. In that respect their silence is blameworthy. They are teaching a doctrine without being frank as to *where they get it from*. They rely solely on what they themselves have been taught, and they assume that must be true, without ever checking it. Then they simply tell their congregations that it's true and leave it at that.

They give no honest exposition of what the Bible actually says on this issue, or rather of what it doesn't say. If they did, people would ask awkward questions and even start disagreeing. If that is their motive for avoiding the issue, then their silence would be even more wrong, and possibly wicked. However, there is another much simpler reason why some won't teach about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even where they are not 'cessationists'. That is that they have seen that it is yet another controversial subject and they don't want to become unpopular.

So, their avoidance of this is not for theological reasons, but just because they want a quiet life. In part, that fear of controversy is based on the unbiblical, crazy things done by 'hyper-charismatic' churches, where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are grossly misused. Even worse, in many cases, what is said and done is nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. They are just counterfeit gifts, which come from demons. Satan's strategy is to discredit the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit by causing people to operate in false gifts.

They then say and do weird things, even barking like dogs and clucking like chickens, and claim that the Holy Spirit is causing them to do so. The *false* gifts displayed by such misguided people then deter millions of others from going anywhere near the *genuine* gifts. That reaction may be understandable on the part of immature church members who have been put off by what they have witnessed elsewhere, or heard about. However, for leaders to throw out the baby with the bath-water in this way is not justifiable.

They know better than to do that, or they ought to. Many leaders are fully aware that there are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as counterfeit gifts. For such leaders to stay quiet, and avoid this whole subject, is profoundly wrong. They are denying their people any opportunity to learn about, and operate in, the real gifts. Many are even banning what they know to be the *genuine* gifts of

the Holy Spirit, not because they believe they ceased in the first century, but simply because they are afraid.

They fear being criticised for allowing them to be used, even in a proper, orderly, biblical manner as God intended. Due to their cowardice, a whole generation of Christians has been brought up with no exposure to the genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit. That is the result of their leaders' failure, or refusal, to operate biblically. In their own defence, such leaders point to what apostle Paul said about the need for things to be done "*decently and in order.*" However, let's look at the verse very closely:

⁴⁰ *but all things should be done decently and in order.*

1 Corinthians 14:40 (RSV)

Such leaders focus exclusively on the second part of that verse which says: "...*decently and in order.*" On that basis, they argue against anything being done which might be felt not to be decent or orderly. On the face of it, that seems fair enough. It is what Paul instructed us to avoid. Where they go wrong, however, is to ignore the *first* part of that verse, which says "*but all things should be done*". Paul's concern was not only to *avoid* the use of counterfeit gifts and the misuse of genuine gifts. He also wanted to *promote* the proper use of genuine gifts.

A leader cannot therefore fulfil his duty solely by merely preventing the abuse, misuse, or counterfeiting of spiritual gifts. He also has to permit and encourage the genuine. That requires a leader to have enough discernment, and common sense, to differentiate between the real and the false. Having done that, his duty is then to encourage the former and prevent the latter. Admittedly, that makes life more complicated for himself. But so be it! We are not entitled to disobey God, or rewrite the Bible, in order to make leadership an easier task.

h) Anything to do with Creation, Noah's Ark, the Flood and the rest of Genesis 1-11

Most leaders in the West do not teach that Genesis 1-11 is literally true. They treat these passages as "*just metaphors*" or "*stories which contain a message*". Such men are often just trying to fit in with modern politically correct ideas and the trends of public opinion. They fear men and want to be popular. Many simply don't want to be sneered at or called '*unsophisticated*' for taking the accounts of the Creation or the Flood literally.

Yet the apostles, and Jesus, took them entirely literally. They didn't worry about being sneered at. They obviously preferred not to be sneered at, but they did not allow that *to have any bearing on what they taught*. One church I used to be part of contained a lot of doctors, lecturers and university students. The senior Minister spoke one day about Creation and tried to accommodate the theory of evolution. I think it was partly because he himself had been brainwashed into accepting it, as so many of our generation have.

However, I felt that another reason was that he wanted to fit in with public opinion. He did not want to be looked down on as a '*non-intellectual*'. If that was his reason, it would be wickedness to speak as he did. He was undermining God's Word, and misleading God's people, merely to enhance his own image and to avoid being criticised. But he was not alone. Thousands of leaders are causing terrible damage to the Church and to the way millions of people see the Bible. That is why I believe it is no exaggeration to refer to such men as wicked.

i) Most of the rest of the Old Testament

Many preachers avoid most of the Old Testament, except for the 'easier' parts. They will teach about Daniel in the lions' den, and his three friends in the fiery furnace. But they will ignore the prophecies and any book which requires hard work to understand it. The problem is that a lot of the Old Testament is hard to understand, at least at first. The end result is that most of the modern Church, at least in the West, is ignorant of more than 90% of the Old Testament.

But if you don't understand the Old Testament, which is three quarters of the Bible, you can't properly understand the New Testament or what God is doing now. Perhaps the main reason for this is laziness, and also the leaders' assumption that the congregation won't want to do any hard work either. So, they stick to a few passages that are easier to understand. Other than that, they focus on the New Testament, though not even all of that. They leave out the "hard" parts, such as Romans, Galatians, Hebrews and Revelation.

j) Anything to do with demons or how they affect us today and especially the subject of casting demons out of people

This whole subject is widely considered to be far too controversial ever to be spoken of in churches, even by those who know something about demonology and deliverance. However, an even bigger problem is that so many people assume that demons were only operative in Bible times and play no role today, here and now, in our own lives, or amongst the people we know. Above all, it is taken for granted that they cannot possibly have any part to play in the lives of Christians, or in the problems faced by churches. The very idea is ruled out and is not even considered.

k) Anything to do with the roles of men and women, within marriage and in the Church

It takes a brave man today to speak openly, even in a church, about what the Bible says about the God-given roles of men and women and the profound differences between them. It is much easier for a leader either to say nothing, or to embrace the misguided 'feminist' thinking espoused by the secular world. The people then never get to hear what God has to say. At least it is never explained or taught. Therefore the people never hear anything to counteract the nonsense which the world churns out. That is one of the reasons why so many marriages are falling apart, even amongst Christians.

l) Anything to do with rebutting 'political correctness' in any of its aspects

Many Christians are just as politically correct as the World, but they usually don't realise it and have no idea where their unbiblical ideas come from. Even if they do, they don't know why those ideas are wrong, or how to rebut them. Church leaders should be tearing political correctness to shreds, on a regular basis, so as to counteract the unbiblical propaganda that is continually being poured into people's minds. Yet, instead of counteracting it, many leaders are supportive of it and their sermons are full of its ideas, principles and assumptions.

m) How the Church operated, and how it was structured and led, in the first century, as per the book of Acts and the New Testament letters

I address this huge subject in my Book 8, but it is almost universally ignored by church leaders. The vast majority of them uphold the hierarchical, traditional, 'clergy-led' system which has been accepted, virtually without question, all over the world, even though it is the opposite of what the early Church did. See Book 8 for a full explanation of how traditional practices and structures have replaced what the Bible teaches and what the apostles did.

n) Anything to do with marriage, divorce, family life and child raising

Again, all of this is felt to be too controversial and sensitive to mention. It is safest for a leader to steer well clear, especially as there are bound to be people in the congregation who are divorced and remarried or who have marital problems and/or issues with their children.

Given all the things which are not being taught, it is hardly surprising that there is now such widespread shallowness and illiteracy in the churches about the Bible. Moreover, it is rapidly getting much worse, because a generation of dumbed-down leaders is coming into place who have no memory of the 1970s and earlier, when the Bible was better taught. Such leaders, who were not taught properly themselves, are not capable of teaching others, even if they had the courage to do so, which most don't.

Why it is ‘wicked’ for leaders to fail to teach the whole Bible, whether due to laziness or cowardice

Some may think it harsh for me to describe as wicked those leaders who don’t teach their people the whole Bible. They may concede that they should perhaps be called lazy, cowardly or misguided, but that ‘wicked’ is too strong a word. However, we need to remember the enormous importance of what is being dealt with here. We are speaking of *God’s own Word*. It reveals the one and only means by which people can be saved. It also sets out how they are meant to grow as disciples, and become able to lead others to salvation.

When a leader fails to teach the whole Bible, whether it is due to laziness, indifference, cowardice, or all three, it is a terrible breach of duty. He is denying his people the chance to learn those things. It could even mean those people will never be saved, because they never get to hear the real Gospel. In other cases they may be saved but never become mature disciples, capable of reaching others, or of becoming effective leaders themselves. If so, the “*Great Commission*” given to us by Jesus in Matthew 28 cannot be fulfilled.

Instead of producing ‘disciples’, the churches are now bringing up a generation of spectators and helpless dependants. They are only there to form an audience and to give money to leaders. Most congregations do not know the Bible, have no discernment, and can’t witness to others. They are largely indistinguishable from the unsaved world. Looked at in those terms, one can see why God might view a leader’s neglect of duty as being more serious than crimes on the part of an unbeliever. That is what I expect God to think. If so, many leaders will be shocked at what is said to them at the Judgment Seat.

Such men, and perhaps we will be among them ourselves, will hear Jesus rebuking them for their insincerity, laziness and cowardice rather than praising their ministries, as they had expected. Any harm done by their (or our) failure to lead courageously will be far greater than that which is caused by thieves or burglars, as the results will be eternal. If someone steals a wallet or car, it only has minor temporary consequences. But if a church leader teaches falsely, or leaves out vital truths due to laziness or cowardice, people are damaged and weakened and their eternal lives are put at risk:

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.....”

Hosea 4:6(a) (RSV)

“.....and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.”

Hosea 4:14(b) (RSV)

***For the shepherds are stupid
and do not inquire of the Lord;
therefore they have not prospered,
and all their flock is scattered.***

Jeremiah 10:21 (ESV)

God’s judgment will come upon all who mislead others, but especially on insincere or cowardly church leaders who mislead God’s own people:

***He who misleads the upright into an evil way
will fall into his own pit;***

Proverbs 28:10(a) (RSV)

The problem of arrogant church leaders who can't tolerate being corrected, questioned or instructed, especially by a 'lay' person

Many church leaders are unwilling to be corrected, questioned or instructed, especially by a 'lay' person. They might accept these things from a fellow 'clergyman', but not from 'ordinary' people who are 'only' members of their congregation. That arrogant attitude comes from years of being the ruler of a church, rather than its servant. The clergy system breeds haughtiness and a sense of being above the people. We see this in the account of the man born blind, who received his sight when Jesus healed him. The Pharisees wanted to know what had happened, so they questioned the man:

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them. ¹⁷ So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

John 9:13-17 (RSV)

However, they could not endure it that the man began to challenge and instruct them and had the impertinence to answer back. From their perspective, instruction is something which is only to be done by leaders. Lay people are meant to do the listening and learning, not the other way round. Thus, when the former blind man began to tell them things, rather than defer to them, they became enraged:

³⁰ The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

John 9:30-34 (RSV)

I marvel at their haughtiness in saying: "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" I have been on the receiving end of such attitudes myself. Leaders have been affronted by my challenging them, no matter how politely it is done. They have been particularly irked at the idea that I might teach them something. So, I know what it is to be patronised by leaders with a clergy mentality. It was partly due to their fear of being caught out or proved wrong. They also did not want to be told what the Bible says by a mere lawyer, who is not even 'ordained'. God hates all arrogance. It is an abomination in His eyes and He will expose it and punish it:

⁵ Every one who is arrogant is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

Proverbs 16:5 (RSV)

Situations where church leaders are telling lies

Deceit is endemic within the human race and it concerns God greatly. But God is far more appalled by church leaders who lie. Thus it is all the more likely that He will classify them as wicked. Their deceit does not only consist of the telling of direct lies. They are also two-faced and they mislead others about their intentions, motives and tactics, so as to get their own way, without being open about what they are really doing or why.

Manipulation is the art of influencing the behaviour and decisions of other people covertly, by dishonest, underhand means. That is always very wrong. We should state our objectives and intentions openly and then argue our case straightforwardly, on the basis of logic and reason. However, many leaders have concluded that such a transparent approach results in greater opposition and questioning. They opt instead for whatever is easiest, least costly, and ‘gets results’, rather than doing what is right, in the right way.

Even worse, they are willing to alter, edit, add to and prune the Bible in any way they need to, so as to make life easier for themselves. This is now so common as to be the norm. Furthermore, many leaders are not honest in their use of money, resources or time. They might be employed full time by a church or charity, but they waste time or do things for themselves, such as shopping, internet, leisure, errands or general laziness. Yet, they will portray themselves to church members as if they were busy on behalf of the church.

Of course, there are also leaders who work hard, spend every penny honestly, and devote all their contracted hours, and more, to doing what they are meant to do. However, there are vast numbers who don’t and who are consistently dishonest and lazy. If we operated biblically, these leaders would not be in paid roles in the first place. The approach taken by the New Testament church was that church workers should not get any financial support unless they are *missionaries*.

That means those who are ‘sent’ away from their local church to minister elsewhere, where it would not be possible to get a job and work part time in ministry. That is the biblical model, and it is designed to be that way for many good reasons. Firstly, it takes away the temptation to be dishonest in the use of time and money. If a leader is an unpaid elder, who has a job or is retired, he can just do whatever part time work he can manage for the church. Then he has no reason to lie or pretend.

However, if a leader has to put in 40 hours of paid work per week, year after year, even after he has become bored and disillusioned with ministry, he will be tempted to cut corners and keep up an act. I can think of many leaders who are ‘living a lie’ in terms of the work they claim to do, as opposed to what they actually do. One example was ‘Rick’, the senior leader I tackled some years ago, when I was the Chairman of the Trustees of a large church.

It came to my attention that he was misusing his time and deceiving the church about it. I discovered, by various means, that Rick was lazy and did very little real work. During the day, when he was meant to be doing things on behalf of the church, he was often just watching videos. Moreover, this was on a regular, ongoing basis, not just as a one-off. He would also sunbathe in his garden, go to a ‘tanning lounge’, go out shopping, do jobs about the house or generally relax.

I had been a police officer for three years and was, at that time, a commercial lawyer, specialising in litigation. So I was used to investigating matters. Therefore, I was able to enquire into his conduct more effectively than the other members of the church. They just assumed he was working hard. He tried to project that false impression, but it was all an act. The point is God takes it very seriously when leaders lie in any way at all. We know that because He takes *all* lies seriously. Indeed, He tells us that He considers them an ‘*abomination*’:

***¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God.
Deuteronomy 25:16 (RSV)***

We also know God will judge teachers and leaders “*with greater strictness*” than others:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.

James 3:1 (RSV)

A leader knows God, knows the Bible, and is meant to be an ambassador for Christ and a servant to His people. For him to tell lies is therefore extraordinarily serious. That should sober us, if we are a leader, and cause us to fear the LORD, repent, and turn away from all forms of deception. Also those who are not leaders need to wake up and realise that wolves and hirelings are at large in the churches, and in huge numbers. They urgently need to be identified and resisted.

‘Hirelings’ are church leaders who see their ministry as just a paid job. They are lazy, cowardly, and won’t take any risks for the sake of the people in their care.

A ‘wolf’, in the context of church leaders, is one who either *deliberately* seeks to do harm or is *reckless* as to whether harm is caused. Many fully intend to lead people astray. They knowingly use, abuse and exploit God’s people. They are out to make money, or get power, and don’t care whether people are damaged by what they do. There are now a great many wolves in the churches, and their numbers are growing rapidly. However, for the moment, let us focus on another category of leader, the ‘hireling’. Jesus speaks of such men in John chapter 10:

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.¹² He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.¹³ He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me,¹⁵ as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

John 10:11-15 (RSV)

A hireling has no particular desire to do harm, unless you get in his way or challenge him. He is not deliberately aiming to damage God’s people. Neither does he specifically want to teach falsely or mislead anyone, except in so far as that is needed to achieve his real purposes. Those are to look after his career and protect his own interests. He is not as callous as a ‘wolf’, but he doesn’t care either. He is just earning a wage, in what he sees as a paid job, and has no genuine heart of concern for the people.

The key distinguishing feature of a hireling is that, whereas a true shepherd will lay down his own life for the sheep, a hireling never will. A hireling takes the view that the sheep belong to some other man and are not his own sheep. Therefore he doesn’t truly care about them. It is like the difference between a parent and a babysitter. A parent is willing to die for their child, without hesitating. But very few babysitters would go that far, or anywhere near.

Babysitters don’t see it as part of their job to put themselves at risk, or even to be inconvenienced, for the child’s sake. A hireling, likewise, sees church ministry as a *career*, not a sacred duty or privilege. He has the same attitude as the average man working in a shop, office or factory. Indeed, he is often less diligent than most of them. A hireling may be willing to do his job according to his contract, and to work reasonably hard. But he places limits on how far he will go, how much he will do, and what price he will pay in personal terms.

In particular, he puts strict limits on what *risks* he will take for the sake of God’s people. Those limits will be unspoken, but they are real and they govern how he conducts himself. When a hireling is leading a church, or working as an assistant minister, he will operate in accordance with those unspoken rules. He will not go beyond these boundaries as to how much he is willing to do. He will be a ‘clock-watcher’, and will avoid working excessive hours, or doing anything outside of his ‘job description’.

In particular, he won’t want to do any difficult, unpopular or dangerous work. By ‘dangerous’, I don’t just mean physical danger, though that can come into it. I mean the danger of being criticised, disapproved of or opposed. It can also mean the risk of losing salary, house, car and pension by being too outspoken. A hireling will not preach about sin, judgment, Hell, the Lake of Fire, repentance,

discipleship, dying to self and so on. These topics offend people, despite being essential to hear about. The hireling knows that if he spoke about those things there would be trouble for himself.

People might leave the church, or reduce their giving, such that his own income would then be threatened. Indeed, he might even be sacked. The slightest possibility of trouble for himself, let alone losing his career, is enough to persuade any hireling to keep quiet and tone down or edit the Bible. He will limit himself to “sugar and spice and all things nice”, i.e. ‘safe topics’ which won’t offend anybody. For the people in that church it will be a constant diet of feel good messages and warm, cosy sermons about inoffensive things.

A hireling does not genuinely care about the welfare of the people in the church.

A hireling does not genuinely care about the welfare of the people in the church. He may be ‘nice’, extrovert and sociable but, when it comes to the crunch, he doesn’t *really* care about the people. I saw an example of this when I tackled ‘Fergus’ the insincere young man who once worked for me. I speak of him in chapter 12. He resigned, due to the fact that I had discovered his misconduct, and was about to start a disciplinary procedure. When that happened ‘Carl’, the leader of our church, immediately sided with Fergus.

He asked me whether Fergus could have his job back. He actually asked me to reinstate him before even asking me what had happened. Thus he had already formed a conclusion, before he ever spoke to me. In all our subsequent discussions, despite all the evidence I showed him, Carl never moved from that position. All he wanted was to help Fergus, irrespective of the harm his conduct had on others. Those ‘others’ were employees of mine, especially ‘Malcolm’, who was undermined and used by Fergus.

When I told Carl about these people and what damage Fergus had done, he brushed it all aside instantly. It was irrelevant to him. All he cared about was Fergus, because he planned to go into ministry. Carl therefore saw him as a fellow ‘clergyman’, or at least a future one. So he sided with Fergus automatically. I even gave Carl a recording of the investigatory interviews with Fergus, in which his responses were obviously insincere, but the rights and wrongs of it were irrelevant to Carl.

Neither was he interested in me, or my firm, or my staff, or even Malcolm. One might say in Carl’s defence that perhaps he was showing pastoral care for Fergus, because he was part of the church, whereas the others weren’t. Even if that was true, it would still be illegitimate. But it wasn’t actually true. Two families who attended that church had left because they could not bear to be in the same church as Fergus after the things he had done to their relatives, who worked for me.

When I told Carl that those two families had left the church solely because of Fergus, he was still totally uninterested. He brushed it aside, without making any reply. Accordingly, even when we were speaking of two families who *were also part of that church*, their welfare was still of no importance to him, because they were not ‘clergy’. Carl had his own private agenda, and the spiritual and emotional welfare of those two families was not part of it. The dismissive way in which he brushed them aside, and the bored look on his face as he did do so, was shocking.

God used it as a lesson to me in how indifferent a hireling can be about people’s welfare. I think God wanted me to witness it at first hand, for the sake of this book, and also Book 8. Fergus mattered to Carl because he was a fellow ‘clergyman’, but nobody else in the story mattered to him at all. In fact, in the six years that I was part of that church, Carl never gave any indication that he cared for me or my family. He was sociable enough to chat to about cricket, but we didn’t matter to him. The same was true of all of the other *paid* leaders in that church.

The only meaningful relationships we ever formed there were with people who were *not* paid leaders. You might consider that to be a coincidence, but I don’t think it was. It is the way it is when leaders

are hirelings. They only form relationships with those who can promote their careers. They see no value in having anything more than a superficial relationship with anybody who is of no use *to them*. That is the opposite of how it should be. A leader is meant to serve, not to be served.

‘Norman’, the laziest assistant church minister I have ever known

I have known a lot of lazy church leaders but the most extreme case was ‘Norman’. He was an assistant minister in a large church, the one led by Carl, and was in charge of youth ministry and children’s work. He may have been more motivated in the past, but I very much doubt it. He was probably always lazy, even before becoming a church minister. Indeed, I think he only entered church ministry as a way of finding an easier career. He had worked in a secular job for over ten years, and was fully qualified, but he gave that up.

The problem is that, having left a profession, it is very hard to get back into it. Skills fade and the person becomes rusty. They also lose their confidence in that previous job and can become too afraid to go back to it. Therefore a man can become trapped in paid ministry after he has lost his enthusiasm for it, if indeed he ever had any. The point may be reached where he doesn’t like ministry any longer, or want to do it. Yet he can’t leave it, because he has allowed his previous skills to fade.

It could even be that he has been in ‘ordained’ ministry since his early twenties and has never had any other job. Therefore he now feels trapped in ministry because he has no other realistic options. That was probably true of Norman. He was in his forties and had no drive at all. He was well known for his laziness. It was not spoken of openly, but most people knew about it. There would be knowing looks and raised eyebrows when Norman’s ‘workload’ was mentioned. However, people tried not to be explicit. They knew they were not meant to speak about it.

Norman was notionally in charge of all the youth and children’s ministry, but he delegated just about everything to others. He was fortunate in that regard, because a lot of people volunteered to help. So, one couple led the teenagers’ group which met on Saturday nights and also midweek. Several other couples and singles also helped with those meetings and with the one to one follow up work. Other couples led the work for other age groups. However, Norman rarely attended those meetings for teenagers himself, even to observe. He had, almost literally, nothing to do with it.

The same was true of the work for pre-school kids and those aged 5-8 and 9-12. Various couples and individuals ran all of that, including the day to day work and the leadership of it. In short, Norman did almost nothing. Moreover, outside of those youth work activities, he did very little else either. He occasionally preached to the adults but, even then, he used to download his talks from the internet. I could tell they weren’t his own work and did not involve any study. At first, I didn’t realise that Norman was just downloading other men’s talks.

I began to notice something was odd on the second occasion, because he had again used excellent artwork for the overhead projector to illustrate ‘his’ talk. I remember thinking it seemed very professional and wondering how he could have got hold of slides which so perfectly matched the contents of his own talk. Then I realised that he wasn’t just searching for artwork to *accompany* a talk he had written himself. He was downloading the whole lot, the talk itself and the slides to go with it. None of it was his own work. Thus he had spent literally zero time on it.

He hadn’t done any Bible study, or prayed or meditated on it. Neither was it a message about which God was giving him a heavy burden and which he felt he had to share. It was 100% plagiarism. I found that out for sure one day when he gave a talk about the book of Jonah, after which I went over to ask him some questions. As usual, his sermon had been accompanied by professional-quality artwork, but he was immediately out of his depth when I spoke to him afterwards and quite unable to explain, clarify or justify what he had just been talking about.

That was when I realised he had done no preparation and it wasn't his own talk. He had not studied the book of Jonah for himself, or even read commentaries. He literally read out another man's complete sermon, word for word. When the reality of that sank in I was appalled. He was purporting to preach God's Word, but was too lazy, or uninterested, to do any work on it himself. There were other problems with Norman. I remember someone in the church who was concerned that her 16 year old son was beginning to drift away from church and from youth group.

She went to Norman and asked him to speak to her son, one to one, to try to keep him in church and prevent him falling away. But Norman wouldn't do it. He made lame excuses and said the boy should attend the meetings, rather than need to be rung up or visited by him. When the parent pressed Norman, he eventually gave his real reason for not wanting to contact the boy. It was simply that he didn't want to exceed his contracted hours!

That came as no surprise to me. I already knew how lazy Norman was. To him the top priority was his own working hours, pay and conditions, not the spiritual condition and welfare of that boy, or of any of the other young people. He was like a shop steward, demanding strict boundaries for his own job description and refusing to do anything which he wasn't contractually obliged to do. Some years later, Norman asked the church for a sabbatical period on the basis that he was feeling "burnt-out" and was suffering from "depression".

He then did literally nothing at all for some months, after which his workload was reduced even further! He remained in that job for some years, earning over £40,000 per annum, which equates to about \$60,000, plus other benefits, for doing very little. Yet the church did not make him redundant, or even confront him. The other leaders in that church knew all about his laziness, but were also keenly aware that it would be a dangerous precedent for them to tackle him about it.

It could easily lead to people questioning them about their own work-rate, or even whether they were needed at all. From the perspective of those other leaders, there were some advantages to keeping Norman. While he was there, nobody could say that any of them were the least effective, or least productive, of the leadership team. That title was undeniably his, and there was a kind of safety in that, for the other leaders. It meant they could never be the "runt of the litter". That may be putting it harshly, but I believe it was part of their reason for keeping him.

CHAPTER 18

THE WICKEDNESS OF 'NICOLAITANISM' - WHERE CHURCH LEADERS ARE ABUSIVE, CONTROLLING, MANIPULATIVE OR DOMINEERING

¹³ *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*
¹⁴ *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (ESV)

“My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders.....”

Zechariah 10:3(a) (RSV)

⁴⁵ *And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*

Luke 20:45-47 (ESV)

⁵ *They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.*

Matthew 23:5-7 (ESV)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1 (NKJV)

¹⁵ *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*

Matthew 7:15 (RSV)

² *“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.*

Revelation 2:2 (ESV)

Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicola'itans, which I also hate.

Revelation 2:6 (RSV)

²⁹ *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*
³⁰ *and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*

Acts 20:29-30 (RSV)

²⁵ *But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Matthew 20:25-28 (ESV)

²⁷ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Matthew 23:27-28 (ESV)*

Who or what were the ‘Nicolaitans’ and why does Jesus say He hates their works?

We rarely speak in terms of Jesus hating things, but one thing which He said He does hate is “*the works of the Nicolaitans*”. What were they, and what did Jesus find so objectionable about them? They were not a group, as such, and they certainly didn’t call themselves by that name. The word ‘Nicolaitan’ comes from the joining of the two Greek words ‘*nike*’, meaning ‘*to conquer*’, and ‘*laos*’, meaning ‘*people*’. Combined, these would mean “*to conquer the people*” or rather “*to rule over the people*”. The phrase occurs twice in Revelation:

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ² “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. ⁶ Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicola’itans, which I also hate.

Revelation 2:1-6 (RSV)

¹⁴ *But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality.¹⁵ So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicola’itans. ¹⁶ Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Revelation 2:14-16 (RSV)

So, the word ‘*Nicolaitan*’ really refers to a type of leader, wherever they may be within the Church, not to any group or denomination. In the first century there were no denominations, but there were already Nicolaitan leaders who were dominating and ruling over people instead of serving them. It was their haughty autocratic ways that Jesus hated, and we can safely assume that He still does. Moreover, He has greater cause to do so now because their numbers, both in absolute terms, and as a proportion of the Church, must have risen vastly since John wrote Revelation.

The proper role of any leader in the Church is to be a *servant*. Nobody is ever called to *rule* over anybody. Leaders are meant to serve and to lay down their lives for the people. That is how it should be, but it is not what we see happening today. Instead, many leaders, in virtually all denominations, have an attitude of superiority and entitlement. They believe they are called by God to rule over the people, which is the very attitude that Jesus says He hates. Such men see themselves at the top of a hierarchy, over which God has appointed them as rulers.

They never refer to themselves as rulers, but they *act* as such, and that is what counts. They may well come into full time ministry as humble young men, with high ideals about serving. However, as time passes, many lose that heart-attitude and become haughty, domineering ‘*clergymen*’. Or you could say they develop a ‘*clergy-mentality*’, whereby they see themselves as different from, and higher than, the ‘ordinary’ people or ‘lay’ members. I discuss this in detail in Book 8, “*Biblical and unbiblical churches*” and would refer you to that for further study.

It is legitimate for a leader to *lead*, but never to *conquer* or *rule*. He can urge, warn, exhort, persuade, advise and plead, but he can never command anybody to do anything.

At some point, Nicolaitan type leaders start to see themselves as having the right to rule. They come to believe that they are entitled to do whatever is needed to remain in control. That includes the right to manipulate, dominate or intimidate anybody who gets in their way. Given that they see themselves as the God-appointed ‘ruler’ of that church, anyone who opposes them is, by definition, opposing God. He may also begin to see himself as the main, or only, means by which God speaks into that church.

To him, his own views then become synonymous with God’s will. Therefore, anybody disagreeing with him is disagreeing with God. These are the perverse chains of reasoning that occur in the mind of a ‘ruler’ rather than a leader. To him, his clergy status justifies all his actions. However, God never appoints any man or group to rule over any church. Indeed, even if all the elders agree, they still cannot rule, not even collectively. They can only lead.

Genuine, biblical leadership does include an element of authority, but that is very far from being absolute. The authority of an elder has to be exercised within the confines of biblical principles and godly character. An elder must always seek the *free and informed consent* of those whom he leads. Therefore, in Acts chapter 15, at the Jerusalem Council, the leaders spoke, advised, persuaded and even summed up, but it was *the church as a whole* which *decided*.

Neither James, nor Paul, nor any other leader, ever took “command” at that Council, or gave any orders. James did announce the verdict of the conference, but that had been decided by the *whole church*, not only by the leaders. Admittedly, they did so with the guidance and leadership of James, but not under his rule. That is the crucial point, which so many leaders are missing.

There is more than one way for a church leader to dominate, control, abuse or exploit people. The particular methods they choose will depend on the personality of the leader.

It would be wrong to assume that all controlling church leaders operate in exactly the same way. There are many different ways to control a congregation. The methods chosen will depend on the personality of that leader, the wider leadership structure, the size of the church, and the nature of the denomination. A man may choose to dominate, manipulate, intimidate or deceive people. Or he may use a mixture of those methods. But his overall objective is always the same, to control people.

To be dominating a leader usually, but not always, needs a strong, authoritarian type of personality. Those who have that kind of nature will tend to gravitate towards *dominating* others by means of direct pressure and forcefulness. I can think of many such men, over the years, who have overtly dominated their churches. Others are not naturally forceful, extrovert or confident and may not have a commanding personality. They may well be timid, shy, introverted and even weak.

Actually, a great many church leaders are like that, because church leadership is widely seen as a soft career choice for those who are not high-achievers. Indeed, such men often choose church ministry as a ‘career’, precisely because they are not sufficiently dynamic or talented to succeed and gain promotion in a secular workplace. For such men, *manipulation* is the preferred method, rather than domination, because it is covert and indirect and doesn’t involve confrontation. Moreover, it does not require any display of strength, or ability, or that the leader should have any gifts at all.

Intimidation as a style or method of ruling is more closely linked to domination. You could say it is one of the ways in which people can be dominated. The leader’s aim is to make people afraid, so they will not argue or resist him. Instead, they will just comply and do whatever the leader wants them to do. Fear is intentionally produced as one of the means of controlling them. Such a leader can take full advantage of people’s fear, whatever form it takes.

Deception is another method, and it can be used by all types of leaders, whether they are strong or weak, direct or indirect, and dominant or manipulative. However, deception is used most often by those who are generally more covert and manipulative. It fits better with that model of leadership. Indeed, it is probably an essential part of it, because manipulation is at its most effective when coupled with deception. Then the people are not only manoeuvred, or pressurised, but also lied to.

Some church leaders have naturally strong, forceful, personalities and they control people in a direct manner. Therefore their preference will be domination and intimidation.

If a man is naturally extrovert, confident and forceful he will tend to gravitate towards a dominating style of leadership. I once read a book by a well-known leader who spoke admiringly of another leader whom he had known when he was young. That other leader was autocratic and gave arbitrary orders which he required to be obeyed without question. The author approved of that older man's style of leadership and saw it as a model because it enabled young men to learn "*submission to authority*".

The leader would even tell the younger leaders and trainee leaders in his very large church what colour socks to wear. He saw this as a test of their submissiveness and of whether they had any 'rebelliousness' in them that needed to be extinguished. Most of the men would comply, even when told to wear white socks, which they found demeaning. The author praised this leader's approach, but it was actually emotional and spiritual abuse. That leader wanted total dominance over those young men and to crush their independence of thought.

His aim was actually to break their spirits, so that they would later do his bidding without question, even when it came to socks, which were none of his business. Indeed, one of his objectives, was to get them to obey him *even when they did not agree with or understand him*. The author saw this as a good feature, but God doesn't. In the book of Acts the Bereans are praised for the way they checked Paul's preaching, and for the fact that they *didn't just accept it unquestioningly*. Can you imagine Paul telling young men in Berea what socks to wear?

Moreover, can you imagine Paul refusing to explain his teaching, or regarding it as 'rebellion' if he was questioned? Somebody is wrong here, either Paul or the leader with the socks policy, and it isn't Paul. I heard of another story from a friend of mine. When he was a young Christian, back in the 1970s, he was on a Summer Training Programme with a Christian group which focused on discipleship. One day the leader confronted him about his tie and insisted that he change it. This was done openly, in front of others, and he felt humiliated.

My friend said it was done deliberately "*to crush my spirit*". He had been brought to heel, like a dog. From then on, he always feared that leader. It created a master-servant relationship which is unbiblical. I asked him what he now felt he should have done at the time. He said he should have refused to comply and even left the training programme if need be. I think he was right. The biblical position is we should *all submit to each other*, whether the other person is a leader or not. But we must never let anybody *dominate* us, and should resist anyone who tries to do so.

Church leaders who lack confidence, or are introverted, weak, or timid, tend to control people indirectly, using manipulation and deceit.

The mere fact that a leader is weak or timid doesn't mean he won't be a controller, or even a wolf. He will just go about it in a different way. Men of that type will still manipulate and deceive so as to get their own way, but they will do it *indirectly*, rather than directly. 'Carl' was extremely shy and introverted and he had a chronic lack of self-confidence. I thought at first that this meant he would not be a controlling leader. I therefore assumed he would be a 'safer bet' than 'Rick', an extrovert showman who loved to be up at the front, being seen by people.

However, I learned a vital lesson from Carl, which is that men like him are just as likely to become controllers. They simply go about it in different ways. They deceive rather than dominate, and they manoeuvre people rather than giving direct orders. Yet the result is the same. They still end up controlling the people, just by a different route. When I first met Carl he was an assistant minister in a large church. He could cope when he was in that role, because he wasn't the senior leader. So, at that time, Carl did not seem to me to be controlling or manipulative.

At any rate, I saw no signs of it. He was quiet, unimpressive and ineffectual, but he seemed to do no harm. However, the Senior Minister then left suddenly and Carl was appointed to take his place. This was a promotion too far for him and caused him to change. Carl struggled in his new role and became increasingly insecure and manipulative. He eventually ended up just as controlling as other leaders, despite being so painfully shy. About two years after Carl had been promoted I joined a committee within the church which was looking at overhauling the constitution of the church.

The aim was for the church to become a corporation, so as to limit the potential financial liability of the trustees. With my legal background, I felt I could help. However, I was dismayed by the way Carl operated. He said almost nothing during the committee meetings. Yet, he still made sure that nothing was ever done that could make him more accountable, or which made him feel insecure. For example, I suggested that we alter the constitution so that the person who chaired the Members' meeting would be one of the members, not one of the Leadership Team, as had always been the case.

Carl was deeply threatened by that proposal. Whereas he had been virtually silent throughout previous meetings, he suddenly became animated over this point. I had proposed it because it would make clear that one of the purposes of the Members' Meeting was to *hold the leaders to account* and to *question them as to their roles, output, effectiveness* and so on. I therefore said that it would help if the Chairman of the Members' meetings was one of the members, not one of those paid leaders, who were supposed to be being held accountable.

Carl was highly alarmed and acted swiftly to squash the proposal, together with one of the other paid staff who was also on that sub-committee. They were adamant that it must not go into the draft constitution and should not even be put to the members to consider. They said it would "*create chaos*" if the Chairman of the Members' meeting was not one of the Leadership Team. I could not see why it would, at least not from the members' point of view. But I could see how it would strike fear into the leaders' hearts if it meant they would be held more closely to account.

I also asked repeatedly for the emails from the church's lawyer to be forwarded to all of us on the sub-committee. Then we could see for ourselves exactly what he was advising and examine the reasoning behind it. The church secretary, who was also on the sub-committee, agreed to forward all of these to us, i.e. all past and future emails. But she never did. I later realised that Carl was covertly blocking this. He did not want the sub-committee to see the lawyer's emails about the new constitution, even though we were the very group that was supposed to be drafting it.

Carl wanted to restrict all of those emails to himself and to the Leadership Team, so that only the leaders would know what the lawyer was advising and why. Therefore he spoke privately to the church secretary, after the meetings, to tell her *not* to send them to us. Yet, he never said so openly, in the meetings. He did not have the courage, or the honesty, to do that but he was still determined to get his own way. Therefore all we ever got from the secretary were carefully sanitised extracts from the lawyer's emails. These were cut and pasted for us, but the full emails were always withheld.

Carl knew that knowledge is power and he didn't want us to have any. I later questioned him about it when he came to see us when we said we were not renewing our membership. Carl was unwilling to give any explanation for his conduct. He neither admitted nor denied it, but just stammered and stuttered and became angry. He said we would need to discuss it "*in another meeting, with witnesses present*". But he never arranged any meeting and neither did I. By then I could see no point in arguing with him any further, either about this or anything else.

One way in which both, dominating and manipulative church leaders maintain control is to close down all discussion and debate on any controversial topics.

Have you noticed how little genuinely open discussion takes place in most churches? That is not by accident. It is the policy of insecure leaders to close down all debate. They fear what might happen, or where it could lead. There should instead be a lot of free discussion in churches. Debate should be actively encouraged on major issues so that all points of view can be heard. Then the truth will prevail, and accurate doctrine will result, because the correct meaning of Scripture on any given point will become apparent if it can be aired openly and discussed courteously.

Scripture will always win in a fair fight, where logic and the authority of God's Word can be applied over a period of time. However, a controlling leader doesn't want the *best* argument to prevail. He wants *his own* opinions to be accepted, whether they are right or not. Therefore a controlling church leader will discourage open debate, especially if the issue is sensitive, or relates to any of the distinctive doctrines which that leader teaches. Take the issue of whether there will be a literal 1000 year 'Millennium', during which Jesus will reign on this physical Earth when He returns.

The majority view, at least in the UK, is '*amillennialism*'. That is the belief that there will not be any literal 1000 year reign on this Earth. Instead it is assumed that what the Bible says about this period is only 'figurative', 'spiritual' or 'allegorical'. They believe the time in which we now live *is* the period spoken of. To them, the prophecies about the coming Kingdom are just poetic language and the events and circumstances described will not literally happen. You will have guessed that that is not my view.

I believe the Millennium is a literal 1000 year period in the history of this physical Earth, which has yet to happen but which will, assuredly, happen in the future. Church leaders get uptight about things like this and discourage the expression of any view which contradicts their own. Thus anybody taking Bible prophecy literally is likely to be suppressed. It could be as mild as an awkward silence and a swift change of subject. Or it could be a firm slapping down by the leader, or his supporters, of anyone expressing an unacceptable opinion or raising a taboo subject.

There is an equal reluctance to allow free discussion and debate on all sorts of other issues, not just prophecy.

The same restrictions apply to debates which we might otherwise have on issues such as baptism in water, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, demonology, deliverance, eternal security, the Day of Judgment, the status and future role of Israel, whether the Church has replaced Israel, prophecy in general and whether the practices of the early Church differed from what we see today. In all these areas most churches do not even allow free discussion in private, let alone organise structured public debates, in which all views can be assessed.

Most leaders would see that as far too dangerous. They would fear that their congregations might evaluate the evidence presented by each side and then choose to disagree with the leader. To avoid that possibility, most leaders restrict their churches to hearing nothing other than their own views. That is tragic, because it has a shrinking effect on the minds of the congregation if they are denied the opportunity to hear the arguments for and against each position. The very process of handling such debates, and weighing up the arguments and evidence from all sides, has a maturing effect.

It equips people to think for themselves, with the Holy Spirit as their guide, and the Bible as their measuring rod. That is the only way that we can learn how to discern for ourselves what is true and false. God wants every Christian to learn how to think and make decisions independently, without being reliant on leaders, and to differentiate between what is biblical and unbiblical. Insecure leaders think that preventing open debate is good for the church, as it could lead to people adopting all sorts of heretical beliefs.

They conclude that safety is to be found by restricting what people hear to nothing other than that leader's own views, or the established beliefs and policies of that denomination. They will claim they are thereby protecting the people from heresy and error. Actually such a leader is just keeping his people in a kind of 'play pen' where they are fenced in and unable to go outside of the boundaries which he puts in place for them.

They will then never grow up to become confident, healthy, mature, independent-minded disciples capable of judging and discerning for themselves. They will also never become leaders in their own right, or be capable of acting as 'Bereans' and assessing men's teaching. Neither will they be able to go on to make other disciples, as per the Great Commission, since they will not really be disciples themselves. They are held back and kept as perpetual children, living on milk, and always dependent on that leader, even in the long term. That may suit the leader, but it does not suit God.

There is a big difference between upholding true doctrine and avoiding debate.

A congregation which is limited to the teaching of its own leader will become the equivalent of farm livestock which have been genetically impaired due to 'inbreeding'. That's another reason why we all need to hear people who disagree with us and who say things we've never heard before. Weighing what they say, checking it against the Bible, challenging them about it, and even correcting them, are essential parts of growing as a disciple. That is all part of how we are meant to gain maturity and discernment, and become free and independent thinkers.

It is therefore wrong for a leader to keep people 'quarantined' from hearing or discussing anything of which he doesn't approve. It might appear that such leaders are trying to protect their people, but they are usually just protecting their own ministries and incomes. They also do it to avoid being contradicted and to get a quiet life, without any threat to their power. Such a controlling approach is wicked, because it damages the Church and hinders the Great Commission.

How should a leader properly deal with questions, disagreements, and being contradicted?

How then should a church leader deal with disagreements, questions, debates and even being contradicted in public? The answer is he should take such things in his stride and even welcome them. That said, such a leader would need to spend a long time convincing people that he really does want them to feel free to question him and disagree with him, even in public. He would need to keep emphasising that he will not be offended. Unless he keeps on saying that, people will not believe him. They have been conditioned to expect church leaders to be uptight about any contrary view being expressed.

So he will need to make an ongoing effort to convince people that he really means it and that they are truly free to do these things. Then, when people do nervously start to ask questions or disagree, he needs to respond courteously and answer them seriously and in detail. He also needs to accept correction willingly and gracefully if it turns out he is wrong. Alternatively, if he is not wrong, he needs to argue for his beliefs graciously, but also confidently. Free speech does not mean that leaders have to agree with those who contradict them, or to stay silent when false doctrines are advocated.

He should also publicly contradict those with whom he disagrees, and even use it as an opportunity to restate and clarify true doctrines. Then people will see him modelling the right way to contend for the truth in public, boldly but courteously, and without muzzling people. They will gradually learn from his example how they should deal with those who disagree with them. The problem is that for this to happen most leaders would need to change radically, as they are generally incapable of any of this at present.

They would firstly need to deal with their own chronic insecurities, fears and paranoia, so as to become capable of being relaxed and confident. Realistically, that will require many to give up paid, full time ministry and to get secular jobs. Then they can operate biblically, as unpaid elders, without any fear of losing their jobs, homes and pensions, because those would no longer have anything to do with their ministries.

Abusive leaders misuse the phrase “Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!” They wrongly apply it to themselves and imply that nobody should contradict them.

If you’ve been involved in churches for any length of time, the chances are you have heard some leader use this verse:

*Saying “Touch not my anointed ones,
do my prophets no harm!”
1 Chronicles 16:22 (RSV)*

They misuse this verse by applying it to themselves, or to other church leaders, whom they are supporting. They seek to convey the false impression that every church leader is God’s “anointed”, and that we must not oppose, criticise or contradict them. It is presumptuous to apply that verse to themselves in the first place. It refers to the prophets, by which God means the *genuine* people whom He has called, and who are truly speaking for Him. It is wrong to assume, as a given, that it automatically includes *every* church leader.

On the contrary, the Bible warns us that many leaders will be wolves and hirelings. So, on that basis alone, we can rule out the idea that they are *all* God’s anointed. The aim of many who misuse this verse is to protect themselves and promote their own agenda, as if that was automatically what God wants. The problem is that a high proportion of what is done and taught in churches is the very opposite of what the Bible says. Far from requiring us to support such men unquestioningly, God wants us to stand up to them.

An insecure leader will be suspicious of anyone who has leadership potential. He will also undermine anyone who knows more than he does, or whom God is using more than him.

One of the features of insecure leaders is they knock down, or hold back, any person who presents any kind of threat to them. An example of this, from the Bible, is the way King Saul envied the young David. He became paranoid about his successes and began to undermine him to prevent him becoming a rival for the throne. At the outset, when David was less famous, Saul was happy to use him. But as his successes grew, Saul began to resent him and became increasingly wary:

⁵ And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul’s servants.

⁶ As they were coming home, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with songs of joy, and with instruments of music. ⁷ And the women sang to one another as they made merry,

*“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his ten thousands.”*

⁸ And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him; he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; and what more can he have but the kingdom?” ⁹ And Saul eyed David from that day on.

1 Samuel 18:5-9 (RSV)

King Saul became so deeply paranoid, partly due to being demonised, that he lost control of himself at times and even tried to kill David:

¹⁰ And on the morrow an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; ¹¹ and Saul cast the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice. ¹² Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.

1 Samuel 18:10-12 (RSV)

Despite Saul's opposition to him, David continued to succeed, and Saul's envy increased all the more, until he became David's enemy:

²⁸ But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that all Israel loved him, ²⁹ Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

1 Samuel 18:28-29 (RSV)

Insecure leaders feel threatened when any person in the congregation, in particular younger men, have more natural talent or leadership potential than they have. They will be wary of such men, because they fear they may become rivals, or that their abilities will expose the leader's own shortcomings. If such men join the church, that leader will deny them opportunities to do the things which enable them to grow. He fears that if he allows that talented young man to lead a group, take a service or preach a sermon, he might do it too well.

If so people might begin to compare the leader's performance with that of the up and coming young leader. He might also grow in confidence and experience, such that the congregation begin to wonder why they are paying for a full time minister when that young man is already able to do it better than him and at no cost. These risks strike terror into the heart of an insecure leader. He will therefore knock down any such person while he is still young, before he becomes a bigger threat.

As a result, many talented, anointed, confident men are denied opportunities, and even driven out of churches, due to the paranoia of insecure leaders. It is a widespread problem, but one which leaders never talk about or write about. One valid point which was made to me by 'Carlos', about whom I write in chapter 5, is that in South America it is the norm for talented young men to set up their own churches, even in their twenties, when they are far from ready. They do so because insecure church leaders won't give them any opportunities to teach, preach or lead any small group.

Thus the only way those young men can get any experience is to break away and set up on their own, which is tragic. I raise this issue so that if you are such a young man, and are being denied any opportunity to serve by a church leader, you can better understand his reasons. If you are a member of that church, and see such a young man being frozen out, encourage him to carry on regardless. You could even intervene with the leader on his behalf and try to open some doors for him.

It is wicked for an insecure leader to block the progress of up and coming young leaders and to withhold opportunities to develop.

What God actually wants leaders to do is to make *disciples*. That is the 'Great Commission' and it is not about making converts, or even church members. It is about training and equipping others to become *leaders and disciple-makers*. Then they can, in turn, carry on the Great Commission. That is why it is such a tragedy if a leader's insecurity makes him reluctant to train up others to work alongside him and, in due course, to replace him. Here is what Jesus said:

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Matthew 28:18-20 (RSV)

As leaders, we are meant to be actively reproducing, and even *replacing*, ourselves by making disciples who can become independent of us and *capable of doing our jobs*. That must also mean accepting that some of them will be better leaders than we are. But why should that bother us? A leader is meant to be committed to the Great Commission, not to promoting himself or protecting his own career and income. Indeed, every leader should be aiming to train his people so well that he can make himself redundant after a few years, as they no longer need him. Then he can start a new church elsewhere and do the same again.

If he sees it in this way he will be relaxed when talented young men arrive in his church who are eager to do ministry work. That leader should think: “*Here’s a young man who has potential. He can already preach as well as me, if not better. I will now encourage him and let him speak even more often, so that he can grow. Then God can raise him higher and use him more widely.*” Every leader should think like that, not least because apostle Paul said the key role of any leader is “*to equip the saints for the work of the ministry*”. He is not meant to do all the work himself:

¹¹ And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (RSV)

Some of my own experiences of being held back and blocked by insecure church leaders

A leader’s role is to equip, train, encourage, assist and promote *other people* to do the work of the ministry, not to do it all himself. His aim should be to make it possible for God to raise up and use as many of *them* as possible. Assisting their development is not a threat to that leader’s ministry. It is actually *his main purpose* and he ought to be seeking to bring it about, rather than preventing it. In my younger days I suffered at the hands of a number of insecure church leaders and was blocked and denied opportunities to do things.

They saw me as a threat because I studied a lot, read the Bible assiduously, memorised Scripture, read vast numbers of Christian books and was continually engaged in evangelism. I was also eager for opportunities to preach, because I was studying all the time and learning things which I wanted to share. From the outset, I knew I had a gift for teaching and also for evangelism and I wanted an outlet for it. Some leaders were willing to let me do so, but only once. Then they blocked me after that and made all sorts of excuses. Or they kept putting me off or creating delays.

You might imagine that was because I was doing it badly, or preaching heresy, and they wanted to protect people from me. But that wasn’t the case. I knew my preaching was theologically sound, and that I had delivered it well. For one thing, I knew it because so many people told me so afterwards, except of course for the leaders themselves. I remember one occasion when I was in the church led by ‘Rick’. It allowed guest speakers, so I asked for a teaching slot. Rick agreed to this and I spoke on how we can overcome discouragement and encourage ourselves and others.

The content was thoroughly biblical and it was a message which people had never heard before. For all these reasons, it was very well received. In fact, that is an under-statement, because God anointed that sermon in an extraordinary way. He opened the eyes and ears of the people present and really touched them. I could see that the words were hitting home and, after I had finished, there was a powerful reaction from the congregation. A queue literally formed of people wanting to thank me and to ask me questions or share their problems.

That was totally unlike what happened whenever Rick spoke, or when any visiting speaker spoke. I'm not saying any of this to boast, but simply to explain the perversity of Rick's reaction and his subsequent conduct. As I walked away from the lectern after my talk, Rick was looking at me with obvious resentment in his face. However, I didn't let that stop me. A week or two later I asked Rick if I could be given another speaking slot. But he fobbed me off. There then began a series of other 'fob offs' in which I was sent to and fro between Rick and one of the other leaders, 'Desmond'.

Rick initially told me they hadn't yet drawn up the list of speakers and would be doing so in the next month or two. He told me to speak to Desmond in about a month. So I waited and then approached Desmond, but I was then told I was too late and that they had already drawn up the list. I then waited again and approached them both a couple of months later, only to be fobbed off yet again. I was repeatedly given the run-around in this way until it became plain that they were colluding together to prevent me from speaking again.

Another occasion when 'Rick', an insecure church leader, deliberately sabotaged my sermon

Most people, would have given up at that stage, but I am unusually persistent. So I kept pursuing this and directly challenged Rick and Desmond about it. Eventually, having run out of excuses, they reluctantly agreed to let me speak again and a date was set. I prepared a talk and made sure it would last no more than 40 minutes, the standard time allotted in that church. Moreover, on this particular Sunday, something else was scheduled for immediately after the sermon, so I knew I had to finish right on time and could not go over, even by a minute.

This need to finish strictly on time was made very clear to me. I only emphasise it here to provide the context, so as to make sense of what then happened. When the time came for me to speak I walked to the front but, at that very moment, Rick jumped up and asked if he could "*just give an important notice*". I then stood to one side and he proceeded to speak for 17 minutes, despite knowing full well, because he had told me himself, that I had a fixed time limit of 40 minutes. I was therefore left with only 23 minutes to give a talk which I had carefully planned to last 40 minutes.

Everything Rick said in his "important notice" was actually unimportant. It was just a mini-sermon on a series of thoughts he'd recently had, but it was all inconsequential and non-urgent. Moreover, he repeated himself many times and spun it out for as long as he could. He sounded like a contestant on the Radio 4 programme, 'Just a Minute', in which they have to speak on random subjects for as long as they can. What he was saying was just waffle and he didn't need to say any of it, let alone spend 17 minutes on it during the scheduled slot for the speaker.

At first, I assumed his "notice" would be extremely important and also brief. But, as the minutes went by, I began to wonder where he was going with it. I then began to wonder why he was giving it at all, and especially why he was taking so long over it. Eventually I realised that his real purpose was to sabotage my talk by forcing me to edit it whilst delivering it, without any advance warning. Had I been told, even the day before, that I would only have 23 minutes, I could have redrafted my talk to fit that length of time. But doing that mid-sermon is another matter, especially when you feel upset.

I was amazed at how a church leader could deliberately sabotage someone's sermon in his own church. Yet he did, and it didn't appear to trouble his conscience one bit. I felt very unsettled by it and had to throw out whole sections of my talk and drastically reduce other parts. But I made sure I

finished on time. I handled it better than many would have done, because I was an experienced public speaker due to many years of practice in politics and in my job as a litigation lawyer. But the talk was still spoiled, as Rick had intended it to be. At least it was not as good as it would have been.

This kind of obstruction by insecure leaders has only ever happened to me in *churches*, never in any of the law firms I worked for. My bosses at work all spotted that I was eloquent and persuasive and, from an early stage, they pushed me towards litigation and advocacy. They even asked me to do their advocacy for them in cases they were handling. I was also asked to give talks on legal subjects, with bosses present. None of them ever wanted me to do badly, as Rick did.

Likewise, when I was active in politics, older men encouraged me and nobody tried to undermine me. On the contrary, they urged me forward and encouraged me to take up positions on committees. I was also asked to be an officer on the executive of the party, a councillor and eventually Chairman of the Conservative Association. The contrast between how I was treated by leaders in the church, and by bosses or leaders in my legal and political activities, was stark. They were polar opposites.

If that isn't enough to prove my case, let me cite some additional evidence given to me by a retired pastor which corroborates what I am saying. I was sharing with him my frustrations at being continually blocked as a speaker by church leaders. He then told me, quite explicitly, that my diagnosis of the problem was entirely accurate and that I was being deliberately obstructed by leaders, due to their insecurity. He then went on to confirm that what was happening to me was nothing unusual and that most of the pastors he had ever known were extremely insecure.

He even said that when a pastor goes on holiday, or has to travel, and therefore needs to arrange a guest speaker, many will make sure that the replacement speaker is not very good. They will deliberately choose people who have little or no skill so that nobody will consider the visitor to be better than he is. You may find that hard to believe, but he said it soberly and seriously, without any trace of exaggeration. He had found it to be so in his own ministry and had been told the same by other leaders.

Dealing with church leaders who are greedy for money, teach falsely about tithing, or misuse church funds

One of the biggest destroyers of Christian ministries is *the love of money*. It can cause even good and faithful shepherds to become corrupt. It can also make them insecure, manipulative and controlling as they try to increase their income, or just hold on to what they have. Anxiety about money, and the craving for more of it, starts to take a hold of such men. Eventually it consumes them, until it affects all they do and makes them a disgrace to the Gospel and a danger to God's people.

A leader is only as faithful as he is in the least noticed, most private areas of his life. One of those is our handling of money. The members of the church may not see it, but God sees it all, even the smallest acts of compromise, dishonesty and unfaithfulness. Far from being trivial, such small things are the most accurate measure of a person's faithfulness. Jesus expressed it as follows:

¹⁰ "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. ¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him. ¹⁵ But he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Luke 16:10-15 (RSV)

If a leader is not faithful in the small things, such as handling money, he will be unfaithful throughout the rest of his ministry as well. Our handling of money is an indicator of our current spiritual condition, but it is also a cause of future moral and spiritual decline if we mishandle it. Paul warned Timothy about the terrible power that the love of money has to lead us into all sorts of other evils. It isn't just that we end up sinning in our misuse of money itself, or in how we go about getting or keeping it. It can also corrupt us in a host of other ways too, even where those seem unconnected:

⁶ There is great gain in godliness with contentment; ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; ⁸ but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. ¹¹ But as for you, man of God, shun all this; aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.

1 Timothy 6:6-11 (RSV)

The answer, according to Paul, was to cultivate a heart-attitude of contentment, so as not to allow any cravings, anxieties or paranoia about money to develop. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, also warns us to keep our lives free of the love of money. He doesn't mean we should avoid money itself, only *the love of it*:

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have;
Hebrews 13:5a (RSV)

When leaders have the love of money

I can think of many leaders who have loved money and mishandled it, and/or mistreated people in order to get it or keep it. One of the worst ways this is done is by the manipulative and self-serving way in which so many leaders teach about giving to the local church. In particular, I am referring to how they teach the man-made, unbiblical doctrine of “*tithing*” to one's local church. This practice is derived from an aspect of the Law of Moses but it has no place in Church life.

Nevertheless, tithing to one's local church is so widely taught, especially in evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic churches, that to question it is assumed to be heretical. That is mainly because objecting to the concept of tithing to the local church is a direct threat to the leader's income. As a young believer I fully accepted the concept of tithing to the church I was part of, and I practised it faithfully for many years. It was what I was taught to do in one church after another.

As I became more mature, and as my own knowledge of the Bible grew, I realised that tithing to one's church is nowhere to be found in the New Testament. Jews tithed to support the work of the priests and Levites and the upkeep of the Temple. But that has nothing to do with local churches in the Church age. In any case, the Law of Moses ended when Jesus died. Therefore we are not under it anyway, including what it said about tithing. That provision does not apply to us any more than the dietary rules do, or the prohibition of garments made from mixed fabrics.

A Christian's duty today is not to “*tithe*” but to “*give generously*”.

Now, in the Church age, the duty of every Christian is to be ‘*generous*’. Precisely what that means in practice is not defined. God has deliberately left it to each of us to define ‘*generously*’ for ourselves, based on our own conscience and heart-attitude. Depending on who the person is, what they earn, and their other circumstances, it may mean giving less than 10%. But it could also mean giving more than 10%. God wants each person to decide for themselves, *with complete freedom*, what they personally should give in order to be ‘*generous*’. He will then judge us individually for the choices we make.

Moreover, the New Testament does not specify *who* we are to give to. That is also left entirely up to us to decide. God wants each individual to give *to whoever they choose to give to*, in accordance with their own conscience, their own personal priorities, preferences, and God's specific promptings. There is nothing in the Bible to say we should give to the local church, and still less to pay wages to *local* elders. On the contrary, the biblical pattern is for each of them to support themselves financially, not to be paid by the local church.

We don't see *local* leaders being paid anywhere in the New Testament. The only Christian workers who received financial support in the book of Acts, or the letters, were those who were *sent away from their own local church*. That is to say apostles or *missionaries*, who travel away to churches *other than their own local church*. For such men it may not be possible to earn their own living. Therefore, they can, and should, be supported. But this is usually done by the church which sent them, not the people to whom they are sent.

This is a practical arrangement. It means financial support is only given to those who need it, because *the requirement to travel* prevents them getting a job. That was how the churches operated in the book of Acts and the letters. But it soon became the opposite of how the denominational, hierarchical churches operated. Before long, they had created the concept of professional '*clergy*' who don't travel, but don't support themselves either. That led to the unhealthy and unbiblical system we have today, in traditional churches, in which local leaders are paid by their own local people.

That means they come to depend on their own congregation for their entire livelihood, plus their home, pension and car. It is not that such a funding arrangement is inherently wrong or wicked. The point is that it is *unbiblical*, as is it is not what we see done, or taught, in the New Testament. Moreover, it is foreseeably unhealthy, because it is likely to lead to other things, which are inherently wicked, such as the love of money and then manipulation, domination, control and deception.

CHAPTER 19

SOME OF MY OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF NICOLAITAN LEADERS WHO RULED OVER THEIR CHURCHES

³ *Thus says the Lord God, Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!*

Ezekiel 13:3 (ESV)

⁸ *Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Because you have uttered falsehood and seen lying visions, therefore behold, I am against you, declares the Lord God.*

Ezekiel 13:8 (ESV)

³⁴ *They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.*

John 9:34 (ESV)

² *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*

2 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV)

²⁰ *For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.*

2 Corinthians 11:20 (ESV)

'Sam and Judith' - a married couple I once knew who led a church and were very money conscious. They manipulated church members to give financial support.

After we left the church led by 'Rick', whom I had challenged over his dishonesty, we visited a few others to see where to go instead. One of the first churches we tried out was led by a married couple, 'Sam and Judith'. They had actually left Rick's church themselves some years earlier, having identified his carnal and controlling ways long before I did. I therefore assumed that if they had discerned what was wrong with Rick, they themselves must be good people, whom we could trust. But I was badly mistaken, and there is a lesson in that.

The mere fact that a person can discern evil in others does *not* mean that he is not evil himself. The "enemy of your enemy" is not necessarily your friend. They may only be his enemy because they see him as a *rival*, not because they are any more godly than he is. That was certainly so in the case of Sam and Judith. It turned out they were even more manipulative than Rick. They had indeed correctly identified what was wrong with Rick, but they went on to reproduce all of his ways in their new church which they set up after leaving his.

That is not as unlikely as it may sound, as the main reason they had identified his ways was precisely *because they were like him themselves*. Therefore they could see through his weasel words, and discern his real motives much quicker than I could. The familiar phrase "*It takes one to know one*" has a lot of truth in it. They could see that Rick was controlling and manipulative but their main objection was that they wanted to be the ones doing the controlling and manipulating, not the ones subjected to it.

Just because a church leader has identified deception, abuse or manipulation in other leaders does not necessarily mean he is not doing the same things himself. Indeed, one of the most effective 'covers' for a controlling leader is to speak against those things in others. That is likely to convince all but the

most discerning of people that he must therefore be a leader who can be trusted, such that it is safe to join his church. In this way many ‘refugees’ from abusive churches are tricked into joining other churches which are just as bad, if not worse, than the ones from which they fled.

Victims of abusive leaders leave one church after another, seeking honest, godly leadership, only to find the same practices and attitudes in each place. The only thing that alters with each successive church is how long it takes to identify these features. In the first church it may take 10 years. Then it might take three years in the next, one year in the next, three months in the next, and so on. That was how it was for us. In the end, we could see falseness and control almost immediately, partly because we looked for the tell-tale signs from the outset, not only after things had gone wrong.

How I discovered Sam and Judith’s love of money and their willingness to manipulate people in order to get it

When we briefly went to the church led by Sam and Judith, after leaving Rick’s church, I saw some things that made me uncomfortable, even in the first few weeks. They consistently hyped things up and promoted their own ministry in the same ‘showy’ way that Rick did. That in itself made me uneasy and reminded me of Rick. Indeed, they probably learned that approach from him. However my eyes opened properly when Sam came to see me at my office and raised the subject of tithing.

He said that he and his wife had been praying about what to do when I started to give their church ten per cent of the profits of my business! My law firm was quite large and, at its peak, it had over 80 employees. I was surprised to hear Sam say this. I hadn’t expected him to be so blunt, even though I knew he believed in tithing. However, I had by then realised for myself that tithing is not the New Testament model for giving. So I said to Sam “*Can you show me any place in the New Testament where it says we should tithe to our local church?*”

Sam began to waffle for a while with religious-sounding slogans in support of tithing. But I said that what he was saying was just man-made traditions and that tithing was nowhere to be found in the New Testament. His reply to that shocked me. He said “*Yes, but if we didn’t teach tithing, how would the Church get money?*” Sam didn’t just mean his own local church. He was referring to the Church as a whole and was acknowledging that *he knew that the Bible doesn’t teach tithing*, or contain even a single verse to justify teaching it.

He was saying that it was necessary, *on a pragmatic basis*, to teach it anyway, *because churches need money*. I had never heard such a brass-faced attitude from any supporter of tithing. I had discussed it with various people prior to this but, as far as I could tell, they all sincerely believed that it was what God wanted. They were teaching it because they believed, albeit wrongly, that it is a biblical requirement. The difference was that Sam was teaching it despite being *well aware that it isn’t biblical*.

Moreover, he wasn’t embarrassed to say so, when he realised that I knew the Bible well enough to argue the position and wasn’t going to be deceived. He was changing tack and appealing to my sense of pragmatism about the need for churches to get funds somehow, if they were to continue to operate. I was stunned by his admission, and by what it signified about the hardness of his heart. It meant that he was willing to tell deliberate lies simply to get funding. Bear in mind also that the lies he was telling were about *God’s Word itself*, and that he was telling them *to God’s people*.

I feared for him, and for how he will fare at the Day of Judgment if he doesn’t repent of this. What will Jesus say to Sam about his deliberate misrepresentation of God’s Word? Also how will Jesus view his treating the congregation as if they were a cow to be milked, rather than precious people to be served and protected? We left Sam and Judith’s church immediately after that meeting. I had already heard enough to weigh up their real nature and to realise that they were even worse than Rick. For all his faults, he had never been as brazen as Sam.

The stark difference between apostle Paul's approach to ministry, especially the handling of money, and the way in which so many leaders behave today

Sam felt entitled to twist God's Word if that was necessary in order to get people to give him money. Apostle Paul never did that. To him, God's Word was precious and he took very seriously his duty to teach it all as fully and as accurately as he could. Paul did not twist it, leave any parts out, or over-emphasise any of it, in order to get his own way. He taught what he called "*the whole counsel of God*":

²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Acts 20:26-27 (RSV)

However, Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus that, after his departure, "*fierce wolves will come in, not sparing the flock...*" He therefore urged them to take care of the church. That is, in any case, already the primary duty of any leader:

²⁸ Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Acts 20:28-31 (RSV)

Paul pointed to his own attitude towards money and the way he handled it. He had no love of money at all and worked to support himself financially rather than receive funding from those to whom he ministered:

³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Acts 20:33-35 (RSV)

Paul was so concerned not to exploit anybody, or even to be wrongly accused of doing so, that he chose not to accept financial support. Yet he was fully entitled to it, because Paul was a missionary, who had been *sent*, rather than a *local* elder. So although he had every right to ask for financial support, he didn't do so. He preferred to work with his own hands, as a tentmaker, to support himself. He had no longing for money. It meant nothing to him.

As a result it had no hold over him and he could not be influenced or corrupted either by being offered money or having it withheld from him. Therefore people who had money and who could either give it or withhold it had no power over him. Nobody could ever cause Paul to compromise. He was completely free to teach the whole truth fearlessly, without any thought as to what effect that might have on his income.

Nehemiah had a very similar attitude to Paul. He refused to exploit people or to "lord it over them".

Nehemiah took the same approach as Paul. He was appointed by King Artaxerxes to be the Governor of the land of Judah. Men who had that position before him had exploited the population by taxing them heavily, taking their goods and produce and even seizing their land. But Nehemiah was not

willing to exploit anybody or to “lord it over” the people. He and his men did the rebuilding work *themselves* rather than forcing the people to do it for them:

¹⁴ Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Ar-ta-xerx'es the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brethren ate the food allowance of the governor. ¹⁵ The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens upon the people, and took from them food and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ I also held to the work on this wall, and acquired no land; and all my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷ Moreover there were at my table a hundred and fifty men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations which were about us. ¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; fowls likewise were prepared for me, and every ten days skins of wine in abundance; yet with all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the servitude was heavy upon this people.

Nehemiah 5:14-18 (RSV)

When Nicky Cruz came to preach in a sports centre near my home he pressurised the audience into putting more money into the collection and also into coming forward at the end.

When I was a young believer I took several relatives to hear Nicky Cruz of ‘*The Cross and the Switchblade*’ fame. I really wanted my unsaved family to hear the Gospel from him and had high hopes of them accepting it. However, it turned out badly, partly because of the way he handled money, and also due to his hectoring manner. During the meeting the stewards came round with buckets for a collection and people put in what they wanted to give. I assume some were generous and some were not. Nicky Cruz examined the buckets when the stewards reassembled at the front.

Then, he complained that we had not given enough! The money hadn’t been counted, so he was judging the extent of our contributions by how full the buckets were. Evidently, he didn’t think they were as full as they should have been. He then told the stewards to go round again with the buckets. I could see people giving more, but I felt it was done under duress. He was pressurising them into it and I felt ashamed. I had hoped that my family, who were all in the Catholic church at that time, would be impressed by him and persuaded to accept the true Gospel.

Instead, they were put off, partly by his attitude to money, but also that he was trying to dominate us. At the end of the evening, when he made an ‘altar-call’, and not many people responded by coming forward, he told us off sternly about how he had “*come all this way*” and yet so few of us were coming to the front - as if we were letting *him* down. For us, the meeting was completely unsuccessful. My family was put off the Gospel for a long time because of him. He presumably thought the expenses of his ministry justified him in acting as he did, but I believe it was very wrong.

The appalling behaviour of the ‘money preacher’, Creflo Dollar, in urging the public to give him 65 million dollars so that he can buy himself a new jet plane

In 2015 the ‘money-preacher’, Creflo Dollar, issued an appeal to the Christian public to send him \$65,000,000 to buy a new jet aeroplane. He supposedly needed this to get around more easily in his ministry. He thought God wanted him to have it and that the Christian public should pay for it. It is hard to imagine how a man could be so deluded as to believe that, but he did. His theology of money is so warped that he has persuaded himself that wealth is one of the main signs of God’s blessing, and that he is entitled to seek it from God’s people.

Creflo Dollar came to attention on social media because of his absurd extravagance, but the publicity hasn’t prevented gullible Christians giving to him. Moreover, similar church leaders, all over the world, are pushing the same false teaching about “*prosperity*”. They are deceiving naïve Christians,

even in poor countries, into giving them huge sums of money in the hope that God will repay them many times over. The “*prosperity gospel*” and “*health and wealth*” teaching are actually an abomination and an offence to God.

That said, as with most false doctrines, it is based on a half-truth, because God will bless those who are generous. However, we are not to give money if our *sole or main purpose* in doing so is to get back even more money from God in return. That is not generosity, it is covetousness and it is a wrong motive for giving. However, it is even more wrong for leaders to prey on such gullible people, who don't know the Bible properly, and to manipulate them into giving by appealing to their greed.

It is one thing for a foolish or naïve person to give with improper motives. It is even more sinful to seek to *obtain* money from those people by deception. I tremble to imagine what Jesus will say, and do, to such wolves on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, we cannot necessarily assume that that rebuke will only be given at the Judgment Seat. Having lied to and exploited countless people, they may find themselves at the Great White Throne instead. That is for the *unsaved*, and leads to the Lake of Fire.

The manipulative way in which a church leader, whom I will call ‘Gregory’, was appointed as an assistant minister

‘Gregory’ was about 40 and was at a Bible College as a mature student but was applying for a position as an assistant minister in a large Evangelical church. The Leadership Team had said the position would be advertised so that a full range of candidates could apply. However, they took a strong liking to Gregory. Therefore, instead of inviting all the shortlisted candidates to come and preach a sermon as part of the application process, they simply recommended that Gregory be appointed. Thus the other applicants were never seen or heard by the church members.

The Leadership Team said they “*unanimously recommend that Gregory be appointed*”. Two other candidates had already been interviewed and shortlisted by the Leadership Team, but they were not invited to preach to the whole church. Gregory was the one the Leadership Team wanted and they were making sure he would get the position. If they had let the selection procedure run its course the whole church could have made a free choice, having seen and heard all the best candidates, or at least the short-listed ones.

That was the right way forward, especially as it had been said that the ones they were interested in *would* be invited. But the Leadership Team did not want to take the ‘risk’ of the church choosing one of the other candidates, so they steam-rolled Gregory through. In saying they recommended him “*unanimously*” they were hinting that anyone who did not agree was a trouble-maker. They also implied that it was urgent to make a decision. That put pressure on the more timid members.

It also made it harder for any opposition to Gregory to get organised. A bogus allegation of urgency is often used as a device by those who want to get their own way. It makes it more difficult for those who disagree to get a campaign underway and makes sure that they are the only ones with time to get organised. I don't know if the alleged urgency was Gregory's idea or theirs, but it was used to justify the change of plan.

The net effect of their actions was that they took the decision out of the hands of the church as a whole and reserved it to themselves as leaders. People also felt unable to disagree, because if they were to object publicly it would be embarrassing and could create a scene. So most just went along with it reluctantly, with only a few muted grumbles. That was exactly what the Leadership Team had expected the reaction to be. They knew they would be able to get their own way, and obtain the votes of the members, if they took this approach.

The manipulative way that a new trainee leader was ‘bounced’ on a church, so the members couldn’t really object to him

A similar trick was used later when another new trainee leader, ‘Sebastian’, was brought in, with a view to him leading a new church plant. I felt he was inadequate and lacked leadership ability. But the Leadership Team liked him and felt they could work with him. What they really meant was they would never get any trouble from him. He was never going to set the world on fire, as he had very little talent, but neither would he ever disagree with them. If he had been applying for a job in my law firm, even at a very junior level, he wouldn’t have got an interview.

Yet, the Leadership Team were determined to have him, so they put him forward in a similarly manipulative way. They had to allow a vote by the whole church, as the Constitution required it, but they fixed it so that there was little option but to go along with what they proposed. Instead of just asking us if we wanted to appoint Sebastian, as a stand-alone question, they joined several questions together as package. The combined proposal was whether the new church plant should go ahead, should the wider church support it, should Sebastian lead it and should he be paid a salary?

The church was offered a single ‘Yes or No’ answer to *all of those questions combined*. There was no option to approve of the church plant as a concept, but vote no to Sebastian leading it. There was also no option to vote for him to lead it, but without a salary, or only on a part time basis. They made sure it was all-or-nothing because they knew the church plant idea had a lot of support but that Sebastian himself was a much less attractive prospect. They left the members with no option but to approve his appointment as part of the overall package, or call off the whole church plant entirely.

That was manipulative and devious. Instead of seeking the views of the whole church, they were effectively imposing their own view. Also, instead of allowing a genuine free choice on each separate issue, they turned the whole thing into a sham. Many who voted for the whole package would have chosen not to appoint Sebastian if it had been possible to vote issue by issue. The Leadership Team were well aware of that. It was precisely why they did not offer the option of a church plant without Sebastian leading it, or without him being paid.

The manipulative way in which another trainee minister was bounced onto the church by the Leadership Team again pretending there was a great urgency to vote

Some may think I was misinterpreting the motives of the Leadership Team concerning Gregory and Sebastian, or seeing a pattern where there wasn’t really one there. If so, consider this next episode which arose shortly afterwards. Another young man, ‘James’, was being put forward by the Leadership Team to become a trainee minister. There was a different set of facts here, as James was capable, motivated and had a lot to offer. The problem was the finances of the church were not sufficient to justify yet another trainee minister.

It was not long after Sebastian had been appointed and the church hadn’t even been able to afford to pay for him, let alone James as well. The church was struggling, due to the recession, but also because of having too many paid staff. One of the signs of an ‘empire-building’ leader is the desire to keep on appointing more and more staff. They want their church to be bigger than the other churches in the area. To such empire-builders, the cost of funding these staff is not a problem. It is assumed to be the duty of the wider membership.

The role of leaders, in their view, is to spend the money and the members’ job is to pay the bill. They were like the pigs in George Orwell’s “*Animal Farm*”, making plans which required the long-suffering horse, Boxer, to work harder and harder. Money was scarce, and they ought to have considered it carefully, but they called an emergency Members’ Meeting and claimed they urgently needed a decision. They said James needed to give a full academic term’s notice to leave his current

job. We later discovered he actually only needed to give *half* a term's notice, which some of the leaders must have known.

Thus there was plenty of time for the finances to be examined. But they *didn't want* scrutiny, which is why they rushed the decision through. A few months later it emerged that the church was unable to pay the extra salary for James, or even Sebastian. The Leaders then asked the members to give even more. They must have known this shortfall was likely when they appointed James. If not, they should, have known, and they would have if they had allowed questions to be asked. But they didn't want awkward questions, or for anybody to suggest that James' appointment be postponed.

Influencing the votes at Members' meetings by posing questions in this manipulative way - "*The Leadership Team unanimously think XYZ. Do you agree?*"

When voting at the meeting the members were simply asked: "*The Leadership Team unanimously think X,Y,Z. Do you agree?*" I believe that was manipulative. They should have just asked the members what they thought, and sought their *input and advice*. Instead they were pressurising them to simply give their *endorsement*, in the form of a closed 'yes-or-no' question. There was no real request for the *views* of the members. They only wanted our *votes* and did not ask whether we saw any issues, hazards or problems, or had any other questions or concerns of our own.

Neither did they ask if any of us felt the proposal should be modified in any way. The yes-or-no format was too stark and did not help to open up a general discussion. Indeed, it was expressly designed to *prevent* that. Their aim was not merely to inform us that they all agreed about it. It was to pressurise us to accept the proposal without any further debate, and without seeking to modify it. The aim of the Leadership Team was not to involve the members in any meaningful consideration of the issues. It was only to get their own decision approved, as required by the church's constitution.

They saw it as their job, as rulers, to do all of the thinking, and ours to agree with them. That is not the approach of a servant leadership, but of a controlling one. There is nothing wrong with leaders taking the lead and informing the wider membership of their own views and their recommendations. That is absolutely fine, in itself. Everything depends on *how* it is done, and on the *heart-attitude* of those making the recommendation. A real leader, with a genuine servant heart, is not determined to get his own way.

He will therefore suggest, advise, urge, warn, persuade, exhort, and so forth. But he does so in an attitude of humility and openness and with *a willingness to be questioned, challenged and contradicted*. In fact, a true shepherd positively *wants* to hear the views, and the advice, of those whom he is leading, even if they disagree with him. Indeed, he especially wants it then, because that is when it is most needed. For example, we were recently trying to think of a new name for our small house church. We therefore asked the whole membership for suggestions.

When we met to consider the suggestions, we positively asked for modifications and further proposals. We were not just 'willing' to receive these. We genuinely wanted them. I was also anxious not to rush anybody, so I suggested, on two occasions, that instead of putting the existing options to a final vote, we should wait for the next meeting. I wanted to give the quieter members more time to weigh up the proposed new names in private, or among ourselves, and to think of any reasons why they *didn't* sound right, or *shouldn't* be used.

In particular, I didn't want anybody to feel rushed into a decision, or into accepting anyone else's opinion. I especially wanted to avoid doing what the Leadership Team had done in the church we used to attend. I was also conscious that all the suggestions for new names had come from leaders. I didn't want anybody to feel embarrassed about disagreeing with any of these, or to think that it would be awkward to do so. Thus I urged people to point out any disadvantages to any of the names we were considering.

Another thing I did, which I think helped, was to ask for their current views of the proposals, but without putting it to a formal vote. I said: *“People can sometimes feel pressurised when taking a final vote. So, let’s treat this as an informal expression of how you currently feel, and we won’t treat the result as binding. Therefore, which of the proposed names would you choose if we were to vote on this today?”* Then I read out each of the proposed names and a particular one emerged as the clear front-runner.

We then adjourned the final decision to the next meeting to give people a chance to reconsider, in case anybody felt rushed. When we did take a formal vote on it later, the same name was chosen. But it was a useful exercise. It helped to make people feel more relaxed and free to express their views and reservations, rather than just go along with whatever the leaders were saying. It also made sure that nobody was pressurised. Also, the new name was felt to be one which we had *all* had a genuine hand in choosing. Nobody felt it had been imposed upon them,

The crafty way in which the Leadership Team tried to ensure that ‘Gregory’ was appointed as Senior Minister by making him the only candidate

This is another story about ‘Gregory’, an assistant minister in a church I used to be part of. The Senior Minister, Carl, was leaving, so his position was going to become vacant. Gregory was keen to take the role and the Leadership Team wanted him. So they set about making sure he would get the job. The proposal was that applicants for the position of Senior Minister would be taken *“only from the existing full time ministers of the church”*. That may sound like a ‘pool’ but it actually consisted of only two assistant ministers, one of whom, ‘Norman’, was exceptionally lazy. He had also had time off for stress and was, by this stage, on even lighter duties.

It was obvious that Norman would never apply for the position, so Gregory was, in effect, the only real candidate. Nevertheless, it was presented to the church as if it was a choice between Norman and Gregory. The Leadership Team then called a brief meeting at the end of a Sunday service, and said they wanted to limit the pool of candidates to the existing staff of the church, Norman and Gregory. But they were well aware that Norman would never apply for the position. His name was only kept in the running to give the false impression that the Church would be offered a choice.

Gregory was going to be the only candidate, as they already knew, and fully intended. It was not a formal Members’ Meeting, so no official vote was taken, but they wanted to see whether they would get away with limiting the ‘pool’ to just Norman and Gregory. Even a manipulative leadership team can sometimes feel unsure as to whether they have gone too far. They wanted to avoid the embarrassment of formally proposing Norman and Gregory as the only candidates, only to have that rejected.

So, they used the age-old technique of obtaining advance warning of dissent in the ranks by running the idea ‘up the flagpole’ and seeing how many ‘saluted’. If not too many objected they would feel safe to go ahead and make the formal proposal at a proper Members’ meeting. If not, they could retreat and reconsider their approach, without losing face, because it would never have been a formal proposal, but merely a ‘thought’. They discovered they had gone too far. The members were in an assertive mood and some of them spoke up, which was unusual.

They urged the Leadership Team to rethink their approach and to open up the application process by advertising the position nationally, to allow external candidates to apply. That should have been done in the first place. At least it should in the case of that church, given that they were operating a traditional model of paid church leadership. My own belief is that it is unbiblical to operate in that way and that they should actually have had unpaid local elders. But, be that as it may, the point is they were operating a traditional system and were seeking to manipulate its dealings.

At the next full Members' Meeting the feelings of the wider membership were even more intense. There was a lot of pent-up frustration about the ongoing financial mismanagement and the repeated appeals for more giving to get the church out of one crisis after another. That discontent burst out and several people, who never normally said a word, asked sharp questions and raised objections. It must have been a chastening experience for the Leadership Team. They had probably expected some slight agitation, but were not prepared for what they got.

Some of them looked visibly shaken. Of course, it would never have happened if they hadn't taken the members for granted for so long and treated them as if they were taxpayers, who could be called upon endlessly to pay more and more. The leadership had gone too far and it resulted in a letting off of steam on a scale that the church had not seen for a long time. That said, it didn't make any difference in the end. The Leadership Team went ahead with their own plans, ignored the members' views, and did not advertise the position.

It is possible that some individuals on the Leadership Team may have had other applicants in mind that they would have wanted to consider, including external candidates. If so, their feelings were not made known to the members. A particular man, whom we will call 'Ivor' had been a Trustee of that church, but had resigned in the past because he was uneasy about how its decisions were being reported to the wider church. On more than one occasion, the church was told that the Trustees' recommendation was "*unanimous*".

Yet Ivor knew that it wasn't actually unanimous because he himself had disagreed, or expressed reservations, or others had. But the membership were never told any of this. Ivor could have stood up at a Members' Meeting to protest about how things were being inaccurately portrayed, but he never did. He was gentle and he didn't want to cause a scene or embarrass the other Trustees or the Leadership Team. So, he just quietly resigned, without revealing any of his misgivings in public.

Even after the meetings, the Leadership Team still ignored the members' views and only interviewed Gregory.

The Leadership Team may have been chastened by the impassioned mood of the members. But they obviously weren't chastened enough, because they proceeded to completely ignore the members' wishes. They made some soothing noises, and purported to listen, but then went full steam ahead with their original plans. For a time they continued to give the impression that Norman was still a potential candidate. But nothing was done to advertise the vacancy, or to seek further candidates in any other way.

After a while, even Norman's theoretical candidacy disappeared, as he was appointed to another role, in youth work for a national organisation. He must have known for a long time, and so must some of the other leaders, that he was never actually going to apply for the position of Senior Minister. Yet, nobody said anything. It suited their purposes to keep up the appearance of a choice for as long as possible. When Norman accepted that youth work role, Gregory became the only candidate. But they still did not advertise the position, even though that had been specifically asked for at the full Members' Meeting.

They just rode the storm until it passed. They knew the unrest would die down after a while, and it did. People realised they were not going to be listened to and stopped protesting. Therefore, the Leadership Team got their man in the end. Gregory was appointed as the only candidate, although some voted against him, even though no other name was on the ballot. The reason I am telling these stories about Sebastian, James and Gregory is that the conduct of the Leadership Team was wrong. If it had occurred in some business or political party, it would have been said to be corrupt.

Yet, God expects far less from unbelieving businessmen and politicians than from Christians, especially leaders. What those leaders did was wicked because they consistently over-rode the wishes

of the members and made sure they got their own way. They knew more than unbelievers know and they are, therefore, expected to operate to a higher standard. They may not realise it, but God holds them (and you and me) accountable. We may all be surprised at the Judgment Seat to learn what He thought of such devious tricks, all of which He sees and remembers.

The manipulative way in which the Chairman of Trustees at a Members' meeting prevented any contrary view being expressed

Maybe you feel the examples I am giving are just one-off incidents and don't prove any wider pattern. If so, let me give another example of what happened in a church Members' meeting some years ago, after 'Sebastian' had been appointed as a trainee minister. Shortly afterwards, the church found itself in another financial crisis and the leaders called a Members' meeting to discuss it. In the meeting shortly *after* Sebastian's appointment, the financial problems were brought to the members' attention. The meeting was chaired by one of the Leadership Team, 'Bernard'.

It was a meeting to discuss a serious financial shortfall. At a personal level, Bernard was a very charming, extrovert, friendly person and an absolute pleasure to be with. I emphasise that, because even delightful men like him, *when operating in a leadership role*, frequently adopt manipulative tactics and pressurise people into doing what the leadership wants. Therefore don't make the mistake of thinking that anyone who is charming and friendly would never do that. They can, and they do. Indeed, it is common, because the very model of church leadership enables, and even encourages, them to be manipulative.

The expenditure of the church was now greater than the income, and something had to be done. One option, and probably the right one, was to look open-mindedly at redundancies, pay cuts, or at least reducing the hours of the staff. In any business, or even in a charity, those possibilities would have been considered, but not in that church. Bernard began the meeting by telling us about the financial shortfall. But, before the members had any opportunity to speak, he made it very difficult for anybody to suggest any pay cuts, reductions in hours, or redundancies.

He said emphatically, as if it was self-evident, "I know that none of you will even want to consider pay cuts or redundancy. That would, obviously, be out of the question and none of us would want that." Saying that, right at the start, had a crushing effect. It made it impossible for all but the bravest person to then speak up and suggest any of those things. I believe he knew it would have that effect, and that that was precisely why he said it. He wanted all contrary views to be silenced at the outset by making anyone who disagreed look like a bad person, with no compassion.

If redundancies and pay cuts were so unthinkable, why did he need to say it at all? If a thing goes without saying, it doesn't need to be said. He said it to put the question out of bounds, and to pressurise members into silence. Otherwise, somebody would have raised it, and he did not want to allow any chance of that. The Leadership Team wanted the problem solved in one way only - by the members giving more money. So, Bernard's first task was to first rule out any discussion of reducing expenditure.

Step two was for the leaders to pressurise members into giving more money, and it worked. After that meeting some of them gave even more and the shortfall was temporarily solved. Some might call that a happy ending and assume that God must have been pleased. But I think He was grieved that His people were being milked, like a herd of cows, simply so that leaders could get what they wanted. I believe God also showed me a little of how He felt about the sly way that meeting was conducted, not only by Bernard as the mouth piece, but by the whole Leadership Team.

I felt appalled and was angry on the members' behalf. Yet very few of them had any idea that they were being exploited and manipulated. Some may have felt something was wrong, but they were probably unable to put their finger on it and would have assumed they must be mistaken. I felt that

God also impressed it upon me that I needed to write about it so that others, who are being similarly manipulated in other churches, would have their eyes opened. I believe God wants them to see what is being done in churches all over the world, how it is achieved, and why it is wrong.

Several months later, the church rushed through the appointment of James, and the same financial shortfall arose again. I believe the leaders had known that that would arise, just as it had when Sebastian was appointed. At any rate, when that next crisis arose, the leaders solved it in the same way. They put pressure on members and manipulated them into giving yet more. In the 'crisis' meeting, when explaining how this new shortfall had arisen, Bernard said "*The Leadership Team has recently given pay rises to all the staff*".

One person at the Members' meeting that night was too timid to say anything, but later she said privately "I did wonder why they gave them all pay rises in the first place, given that there was no money, and especially as there's a recession. Hardly any of the members are getting pay rises in their jobs". That must have occurred to others, but none of them had the courage to say it at the meeting. So the leaders got away with it, as usual. Moreover, nobody ever asked the members if they wanted the leaders to get a pay rise. It was all done behind the scenes by the Trustees.

There is a crucial difference between skilful, diplomatic chairmanship and the manipulation of a meeting or group.

Bernard had manipulated a members' meeting to get what the Leadership Team wanted. In doing so, I believe he misused his position as the Chairman. That requires us to ask what a chairman is entitled to do when chairing a meeting. He has to lead to some extent, and to guide and manage those present, but how far can he go? What can he not do, and when are the lines crossed, such that he moves into manipulation rather than chairmanship? I have chaired many meetings in business, politics and churches, and I would say that the legitimate objectives of a chairman are:

- a) To maintain order and civility within the meeting and prevent people misbehaving.
- b) To achieve the purposes of the meeting and to ensure the agenda is covered properly and fully so that sound decisions can be made.
- c) To keep the discussion relevant, and in line with the agenda, so that the conversation is not side-tracked into irrelevant issues.
- d) To protect the meeting from those who would hijack it, manipulate its outcome, or prevent others from being heard.
- e) To ensure that all views are heard and that every section is allowed to speak, not just those who support the leadership's opinions or proposals.
- f) To limit the time taken up by the confident, talkative members and to ensure adequate time is given to the quiet, timid members.
- g) To act with integrity on behalf of *all* people concerned, not just one sub-section with whom he personally agrees, or whose favour he seeks.
- h) To keep the meeting within the letter and spirit of the procedural rules and never to abuse the procedures to achieve his own purposes.
- i) To make possible the expression of contrary views and criticism so that the church or other organisation gets to hear things which need to be heard, not just the party line.

Above all, a chairman needs a strong sense of right and wrong, and has to be guided by conscience. His aim must always be to act with integrity and without fear or favour. He needs to be keenly aware that God is taking note, not only of what is said and done, but also of any underlying motives or

hidden agenda. If Bernard had conducted himself properly he would have been aware of the Leadership Team's objection but he would have said, at least to himself:

"I am here tonight to serve the overall interests of the whole church, not just the leaders. Moreover, my job is to enable every member to express their views, not to persuade them to accept the leaders' views. Therefore, I will not serve my own purposes, or those of any person or group. Neither will I unfairly curtail any person's freedom to speak."

One leader I knew used to count the members' votes on his own, in another room. Then he disposed of the ballot papers, so nobody could verify what he said the result was.

This occurred in a different church, led by 'Norris', the full-time paid leader, with a group of unpaid elders below him. He used to blatantly fix the votes, not just manipulate people over how to vote. He literally took the ballot papers away with him, into a side room, and counted them on his own. Then he even disposed of all the ballot papers, so that nobody could ever check what he said the result had been! Nobody was present with him to verify the count, as is obviously necessary in any properly conducted vote. He made sure of that.

Yet, none of the members were bold enough to object, or to question his honesty, in case it might cause offence. They assumed it would be wrong to make such a suggestion, or even to imply any impropriety. Therefore, nothing was ever said and he just carried on. Unsurprisingly, Norris never lost any argument. The votes always seemed to go his way. He simply made up whatever figures he wanted. Or he could dispose of some of the ballot papers from unhelpful people who had voted the 'wrong' way and then write out new ones, in the privacy of the counting room.

It is extraordinary enough for that to happen, but it is even more amazing that nobody ever objected. They didn't dare. Norris knew that, and traded on it. He knew it would take an exceptionally assertive person to say: *"We think you might be fiddling the counting of the votes, so we'd like to have someone else there with you to watch you and check the figures"*. That is what should have been said, but it never was, and he knew it never would be. Manipulative people are highly skilled at knowing what they can get away with and how unassertive, or gullible, their victims are.

They can also sense how much the people currently know and whether their eyes have opened yet. I can remember various occasions when I have realised what a leader was doing, or what his real motives were. As soon as that occurs they can instantly tell that you know what they are doing. Their whole demeanour then alters. They begin to regard you with suspicion and contempt, not because *you* are doing wrong, but because they know that you have realised that *they* are. From that point on, they will see you as a threat, and treat you as such.

The manipulative use of a prayer meeting about finances to "guilt trip" members into giving more money

When Carl's church was in a financial crisis they called a prayer meeting. That is reasonable enough, in itself, but the problem is it turned into an attempt to make members feel guilty. They were "got at" and made to feel responsible for the crisis and that they should give more money. That is a vital warning sign. Be wary of any person who makes you feel *guilty*. It is not a valid way of influencing others. We can appeal to people, inform them, and even persuade them. But we can never do so on the basis of making them feel guilty if they choose not to help.

Any appeal which is conducted in that way is not of God, because it is manipulation. God *convicts* people, by pointing out their sin and urging them to repent. But He never causes us to feel guilt or condemnation. That is what Satan does, which is why one of his names is the 'accuser'. Therefore, whenever such tactics are used, have the discernment to see it. Moreover, have the confidence to trust

your judgement, and the courage to act upon it, by refusing to give. God does not want you to be manipulated, whether by guilt, condemnation, or any other way.

He wants all financial giving to be done in genuine freedom, by those who freely choose to do so. God wants all giving to be a pleasure and to be done joyfully. Any form of manipulation whatsoever is the very opposite of what God wants. It does not honour Him if you give in to it. Be brave and refuse to give anything at all to a manipulator. On the contrary, go even further. Stand up and ask them what they are doing and tell them to stop it. They are not working for God, but for themselves and are pursuing their own interests, not His.

‘Mark’ was so traumatised by the reaction he got when he questioned a church leader that he was still phobic about doing so, over 50 years later.

If you are in any doubt about the damage that can be done by abusive, domineering leaders, consider what happened to ‘Mark’. He was in his mid-seventies when he told me his story, but he was still affected by an incident which occurred when he was seventeen, nearly sixty years earlier. I came to learn of this because I noticed how nervous Mark became if there was any possibility of upsetting a church leader, or of being taken to be questioning or contradicting them. I therefore probed a little to find out what he was so phobic about and why.

It emerged that when he was seventeen he had questioned the pastor of the church he was then in. The pastor did not like the question and tore into Mark, slapping him down and putting him “in his place”. Mark learned from that incident that you must never question or disagree with pastors. He found the incident so traumatic that he was still emotionally scarred by it, six decades later. It was still affecting him, not only at an emotional level, but in how he conducted himself within the church, especially when speaking to, or about, leaders.

It shows how much damage can be done by an abusive leader, especially to those who are young, timid, sincere, or naïve, and see the leader as an “authority figure”. A leader does have authority, *but not of that type*. It is primarily the authority to serve and to put himself in danger for the sake of the congregation. He also has the right to warn, advise, help and teach. However, he *never* has a right to command, abuse, use, exploit or control. Every leader needs to realise all of that and to reflect regularly on what Jesus will have to say about his leadership style at the Day of Judgment.

The mere fact that a leader is charming, extrovert and sociable does not mean that he can’t be a manipulator or controller.

This is a really vital point, which needs to be strongly emphasised. If not, you may fail to recognise manipulative or controlling leaders because they seem to be too ‘nice’ to behave in such ways. In my experience, some of the most devious, manipulative, controlling leaders I have come across were also charming and extrovert at a personal level. Thus they could be fun to be with, and yet still behave very wrongly. That is not always the case, but the point is that it can be, and often is.

Indeed, why would it be otherwise? A leader who wishes to manipulate and control others is hardly likely to come across as odious and rude, if he can help it. At least he won’t want to do so, until and unless you have seen through him and discerned his real purposes. Then he will show you his teeth, but generally not before then. Be wise enough to see this point and to judge everybody, including leaders, by their fruit, the integrity of their character, and their handling of God’s Word. Never do so on the basis of their personality, humour, charm or ‘niceness’.

CHAPTER 20

HOW TO DECIDE WHETHER TO LEAVE A CHURCH OR TO STAY AND FIGHT TO CHANGE IT

²⁴ *and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 (RSV)

¹⁷ *Therefore come out from them,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch nothing unclean;
then I will welcome you,
2 Corinthians 6:17 (RSV)*

¹⁴ *The Lord enters into judgment
with the elders and princes of his people:
“It is you who have devoured the vineyard,
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
Isaiah 3:14 (RSV)*

²⁰ *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)*

¹¹ *Depart, depart, go out from there;
touch no unclean thing;
go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves,
you who bear the vessels of the Lord.
Isaiah 52:11 (ESV)*

Whether to stay and fight the wicked within a church, or to leave and start again elsewhere, depends on all the circumstances of each particular case.

We now turn to the complex issue of whether to stay and fight to save your church from evil-doers and false teachers, or to leave and go elsewhere, or even start a new church yourself. There is no short answer. It depends on a wide range of factors. As Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything. There is therefore a time to leave a church and a time to stay, a time to give up on it and a time to fight for it. Wisdom consists of being able to ‘tell the time’, so as to know which option to choose in your particular circumstances.

Over the years I have been in various situations, each of which called for a different response. Sometimes I judged it correctly and sometimes I got it wrong. However, my mistakes have mainly been in the direction of staying in churches for *too long* and not realising that it was pointless to keep on fighting. That was the case in Rick’s church. It took me two years to get out from the point when I first saw the problems. I spent one year gradually realising the scale of the crisis, and then another year trying to change things, before I realised I was getting nowhere and achieving nothing.

It was all entirely futile. I was just allowing myself and my family to be damaged and undermined. A lot of mental, emotional and spiritual harm can be caused by a long, drawn out fight to save a church. There is also the fact that during all that time, the church is likely to be a hostile, chaotic war zone. Therefore it is not a place where you or your family can thrive and grow. Your decision to stay and fight may just delay the point at which you can ‘escape’ and move to a better church, where your family can be fed and have healthy relationships.

Don’t fight merely to keep the ownership or control of a church building, or a church name, or responsibility for paid staff.

If the fight is over material things, such as the church building, you would usually be better off letting the other group have it. I have heard of situations where both sides want the building, especially if it is picturesque and popular for weddings. If that is your aim I strongly recommend you think again. It is better to let the other group have it, as that is not an important issue of doctrine or morals and is not worth fighting over. Why would you want the building anyway? It is more likely to be a hindrance than a help.

Two things devour the finances of most churches and prevent them doing what they are meant to do. Those are buying and maintaining the building and paying the wages of the staff. Far from being important, neither of these are even biblical. New Testament churches did not have any special buildings or ‘clergy’. They all met in homes or in barns or farm out-buildings, and were led by unpaid local elders. So, why fight for the ‘privilege’ of keeping the building, or the paid staff, when those are part of the problem, not its solution?

In a battle over the leadership or direction of a church, calculate realistically how many people are with you and how many are with the wicked.

In any battle you first need to count the likely cost of the fight, how long it may take, and how much damage will be caused. You also have to work out, realistically, how many people are with you and how many are with the wrongdoers, or with those who are teaching false doctrine or engaging in unbiblical or sinful practices. If there is a church of 100 people and only a few wrongdoers, especially if they are *not leaders*, it is probably right to stay and fight to save that church. That may still be so even if you are the only person who can see the nature and gravity of the problem.

It would be even more appropriate to stay if there are a number of you who can all see what is going on, and you are all willing to fight. But if there are 100 people in the church, and 20-30 of them are behaving wrongly and/or teaching false doctrine, you may be wasting your time trying to fight for that church, especially if that group includes some or all of the *leadership*. Much will depend on the nature of the other 70-80 people. If they include enough sensible, brave, committed people, who are willing to speak up and help you tackle the wrongdoers, there could be a way forward.

Realistically, the vast majority of Christians are followers, not leaders. Also, most are weak, passive and cowardly and are not willing to take any risks or put themselves in the line of fire. Thus, even if there are 70-80 people who are not involved in the wrongdoing or heresy, most of them will just want to keep their heads down. So, they may not actively oppose you, but you can’t expect any support from them either. When I tried to tackle Rick the church had about 300 people, but only a handful were willing to help me. Even of that few, none were willing to help me *publicly*.

They wouldn’t stand up and be openly identified as challenging Rick and supporting me. So, it was not a fight between 300 people. It was really just a fight between me on one side and about ten leaders on the other. The other 290 were silent, passive bystanders. Most were completely unaware of what was going on anyway, because I was very confidential and did not inform them. A few were

aware, but they chose to keep well out of it. As for the 290 members to whom I had not spoken, the only information they ever got came from Rick and the other leaders.

The leaders were actively maligning me and seeking to turn people against me with lies and smears. While they were doing that I was being extremely discreet and restrained. Therefore most of the church members only got to hear Rick's side of the story, and the things said by those who were backing him. Unsurprisingly, I got nowhere in trying to tackle Rick. In those days I didn't know even a fraction of what I now know about how to handle the wicked. If I faced the same situation today, I would have got out of that church much earlier, without bothering to fight any battles.

I probably wouldn't even try to challenge anybody to get them to see their sin and repent. I would now know that attempting those things is futile if you are dealing with people whose *character and sinful behaviour* are the problem. Such people do not want to be challenged or corrected and will attack you if you try. The position would be very different if the argument was purely over doctrine or practice and was being conducted against honest men of good character.

Godly men, who are simply mistaken or misinformed in their theology, will be open to hear you. They will also will be willing to alter their beliefs or practices if you can show them to be wrong. Sadly, such people are rare, even in the leadership of churches. Moreover, they are unlikely ever to be a problem to you in the first place. Nonetheless, I raise the theoretical possibility, for completeness, as such a situation may occasionally arise.

If you are in the minority and can't win, it is almost always best to leave the church without a fight.

If you and your group are in the minority, and especially if the 'other side' consists of some or all of the leaders, then just quietly leave that church. You will avoid a lot of damage to yourself and your family and increase the chances of finding a better church elsewhere and of doing so sooner. That is what we did in four other churches that we left. We knew we could not change the hearts or minds of the leaders because they were autocratic 'rulers' who dominated those churches. I could also see each time that the congregation were not aware of how they were being abused.

Many church members actually like being ruled over and would not be willing to break free, even if the facts were explained to them. At any rate, whereas we were damaged by our departure from Rick's church, the way we left those other four churches was much less eventful. We got out without much damage although I did take a wealth of stories for this book. I believe that is one reason why God permitted us to get involved with those churches in the first place. I wasn't able to help them, and they couldn't help me, but our time in each of them gave me material for this book.

However, in the unlikely event that you are in the majority and the wicked are in the minority, then it may be worth fighting for that church.

Looking back now, with the benefit of hindsight, I can think of only one occasion, in three decades, when the right thing to do was to stay in a church and 'fight'. When we joined that church there was a large group of devious, malicious people in it, even though it was small. I was not aware of them at the start, but I could see that there were problems, and more problems emerged as the months went by. However, what was unusual about that church was that there were two other couples in it who were sincere, biblically-sound and willing to take a stand alongside us.

Their solidarity made all the difference even though, in the beginning, the wrongdoers outnumbered us. What was even more unusual was that, instead of the godly people being driven out, the wicked ones began to leave, one by one, and couple by couple. In the end, about 20 of them had gone. That profoundly altered the balance of power. The sincere, right-thinking element were then in the

majority, because Rhoda and Stephen and many others like them had left. We reached the point where just one couple, Philip and Sonia, were still a major problem.

However, their misconduct mattered more than it ordinarily would because Philip was an elder and we could see no sign of them choosing to leave. Neither could we see any realistic possibility of them repenting or changing. The stark choice we faced was either to expel them, or for us to leave instead. So, together with the two godly couples, we decided we would not even attempt to confront Philip and Sonia, or to remove Philip as an elder. We chose just to leave quietly, and we did so without consulting any other members.

We did not wish to gossip or to give anyone any basis for accusing us of doing so. However, as soon as we left to form a new church, most of the other members said they wanted to come with us, rather than stay with Philip and Sonia. That was not because we had lobbied them. On the contrary, we didn't even tell them we had left. Philip did so himself by sending out an email, on the very evening that we told him we were leaving. To his great surprise, most chose to come with us, rather than stay with him.

The point is those people freely chose to leave that church and come with us and were not persuaded to do so. Therefore, we got there in the end, albeit by an unusual route. It is rare for the wicked to leave a church voluntarily, as Stephen, Rhoda and others did. They usually have to be tackled head on and expelled, or else they won't go. It is also unusual for the wicked not to combine together, to drive out the godly.

The norm is for the wicked to join with others and to fight hard, as a group, to protect their own interests. However, for some reason, on that occasion they did not, or at least not for long. Most of them just left, in quick succession, without a fight. I believe God brought it about, because it was such an unusual sequence of events. However, at a natural level, it was also because of the kind of people who were in leadership in that church.

When we first joined that church I was not an elder. There was one main leader who had begun the church about ten years before and his main focus was on teaching. However, about four months after I joined, it emerged that he was leaving to work abroad. There were no other people in that church with a teaching ministry at that time. Therefore, although I had only joined recently, and was not an elder, I was asked to take over the teaching.

So, there were just over 30 people in the church with four elders, three of whom were weak, cowardly or wicked. However, what was unusual was that one of the elders, Ted, the one who *did the most work*, was a godly man. So was his wife. Also, one of the younger men, Charles, although not an elder, was equally godly and sincere. He was very active too. He therefore did far more of the actual work, and was more of a real leader, in practical terms, than three of the elders were. Therefore an unusual situation arose, which you don't often see in church disputes.

Ordinarily, the entire leadership has become corrupt and there is no way of defeating them or getting them out. However, on this occasion, three of the four elders were either useless or wicked. But, on our side, we had one elder who was godly, plus myself and Charles. He and I were *de facto* leaders, and did the work of leaders, even though we were not elders. Therefore, whereas it would ordinarily have been a walkover and the wicked would have driven us out, they had a fight on their hands.

The godly elder, Ted, had been on the brink of leaving that church in the past. But somehow he had stayed. Therefore he was in place, and was able *and willing* to help me, when the conflict began. That is very unusual. What is more, Charles was more hard-working, talented and effective than the three elders who were a problem. So, in practical terms, it was Ted, Charles and me against the other three elders. That made it three against three, which meant we had a realistic chance of succeeding. Thus it was worthwhile standing our ground.

Over about a year, various events occurred, some of which I have written about above. For example, ‘Rhoda’ told lies about Charles. When she did, the other elders, with the exception of Ted, were of no use in tackling her. Then one of the three ineffectual elders suddenly left the church, not long after Rhoda and Stephen left. That was helpful and tilted the balance of power further in our favour. It meant we now faced only two elders, and a reduced number of supporters. Moreover, one of those elders, ‘Gareth’ was elderly and did not always attend anyway.

The battle lines were such that the only effective opposition we now had to face was from ‘Philip’ and his evil wife ‘Sonia’, plus a few of their supporters. I believe they knew they did not have enough power, or numbers, to defeat us. That didn’t stop them from opposing and undermining us. But it did mean they could not drive us out, or completely alienate us, as such cliques usually can. Their practical problem was that I was doing most of the teaching and Ted and Charles were doing most of the hands on work of running the church. So they were not in a strong position.

Despite the steady departure of hostile people, there were still some left. That is why we concluded that Ted, Charles and I, plus our wives, should leave and let Philip and Sonia keep the venue, the name and whoever wanted to stay with them. We were willing, if need be, to start a new church from scratch, with just the six of us. That willingness to leave and begin again took away the need for us to tackle the hostile people head on. It also meant we did not need to expel Philip and Sonia.

If the church had been larger, but all other factors had been the same, it may have been right to have a confrontation. But we felt there was nothing to gain from it in the circumstances. We had no desire to *persuade* anybody to come with us either. We only wanted those who *wanted* to come of their own accord, and genuinely shared our values and vision. So many problems can be avoided if you are content for your church to be as small as God wants it to be. If you can accept that, and be relaxed and happy about it, then you don’t need to strive and it avoids many pointless battles.

You need to resolve that you only want the sincere, genuine people who want to be with you and who share your aims, values and approach. There is no point persuading people to come with you, or stay with you, if they don’t, or if they are worldly and carnal. Such people would only destroy your new church anyway, and so you are actually far better off if they *don’t* come with you. Recognising that fact is vitally important. It makes it possible to achieve a real breakthrough, such that you seek to build a *genuine and godly* church, not a large or impressive-looking one.

If the leader or leadership team of a church are abusive or controlling, or are teaching false doctrines, it is usually best to leave quickly, without any confrontation or fight.

We must distinguish between situations where there is wickedness in the *leaders* of a church and those where it is found in its *members*. If the leaders are abusive, controlling, manipulative or deceitful, or if they are teaching false doctrines, it is best just to get out quickly. Go voluntarily, without a fight, before they can do you any more harm. I say ‘any more’ because, by the time you wake up and discern their real nature, you will probably have already been damaged by them, whether you know it or not.

Also, if the wickedness is amongst the leaders, the chances of persuading them to repent are very small indeed. I have never yet succeeded in getting any leader to change, or even to listen to my warnings. Neither has anybody else that I know who has ever tried to correct one. In fact, I have never seen any kind of happy ending to such a situation. By the time the ‘rot’ has become visible to you, it is probably too far gone to be remedied. Someone should have tackled that leader years earlier, when he was still able to hear and repent.

But the likelihood is that nobody ever did, or else they didn’t succeed. Therefore, it will now be far too late for you to put things right in that leader’s life. So, just leave quietly, without any attempt to change the nature of the church, or its leadership team. They have set out their stall for how they

want to lead. They aren't going to change their ways just because you or your group say they should. They are far more likely to deal with it by attacking those who challenge them.

They will not face up to the issues, whether personal or doctrinal. Instead, they will turn on you and either remove you or undermine you. Then the difficulty is brought to an end, at least from their perspective. If you can't see this, or won't accept it, and you attempt to save that church from disaster, you are overwhelmingly likely to fail. You are also likely to get damaged in the process, as the leader fights to defend his ministry, income, power and control.

I have been involved in, or have been told of, many such fights within churches. They almost always become dirty, and from an early stage. Therefore, be wise and realistic. Just slip away and look for a more biblical church elsewhere, if there is one. If not, start one yourself. Try to be open-minded to that. Many people think it is impossible, or illegitimate, for them to start a church. They have been conditioned, over many years, to think that a church must:

- a) have a special building in the traditional format, with rows of seats and a pulpit
- b) employ a paid leader
- c) have a lot of members
- d) be part of a wider denomination
- e) have 'permission' from some person or group in order to be 'allowed' to set up a new church
- f) be 'under the authority' or 'covering' of some person or group, so as to have 'legitimacy'

Those unbiblical ideas have been programmed into most of us and have become part of our 'software'. They create a perception of insurmountable obstacles, such that starting a new church with a small group of friends is felt to be impossible. People have also been taught to think that even if they could do it, it would be "*illegitimate*" and "*not a proper church*". It is actually the other way round. The churches in the book of Acts and the New Testament letters were all *small, local, independent and self-governing*. They also all *met in homes, barns or the like*.

None of the points in (a) – (f) above applied to any of the churches that the apostles set up. Therefore, don't be put off or feel disqualified by any such ideas. Don't be persuaded to think that you and your little cluster of friends and relatives can't start a valid church. You *can*, and it may well be exactly what God wants you to do. At any rate, it is far better than:

- a) staying 'under' abusive leaders, or
- b) moving elsewhere to another unbiblical, traditional, hierarchical, clergy-minded church, only to be ruled and controlled by other men who think and act exactly like your current leader(s).

However, what if your current leaders are godly men, teaching true doctrine? What if it is *they* who are being attacked by a wicked person or group within the *membership*? Even if it is a large group opposing them, it may well be right to stay and fight to defend such leaders from them. The difference is that, in such a situation, you have at least a realistic prospect of success. Indeed, your willingness to stay and fight, and to support such a leader, may well be a decisive factor in enabling him to turn that church around.

It may enable him to overcome those who are behaving wickedly, seeking to undermine him, or trying to divert the church onto a wrong path. In that minority of cases (in the West) where a church has godly leaders, the demons will do everything they can to raise up carnal, worldly people from within that church to undermine him. Your willingness to stand alongside such a man, or men, and to take flak for doing so, may make all the difference and enable a good church to survive.

It can take a lot of wisdom and discernment to tell the difference between situations where godly members are confronting ungodly leaders, and those where ungodly members are undermining godly leaders. In the eyes of a naïve, undiscerning church member, the former is frequently mistaken for the latter. That is why, if you do ever try to tackle an ungodly leader, even the decent, honest, members of that church may well oppose you and think they are doing God's will and that you are opposing God's will.

That is simply the way it is, because the level of discernment is so incredibly low in most churches. Accordingly, there is no 'one size fits all' solution to these problems. You will need to pause, pray, think hard, and take advice from *mature* Christians, both within and outside of your church. All of those steps are needed to maximise the chances of your making the right judgment about who is right and wrong, and what you need to do about it. If you imagine the answer is always clear and obvious you are badly mistaken.

Therefore approach any such case carefully with a lot of prayer, a keen eye and an open mind. Also be willing to see things which you might prefer to believe were not happening. Otherwise, you are asking to be deceived and/or to misdiagnose what is going on. The most common 'solution', which most concerned church members opt for, is neither to fight nor leave. They just accept the status quo and passively remain in an unbiblical, badly-led, badly-taught 'Nicolaitan' church. They cannot make up their minds what to do, or they lack the courage to do it.

Therefore they compromise and tolerate wrong conduct or false teaching on the basis that "There's nothing we can do about it" or "It would be just the same if we moved somewhere else" or "We aren't qualified to start a new church ourselves". Whatever their reasons may be, they end up staying too long, or even forever, financing the ministries of hirelings and even wolves. Such men ought not to be leading churches at all, let alone being supported by you in doing so.

If more people had the discernment, and the courage, to leave such men, and to withdraw their financial support, the apostate churches would evaporate away and disappear. It is from the godliest members, who are also the most likely to be concerned, that most of the financial support comes. Therefore we need to stop propping up unbiblical, false, worldly men who are leading '*Ichabod churches*', from which the glory of God has long since departed, if indeed it was ever there.

What about a church which isn't doing anything specifically wicked, but which simply has an unbiblical, hierarchical structure, which you would like to try to change?

What if you are in a church which isn't doing anything particularly wicked, but is simply unbiblical and hierarchical? What if it is clergy-minded and is following man-made traditions for church practice and structure? Someone I spoke to recently was in that situation and asked me what they ought to do. If you are unclear as to what I mean by the above terms, please refer to my Book 8, in which I closely examine what a biblical church is meant to be and what the early Church did, as compared to what most churches do today.

My advice was that he should simply leave quietly, without any fight, and start a small biblical church himself, with a handful of other like-minded people. I said that if a church is based on the traditional model, it will not want to change and he would not be able to persuade it that it ought to. If you try to change them, the people in that church will probably have no idea what you are talking about. Therefore, it is futile to start agitating about how the structure and practices of that church are unbiblical. You will not be understood.

It will be assumed that you are a trouble-maker, obsessed with obscure issues. That is virtually inevitable, because those people will have known nothing else, ever since they became Christians, or even since they were children. They then become the equivalent of domestic pets, who have no idea how to feed themselves and need to be looked after by a 'master' who provides everything for them.

People won't like it if you suggest that their systems, traditions and structures, are the very opposite of what they should be, and that they need to be reversed.

They will feel very threatened if you say every member ought to be capable of "feeding himself" and of helping to disciple others. People have no desire to make major changes, or become independent-minded, at least not as groups. Most will panic at the idea, just as a pet dog would if you turned it loose and left it to forage and hunt for itself. Individuals may possibly grasp what you are talking about, especially if they have no church background, but not a whole group, simultaneously. Thus they are likely to lash out at you if you make any such proposals.

The leaders will be particularly threatened by any talk of adopting a biblical structure and of imitating the practices of the first century church. Their incomes, homes and pensions depend on the continuance of the traditional unbiblical system, and turkeys don't vote for Christmas. So, even if such leaders don't normally behave aggressively, they will make an exception in your case, to protect themselves from your 'radical' views. Therefore, if your own eyes have opened, so that you can see the errors of the traditional church model, just come out of it quietly.

Then either search for a biblical church elsewhere and join it, or start one yourself. Don't seek to bring people with you, unless they are very close friends of yours who know your views and *share your convictions*. Just leave as graciously as you can, keeping as many relationships intact as possible. Remember that God will judge you for the *manner of your departure*. So don't do or say anything carnal or which would dishonour Him or damage other people in the church.

Leave in such a way that God can reward you for your integrity and self-control. The success or failure of your new biblical house church will partly depend on *the manner in which you form it*. Therefore make sure you set it up in a way that both you and God can be proud of. Don't do anything aggressive, underhand or nasty, and don't attack or malign others. Never go against your own conscience. Behave in a 'squeaky clean' way at all times, even if it means fewer people come with you.

It is actually better for them not to come if any ungodly behaviour is required in order to attract or retain them. They would not be the kind of people you need to start a biblical church anyway. Therefore, focus on trying to reach out to the sincere and godly, *however few those may be*. To return to the original point, organisations do not like to change. They are more set in their ways than individuals are. That is particularly true of churches, as they tend to be even more rooted in tradition, with settled habits and expectations. Any attempt to change those is likely to be doomed.

We need to distinguish situations involving heresy or wickedness from the everyday problems that Christians have, and the errors they make, as they learn to be disciples.

We have been looking at situations where church leaders or members are manipulative or otherwise wicked, or where false doctrine is taught, such that you need to get out, or fight to save the church. However, we have to distinguish such cases from those where immature, misguided, misinformed or uninformed people are causing problems, but are not wicked. Such immaturity, and even carnality, is to be expected in churches, especially from new believers, as they learn how to be disciples.

We need not leave a church merely because some of the members have problems or weaknesses, even at a severe level. What those people need is for mature Christians to get alongside them, set an example, and help them to grow and change. So, in speaking of whether and when to leave a church, I am not referring to those immature or carnal people, provided they are *not in leadership*. But if they are leaders, that changes everything. You cannot consent to be led by such men.

However, what if they are not leaders, but are numerous, or their behaviour is serious, and the leaders are *doing nothing about it*? That could make it necessary for you to leave. Such carnal behaviour, if

left unchallenged by the leaders, could spread throughout the church, especially to the young people. So, if you have children, you may need to leave in order to protect them from the unwholesome influence of those others, even if they are not yet wicked and are only carnal and immature.

CHAPTER 21

HOW TO CONDUCT YOURSELF PROPERLY, AND SAFELY, WHEN TACKLING THE WICKED, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING GOD'S HELP

²⁰ *“Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared. ²¹ Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him. ²² But if you hearken attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.*
Exodus 23:20-22 (RSV)

⁷ *he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,
Proverbs 2:7 (RSV)*

¹⁴ *So the men partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the Lord.
Joshua 9:14 (RSV)*

²³ *Keep your heart with all vigilance;
for from it flow the springs of life.
Proverbs 4:23 (RSV)*

*He who walks in integrity walks securely,
but he who perverts his ways will be found out.
Proverbs 10:9 (RSV)*

*The Lord is a stronghold to him whose way is upright,
but destruction to evildoers.
Proverbs 10:29 (RSV)*

⁴ *For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.
Psalm 149:4 (RSV)*

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
Proverbs 14:29 (RSV)*

*A prudent man sees danger and hides himself;
but the simple go on, and suffer for it.
Proverbs 27:12 (RSV)*

*He who trusts in his own mind is a fool;
but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.
Proverbs 28:26 (RSV)*

*A fool gives full vent to his anger,
but a wise man quietly holds it back.
Proverbs 29:11 (RSV)*

The fact that someone is attacking us does not entitle us to do whatever we want in order to defend ourselves. We must still control ourselves and react in a godly way.

The fact that someone is doing wicked things, or even trying to harm us, does not entitle us to do whatever we want in response. The wicked person may not recognise any moral boundaries, but we still have to. We cannot just say or do whatever it takes to resist them, or fight fire with fire by doing back to them whatever they do to us. So, we cannot deal with a liar by telling lies about him. Neither can we respond to manipulative tactics by being manipulative ourselves. Our task is therefore made harder by the fact that our resistance to wickedness has to be righteous.

It must be done in a godly way. Therefore, the mere fact that someone is a threat to you does not entitle you to carry out a 'pre-emptive strike' by attacking them before they can attack you. We can resist the wicked, and use our *legitimate* authority against them. However, we may not use *their* tactics, or tell lies, even if we have good reason to feel threatened and expect to be lied about. This is not just abstract theory. I have often had to tackle malicious people whom I *knew* would use lies and manipulation to avoid being brought to justice.

This happened in the police and also when I acted in civil litigation cases on behalf of clients. However, it probably happened most when I had to investigate and discipline staff in my own business. Wicked people will do virtually anything to get away with things. Thus I had to be even more thorough and imaginative in laying traps to expose them without going outside of the law myself or telling any lies. Those constraints on my own actions, and reactions, made things a lot harder.

Even so, it can be done, whilst still preserving your own integrity, as I have proved many times. I believe I received God's help precisely because I did things His way, and because I prayed for His help in trapping the wicked in their schemes. God answered my prayers by causing such people to "fall into the pits they had dug for others" and/or to accidentally expose their own, or each other's, misconduct. I believe God was willing to do that for me because I kept my own hands clean and did not act as they did. King David had the same experience:

- ¹⁸ *He delivered me from my strong enemy,
from those who hated me;
for they were too mighty for me.*
- ¹⁹ *They came upon me in the day of my calamity;
but the Lord was my stay.*
- ²⁰ *He brought me forth into a broad place;
he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*
- ²¹ *"The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me.*
- ²² *For I have kept the ways of the Lord,
and have not wickedly departed from my God.*
- ²³ *For all his ordinances were before me,
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.*
- ²⁴ *I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.*
- ²⁵ *Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.*
- ²⁶ *"With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;
with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;*
- ²⁷ *with the pure thou dost show thyself pure,
and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.*
- ²⁸ *Thou dost deliver a humble people,
but thy eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down.*
- 2 Samuel 22:18-28 (RSV)*

When dealing with the wicked it is vital to act with honesty, integrity and righteousness. Your own character will be either your defence or your undoing.

You will never defeat the wicked by being like them. They are far better at it than you, have had more practice, and feel comfortable doing it. They will therefore run rings round you if you try to use their tactics. You would actually be playing into their hands, as any dishonesty on your part will be seized upon with relish, and used to discredit you. The fact that that would be hypocritical, as they do far worse things themselves, is beside the point. They don't claim to be honest or godly, so they don't need to be consistent.

In other words, they are allowed to be hypocrites, but you aren't. So if they can get you to act like them they will take full advantage of it, and will even publicise your wrongdoing. The only answer is to resolve never to take part in anything dishonest, or even questionable. This is what the 'armour of God' from Ephesians chapter 6 is about. You are to act in accordance with the *character qualities* listed within the armour of God. Then you will be protected from all sorts of things that would, otherwise, have happened to you. Let's look at the passage:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Ephesians 6:10-18 (RSV)

Many assume that the armour of God in Ephesians chapter 6 is entirely supernatural. Some even think of them as lucky charms. However, I believe it is primarily about character. That is if you act in these ways, then your conduct will protect you. You will be protected by what you do, but even more so by what you *don't do*. Maintaining godly standards will automatically prevent you from doing improper things, or even morally questionable things, which would have added to your problems if you had done them.

The above passage from Ephesians 6 does refer to our battle against the Devil and his demons. But it also applies to our battles with wicked human beings. They operate on very similar lines to demons, having the same nature as them, albeit not at the same level of wickedness. It is also true that the degree to which God will answer your prayers, and intervene on your behalf, is partly linked to your character and conduct. Accordingly, if you "cherish iniquity in your heart", God may choose not to hear your prayers, as the Psalmist says:

*¹⁸ If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
¹⁹ But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the voice of my prayer.
Psalm 66: 18-19 (RSV)*

Acting in a godly way at all times, regardless of any provocation you may face, will protect you, whether you are contending with demons, or wicked people, or both. It will also cause God to be more willing to answer your prayers and intervene on your behalf. Let's look briefly at each part of the 'armour' and see how they operate and why they are needed:

“The belt of truth”

The RSV and KJV refer to “*girding the loins with truth*”. The NIV puts it more simply as the “*belt of truth*”. It means that a Christian must always be truthful in everything he says, does and thinks. This applies to all our dealings with others, but also in what we say to ourselves, because it is with ourselves that we are least truthful. It is normal to deceive oneself and to think favourably of all our own actions and motives rather than scrutinise them with ruthless frankness. A person can easily persuade himself to believe whatever suits his own interests or makes himself appear in a good light.

Forcing yourself to stop being false, both with yourself and others, will prevent many problems that would otherwise have arisen. People get themselves into terrible situations due to lies, even very ‘small’ ones. These are often only told to avoid or solve problems, but they are actually more likely to create new problems or make existing ones worse. The classic example was President Richard Nixon. He had to resign, not because of the original Watergate break-in, but due to his subsequent attempts to *cover it up*. It was telling lies to save his job that actually caused him to lose it.

A similar thing occurred with the former Cabinet Minister, Jonathan Aitken. He had to resign, and even went to prison, because he told one lie. Other than that, his behaviour was good, and certainly better than the newspaper which went after him. Yet, the fact remained that he had told that one lie, and it would not go away. After a humiliating court case the lie was exposed and he had to resign and go to prison. That was where he heard the Gospel and was saved. He later wrote a book, *‘Pride and Perjury’*, about his downfall and the lie which caused it.

If we tell the truth all the time, people may be able to see that we made mistakes, were foolish, acted wrongly, and let people down. But they will never be able to say we acted *dishonestly*. That is vastly more important than any of the things we might seek to cover up. That is one reason why Winston Churchill had such an incredibly long career in politics, being an MP from 1900 to 1964. He made mistakes and some of his projects failed, though not usually because of him. Yet he always survived and bounced back after every setback

That was largely because nobody was ever able to point to any scandal or dishonesty, however small. He always told the truth and acted honourably. So, we are told to wear the “*belt of truth*”, in the sense of avoiding all falsehood, lies or phoniness. If you do so, you will automatically be kept away from a host of problems which would, otherwise, have happened to you. You may never come to know what those things would have been, because truthfulness preserved you from them and they never happened. But they would have harmed you if they had happened.

“The breast plate of righteousness”

The breast plate of righteousness involves the righteousness we exhibit, and the sanctification we develop, by living day by day with integrity and consistently doing what is right, in accordance with our conscience and God’s Word. Therefore, always behave righteously, even when you are confronting the wicked, in fact *especially* then. That enables God to approve of your actions and plans and to support you in them and reward you for them. King David spoke of this:

***The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he recompensed me.
Psalm 18:20 (RSV)***

***Blessed is he who considers the poor!
The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble;
Psalm 41:1 (RSV)***

“The equipment of the Gospel of peace”

This involves the peace that comes from knowing you are saved. Tackling the wicked can rob you of your peace, especially if there are many of them, and the battle goes on and on. Knowing you are eternally secure increases your capacity to fight, and to endure doing so for years. I know what it is to be kept awake at night by the latest battle against yet another wicked person. The peace that comes from knowing you are saved is vital. No matter what they do, and whether you win or lose, they can never take that peace away from you. Without it, the strain could become overwhelming.

“The shield of faith”

This is the power, and the protection, that you receive from believing in, and acting upon, God’s Word. Faith is about trusting God and believing His promises. It also involves speaking those promises out loud and acting on them, as you face the challenges of life, and especially of tackling the wicked. However, it is one thing for God’s promises to sit there on the pages of the Bible, untried and untested. It is entirely another matter to make those promises part of your own life by proclaiming or ‘confessing’ them and then relying on them in real life situations.

To ‘confess’ means ‘*to say the same as*’. So, when we confess our sins we say the same about them as God says. We can also confess God’s Word by saying the same as He says in the Bible about any other issue, not just our sin. That includes taking a passage in which a promise or statement is made and then speaking it out yourself and relying on it. You are then taking that promise from the pages of the Bible and allowing it to operate in your own circumstances. Until then, those statements or promises that God has made were just theoretical head knowledge, not a practical reality.

By proclaiming God’s promises, and acting in reliance on them, they become real in our own lives. That is when we truly find out that God can be trusted. However, the *faith* that we are to have must be faith *in God Himself and in His Word*. It is not faith in the concept of faith itself, as if it was some kind of disembodied ‘force’. There has been a growing belief in a false and unbiblical doctrine which speaks of faith as if it was “the force” from Star Wars. Faith is not magic. It is not a stand-alone power which can be ‘harnessed’ by itself, without reference to God Himself.

To think of faith in those terms is to make the same error as the ‘*word of faith*’ movement. They take faith in God, and faith in His Word, and turn it into little more than voodoo. Our faith must always be in God Himself, not in faith itself, or in anything else. So, when we proclaim God’s Word we are not harnessing a power, as if it was electricity, which we can wield at will. We are meant to operate in bold but humble reliance upon God’s Word, and to confidently state our reliance upon Him and what He has said.

“The helmet of salvation”

Paul doesn’t actually explain within Ephesians itself what he means by this expression. However, he is referring to ‘*hope*’. We discover that from 1 Thessalonians, in which Paul speaks more fully:

But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 (RSV)

Hope has to be cultivated because it is needed as a protection for our minds. Hence the metaphor of a ‘helmet’. By maintaining our hope we prevent a whole range of problems within the mind such as depression, fear, anxiety, demoralisation, despair and so on. All of those are kept at bay by hope. The best definition I have ever heard of ‘hope’ was given by Derek Prince. He said it is “*the confident*

expectation *of good*.” Faith centres upon our trust in God’s character and promises, whereas hope relates to the way we think of the future and the expectations we have for our own lives.

God wants those expectations to be consistently positive, confident and healthy. He does not want us to dwell on gloomy expectations of failure, disaster or death. By contrast, the demons want you to dwell on all of those. If you continue to let yourself think such dark thoughts you will eventually become unable to withstand even the stresses of ordinary life, let alone prolonged clashes with the wicked and the demons who guide them. Hope is built up and maintained by coming to believe in God’s Word and, in particular, what it says about our future.

Therefore, set out to become thoroughly well-informed, and convinced, about what the future has in store for a genuine Christian. It then becomes easier to maintain a hopeful disposition and a confident expectation of good, because the Bible says our future is glorious. Developing the habit of focusing on all of that will keep your mind solid, stable and secure. Then you will not be overcome by depression, anxiety and discouragement, which the demons are continually trying to create in you.

“The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”

This last item is defined within the verse itself. It refers to the way in which we wield God’s Word as a weapon. This is closely related to the proclamation, declaration and confession of God’s Word, and especially His promises. To declare and proclaim His promises as part of our prayer times has great power to change our circumstances. It also has a major effect on the way you think, speak, act and react. A person who is persistently repeating God’s Word back to him will be changed and strengthened by the very process of doing so.

Your faith, hope, strength, endurance and resilience will all grow, as will your alertness and discernment. A person who is consistently proclaiming God’s Word out loud within their prayers is not only saying them, but *hearing* them. Remember that the Bible says that faith comes by hearing. Such a person will also change in terms of how they see, and are seen by, the demonic realm. Their own strength will increase and that of the demons will decrease. The demons will also realise that you are not so easily deceived, demoralised or intimidated as you used to be.

It is rather like the reaction of a gang of bullies who watch, with growing alarm, as your muscles and combat skills grow due to training as a boxer. Be bold and assertive when tackling the wicked, but without falling into the opposite error of being over-confident or cocky. Under-estimating the wicked is as dangerous as over-estimating them. God wants you to develop the right balance, whereby you refuse to be intimidated by the wicked but, at the same time, you do not become presumptuous or complacent either.

Your confidence has to be in God, not in yourself, or your own abilities. The moment you start under-estimating the wicked, assuming they can’t harm you, or treating them lightly, you put yourself in danger. Finding that balance will take time because your early victories can produce over-confidence, which may then lead to some defeats. In the end, having had some victories and defeats, you may find that place of balance, whereby you are both confident and alert at the same time.

Be aware that if you get in the way of a wicked church leader, or any other wicked person, witchcraft may well be used against you.

I shall only mention the subject of witchcraft very briefly here, because I shall cover it further in chapter 27 below. For now, we merely need to flag this issue and briefly define it. At its most basic level it is the means by which person A seeks to control or influence person B by means of ‘*soulish power*’. In particular it is achieved by manipulation, domination and intimidation. Witchcraft also

involves *mind-control*, whereby person B's thoughts and feelings are influenced by person A, or by the demons who are within or alongside either of them.

This usually occurs without person B ever realising what is going on, who is doing it, or how it works. The person practising witchcraft can, merely by the use of their own mind, emotions and will, (even without the help of demons) influence the mind, emotions and will of the other person. That is how people control and manipulate each other every day at work or in churches. It is commonplace. At a more spectacular level, most of us have seen the immense power that hypnotists can have over people in stage shows. The things done there are entirely real. It is not a trick. Real power is being wielded.

That is an aspect of witchcraft, but it is still only at the lower end of the scale. Witchcraft becomes even more powerful and dangerous when person A adds the use of *demonic* power to their own soulish power. The same basic techniques are being used, and with the same objective, namely controlling person B. However, the 'help' of demons is now being used *in addition*. This is a subject which most of the Church, at least in the West, either ignores or under-estimates. Many don't even believe that it is real or, even if it is real, that it could ever affect *them* or the people they know.

It is seen as something purely theoretical, which only affects people elsewhere or in the past, not here and now. The very idea of witchcraft is often made light of, with caricatured images of witches in pointy hats and cauldrons. It is also assumed that those who were accused of witchcraft in past centuries were innocent people, falsely branded as witches by fanatics with over-active imaginations. That was not always the case. Witchcraft is absolutely real and there is nothing imaginary about it.

The danger is greatest for those who don't believe it is real, see no need to seek God's protection from it, and don't recognise the symptoms when they arise. If that describes you, please check what the Bible has to say about this and begin to take it seriously and literally. It may assist if I tell one brief story of how we once came up against the power of witchcraft and sought God's protection from it. Bear in mind also that this took place *in a church* and that the 'person A' who was engaging in the witchcraft was one of the *leaders*.

It occurred after we left the church led by 'Rick', due to our concerns about his lies, carnality and 'showmanship' as a leader. We had similar concerns about the church as a whole and the character and conduct of the wider leadership. I had a number of meetings and wrote various letters, in which I set out my concerns. I urged them all, but especially Rick, to repent and change course. After a long battle we left the church because we were getting nowhere. In fact, we were being deliberately undermined and lied about, to prevent others listening to us.

When we left, a letter was read out to the whole church and then handed out at a Sunday meeting. We were not present, but we heard of it afterwards and somebody got us a copy. It had been agreed prior to this that the wording of that letter would be worked out jointly with us. Instead, it was handed out without our ever seeing it. The letter purported to be from the whole Oversight Team, but I later learned that they had played no part in writing it. They were not even aware of it until it was read out at church.

So, it had been produced in breach of the agreement we made, and was not actually from the group which it purported to be from. At first sight, the letter didn't sound too bad. It contained a lot of pseudo-religious language, which I felt was phoney. But it was basically a brief explanation of the fact that we had left, though without saying why. Strangely, it also contained, underneath each paragraph, verse references from the book of Acts. It didn't set out the actual passages. It just gave the bare references. So, you would only know what they were saying if you looked them up.

We had not done this at first, but we did so later, after we were alerted to what was being said subliminally within the letter. A friend of ours had checked through it and he said to me: "*Do you realise they're cursing you? The verses they have selected tell the story of Ananias and Sapphira and apply it to you*". We then checked for ourselves and, sure enough, the sequence of verses amounted

to a death-curse being directed at my wife and myself. It was unmistakable. Therefore, my wife and I took a number of important steps.

Firstly, we prayed that God would break the power of any curses uttered against us and against our family or our business. We asked others to pray for us all as well. We also *forgave* Desmond, the real author of the letter, plus Rick with whom he was in close liaison, plus the whole Oversight Team, in whose name the letter had been sent. They had done nothing to revoke it or to apologise for its contents, even after they became aware of it. That point about forgiving them all was important. That is one way to prevent other people's curses from taking effect in our lives.

If we forgive them, bless them and also ask God to bless them, then we are acting in the opposite spirit from them. That is what God wants us to do, rather than returning cursing for cursing, or becoming carnal and enraged like they are. For a curse to alight upon a person there needs to be some opening in their life, such as sin, or an ungodly attitude or reaction. Or it could be that they themselves are engaging in cursing, or responding to other people's curses with curses of their own. If you refuse to join in you will, to a large extent, be protected from the effect of their curses.

Please see chapter 27 below, plus the chapters on forgiveness within my Book 2. At any rate, I then wrote to Desmond, Rick and the whole Oversight Team, pointing out the unmistakable meaning of their letter and its sinister sequence of verse references. I told them that what Desmond had sent us, in their name, was a curse and was plainly meant as such. I also told them that what Desmond was doing, in their name, was witchcraft and that God would hold him, and all of them, accountable for it.

I urged them to retract the letter and repent of what they had done, and of what they had allowed to be done in their name. I also warned them, and *Desmond in particular*, that this was an extremely serious matter and that if they did not repent, any curses they uttered would come back upon themselves. I was not wishing that upon them. On the contrary, I was trying to help them not to be damaged by what Desmond and Rick had said and done. We reap what we sow and engaging in the occult was laying them wide open to a demonic attack upon themselves.

Lastly, I asked the whole Oversight Team to meet with me to discuss the situation. However, my warnings were all ignored, and they refused to meet. One of the other church leaders in the town, who had acted as a mediator and had tried to set up a meeting, was told that they didn't want to meet with me. Desmond even added for good measure: "*No, he's left the church now. He's history*". Very sadly, the things I had feared would happen to them did happen, and on a far worse scale than I had expected.

The most serious development, which I believe was the direct result of his own actions, was that Desmond was diagnosed with acute leukaemia. He was the deputy leader of the church, and the main author of that letter. It was he who inserted the verses about Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead. The diagnosis came only a few months after he wrote it. He then declined rapidly and was dead within a few further months, despite the fact that we forgave him, asked God to forgive him, and prayed earnestly for his healing.

I believe Desmond's illness was the direct consequence of the curse he wrote out against myself and my wife. It returned back upon his own head, as curses do. That is how it works. I will explain that briefly in chapter 27 below and then more fully in future books in this series. However, it wasn't just Desmond who was affected. The whole church imploded and became a shadow of what it had once been, or rather what it had *appeared* to be, because there was a lot of hype. Here is a brief summary of some of the more obvious things that resulted.

Firstly, Rick's entire ministry fell apart, after having been a full time evangelist and then a church leader for over 20 years. This collapse occurred in less than a year. He left ministry, left his wife for another woman and left the town to live with her. Secondly, 'Peter' the leader of the children's ministry, which was the biggest part of the church, and the most (apparently) successful, also left his

wife. He had been having an illicit affair, even while leading that ministry with his wife. Thirdly, the church shrank in size, as a lot of people left it.

The children's ministry collapsed overnight when Peter's wife discovered his adultery. The shock devastated her and she was too distressed to continue. The children's work had been the 'flagship' ministry of the church. The leaders had often boasted about it, because it had been attracting huge numbers of children from all over the area. They were literally brought back and forth by buses. Yet, it all fell apart. Other things happened too, which I won't mention, because they concern individuals whose privacy I wish to preserve.

Some might say that all of those things, which all happened very quickly, were just a series of random coincidences and had nothing to do with the behaviour of those leaders or with Desmond's curse in particular. My own conviction is they were direct consequences, just as I had feared would occur. However, in stark contrast to them, we went from strength to strength. Our business flourished and grew much larger. Then, in later years, I also went into full time ministry as a writer, speaker and Bible teacher.

I don't believe any of that would have been the case if we had not taken the curse seriously and prayed for it to be broken and to receive God's protection from its effects. I have told this story in order to warn you to take such things seriously. This is necessary if you intend to do battle with the wicked, because you will then become a target for human and demonic opposition. That will include the use of curses and witchcraft. You need to learn what these things are and how to deal with them, or you will suffer a lot of needless damage which you could have avoided.

Be comforted by the fact that the wicked are only around for a short time.

In the 35 years that I have been a Christian, I have come across very many wicked people. However, none have ever been an active part of my life for more than a few years. In one way or another, God prevents them going on forever. He either moves them, or He moves you, or you learn how to defeat them. If so, their continued presence no longer troubles you as much. Alternatively, the reign or influence of the wicked is at least cut short by their death, as God reduces their life span:

*But you, O God, will cast them down
into the pit of destruction;
men of blood and treachery
shall not live out half their days.
But I will trust in you.
Psalm 55:23 (ESV)*

Ultimately, the wicked can only live for about 70-80 years at most. However, it is likely to be less, because they tend not to live as long as the righteous:

*¹Fret not yourself because of evildoers;
be not envious of wrongdoers!
²For they will soon fade like the grass
and wither like the green herb.
Psalm 37:1-2 (ESV)*

Take courage because, for one reason or another, the wicked will not last long. That being so, we have all the more reason to resist them and to hold on.

We must not fear the wicked.

We need to take the wicked seriously and tackle them firmly, but we never need to *fear* them, especially once we wake up and realise who they are. From then on we are in a much better position to defeat them. Therefore, although they *want* you to fear them, you must never do so:

*⁵Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me,
Psalm 49:5 (RSV)*

*⁶I am not afraid of ten thousands of people
who have set themselves against me round about.
Psalm 3:6 (RSV)*

The wicked fight deviously, in secret, and out of sight. They try not to come out into the open.

David was a great warrior, but he knew that in dealing with the wicked, even he needed God's help. The activities of the wicked are not out in the open, where you can see them. They like to operate covertly and their main weapon is deception. They also set hidden traps for the godly. One reason why they act in these ways is because the wicked are often weak and even pathetic people. Most would be no match for us if they came out into the open. Thus their general policy is to operate behind backs. So there is all the more reason to seek God's protection, as David did:

*²hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
from the scheming of evildoers,
Psalm 64:2 (RSV)*

When tackling the wicked we also need to rely upon God's Word, like King David. The more you study the Bible, the more understanding you will gain of the ways of the wicked. You will then be better prepared. God will also use Scripture to give you specific insights at key moments, as and when you need them. Therefore make a careful, lifelong study of the whole of God's Word, so that you can be ready in advance for anything that happens.

Most people don't recognise the wicked people in their lives, or even know they are in a battle. Therefore they don't seek God's protection.

Many fail to seek God's help against the wicked, because they don't even realise there is a battle to be fought. It is so covert they are unaware that it is even going on. Others may realise there is a battle, but lack the discernment to recognise who the wicked are, so as to be able to fight them. The more senior you become, the more covert the opposition will become. Early in your career, the wicked will oppose you openly. But if you rise to be a manager they will do it secretly. Thus you have all the more reason to seek God's help.

When Delilah extracted secret information from Samson, in order to destroy him, it was almost certainly achieved by the use of witchcraft.

Delilah wore down Samson's resolve by repeatedly asking him to reveal the secret of his great strength. She wanted to pass it on to the Philistines, so they could destroy him. Have you ever wondered how Samson could be so stupid as to give her that secret information, after seeing she had already betrayed him? On the face of it, the account doesn't make sense. There has to be more to it than mere persistence on Delilah's part. No doubt her nagging had some effect.

However, it cannot fully explain why Samson gave in to her, especially after seeing what she had done on each of the previous occasions, when he'd given her false answers. It also doesn't even explain why he let her go on questioning him, or remain with him at all, after having betrayed him to the Philistines already. Let's look at what happened from when he first met Delilah. Remember she didn't *become* false. She was already false, from the very outset:

⁴After this he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Deli'lah. ⁵And the lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

Judges 16:4-5 (RSV)

Delilah wasted no time and started to probe at Samson to get him to reveal his secret. Samson doesn't just say no, or tell her to be quiet, or even send her away. He simply gives her incorrect answers, which he must know will eventually be revealed to be incorrect, even if she doesn't betray him:

⁶And Deli'lah said to Samson, "Please tell me wherein your great strength lies, and how you might be bound, that one could subdue you." ⁷And Samson said to her, "If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings which have not been dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

Judges 16:6-7 (RSV)

In the absence of supernatural factors, any sane person would have got rid of Delilah immediately after this first incident. It was obvious she had given the (false) information to the Philistines. Any sensible person would see what is going on and refuse to cooperate any further. But Samson did not. Neither do many others when faced with witchcraft. Samson became increasingly passive and let her continue, even though every fact indicated that he shouldn't.

He even allowed Delilah to speak as if she had been wronged by him. It may sound absurd for her to claim that, but it is actually very common. A person operating in witchcraft will often make brazen assertions, and with a completely straight face. They know that your capacity to think straight, and to see their sinister motives, is blocked by the very mind-control techniques they use against you. Those are an integral part of what witchcraft is all about. Delilah continued, without any shame, and did the very same thing, all over again:

¹⁰And Deli'lah said to Samson, "Behold, you have mocked me, and told me lies; please tell me how you might be bound." ¹¹And he said to her, "If they bind me with new ropes that have not been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man." ¹²So Deli'lah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And the men lying in wait were in an inner chamber. But he snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread.

Judges 16:10-12 (RSV)

When her second attempt fails, Delilah still isn't embarrassed or afraid and she doesn't run away, as some would do if exposed as a traitor. She knows that Samson *isn't able* to function as he should, or to see through her, or to think straight at all. Therefore she knows she will be able to do it all over again. When she does, Samson passively goes along with it and gives her a third incorrect answer. But each time he gets a little closer to the truth. He is gradually drawn, even against his own will, towards revealing his secret, as if by an invisible magnet:

¹³And Deli'lah said to Samson, "Until now you have mocked me, and told me lies; tell me how you might be bound." And he said to her, "If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web and make it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man." ¹⁴So while he slept, Deli'lah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web] And she made them tight with the pin, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web.

Judges 16:13-14 (RSV)

Eventually, on the fourth occasion, Delilah gets the real answer out of Samson. She had been nagging at him, “*day after day*”, until “*his soul was vexed to death*” and he caved in:

¹⁵ And she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and you have not told me wherein your great strength lies.” ¹⁶ And when she pressed him hard with her words day after day, and urged him, his soul was vexed to death. ¹⁷ And he told her all his mind, and said to her, “A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I be shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.”

Judges 16:15-17 (RSV)

This time Delilah knew it was the real answer. The wicked are very discerning. As before, she went straight to tell the Philistines, with disastrous results for Samson:

¹⁸ When Deli’lah saw that he had told her all his mind, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, “Come up this once, for he has told me all his mind.” Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. ¹⁹ She made him sleep upon her knees; and she called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him. ²⁰ And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep, and said, “I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free.” And he did not know that the Lord had left him. ²¹ And the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with bronze fetters; and he ground at the mill in the prison. ²² But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Judges 16:18-22 (RSV)

Why did Samson have such poor judgment when dealing with Delilah? The explanation cannot be his foolishness alone. It’s true that he had previously behaved foolishly, but that one factor can’t explain the almost comatose passivity that he showed. She clearly had a hold over him that made him incapable of thinking straight. He was under the power of her witchcraft. I have experienced it myself many times in the past, where I felt my mind was numb and I was so confused I was unable to think properly.

That bewilderment is also based on some natural factors, because some of the things you think are *facts* are actually *lies*. Therefore, however hard you try to make sense of the ‘facts’, they don’t add up. That combination of truth and lies creates a debilitating feeling of confusion. Your mind knows, unconsciously, that something must be wrong somewhere and that the pieces of the jigsaw don’t fit together, or make sense. But you can’t put your finger on *why* and that leaves you feeling disorientated.

However, it is often also due to the fact that one or more of the people you are dealing with is practising witchcraft against you. That has happened to me many times when dealing with false staff at my law firm, or false Christians within churches. When trying to investigate wrongdoing, I would feel inexplicably indecisive, confused and mentally numb, as if I was wading through deep mud. It can be paralysing. One of the other hallmarks of such witchcraft is that I have even found myself feeling *sympathy* for the wrongdoer.

They have an extraordinary way of making you feel sorry for them, even while they attack and exploit you. We saw it above, in the way Delilah spoke, as if she was the one who had been wronged. My former PA, Julie, used to operate mind-control. For example, I sometimes found myself forming the thought that I ought to pay her a bonus, or give her a pay rise. The idea would come into my head, even though she had not said anything, and I would feel drawn to speak up and offer it.

When I did so, she would purport to be surprised, and even reluctant. In the end I realised that, on many such occasions, she had been *planting thoughts* in my mind. Partly it was done in the natural, through well-chosen and well-timed words, spoken subtly and almost subliminally. However, it was

also achieved supernaturally, through witchcraft. Now that I am aware of this, and more alert to it, the problem has reduced. If you are unaware of the power of such mind-control, or don't take it seriously, you will be influenced by it, especially if you try to tackle the wicked.

A similar thing occurred with Rick, the church leader. I often gave financial gifts to him spontaneously, thinking the idea was mine, or that God had prompted me. I later concluded that he had planted the thoughts in my mind. It was partly by his own guile and manipulation, but also by his use of witchcraft and the whisperings of demons. I mean that last point literally, because Rick was heavily demonised. I later saw a demon in his eyes and I tell the story in chapter 17 of my Book 1.

I would urge you to recognise that there really are such things as witchcraft and mind-control and that multitudes of people practise these to one extent or another. There is nothing imaginary about any of it and it is going on all the time. Moreover, it is done by entirely *ordinary* people, even in churches, by those who claim to be Christians. Indeed, that is where witchcraft is at its most damaging, because it is least expected and because the Church is so important.

The right way to handle difficult, and even wicked, bosses at work, when you are young and/or in a junior position

A young Christian recently asked me how to handle difficult bosses at work. She had started a new job and some of the senior staff were making life hard. This will arise for all of us at times. Most of the workplace examples I have given are from the perspective of a boss, because I was a boss for most of my career. However, I wasn't always a boss and I can still remember what it was like to be on the receiving end of real, *or imagined*, harshness and unfair treatment. It can be very difficult to handle and deeply distressing.

However, a high proportion of the rough treatment that Christian employees receive is not necessarily due to wicked bosses. Or it could be that the boss is wicked, but that is still not the reason why they are being treated roughly. There are a number of possible alternative explanations. Firstly, the boss could be wicked and is giving you a hard time purely because he is wicked. Secondly, the boss might well be wicked, but that is irrelevant, as he is giving you a hard time because *you* are lazy, negligent, incompetent or have any number of other faults.

Thirdly, the boss could actually be a good person, who isn't wicked at all. Yet he may be giving you a hard time for the same reasons, namely your bad habits or character deficiencies. Fourthly, the boss could be either wicked or good, or something in between, and he is giving you a hard time because *God wants him to*. God Himself might see faults in you that need to be confronted, or 'rough edges' that need to be 'sandpapered' away. He may be using the boss as His 'agent' to do that for Him.

God is very practical and realistic. He knows that very few Christians will ever tell you the frank truth about your faults, whereas bosses are more likely to be willing to do so. Therefore God makes full use of them in our lives to get us to learn and to change. So, before we leap to conclusions about why we are being given a hard time at work, we need to consider each of the above possibilities. We may have assumed our boss is wicked, or at least harsh and unfair, when in fact he might be none of those things.

He may just be responding rationally to the faults in us that he can see, but which we can't see, or won't admit to. That is very common, because few of us see ourselves as we really are. Most of us never get anywhere near the truth when assessing ourselves. We view ourselves through rose-tinted lenses while, at the same time, other people are seen through grey lenses which accentuate their faults and mask their virtues. So, although we will often have to face wicked bosses who are dishonest, selfish and unfair, it should not be your automatic assumption that that is what they are.

When trying to assess the position, give serious consideration to each of the four options I listed earlier. Don't just assume automatically that there is nothing wrong with you, and no conceivable reason why any sane person would ever wish to criticise or punish you. Therefore, if you are suffering at work, or if bosses are making demands of you, or holding you more accountable than you would wish, stop and ask God about it. Try praying along these lines:

“LORD, I am going through difficulties with colleagues and/or bosses who are criticising me and/or making demands of me. Please show me why this is happening and whether any of it is my own fault. In particular, please show me what your purposes are in all of this and whether you are using those people to try to change me, chasten me, or toughen me up. If you do want me to change, please show me how and why, so I can cooperate and get this process of change over with more quickly.”

If you pray in that way you will begin to see your bosses differently. You will also start to see yourself more clearly, especially your faults, bad habits and bad attitudes which, hitherto, only other people knew about. You will also begin to see God's purposes more fully and to realise what His long term aims are for your character development. Even where you are doing nothing wrong, and are truly up against wicked people, you will be better able to handle them and more capable of seeing how God can use them to strengthen your character, as He did with Joseph in Egypt.

You can even start to find it possible to give thanks for such mistreatment and for those who dispense it. Even they can be used as God's agents for your self-improvement, and they often are. Giving thanks to God (not them) for the ordeals they cause, and for their effects in your life, will also help to get it over with more quickly and produce better results. However, there are also times when mistreatment at the hands of the wicked is *not* what God wants for you. In such cases, He wants you to pray for His help in protecting you from the wicked and/or removing them from your life.

We shall look at that in the chapters below. Therefore we also need to know when, and how, to resist the wicked and even to pray against them. Life would be a lot simpler if it was always one situation or the other, such that we could always use the same methods and take the same approach. However, it isn't like that. Therefore we need to learn how to discern the real nature of the situation, where it's coming from, who is behind it and what God is doing through it. You can't be a one club golfer, and you have to learn how to treat different situations differently.

You cannot resist the wicked solely “in your own strength”. You need to rely on God's strength, wisdom and guidance.

God does want us to be bold and confident. However, our confidence always needs to be in Him, rather than in ourselves or in our own abilities or gifts:

*⁶ For not in my bow do I trust,
nor can my sword save me.
⁷ But you have saved us from our foes
and have put to shame those who hate us.
Psalm 44:6-7 (ESV)*

So, as we fight and win battles, it needs to be done in His strength, in reliance upon Him. It must also be in accordance with His methods and principles, not the world's, or those of our own flesh nature. God must empower and enable us:

*But God will strike the heads of his enemies,
the hairy crown of him who walks in his guilty ways.
Psalm 68:21 (ESV)*

Awesome is God from his sanctuary;

*the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people.
Blessed be God!*

Psalm 68:35(ESV)

You cannot rely solely on your own discernment when assessing people and situations. You have to seek God's guidance, and ask him to *expose* the real nature of other people's characters, or of contracts, job offers or other opportunities being offered to you. If you don't, you will make far more mistakes and end up making deals that you should never have made and getting involved with people you should have kept well away from. King David knew this and he consistently sought God's guidance when choosing what to do, where to go, and even whether to fight:

After this David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the Lord said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And he said, "To Hebron."

2 Samuel 2:1 (RSV)

¹⁹ And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt thou give them into my hand?" And the Lord said to David, "Go up; for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand."

2 Samuel 5:19 (RSV)

²² And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread out in the valley of Reph'aim. ²³ And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, "You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come upon them opposite the balsam trees. ²⁴ And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then bestir yourself; for then the Lord has gone out before you to smite the army of the Philistines." ²⁵ And David did as the Lord commanded him, and smote the Philistines from Geba to Gezer.

2 Samuel 5:22-25 (RSV)

Joshua's failure to seek God's guidance before making a peace treaty with the Gibeonites

An example of the need to seek God's guidance before taking action is Joshua, who led the Israelites in to the Promised Land. God had said they must destroy *all* the Canaanites because they were so wicked they would cause problems in the future if any remained alive. So, Joshua knew he could make no peace treaties with any of them. Even so, a group of Canaanites known as 'Gibeonites' tricked Joshua into believing they were travellers and were only passing through. Joshua therefore made a peace treaty with them, due to his mistaken belief that they were not Canaanites:

³ But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, ⁴ they on their part acted with cunning, and went and made ready provisions, and took worn-out sacks upon their asses, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, ⁵ with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes; and all their provisions were dry and moldy. ⁶ And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; so now make a covenant with us.

Joshua 9:3-6 (RSV)

The Israelites were doubtful at first, and questioned the Gibeonites, but not thoroughly enough. So, they were taken in by the deception and believed they were just travellers from another place:

⁷ But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" ⁸ They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" ⁹ They said to him, "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the Lord your God; for we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, ¹⁰ and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who dwelt in Ash'taroth. ¹¹ And

our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; come now, make a covenant with us."'"¹² Here is our bread; it was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey, on the day we set forth to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and moldy;¹³ these wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they are burst; and these garments and shoes of ours are worn out from the very long journey."

Joshua 9:7-13 (RSV)

Their error was they did not ask for God's direction, or ask God to expose any deception, before entering into something as serious as a covenant or peace treaty with these men:

¹⁴ So the men partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the Lord. ¹⁵ And Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

Joshua 9:14-15 (RSV)

Three days later, when it was too late, as they were bound by their peace treaty, Joshua discovered the truth about the Gibeonites. But he could no longer do anything about it, because to fight them would have meant breaking a vow. We must therefore take great care before making promises. Ideally, try not to make any at all. If you must, then seek God's guidance first, or you could end up being bound by your own words, as Joshua was:

¹⁶ At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them. ¹⁷ And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephi'rah, Be-er'oth, and Kir'iath-je'arim. ¹⁸ But the people of Israel did not kill them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. ¹⁹ But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. ²⁰ This we will do to them, and let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore to them."

Joshua 9:16-20 (RSV)

The making of vows, contracts, deals, or even promises, is really important, as it is so easy to get ensnared by the wicked. Then, when your eyes eventually open, and you realise what kind of people they really are, you are trapped by your own words, due to the agreements you have entered into or the promises you have made. You may have accepted a job offer, or a business partnership, or involvement in a contract, or some other entanglement, from which it can be difficult to escape. Or you may have made a promise which you now regret.

Yet, it could all have been avoided if, before entering into it, you had prayed to God along these lines: *"Lord, I am proposing to enter into this arrangement, or to become bound by this deal/contract/partnership/new job etc. Please show me if there is anything I can't see that I need to see, or anything about which I'm being blinded, deceived or manipulated. Please show me whether you want me to enter into this. Please also block my path if it isn't right."*

It is so easy to be enticed by what may appear to be desirable opportunities. The very fact that it is attractive or time-limited, such that a decision has to be made quickly, can tempt you to go ahead and grab it without praying for guidance. That is a major error, for which you may later pay a high price when the real facts emerge. The decision can seem good, but it could lead to very bad consequences, as Solomon found:

*There is a way which seems right to a man,
but its end is the way to death*

Proverbs 14:12 (RSV)

My own failure to seek God's guidance before accepting an offer of an equity partnership in a law firm

I made this mistake when I was a young lawyer and was offered a partnership with a one third equity stake in a law firm. It was what I had always wanted and had landed directly on my plate. I reasoned that it must therefore be what God wanted for me and that He must have given it to me. That is how one tends to think when presented with an enticing offer. The advantages are focused on, but the disadvantages are glossed over, especially if they come from the quiet voice of our conscience. We can easily drown it out and ignore it when it is speaking against something which we want.

I was offered equity partnership, together with the roles of Head of Litigation and Managing Partner. It seemed so good that I felt it had to be from God. Yet I also knew, from the outset, that one of the equity partners was of dubious ethical character. He was also a senior Freemason, and I already knew Freemasonry was occultic. I also knew he had had a chequered past and had been expelled from a previous law firm, with allegations of dishonesty and manipulation made against him.

I should therefore have been on my guard, based on that knowledge alone, and should have refused the offer. At the very least, I should have taken advice, prayed, and asked others to pray, that God would show me *whether* to accept it. Unfortunately, I didn't do any of those things. I accepted it immediately and told myself his 'dodginess' could be kept under control, especially as I was going to be the Managing Partner. I was wrong about that in particular and it led, three years later, to disaster. I describe that elsewhere in this book and also in Book 2.

Invite God to veto anything which He thinks is not good for you, or even if it is good, but is not the best option.

It is precisely when an offer, business deal, opportunity or marriage proposal, seems attractive that you most need to seek God's guidance. You also need to *ask him to block it if it's not right*, or even if he thinks it's not the best thing for you, and that some other option would be better. For example, we learned to pray like this before buying any house: "*LORD, we really like this house, but if it is not what you want us to buy, please block it and prevent us from buying it.*" We prayed that prayer each time we found what seemed like the ideal house, over a period of about a year, and God answered it.

On *four* occasions our purchases fell through. We got discouraged, because it went on and on for what seemed like an age. Four houses were either withdrawn from sale or another buyer 'gazumped' us by pushing in and taking the house ahead of us. Then, on the fifth attempt, the perfect house came up, which turned out to be God's choice. That fifth attempt was not blocked, though we did invite God to block it if He wanted to. The moral of the story is that you should always seek God's guidance and, even after that, give Him a right of veto.

Positively *invite* Him to block any opportunity that He does not want you to take, especially when it seems attractive. It is even more essential where there is any kind of urgency which puts you under time pressure to decide quickly, without taking advice or making proper checks. The wicked, and also the demons, use time limits to entice us into making unwise agreements or promises. Whenever you feel such pressure, stop and ask yourself *who is creating the urgency*, or making use of it. Then force yourself to step back from the brink and think, ask questions and pray for guidance.

CHAPTER 22

OUR DUTY TO RESIST THE WICKED

*“Cry aloud; do not hold back;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
Isaiah 58:1 (ESV)*

*⁶ “Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of wickedness,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Isaiah 58:6 (ESV)*

*He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous
are both alike an abomination to the Lord.
Proverbs 17:15 (RSV)*

*Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him
who has been robbed.....*

Jeremiah 22:3(a) (ESV)

*Hate evil and love good,
and establish justice in the gate....
Amos 5:15(a) (RSV)*

*Rescue those who are being taken away to death;
hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.
Proverbs 24:11 (RSV)*

*take away the wicked from the presence of the king,
and his throne will be established in righteousness.
Proverbs 25:5 (RSV)*

*⁹ Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God.
Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and
does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting,
2 John 9-10 (ESV)*

God wants us to be grieved by the wickedness of our generation and by the abominations committed in our midst.

Before we can resist the wicked, or even warn them, we first need to be aware of their wickedness and of the abominations that are being committed in our midst by our generation. Moreover, those abominations need to *grieve us*. That is we need to begin to see them as God does and they need to matter to us. There is a sobering passage in Ezekiel in which God sends out angels as ‘executioners’ into Jerusalem to bring judgement on the people because of their wickedness. There is also an intriguing verse in which God tells the angels they must first put a mark upon the foreheads of all who “sigh and grown over all the abominations that are committed in it”:

Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, “Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.”

Ezekiel 9:1 (ESV)

And the Lord said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.”

Ezekiel 9:4 (ESV)

The point is that God’s judgment was to be brought upon all the people except for that minority who had the mark put onto their foreheads as a result of being so grieved about the wickedness around them. So, there is an urgent need for us to take wickedness seriously and for it to matter to us:

⁵ And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. ⁶ Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house.

Ezekiel 9:5-6 (ESV)

We must hate wickedness and resist wicked people, even while praying for them.

The fact that we have to pray *for* the wicked, and even to forgive them, does not mean that we must cooperate with them or give in to them. On the contrary, part of our role as Christians is to resist the wicked, both for our own sake, and also for the benefit of others. There are many weak and defenceless people out there who are depending on us to stand up to the wicked on their behalf. They can’t do it themselves, so we must do it for them:

*learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow.
Isaiah 1:17 (RSV)*

*It is not good to be partial to the wicked
or to deprive the righteous of justice.
Proverbs 18:5 (ESV)*

It is right to be merciful with the weak, the immature, those who make mistakes and sometimes even the wicked. But we must never be weak or sentimental towards the wicked. Neither should we ever appease or accommodate them. Many sincere but naive Christians speak as if we should, but it isn’t what God wants. God wants us to resist the wicked and not to give way to them at all. We must make ourselves an obstacle in their path. God is not pleased with anyone who gives way before the wicked, or who lets them get what they want, either in our lives, or in the lives of others:

*Like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain
is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.
Proverbs 25:26 (RSV)*

*²⁰ 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 (ESV)

Furthermore, it is perfectly legitimate, where a wicked person is causing problems in a workplace or neighbourhood, or even in a church, to take steps to *remove* them or to ask God to do so. When such a person is removed the whole atmosphere will change:

*Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out,
and quarrelling and abuse will cease.
Proverbs 22:10 (RSV)*

Consider also what Job said about his handling of the wicked and remember that God spoke of him in the most exemplary terms, as a model of how we should act. It is therefore very significant that Job says of himself that he stood up for the poor and the weak and confronted their oppressors:

¹⁵ *I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame.*
¹⁶ *I was a father to the poor,
and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.*
¹⁷ *I broke the fangs of the unrighteous,
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.*
Job 29:15-17 (RSV)

King David's sense of his own duty to resist the wicked and to defend the righteous

King David felt it was his duty to resist the wicked, thwart their plans, remove them from power and even kill them. He was determined to oppose the wicked wherever he came across them:

⁴ *A perverse heart shall be far from me;
I will know nothing of evil.*
⁵ *Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly
I will destroy.
Whoever has a haughty look and an arrogant heart
I will not endure.*
⁶ *I will look with favor on the faithful in the land,
that they may dwell with me;
he who walks in the way that is blameless
shall minister to me.*
⁷ *No one who practices deceit
shall dwell in my house;
no one who utters lies
shall continue before my eyes.*
⁸ *Morning by morning I will destroy
all the wicked in the land,
cutting off all the evildoers
from the city of the LORD.*
Psalm 101:4-8 (ESV)

You may not be King of Israel, but there will be areas of your life where you have some authority, even if only at a low level. You could be a teacher or a shop assistant or work in an office. You might even be a manager or supervisor. Or you could be a leader in a church, or even an ordinary member. Whatever you are, there will be some people, or things, for which you are responsible. In those areas you have the opportunity, and the *duty*, to resist the wicked. It could be wickedness coming from your colleagues, staff, customers or bosses.

You can make yourself an obstacle to their plans by refusing to join in with what they do, or to cover up for them. It will not necessarily involve open confrontation and can often be done just by quiet resistance. God wants us all to uphold righteousness and oppose wickedness, but in our rapidly degenerating society we see the opposite happening. The Police ignore, or even excuse, the wicked. They choose not to prosecute crimes such as fraud, pornography and especially paedophilia by Muslims. Yet they are eager to prosecute decent people who break minor traffic laws.

That is partly because such easy targets improve their statistics, but it is also because their heart-attitudes are wrong. In one case a woman removed her senile father from a dreadful care home, where he was being neglected and abused. She was then jailed for five months by the Court of Protection. Her father was deemed to be a 'mental patient' and was under the 'protection' of that Court, and they said that she was *'interfering'*. The authorities threw everything they could at that woman, even though she did what any right-thinking person should do.

They only prosecuted for her because her intervention showed up their own ineptitude and neglect of duty. They could not tolerate that. But they had no difficulty in tolerating the neglect of her elderly father, about which she had complained, and which they did nothing to address. Instead, the daughter was punished because she exposed the failings of the system. That embarrassed the authorities, so they hit back at her, firstly for vengeance and, secondly, to deter others. Conversely, those who were responsible for those failings went completely unpunished and were not even investigated.

We saw the same injustice and corruption in the scandal of Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust, which neglected and mistreated thousands of hospital patients, causing countless unnecessary deaths. Yet, not one person has ever been prosecuted. The wrongdoers were allowed to get away with it completely. Some were even promoted, whereas the 'whistle-blowers' who complained, or who tried to alert managers to the abuse, were victimised and driven out by a ruthless and unprincipled management.

They now find it hard to find work at any other hospital because the establishment is closing ranks and making sure that nobody elsewhere offers them a job. The managers' focus was solely on *preserving themselves*, not protecting the patients. Therefore they attacked all those staff who told the truth. That self-serving attitude is now commonplace in our hospitals, schools, workplaces and police forces. They routinely defend the guilty, despise victims, and undermine witnesses, as we saw in Rotherham, Sheffield, Birmingham and elsewhere.

In all those cities cowardly, dishonest, politically correct police and councillors did nothing whatsoever to protect *thousands* of girls whom they *knew* were being raped and abused by Muslim men. They calculated that arresting vast numbers of Muslim men and exposing what they had done might harm their own promotion prospects or cause them to be accused of 'racism'. They weren't willing to risk that, so they looked away, did nothing, and silenced anyone who tried to speak up. The girls meant nothing to them in comparison to their own careers.

An experience I had as a School Governor

On a much smaller scale, I was once a school governor in a state Secondary school, before my own children went to school. At one Governors' meeting an item arose on the agenda concerning a girl of about 13 who was being bullied at her present school elsewhere. She was applying to join our school to escape from her tormentors. The Headmaster set out his view to the Board of Governors and recommended that the girl's request be refused. He gave some feeble excuses about how the school was *'crowded'* and that it would not be in the *"financial interests of the school"* to let her in.

There may have been some elements of truth in what he said, but those were not his real motives. What he actually thought was that this girl might be bullied at his school too. If so, that would mean more work for him in taking disciplinary action and conducting meetings with parents. There would

also be bad statistics for his school if he had to record new incidents of bullying. He preferred to 'solve' the bullying problem more simply, by keeping out of the school any pupil who was *likely to be bullied*. In his mind it was the *victims* who were primarily the problem, not the bullies.

To him, the victims were like magnets to bullies and thus they would probably be bullied whichever school they went to. So, the way he saw it was that letting this 13 year old girl join his school would create more work for him, as the bullying would only stop if he put himself to a lot of inconvenience. He didn't want to do that because the truth was he didn't really care about the bullying, or about that girl. From his own self-centred perspective, that twisted logic made sense, because keeping the victims out was far easier than investigating and expelling the bullies.

He was thinking only of what was easiest for himself, and for his staff, not his duty towards victims. He would have justified his approach to himself by saying he was merely being realistic. I didn't think so. I felt he was being callous and was neglecting one of his most basic duties, which was to protect children. I was appalled by his attitude and said that the bullied child was what mattered, and that if we refused her admission we would be letting her down and acting disgracefully. I was the only committee member to speak up against what the Head (and also one of the teachers) had said.

After I spoke the other Governors felt ashamed at having said nothing on the girl's behalf and unanimously voted to overrule the Head and to support me. So we let the girl in. But she never knew that it had almost gone the other way, and would have done so, if I had not spoken up for her. Our Headmaster had the same selfish attitude as the Head at the previous school, who had neglected the complaint of bullying for exactly the same reasons. He too didn't want the hassle of confronting the bullies, meeting their parents, expelling the bullies and handling the protracted appeals process.

In fairness to them both, it is also the fault of the County Councils and Education department. In their upside-down world, a school gets marked down in league tables if the staff *expose* incidents of bullying, and especially if they expel the bullies. If such actions are recorded it counts *against* that school. It ought instead to count *for* them, as it shows they are taking bullying seriously. Therefore, it is even more in the interests of school Heads and teachers to pretend that bullying isn't happening. Then no such records need to be made. So the first Head had 'solved' the problem the same way, by neglecting the complaint so as to cause the *victim* to leave the school, while all of the bullies stayed.

That outcome suited him very well. It reduced his own workload and avoided black marks being recorded against his school. However, I expect that nothing would ever induce him to admit any of that publicly. This sad story demonstrates how the duty to oppose the wicked and defend the innocent does not only apply to Kings and Prime Ministers, but also to you and me in our small daily dealings. I was just a junior member of a small committee, with only one vote. But I was able to make a difference and I like to think that that girl's life was changed for the better by my intervention.

God wants us to stand up for the weak, the poor and those who have no voice.

God wants Christians to speak up for the weak, the voiceless and the poor. Without us, they would be left desolate and would be continually oppressed. Therefore, we have a clear duty to intervene and protect them and to defend their interests:

*⁸Open your mouth for the dumb,
for the rights of all who are left desolate.
⁹Open your mouth, judge righteously,
maintain the rights of the poor and needy.
Proverbs 31:8-9 (RSV)*

It is a betrayal of the people whom we are called to protect if, because of fear, we tolerate what the wicked are doing. We are commanded to be solid in our resistance, standing in their path and obstructing their aims. If we do that, and rebuke the wicked, we will experience God's blessing:

*²⁴He who says to the wicked, "You are innocent,"
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations;
²⁵but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight,
and a good blessing will be upon them.*

Proverbs 24:24-25 (NKJV)

Therefore be zealous and tenacious in opposing the wicked. See it as a normal part of what it means to be a Christian. Show the same indignation that Jesus showed when He cleared the Temple of the corrupt money changers. That is a righteous form of anger which it is entirely permissible for us to have, and to express. It has nothing to do with temper, which comes from our fleshly nature:

*⁵³Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked,
who forsake thy law.*

Psalms 119:53 (RSV)

We must not form alliances with the wicked, or do anything to serve their purposes.

A prophet called Jehu, the son of Hanani, (not King Jehu) rebuked King Jehoshaphat of Judah because he had assisted the wicked King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom. He had formed an alliance with him and then taken the Southern Kingdom of Judah into battle alongside King Ahab's army. God was angry that King Jehoshaphat had done that. What he should have done was to resist the wicked, not join alliances to assist them:

¹Jehosh'aphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. ²But Jehu the son of Hana'ni the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehosh'aphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the Lord. ³Nevertheless some good is found in you, for you destroyed the Ashe'rahs out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God."

2 Chronicles 19:1-3 (RSV)

King Jehoshaphat did not learn his lesson, even after being rebuked by Jehu the prophet. Later in his life he acted wrongly again by assisting the wicked King Ahaziah, who was also from the Northern Kingdom, by building ships to use alongside his. Therefore another prophet, Eliezer, rebuked Jehoshaphat again for assisting the wicked, rather than opposing them, or at least keeping out of it and not helping them:

³⁵After this Jehosh'aphat king of Judah joined with Ahazi'ah king of Israel, who did wickedly. ³⁶He joined him in building ships to go to Tarshish, and they built the ships in E'zion-ge'ber. ³⁷Then Elie'zer the son of Dodav'ahu of Mare'shah prophesied against Jehosh'aphat, saying, "Because you have joined with Ahazi'ah, the Lord will destroy what you have made." And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish.

2 Chronicles 20:35-37 (RSV)

Has God ever had to intervene in your life to resist you, or to destroy something you have made, because you were using it to assist the wicked? Have you ever even thought about that? It may be worthwhile to reflect on that question.

Zerubbabel is a model for us in how to deal with the wicked.

Zerubbabel was better than most of us in identifying and resisting the wicked. He rebuilt the second Temple in the face of bitter opposition from wicked men. That opposition was not done openly, but by cunning and deception. They even tried to infiltrate the group and to undermine them from within. But Zerubbabel discerned their schemes and would not let them join in with the work. You might imagine that such a policy of infiltration could never be used against you, but it could. It was used against me many times when I ran my own law firm for 13 years.

I set it up because I believe God wanted there to be a law firm which He could use, in many different ways, to achieve His purposes. I needed 100% ownership so that I could be free to run it in His way, and to make it entirely available to Him to use in any way He wished. In my previous law firm I was only a one third owner, so I was not free to do whatever I wanted. I had to take note of the wishes of the other equity partners. Therefore setting up that new firm had a significant spiritual purpose. The demons knew that too and were determined to resist me.

What I did not realise for quite some time was that one of their main tactics was to bring in new staff, of their choosing, to work in my firm. Those employees, whom they planted in my firm, could sabotage what I was doing, waste my time, and undermine me. So, one after another, the demons guided wicked people to apply to join my firm and helped them to get in. They then became an ongoing thorn in my side for 13 years. One by one, I realised what these staff were doing and got rid of them. But, one by one, replacements came in to carry on the disruption.

In the end, I got far more effective at spotting such people at interview stage and weeding them out. If that failed, I got rid of them earlier and earlier, preferably while they were still on trial/probation. I would have done better if I had had the level of discernment that Zerubbabel had, so as to prevent them getting in. But I didn't, at least not at the time. However, those years of difficulty had a redemptive purpose, which God was able to use. The stream of wicked employees who got into my firm gave me a host of experiences and lessons which I was able to use in writing this book.

Without them I couldn't have done it. Then others wouldn't have had the chance to learn from my mistakes. The enemies of Zerubbabel did not give in either, or stop trying to oppose him. When infiltration failed they tried instead to discourage, frustrate and intimidate the workers from the outside. These same policies will be used against you, if you are a genuine Christian. The demons will ensure that every follower of Jesus is opposed in these ways. There are so many wicked people for them to choose from that they do not find it difficult to bring them into your life, to become your opponents.

The Devil has no shortage of staff. Therefore this is a major part of the demons' approach in opposing us. That being so, be on the lookout for such people and never yield to them. What Zerubbabel did to resist the wicked may seem obvious to us now, as we read about him in the Bible. But most of us, when faced with such obstacles, would just give in and stop trying. Zerubbabel resumed the rebuilding work, even while the opposition was ongoing, whereas many of us would wait until there was no opposition at all before starting again.

That approach won't work because the things that arouse the greatest opposition are the very things that God most wants to be done. Therefore, never make the absence of opposition a pre-condition to being willing to do something, or to try again. The absence of opposition is actually a sign that you are *not* doing what God wants, rather than that you are, because God's will is always opposed by the Devil, the demons and the wicked.

When the work was resumed, Tattenai the Governor told King Darius, hoping that he would stop the work. But Zerubbabel was bold and stood his ground. He lobbied King Darius and told him that a decree had been made years earlier, by King Cyrus, which had authorised the work to be done. Zerubbabel was in some danger for defying the order, but he bravely pointed out the earlier decree

and carried on. King Darius searched to see if any such decree existed, and when it was found, ordered the work to be resumed. So, the lies of the wicked rebounded on them. Zerubbabel was not only permitted to continue building, but got the support of King Darius as well:

¹³Then, according to the word sent by Darius the king, Tat'tenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, She'thar-boz'enai, and their associates did with all diligence what Darius the king had ordered. ¹⁴And the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechari'ah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Ar-ta-xerx'es king of Persia; ¹⁵and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Ezra 6:13-15 (RSV)

Zerubbabel faced the same opposition that we all face, albeit on a larger scale. The wicked will use all of those tactics against us if we try to do God's work. It is not a sign that we are on the wrong track. Their hostility actually shows that we are on the *right track*. Opposition is not our cue to stop, slow down or compromise. Be encouraged by it because it shows that what you are doing is worthy of opposition. That is a good sign, and even a compliment. Therefore expect such opponents to arise, and to use all the same tactics as were used against Zerubbabel. Don't be surprised by anything they do.

Neither should you be discouraged when they achieve, or appear to achieve, some successes in slowing you down. It is all part of the game and is fully to be expected. It is also part of the process that God uses to train, build, strengthen and educate you. The wicked people who try to oppose us are often the very people whom God is using to develop in us the skills needed to become overcomers. So, in dealing with the wicked, we have the opportunity to grow in boldness, bravery and courage. Accordingly, even their opposition can be turned to our own advantage, at least in the longer term.

Nehemiah is another model for us in how to deal with the wicked.

Nehemiah faced similar opposition when he set about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He was given permission to do so by King Artaxerxes, but when he started he was opposed by two more wicked men, Sanballat and Tobiah, who were determined to stop the work:

¹⁷Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer disgrace." ¹⁸And I told them of the hand of my God which had been upon me for good, and also of the words which the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work. ¹⁹But when Sanbal'lat the Hor'onite and Tobi'ah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they derided us and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

Nehemiah 2:17-19 (RSV)

However, Nehemiah was equally determined that the work should not be stopped, so he responded boldly:

Then I replied to them, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build; but you have no portion or right or memorial in Jerusalem."

Nehemiah 2:20 (RSV)

The work was progressing, but Sanballat and Tobiah used every possible scheme to stop it, starting with ridicule and discouragement:

¹Now when Sanbal'lat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he ridiculed the Jews. ² And he said in the presence of his brethren and of the army of Samar'ia, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" ³ Tobi'ah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!"

Nehemiah 4:1-3 (RSV)

Nehemiah responded with 'imprecatory prayer' *against* his enemies (see chapter 26 below). Note how bluntly and fiercely Nehemiah prays for God to intervene and to oppose his enemies:

⁴Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn back their taunt upon their own heads, and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. ⁵ Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from thy sight; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

Nehemiah 4:4-5 (RSV)

Then, having prayed, and regardless of the opposition, Nehemiah and his men got back on with the work:

So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to half its height. For the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah 4:6 (RSV)

Sanballat and Tobiah did not stop there. They plotted to attack the workers, to force them to stop:

⁷But when Sanbal'lat and Tobi'ah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ash'dodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry; ⁸and they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

Nehemiah 4:7-8 (RSV)

Nehemiah refused to let these plots stop him, or even slow him down. He prayed again for God's help against these enemies. But, at the same time, he also took practical steps to prepare to fight to defend the wall:

¹³So in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in open places, I stationed the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

Nehemiah 4:13 (RSV)

Nehemiah and his men also remained vigilant and were ready at all times to resist any attack, even while they carried on rebuilding the wall:

¹⁵When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. ¹⁶From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail; and the leaders stood behind all the house of Judah, ¹⁷who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were laden in such a way that each with one hand labored on the work and with the other held his weapon.

Nehemiah 4:15-17 (RSV)

Even then Sanballat and Tobiah did not give up. When they saw that the workers on the walls were armed and ready to fight, they tried a different tactic. They repeatedly attempted to lure Nehemiah into coming to meet them in a village, some distance away from the wall, so they could attack him when he was isolated, away from his supporters:

¹Now when it was reported to Sanbal'lat and Tobi'ah and to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), ² Sanbal'lat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

Nehemiah 6:1-2 (RSV)

Again, Nehemiah discerned their sinister intentions and refused to meet them:

³And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" ⁴And they sent to me four times in this way and I answered them in the same manner.

Nehemiah 6:3-4 (RSV)

When that tactic failed Sanballat and Tobiah tried another. They wrote an open letter, which they let Nehemiah see, in which they falsely alleged that he intended to rebel against the King (who was occupying Israel) and that Nehemiah was aiming to set himself up as King. They showed this letter to Nehemiah and threatened to give it to the King. They hoped that threat would intimidate him:

⁵In the same way Sanbal'lat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. ⁶In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall; and you wish to become their king, according to this report. ⁷And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now it will be reported to the king according to these words. So now come, and let us take counsel together."

Nehemiah 6:5-7 (RSV)

The likelihood is that they never actually intended to send that letter to the King. Had they done so, and the King had learned of the lies it contained, they would have been in trouble themselves. They were bluffing and their real aim was just to intimidate Nehemiah. But it didn't work. He carried on with the work and renewed his prayer for God's help:

⁸Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind." ⁹For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen thou my hands.

Nehemiah 6:8-9 (RSV)

After that trick failed a man called Shemaiah tried to intimidate Nehemiah by telling him that men would come at night to kill him. It was a lie and was meant to scare Nehemiah and to get him to hide himself in the Temple instead of doing God's work. The demons and the wicked are well aware of the power of fear to paralyse us. They will use it against you, hoping you will become so afraid of real or imagined dangers that you will shrink back from doing God's work. But Nehemiah refused to be diverted. He also discerned that Shemaiah's words were lies anyway:

¹⁰Now when I went into the house of Shemai'ah the son of Delai'ah, son of Mehet'abel, who was shut up, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple; for they are coming to kill you, at night they are coming to kill you." ¹¹But I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in." ¹²And I understood, and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobi'ah and Sanbal'lat had hired him. ¹³For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me an evil name, in order to taunt me.

Nehemiah 6:10-13 (RSV)

Nehemiah also prayed that God would act in response to the evil things which Sanballat, Tobiah and others had been doing. Most Christians spend little or no time even praying *about*, let alone *against*,

the wicked. It does not occur to most of us to do so, or if it does, it is assumed to be inappropriate. But Nehemiah didn't think so. He called on God to remember their deeds against them. He was effectively asking for God's judgment upon them. I discuss this practice, which is called 'imprecatory prayer', in Chapter 26:

¹⁴Remember Tobi'ah and Sanbal'lat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess No-adi'ah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

Nehemiah 6:14 (RSV)

Eventually the wall was finished. When the wicked saw that, it was their turn to be afraid:

¹⁵So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations round about us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Nehemiah 6:15-16 (RSV)

Even then, the wicked did not stop trying to obstruct and sabotage the work. Nehemiah discovered that Tobiah had got himself a room within the Temple. He got it from Eliashib, a priest, who must have been lied to, bribed or otherwise induced to give him that room. Tobiah wanted it so that he could continue to undermine the work, even from within the Temple. As the wicked so frequently do, he had found a way to infiltrate God's people and to get himself inside their group, so that he could sabotage things from within:

⁴Now before this, Eli'ashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was connected with Tobi'ah, ⁵prepared for Tobi'ah a large chamber where they had previously put the cereal offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. ⁶While this was taking place I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Ar-ta-xerx'es king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king ⁷ and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eli'ashib had done for Tobi'ah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

Nehemiah 13:4-7 (RSV)

Nehemiah did not hesitate because he realised the harm that Tobiah could do from that strategic vantage point. He therefore threw him straight out. Christians are often too wet to take decisive action against the wicked, and too "nice" to confront people. It is assumed that it "wouldn't be the Christian thing to do". That is misguided, woolly-minded nonsense. We *are* commanded to be kind and gentle, at the right times, and with the right people. However, there is no command to be 'nice'. It isn't even a biblical word.

The naïve and misguided desire to be nice will cause you to do the wrong things, and to fail to do the right things, or to fulfil your duty, when dealing with the wicked. Therefore don't think in those unbiblical terms. Be godly, righteous, holy and bold. Be kind, patient and generous too. But don't be *nice!* Many Christians also fear the wicked and worry that decisive action might antagonise them. So they look the other way, avoid confrontation, and let the wicked get away with things. That was not Nehemiah's approach. He took direct action to remove the wicked and their possessions too:

⁸And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobi'ah out of the chamber. ⁹Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers; and I brought back thither the vessels of the house of God, with the cereal offering and the frankincense.

Nehemiah 13:8-9 (RSV)

Mordecai is another model for us in terms of how to deal with the wicked.

Another man who stood up to wicked men was Mordecai, the cousin of Queen Esther. We first see him in action when he discovers that two of the King's advisers are plotting against the King. Mordecai tells Queen Esther and she tells the King:

²¹ And in those days, as Mor'decai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasu-e'rus. ²² And this came to the knowledge of Mor'decai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mor'decai. ²³ When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the Book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king.

Esther 2:21-23 (RSV)

This intervention led to the two traitors being caught and executed. Some Christians would feel squeamish about reporting a person to the police, or to their employer, because it may get that person into trouble or lose them their job. But that was not how Mordecai saw it and neither should we. That is not to say that we should always go running to our employer, or to the police, reporting every little thing that we see or hear about. However, where there is some significant wrongdoing, we need to be guided by our conscience, and by wisdom, as to whether to report it and even to give evidence.

Vastly more crimes could be detected and prosecuted, and a lot of workplace misconduct stopped, if more people were willing to speak up as Mordecai did. Mordecai was later used by God, alongside his cousin, to defeat Haman, a powerful but wicked official working for King Ahasuerus. When Haman was promoted to the highest place in the service of the King he wanted everyone to bow to him. But Mordecai was not intimidated and refused to degrade himself, or to be dominated:

¹After these things King Ahasu-e'rus promoted Haman the Ag'agite, the son of Hammeda'tha, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. ² And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and did obeisance to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mor'decai did not bow down or do obeisance.

Esther 3:1-2 (RSV)

It was soon noticed that Mordecai would not bow down to Haman. Therefore the supporters of Haman tried again to intimidate him by falsely implying that the King had commanded everyone to bow. In fact, there is nothing to indicate that the King ever made any such order. It was purely Haman's own doing. Mordecai would have realised that they were just followers of Haman, seeking to ingratiate themselves to him. Such acolytes, or 'groupies', always surround powerful men and they will do you harm if it improves their own standing:

³Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mor'decai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" ⁴And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mor'decai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew.

Esther 3:3-4 (RSV)

When Haman heard that Mordecai would not bow to him he was furious. He resolved to kill not only Mordecai, but the entire Hebrew race as well. That vicious response gives you the measure of the man. It is no coincidence that he had the same idea as Hitler. It came from the same satanic source. Haman then lied to the King and manipulated him into giving an order that all Jewish people should be put to death, throughout the entire Empire:

¹³Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month,

which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. ¹⁴A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day.

Esther 3:13-14 (RSV)

Mordecai was appalled, but he still did not give in. Neither did he remain passive. He actively set about seeking to get the order revoked, with the aid of his cousin, the Queen. She agreed to help, even though it would put her own life in danger. Exposing Haman required her to approach the King uninvited, for which the penalty could be death. Meanwhile, Haman built a gallows on which he intended to have Mordecai hanged. At a private dinner with the King, Queen Esther chose her moment to reveal Haman's wickedness to him, despite the danger to herself:

¹So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ²And on the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." ³Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. ⁴For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." ⁵Then King Ahasu-e'rus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, that would presume to do this?" ⁶And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was in terror before the king and the queen.

⁷And the king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. ⁸And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was; and the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. ⁹Then said Harbo'na, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, "Moreover, the gallows which Haman has prepared for Mor'decai, whose word saved the king, is standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high." ¹⁰And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mor'decai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Esther 7:1-10 (RSV)

Most Christians today would be too scared to clash with someone as wicked as Haman. They would either be passive and do nothing at all, or they would seek a compromise. But Mordecai and Esther tackled him head on, and they won.

Never pander to the wicked or try to appease them. They will only despise you for doing so.

When dealing with the wise and the simple, and sometimes even fools, it is possible to win their cooperation by offering compromises. In a situation of tension or conflict gracious offers, and a willingness to give up rights, can sometimes be the right things to do. With decent people a conciliatory approach can produce an equivalent response, because they can see your own concessions in the right way. However, when dealing with the wicked, the same rules do not apply.

Any concessions on your part will be misunderstood and abused, as they can only be seen as weakness. Instead of matching your decency and graciousness, they will just demand even more from you. Therefore, when engaging in any negotiation we need, first of all, to discern what type of person or group we are dealing with, because they each react in very different ways.

Otherwise we are likely to make serious errors and be badly misunderstood if we compromise or offer any leeway. When dealing with someone whom you believe to be wicked, the only appropriate response is to *resist them firmly*. Give no ground and make no concessions. Showing any kind of favour to them will not cause them to improve their behaviour. Neither will they give you any favour in return. That is simply not how the wicked operate:

If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals perversely and does not see the majesty of the LORD.

Isaiah 26:10 (RSV)

Therefore a wise person will choose to resist the wicked, wherever he is able to do so:

***A wise king winnows the wicked,
and drives the wheel over them
Proverbs 20:26 (RSV)***

Likewise, don't ever excuse the wicked, or speak well of them in any way. To do so would not only be ineffective, but wrong. Instead, we should rebuke them:

***He who says to the wicked, "You are innocent,"
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations;
Proverbs 24:24 (RSV)***

In the past I have tried to appease, or cooperate with, people who later turned out to be wicked. I hoped that if I was accommodating with them, they would reciprocate. But they never did. That said, on those occasions, I was often not aware at the time that they were wicked, mainly because I did not even ask myself what they were.

The policy of appeasing Adolf Hitler in the 1930s

The most famous example of the folly of appeasing the wicked is the way the pre-war governments of Stanley Baldwin, and then Neville Chamberlain, handled Hitler. When he came to power, in January 1933, Hitler's intentions and beliefs were already well-known. He had set them out with unmistakable clarity in his autobiography and political manifesto, '*Mein Kampf*'. Thus there was no excuse for anybody not realising how evil he was, or what he intended to do. The real problem was that our leaders *chose* not to see what Hitler really was, because they *did not want to take action*.

That reluctance to act was because that generation of politicians had served in World War One themselves, or had lost sons and relatives as part of its vast casualty figures. Thus it was understandable that they were desperate to avoid even the possibility of starting another war. They allowed their fear, and their intense desire for peace, to cloud their judgment until they could not, *or would not*, see the plain facts. They chose to believe what they *wanted* to believe, rather than face reality. Therefore, year after year, the British Government gave way to Hitler and appeased him.

On each occasion they convinced themselves that by giving way to Hitler, "*just this once*", or "*for one last time*", they were avoiding war. In fact, they were doing the exact opposite. They were making war inevitable, and on a vastly larger scale than if they had acted earlier. They therefore let Hitler get away with repeated and blatant breaches of the terms of the Versailles Treaty. In particular, they allowed him to build up his armed forces, even his air force, not only to equal our own, but to be far larger. They also allowed him to take territory in the Rhineland, Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Every time, they hoped it would be the last demand Hitler would ever make. This went on until Hitler eventually invaded Poland and shattered the remaining illusions of the appeasers. It exposed their naïve policy for the folly that it always was. It was only at the end of August 1939, when it was far too late, that their eyes opened at last and they belatedly stood up to him. But, by then, Germany's armed forces were much stronger than ours, because we had done so little even to rearm ourselves between 1933 and 1939, let alone to stop Hitler rearming Germany.

In fairness, Baldwin and Chamberlain had the best of motives. Their error was that they forgot, or never realised, *or never admitted to themselves*, the nature of the man they were dealing with. Had we

been in a commercial dispute with decent nations like Holland, Australia or Norway, then diplomacy and concessions would have made sense. Such magnanimous policies may well have produced a good response. The problem was we were not dealing with such nations, but with a wicked man, surrounded by other wicked men. Our leaders should have seen the reality and acted accordingly.

What makes it even sadder is that if they had done, war could so easily have been avoided. Hitler would have backed down if he had been stood up to. Even if he hadn't, he would have been overthrown. The German generals had already formed a plot to overthrow Hitler if Britain and France issued an ultimatum over Czechoslovakia. Moreover, we were *actually told of this plot in advance*. Therefore, if only we had shown some backbone and stood up to Hitler, even as late as 1938, he would have been deposed by his own generals and war could have been avoided.

Even if Hitler had not been overthrown, and a war actually began, Britain and France combined could possibly have defeated Germany, even as late as 1938. It takes a long time to re-arm, even if you are Adolf Hitler. The rate of increase in the output of munitions factories and the training of armed forces starts slowly, with only small returns in the early years, but then goes up exponentially. It can double or treble in the later years of the expansion programme. 1938-39 was such a turning point, when Germany's armed strength shot up hugely and they suddenly became stronger than France and Britain combined.

Yet, no ultimatum was issued and war was not declared, even when Czechoslovakia was entirely overrun. The tragedy is that if we had fought earlier, or even threatened to do so, Hitler could have been quickly crushed and removed from office in 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937 and even 1938. However, by 1939, Germany had become too strong for us. From that point on, only a full scale world war would suffice to overcome Germany. By misguidedly appeasing that wicked man, all we achieved was to greatly lengthen and enlarge the war that followed.

The very bloodbath that Chamberlain and Baldwin had sought to prevent was actually made more likely by their policies. In the end, it became inevitable. The same principle applies, on a smaller scale, in our own dealings with other people at work, or in our churches. We should be willing to consider giving way to the wise and the simple, and sometimes even to fools. With them, it may be right to give ground and make concessions. However, when dealing with a wicked person, or a wicked group, we should resist and *make no concessions whatsoever*.

Counter-intuitively, being firm and strong is the only way to win the respect of the wicked. It gets you *less* trouble from them, not more. Appeasing them will only ever cause them to behave in even worse ways. They never put limits on themselves, so they will keep on going farther and farther until they are eventually stopped by somebody else. It is pointless expecting the wicked to restrain themselves, or to recognise any ethical boundaries. They never have and they never will. You have to do it for them by drawing a line in the sand, past which you will not let them go.

The starting point is to *gauge the nature* of the person you are dealing with, to decide what *category they belong to*. Until you do that, you cannot know how to respond to them, i.e. whether diplomacy can, or cannot, be used. That is the approach we need to take as a manager or boss if we are trying to deal with workplace bullying. That said, most employers just turn a blind eye to it. They don't really care about it and can't be bothered with the time and paperwork that is involved in confronting it. So they just let it go on and do little or nothing about it.

I always felt it was my duty to confront all such misbehaviour and to tackle all bullies and wrongdoers head on. Maybe that was partly due to my nature and also to my police background. My aim was to get the bullies out of the firm as quickly as I could, consistent with obeying the law and thoroughly checking all the evidence to make sure it was reliable. That is a more realistic example of what resisting the wicked might mean, in practice, for most of us. In my own position, as an employer, I never had to use any physical force to restrain or apprehend anybody.

Nonetheless, the contest against the wicked at work was entirely real. Sometimes it required a great deal of time, effort, courage, and persistence. Alternatively, even if you are not in a managerial role, resisting the wicked could still mean making yourself into an obstacle to them. You would just go about it in different ways. For example, if there is some kind of fraud at your workplace, involving theft or falsifying records etc, you could just refuse to go along with it. By so doing, you could make yourself into a ‘road block’ in the way of their plans.

You could even go further and report them to management, if that is possible and appropriate, and if you have a reasonable basis for suspecting them. In lots of other ways too you could refuse to join in with the things that the wicked do, or to cooperate with them. Such action or inaction on your part, can, even by itself, stop something evil from happening. It can also embolden others to resist too. They might not have the courage to be the first, or to do it alone. But they could be brave enough to join in, if you lead the way.

That said, you also need to be realistic and not expect much from others when it comes to courage. Most people have very little, if any, and think only of self-preservation. They will not take any risks merely to do good, though many will take risks in order to do evil. Therefore, you are likely to be entirely on your own if you choose to tackle a person at work, or even in a church. You need to be fully aware of that fact and not be under any illusions at all about what level of support you can expect to receive from others.

An occasion when I had to stand up to a wealthy and powerful client

An example of how a Christian can stop wrongdoing, even single-handedly, was something which happened when I was a young solicitor. I was employed in a large law firm, in the commercial litigation department, and was acting on a case for a company which was being sued for a major sum. We reached the stage where our client had to disclose a list of all relevant documents that had anything to do with the case, as per the Court’s standard directions. Both sides had a legal duty to reveal these, regardless of whether they supported or contradicted their own case.

The Managing Director of the client company dropped off a large box of documents at our office for me to look through. My job was to produce a ‘List of Documents’ on their behalf prior to disclosing them. When I read through the documents I found one which was very damaging to our own client’s case. Nobody outside of their company had ever seen it. I immediately saw that it would harm our client’s case and asked the Managing Director to come in to see me. I told him the document was very damaging, but that we still had a duty to disclose it.

It meant he would have to settle the claim far less favourably than he had hoped, because it proved that his company was largely in the wrong. He then told me to *get rid* of this document, but I said I couldn’t do that. Therefore he said he would destroy it himself. I told him he couldn’t do that either, as failing to disclose it would have been fraud. We would be lying to the opponent about our own documents, and about the merits of our case. He then got angry and said that if I disclosed it he would speak to the Senior Partner of the firm I was working for, who was a friend of his.

He warned me that he could do me a lot of damage if I didn’t stop “being difficult”. It was intimidating, because he was in his fifties, whereas I was an employed solicitor in my twenties. I also knew that he had the power to damage my career. However, I stuck to my position and told him he was free to complain to the Senior Partner. So that is what he did and I was summoned to go to his office. I felt afraid as I walked the stairs to his room but, to my surprise, he supported me. He told the Client that he had to comply with the Court’s directions and that I was only doing my job.

So I survived. The point, however, is that the stand I took prevented our client from winning its case by deception, i.e. by hiding relevant documents which supported the other side's case. It therefore prevented the other side from being defrauded. It was my duty to defend my own client, and to present its case to the best of my ability. However, that duty does not extend to helping my client to deceive the Court and its opponent. So, my stand prevented an evil being done and I feel God was pleased with me for being resolute, even when faced with threats.

Even one Christian acting alone, if he is willing to take a stand, can prevent a lot of wickedness.

A heavy weight of responsibility has been laid upon each of us. Just one courageous and resolute Christian can prevent evil from triumphing within a church or workplace. So, we must never give way or betray those who need our help. God will hold us accountable for what we do, or fail to do:

*¹⁰If you faint in the day of adversity,
your strength is small.*

*¹¹Rescue those who are being taken away to death;
hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.*

*¹² If you say, "Behold, we did not know this,"
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,
and will he not requite man according to his work?*

Proverbs 24:10-12 (RSV)

God has sometimes used me to take a stand for him. Though only small, they were things which God wanted me to do and my actions pleased Him. One example was when I was a young police officer and saw a newsagent's shop with some graphic pornographic magazines on full display. I told him to remove them as they were indecent, contrary to The Indecent Displays (Control) Act 1981. He did so, but then spoke to my Inspector, who was a friend of his. Instead of supporting me, the Inspector told me that he wanted the newsagent "*left alone*" and told him that he could put the magazines back on display.

To my surprise, he didn't. For some reason, he listened to me and never put them back. That little victory didn't change the world, but it made a difference in one small newsagent's shop for years afterwards. I think God was pleased by what I did and that it was He who prompted me to do it in the first place. God is not only interested in those few extraordinary people who can change the course of history for whole nations. They are rare and we are unlikely ever to be in that league. But every individual has the capacity to alter the course of events *within his own family, workplace or church*.

You don't need massive faith, strength or ability to do that. God will create small opportunities for each of us to take a stand and make a difference at a local level. We must never despise that responsibility, or consider it insignificant. God will judge each of us for what we do, or don't do, in our small situations, just as seriously as He will judge the great and powerful people for how they handle their major problems. There is no difference in God's eyes. We are all equally accountable, *in relative terms*, whatever level we are at in terms of power and authority.

The time we got a blasphemous film, "The Last Temptation of Christ", banned from our town

Another example was some years later when I was training to be a solicitor. At that time I was actively involved in the Labour Party, though I later moved to the Conservative Party. A film came out called '*The Last Temptation of Christ*'. It was awfully blasphemous and portrayed Christ on the cross having impure thoughts about having sex with Mary Magdalene! When I heard about it I felt appalled and I knew I had to do something. I then heard of a power for local councils to stop a film being shown in their area if they considered it unsuitable.

We had very little time, so I formed a small group and we stood in the town centre getting signatures for a petition. I wrote to the local newspaper too. It caused controversy, and I got a lot of criticism in the letters page. Yet we got over 1000 signatures in a few days. I then put that before the Borough Council and asked them to stop the film being shown in our cinema. To my surprise, they voted (narrowly) to do so. So, though it went all over the world, that vile film never came to our town.

It was only a small victory, but I felt that Jesus' heart was touched that I was willing to stand up for Him and face abuse for His sake. It prevented a blasphemous film from being shown, at least in one small town. And it was all because one apparently insignificant person took action and got the ball rolling. Strangely, the worst opposition and criticism was not from atheists, but from liberal Christians, and especially church leaders. It was not just in terms of receiving active opposition that I felt let down by many church people, but also in their passivity and lack of support.

Many kept silent whom I had imagined would help me and speak up for our campaign. In particular, not even one church leader, of any denomination, chose to be publicly identified with me. None of them wrote to the newspaper to support me, or to respond to those who were writing letters criticising the campaign and insulting me. They did not even send me an encouraging word or letter. Yet over 1000 ordinary people were willing to help, including a lot of sincere Christians. That said, many of those who were appalled by the idea of the film were actually non-Christians.

I actually got better support in the Labour Party than from church leaders, all of whom kept their heads down. By contrast, although a group of Labour Party members opposed me, and asked for a debate on the issue, many others spoke up openly in support of me. Also, later that year, I was elected to be the constituency's delegate to the national Labour Party conference. So, even from them, I received a small reward. Those are the ways in which Jesus can help us, and even honour us, when we take a stand for Him and are willing to receive criticism and abuse for His sake.

One man's letter of complaint caused a major company to withdraw a blasphemous card.

When I was a two year qualified solicitor, a major commercial client, which sold greetings cards, received a single letter of complaint from a young man. He had seen a card in one of their shops which was ridiculing Jesus. It was passed to our law firm for advice and my boss gave it to me to deal with. I advised the client that there was no breach of any law, either civil or criminal, and that they could not be sued or prosecuted. I told them the truth about their strong legal position, but I still recommended withdrawal of the card for a number of public relations and commercial reasons.

To my surprise, the client company agreed and decided that the card should no longer be made or sold. Most of the credit belongs to the young man who wrote in. He was the only person in the whole country who had bothered to complain. But it was also a little victory for me. God used both him and me, despite our smallness and lack of resources, because we were each *willing to speak up*. It shows how any of us, however insignificant we may seem to be, can make a disproportionately large difference if we are willing to be criticised and to risk abuse for the sake of Jesus' name.

How one young mother managed to get Walmart and other large chains to cover up pornographic magazines so that children wouldn't be able to see them

I recently heard an interview online with a young housewife. She was able, all by herself, to get Walmart, and some other large chains, to change their policies on the display of pornographic magazines. This was done without any large scale, coordinated campaign. It was just her, with God's help. It began when she went into a shop and saw the magazines displayed at a child's eye line, clearly visible to them. Instead of doing nothing, like thousands of other customers had, she asked to speak to the manager and explained politely why this was a problem.

This was later escalated to the senior management of Walmart and, to her surprise, they agreed with her. They covered up all the magazines in *all of their stores*, not just the one she went into. She also got similar responses from other chains. Therefore, this one woman, who had no elected position, was able to achieve more than any senators or Congressmen had achieved. And it was all because she cared enough to get involved and was brave enough to speak up, even by herself.

CHAPTER 23

SOME FURTHER ADVICE ON DEALING WITH THE WICKED, WHETHER IN CHURCHES OR IN THE WORLD

²¹ You shall not be in dread of them; for the Lord your God is in the midst of you, a great and terrible God.

Deuteronomy 7:21 (RSV)

*Righteousness guards him whose way is upright,
but sin overthrows the wicked.*

Proverbs 13:6 (RSV)

*I am not afraid of ten thousands of people
who have set themselves against me round about.*

Psalm 3:6 (RSV)

*¹¹ But let all who take refuge in thee rejoice,
let them ever sing for joy;
and do thou defend them,
that those who love thy name may exult in thee.*

*¹² For thou dost bless the righteous, O Lord;
thou dost cover him with favour as with a shield.*

Psalm 5:11-12 (RSV)

*⁶ Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with the saving might of his right hand.*

*⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*

*⁸ They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand upright.*

Psalm 20:6-8 (ESV)

Don't try to be "nicer than God", such that you fail to deal firmly with evil people.

When tackling the wicked, many Christians do not have the stomach to sack a person, or to discipline or expel a church member. Some don't like taking decisive action which might upset someone. Or they feel squeamish about tackling a wrongdoer out of a misguided desire to be 'nice'. A boss or church leader who won't act decisively to sack or demote a worker, or to remove a disruptive or toxic church member, is letting down the present and future victims of that wrongdoer. Those innocent people will then have to continue to suffer at his hands, all because that boss or leader wanted to be 'nice'.

There is a time and a place for showing grace and mercy to those with whom we are dealing. However, that time is only *after* you have come to a conclusion as to what they are, what they did, and whether they are wicked. If you have concluded that they are wicked, then you need to have the 'killer-instinct'. That means you have to be willing to get rid of a person, tell them to leave, sack them, or otherwise confront them. At a lower level, it may involve just telling a person that their attitude or behaviour is unacceptable.

Or it may just mean saying a firm "No" to a domineering person who is trying to control or manipulate others who are unable to speak up for themselves. Those are situations which the vast

majority of us don't want to face up to. Indeed, what sane person would ever *want* to do such things? They are inherently difficult, unpleasant and stressful. Even so, there are times when such things have simply got to be done. You need to recognise those situations and take bold, decisive action when it is right to do so.

That said, when a person says that taking firm action would not be 'nice', what they often really mean is just that they are afraid to do it. In that case, misguided niceness is not actually the problem. It is just being used as a pretext to disguise the person's real reason, which is cowardice. That is a feature which very few people will openly admit to. Therefore they will often use such phrases rather than say what they really mean, which is simply that they were too scared to act.

You must also consider the welfare of the future people, whom you can't see, and who are not in the room. Don't focus solely on the welfare of the person you are now tackling.

Sometimes misguided niceness really is the issue, and is not just a pretext to hide cowardice. It can result in muddled thinking and a failure to recognise the consequences of *not* confronting someone. The 'nice' manager or leader can see how the person sitting across the table would be upset, and even damaged, by being sacked or expelled. They can easily take him into account and be aware of his feelings. But they can't see, or don't take account of, the suffering that will be endured by *others* if that person is *not tackled*. Such people are hard to imagine because they are not there in the room.

The actual, tangible person, who is present in the room, right now, is so much easier to take into account than imagined, hypothetical future people. Nevertheless, you must force yourself to consider their needs, even if they haven't yet joined the company, or the church, or haven't even been born. Those invisible people need you too. You are also just as responsible for their welfare as for the man sitting opposite you, whom you are tempted to let off the hook. In other words, you are accountable to God for the wrongdoer's *future* victims and your decisions need to take them into account as well.

King Ahab angered God by sparing the life of a wicked man, whom God had wanted him to destroy.

King Ahab of Israel angered God by sparing the life of Ben-hadad, the wicked King of Syria, whom God had wanted Ahab to destroy. Ben-hadad had invaded before and been defeated, but had escaped to fight another day. Later, when Ben-hadad was planning to attack again, God sent a prophet to warn King Ahab because God wanted him to be utterly defeated. However, Ben-hadad was allowed to flee again, for a second time. God had wanted King Ahab to execute him because he was wicked and a menace to Israel. But Ahab foolishly let him go:

³¹ And his servants said to him, "Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings; let us put sackcloth on our loins and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life."³² So they girded sackcloth on their loins, and put ropes on their heads, and went to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-ha'dad says, 'Pray, let me live.'" And he said, "Does he still live? He is my brother."³³ Now the men were watching for an omen, and they quickly took it up from him and said, "Yes, your brother Ben-ha'dad." Then he said, "Go and bring him." Then Ben-ha'dad came forth to him; and he caused him to come up into the chariot.³⁴ And Ben-ha'dad said to him, "The cities which my father took from your father I will restore; and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samar'ia." And Ahab said, "I will let you go on these terms." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

1 Kings 20:31-34 (RSV)

Ahab's decision angered God, as He had no wish to show any mercy to Ben-Hadad. So, God again sent a prophet to rebuke King Ahab for letting him go and to say that he was going to have to pay for it with his own life:

And he said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'"

1 Kings 20:42 (RSV)

We need to learn from King Ahab's error. We must not show mercy in situations where God doesn't want us to. As with all things, there is a time to be merciful and a time not to be. We need to recognise when it is the latter and have the courage to "press in for the kill". To fail to deal with the wicked in the way that God wants you to is sin, whatever your reasons might be.

When you tackle the wicked you must be strong and see it right through to the end. They have to be faced down and completely defeated.

If you want to tackle the wicked you will also have to persevere. The battles don't end quickly, so you must grit your teeth and keep going for as long as it takes. They have to be 'faced down' and shown that you won't blink, and will never stop, until they have been defeated. They don't expect you to have that kind of resolve, because so few people do. Most of the wicked have had experiences whereby someone began to resist them, but quickly gave up, as soon as things got difficult or dangerous.

They therefore expect more of the same weakness and spinelessness from you. So surprise them by resolving now that you will not stop until they have been defeated and that you will never, ever concede defeat, however many setbacks you may face along the way. You must show the same warlike spirit that the Israelites were told to show when fighting the Canaanites. Also, be willing to be severe, *and even ruthless*, when you need to be, i.e. when it is right to be so:

¹"When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Gir'gashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites, seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves, ² and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.

Deuteronomy 7:1-2 (RSV)

When God appointed Saul as King of Israel he told him, through the prophet Samuel, that he must be very severe with the Amalekites and "utterly destroy them". God knew that that was necessary:

¹And Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of the Lord. ² Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish what Am'alek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. ³ Now go and smite Am'alek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.'"

1 Samuel 15:1-3 (RSV)

Saul's orders were clear, but he did not obey them fully. In particular he did not kill Agag, the King of the Amalekites. This angered God, because He knew that the safety and future welfare of the Israelites required a very hard line to be taken with the Amalekites. Saul's disobedience on this issue led to God removing the kingship from him and transferring it to David. That shows how serious a matter it is to fail to tackle the wicked properly. It fell to Samuel to finish the job on Saul's behalf. He took a sword and killed Agag with it himself:

³² *Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amal’ekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”*³³ *And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal.*

1 Samuel 15:32-33 (RSV)

When tackling the wicked always stay calm, keep your nerve and show absolute resolve. Never panic or let yourself be fazed by them.

It is vital when tackling a wicked person or group to keep your nerve. Never panic or weaken in your resolve, no matter what they try to do to you. The wicked know how hard it is for sincere people to face them down. They will take full advantage of your naivety as well as your fear. Therefore, you must expect to be “got at”. The wicked, and the demons, will try to undermine you, and your evidence. They will also seek to distract you, threaten you and put fear into you. It could be a fear of what they might do to you, or of what others may say.

In my case, it was the fear of making a mistake and accusing the wrong person or doing an injustice. That thought was constantly whispered into my mind. You must expect to feel all of these things, and many more as well. But don’t let any of it faze you. It is all quite normal when you are tackling the wicked. Expect also to be confused and bewildered, and for the evidence to seem incomplete and even contradictory. All of these things will happen because you are being *opposed*. But it is also because you are dealing with a *mixture* of truth and lies, fact and fiction.

Until you become very experienced, these feelings of anxiety and uncertainty will get to you. You will wonder if you’ve got it all wrong, whether you should let it drop, or whether it just isn’t worth the hassle or the risk. Be ready for such feelings, so that you are not caught off-guard. Instead, hold your nerve and keep digging for evidence. Never let the wicked, or the demons in and around them, get you to give up the fight. The very fact that you feel such fear and confusion is actually evidence in itself. It shows that you are on the right lines and that you need to keep going, not give up.

If you weren’t right, then the people and demons who are trying to scramble your thoughts wouldn’t need to bother. So your bewilderment is actually a kind of confirmation and should motivate you to press ahead. When you get more experienced at tackling the wicked you will see how consistent these patterns and methods are. You will get to a point where you actually find encouragement in the very fact that you are being assailed with doubts and fears. You will start to recognise the tactics of the wicked, and of the demons, and to see where it is all coming from.

Resolve never to let yourself be influenced by fear in any of your decisions or actions.

It is widely assumed that when it comes to what we fear we can’t ‘*decide*’ anything, as our emotions are outside our control. It may be true that we cannot entirely get rid of the fear itself. However, it is certainly within our power to decide never to *act upon*, or be *influenced by*, our fear. This must be possible, because the Bible commands us not to fear people, even those who may kill us. The point is we are never commanded to do anything which is outside our control. Thus, we are never told to be tall, but we are commanded not to fear people:

²⁶ *“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”*²⁷ *What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.*²⁸ *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 10:26-28 (ESV)

We can make a decision of our will that, no matter what fear we may be *feeling*, we shall refuse to take it into account when *deciding what to do*. We can resolve now, ahead of time, that even if we do feel fear, we will not let it influence our decision. That is to say we will not allow it to prevent us from taking any action that we would, otherwise, have taken. If you adopt this approach, and make such resolutions before the fear even exists, you will be ready for it. Then, when a fear does arise, you can say to yourself:

“I’m now feeling fear. I’m afraid that if I sack this person, the other staff could be angry with me. Nevertheless, that prospect is irrelevant to the duty I now have to tackle this wrongdoer. Therefore, I refuse to be influenced by that fear in any of my actions or decisions.”

Then just go ahead and do whatever it is that you are afraid of, *even while you are still feeling fear*. This needs to be emphasised because I know, from questioning people, that it is widely believed that nobody can ever be expected to do something if they are afraid. This has been said to me explicitly by various people, and implicitly by even more. There is an unspoken belief that God would never expect us to do a thing if we were afraid to do it. However, that assumption is entirely wrong. We are repeatedly commanded, and expected, to do our duty whether we are afraid or not.

Doing right, obeying God and taking a stand against the wicked, will inevitably lead to trouble. It will be costly, and even dangerous. That may well be frightening, but it is no basis for concluding that we no longer need to do our duty. The wicked are so used to seeing people avoiding a confrontation, due to being paralysed with fear, that they fully expect you to give way to them. Therefore you can surprise them, and throw all their plans into disarray, if you simply stand up to them. They really don’t expect you to do that, because it happens so rarely, as most people are cowards.

That element of surprise when they eventually realise that you are different, and that you won’t yield to their threats, gives you an advantage. That can enable you to confound all their schemes, simply by being brave and immovable under pressure. Therefore use the tactical advantage that the element of surprise can give you when confronting a wicked person. They make plans based on their rational expectations about how the universe works and they then act on those expectations, which are usually correct.

They are therefore relying on your fear, and they intend to use it to get you to back off, compromise, look the other way or alter your evidence. Imagine how bewildering it is when they discover, in the middle of a battle, that their tactics aren’t working and you aren’t diverting from your purpose. It is how a pilot feels when the buttons and levers of his controls suddenly cease to work. Your resolve not to panic and to go ahead, regardless of your fear, can therefore result in the wicked person being seriously caught out, because he was so sure you would buckle under pressure.

In reliance upon your anticipated cowardice, he may have taken other risks, told other lies, made other threats or tampered with other evidence. All of that may then unravel and be exposed, wrecking all of his plans, because of your totally unexpected refusal to give in. The point is that being brave is something you can *decide* to be, as an exercise of your will. Bravery simply means going ahead despite your fear. You can’t decide to be clever, but you can decide to face your fear and to refuse to be influenced by it.

When you tackle the wicked it must be done without losing your temper, being manipulative, grabbing for positions or acting in the flesh.

Overcoming the wicked requires you to achieve several objectives at the same time. You must keep your resolve, refuse to panic and aim to defeat them. But you have to do all that without becoming manipulative or losing your self-control. You can’t let yourself act in the flesh, even though they are doing so. No matter what they do, you must never use their techniques. You have to beat them

without being like them. These multiple objectives, and the limitations thereby placed on you can make the whole task more difficult.

However, the limitations are also a form of guidance. They prevent you from doing things which might bring some short-term advantages, but which would harm you later on. Losing your temper or your self-control would be sinful in itself, but would also leave you wide open to their counter-attacks. It would also cause you to make mistakes, misjudge people, and over-react to events. In many ways the wicked actually want you to lose your temper. It is the next best option for them, if they can't manipulate you, deceive you, or intimidate you into silence.

It's not just the fact of winning that counts. The way in which you win also matters very much to God.

Keeping your self-control and not acting in the flesh also matter because God is watching. He takes a close interest in *what* you do and say, but also in *how* you do and say those things. In other words, God does want you to win, but He is even more concerned that you should win *in the right way*. Imagine you were an athlete up against rivals who cheat by taking performance-enhancing drugs. The answer is not to beat them by taking more drugs, or better drugs, but by training even harder.

Then you can show that you are even capable of beating the people who break the rules. Of course, you can, and should, help the authorities to catch the cheats, but what you can't do is to 'out-cheat' them. Likewise, we must not attempt to 'out-lie' the liars, 'out-manipulate' the manipulators or 'out-revile' the revilers. You must be effective, but by being different from them, not by being the same. Peter spoke of this:

⁹ Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Peter 3:9 (RSV)

Restraint is hard enough in itself, while you are being provoked, but it is even harder if you also have to think about winning the battle. If all we had to do was avoid over-reacting or being carnal, it would be simple. We could just surrender every time and let ourselves be defeated. Conversely, if all we had to do was to win, and we need not be concerned about our methods and motives, that would also be easy. The whole task is made more difficult by the fact that we have to achieve both objectives at the same time. Thus it can take a lot longer to learn how to do all this than we might expect.

CHAPTER 24

THE VITAL NEED FOR RESOLVE AND COURAGE TO PRESS ON, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE UP AGAINST WITCHCRAFT

¹ *Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides for ever.*

² *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
so the Lord is round about his people,
from this time forth and for evermore.*

Psalm 125:1-2 (RSV)

⁹ *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

Joshua 1:9 (RSV)

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

² *When evildoers assail me,
uttering slanders against me,
my adversaries and foes,
they shall stumble and fall.*

³ *Though a host encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.*

Psalm 27:1-3 (RSV)

²⁴ *Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the Lord!*

Psalm 31:24 (ESV)

Moreover Ahith'ophel said to Ab'salom, “Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will set out and pursue David tonight. ² I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged, and throw him into a panic; and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down the king only,

2 Samuel 17:1-2 (RSV)

¹⁶ *And his servants said still more against the Lord God and against his servant Hezeki'ah. ¹⁷ And he wrote letters to cast contempt on the Lord the God of Israel and to speak against him, saying, “Like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezeki'ah will not deliver his people from my hand.” ¹⁸ And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were upon the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city.*

2 Chronicles 32:16-18 (RSV)

¹ *When David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, ² “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man,*

1 Kings 2:1-2 (RSV)

¹³ *Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.*

1 Corinthians 16:13 (RSV)

²² *And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" He answered, "What peace can there be, so long as the harlotries and the sorceries of your mother Jez'ebel are so many?"* ²³ *Then Joram reined about and fled, saying to Ahazi'ah, "Treachery, O Ahazi'ah!"* ²⁴ *And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot.*

2 Kings 9:22-24 (RSV)

Before you tackle a wrongdoer, you may be tortured by feelings of self-doubt and agonise over whether you are "doing the right thing". You must expect all of that and resist it.

Every time I tackle a wrongdoer I am plagued by feelings of doubt beforehand. My mind is bombarded with the thought, or rather the accusation, that I have somehow got it all wrong, or am over-reacting, or doing an injustice. In the early years I was tortured by such doubts, but I learned two facts which made handling the wicked a lot easier. The first is that the accusations and feelings of self-doubt are due to demons whispering into my mind. They want me to abandon my disciplinary procedures, if it is in a work context, or my investigation if it is in a church setting.

The second point is that the very fact that the demons are so eager to stop me enquiring into or tackling a wrongdoer indicates that I am actually on the right road. If I was doing an injustice and was wrongly accusing an innocent person, the demons would be urging me on. At the very least, they would be keeping quiet about it, because any such injustice would suit them perfectly. Therefore, the very fact that I am being hindered, and urged to stop, means that I need to press ahead with even greater determination, and refuse to be deflected from the task.

After you have tackled and removed a wrongdoer you will feel a "yuk factor" plus self-doubt, anxiety and lowness of mood. This is normal, and does not mean you did the wrong thing.

The demonic accusation doesn't end once the wicked person has been tackled or removed. Even then, when you might think it is all over, your mind will still be bombarded. I have learned to expect to get a 'yuk factor' immediately after I have confronted the wicked person. It happens so consistently that I am now ready for it, and better able to withstand it. If you want to avoid being worn down by the process of tackling the wicked, you need to expect this second wave of mental bombardment and learn to recognise it when it comes.

I get dark thoughts and anxious feelings, which swirl around in my mind and emotions. The accusation is whispered into my mind that I have got it all wrong, blamed the wrong person, misunderstood the evidence, or over-reacted to events. The thought is also planted in my mind that there will be trouble as a result of my decision to sack that person, or that people will not understand what I have done, or why, and will blame me for it and disapprove of me.

In part this is an illusion, but it is also partly true, because a lot of people really do misunderstand what I do. They will inevitably misunderstand you too, if you ever try to confront the wicked. That said, the demons will also try to exaggerate your perception of other people's disapproval, thereby further intensifying your lowness of mood. Demons find it especially easy to oppress you if you are unaware of their tricks, or don't believe that they have any part to play at all. It can be very debilitating and you can feel isolated, and lacking in motivation.

There is also a natural feeling of anti-climax that comes after facing any battle, quite apart from the demonic whisperings. The adrenalin switches off and one is left feeling tired, even in purely physical terms. The body itself, after the intensity of the crisis, goes back the other way for a while, as it needs time to recover. So, what I call the 'yuk factor' is this combination of negative thoughts and emotions that one gets after a confrontation with the wicked. That is exactly how Elijah felt after he had defeated the prophets of Baal and Asherah.

Let us join the story just after his victory, when you might expect him to be buzzing with excitement. Instead, he feels tired, depressed, paranoid and lacking in confidence. Queen Jezebel learns of the destruction of her prophets and swears to kill Elijah and she sends a messenger to tell him. Her threat, which is also a curse, strikes fear into Elijah, even after all the heroic things he has done. Indeed, it is probably *because* of what he has just been through that her words are so effective. The battle had drained him of energy, so Jezebel's threat was well timed, from her perspective:

¹Ahab told Jez'ebel all that Eli'jah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jez'ebel sent a messenger to Eli'jah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

1 Kings 19:1-3 (RSV)

Elijah's fear and despondency are so severe he flees and hides in the wilderness and even asks God to let him die:

⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers."

1 Kings 19:4 (RSV)

The way God dealt with Elijah at this time was very practical. He knew the intensity of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual struggle Elijah had faced and was still facing, even after it was over. So God arranged for Elijah to be given food, sleep and encouragement. Those three things are exactly what you need, and in large doses, after you tackle the wicked:

⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, else the journey will be too great for you." ⁸ And he arose, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

1 Kings 19:5-8 (RSV)

However, even after that sleep and food, and the period of time that had passed, Elijah still felt low. He stayed in a cave and we hear him there, expressing how utterly isolated he *feels*. In fact, he's mistaken, or has been demonically deceived, because he is not actually the only one left:

⁹ And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?" ¹⁰ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

1 Kings 19:9-10 (RSV)

God then prescribes a strong dose of encouragement. Firstly, He speaks to him in a series of miraculous events which culminates in Elijah hearing God's still, small voice. After that, God again commissions Elijah with another task, to anoint Hazael as the next King of Syria. God is giving Elijah something practical to do, and also bringing him out of his self-imposed isolation in the cave. God also gives him good news, and puts things in a better perspective, by revealing that He still has 7000 genuine people who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah really needed to be told that:

¹⁵ And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Haz'ael to be king over Syria; ¹⁶ and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall

anoint to be king over Israel; and Eli'sha the son of Shaphat of A'bel-meho'lah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.¹⁷ And him who escapes from the sword of Haz'ael shall Jehu slay; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Eli'sha slay.¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Ba'al, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

1 Kings 19:15-18 (RSV)

For you to recover from the mental, emotional, spiritual, nervous and physical strain and exhaustion that you experience after confronting the wicked, you need to take similar steps. Be prepared so that these things have already been thought of and are available ahead of time. Then they will be ready when you need them to lift you back up. Firstly, ask other people to pray for you before, during and after your confrontation with the wicked. Don't just leave it to them to realise for themselves that you will need all of this. They almost certainly won't, because they have many other things to think of.

Also they have probably never tackled the wicked themselves. Therefore they won't actually know how it feels, or why you need their prayers. They have no practical experience of this in their own lives, so they simply can't identify with what you are going through. Try not to be angry with them at their lack of support, or offended by their insensitivity. Even the best of people can be completely unaware of your need for support and encouragement. That is especially so if you are a generally confident person, because it simply won't occur to them that you need anything.

Secondly, make sure to get your workload reduced, delegated or postponed, at least for a while, so that you have time for rest and sleep after the 'battle'. Even in purely physical terms, you will feel exhausted, so you need to plan some recovery time into your diary. Also eat fully and properly, even if you don't feel like it, in order to recover your strength and resilience. For that reason, the period after a battle is not a good time to go on a fast. You might do that long before the contest, or long afterwards, but not just before, or just after. Those are times for eating, not fasting.

Also take practical steps to *arrange* for yourself to get encouragement from others. Don't just leave it to chance, and don't disappear and hide in a cave, as Elijah did. Seek for the company of others, whom you trust, and who are wise enough to understand what you have been through, and what you are still going through. However, don't rely on them to realise for themselves that you need encouragement, because they probably won't. Therefore tell them yourself, before, during and after the confrontation, and spell out exactly what you need from them.

Literally say "I am feeling low, anxious and sad after what has happened. Please encourage me and help to lift me up, because I need a boost." You may feel foolish saying all that, but it will need to be said. Most people simply aren't sensitive enough, or alert enough, to have any idea how you feel, or how much help you need at a time like this. Moreover, do not make the mistake of seeking all of this encouragement and emotional support from just one person. If you do you will overwhelm them and exhaust their supply. You will need 100 'units' of emotional support, but most people only have 20-50 'units' to give to you.

Therefore be sensible and realistic. Look for a series of people who can share the burden of listening to you and helping you to get through it and to recover from it. They need that because encouraging and supporting you during and after a battle is also a burden for them. I made the mistake of overburdening my wife at times of crisis. That had the effect of getting her down, which compounded the problem, both for me and her. So, think ahead beforehand and prepare a list of people whom you can visit, share with and lean on later, when you are going through this 'slough of despond'.

If you are the spouse, relative or friend of someone who has to tackle the wicked, you also need to take note of their inevitable need for encouragement. Then you can be ready to provide the support they will need before, during, and after a confrontation. If you can be sensitive to this, realise what is needed, and try hard to provide it, you will make yourself a great help to the Body of Christ. In fact, as an encourager of others, you will be a rare commodity, for which there is a desperate need within the Church.

If you deal with a series of wicked people, one after another, you will feel worn-down and wonder if it is worth all the effort. It is, so brace yourself and keep going.

It is difficult enough to have to face these confrontations with the wicked once or twice. Even that can take its toll on you. But to have to do it again and again and again, year after year, is extremely debilitating. I can testify to that from long and bitter experience. You reach the stage where you wonder whether it will ever end and whether it is all worth it. Be assured that it is. There *is* a purpose and it *will* end one day. Until then, brace yourself, keep on the ‘helmet’ of hope, and keep on keeping on.

The low moods that you experience during and after the battles are normal and are entirely to be expected. They don’t mean you are doing the wrong thing, or that there is something wrong with you. So don’t let yourself be talked into giving up. On the contrary, increase your resolve, seek the help of others, and set your face to carry on regardless, until the job is done. That is how overcomers and conquerors are made.

To overcome the wicked, you must learn to cope with isolation and being misunderstood. You must also learn to encourage yourself, because very few people will do that for you.

You will have to recognise the harsh reality that you are not going to get all the emotional support and encouragement that you need from others. There just aren’t enough wise, sympathetic, discerning people out there to provide it. Even if they exist, and even if you know them, they can’t be there to help you all the time. Therefore you have got to learn how to encourage yourself, at least as a supplement, but possibly as the only source of encouragement

This will largely consist of reminding yourself of God’s promises and of speaking them *out loud* to yourself. Also remind yourself of what the Bible says about God’s character and how He is always with you and has a bright plan for your future. In particular, put on the ‘helmet’ of hope from Ephesians 6:17. Hope is the main protection for your mind and it gives you the resilience that you need to avoid depression and despair.

So, be realistic and provide your own encouragement to yourself and for yourself. It is perfectly possible, once you realise that it can be done and that it is needed. The classic example of how to encourage oneself is David. When he was on the run from King Saul he had an emotionally shattering experience at Ziklag. Amalekite raiders attacked the camp while they were away and kidnapped all the wives and children, including his own:

¹Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amal'ekites had made a raid upon the Negeb and upon Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag, and burned it with fire, ²and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great; they killed no one, but carried them off, and went their way. ³And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept, until they had no more strength to weep. ⁵David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahin'o-am of Jezreel, and Ab'igail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

1 Samuel 30:1-5 (RSV)

On top of all that, David’s men panicked, fell into despair and even wanted to stone him:

⁶And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.

1 Samuel 30:6 (KJV)

David was utterly alone, in a huge crisis, being blamed and criticised by everyone, and with nobody to support or encourage him. But one of the marks of his greatness was that his immediate response was to *encourage himself*. He did so by prayer, proclamation, declaring God's Word and reminding himself of God's character and promises. Then, having strengthened himself, by *his own* words of encouragement, David led the men to launch a counter-attack on the Amalekites and to recover all of the hostages:

¹⁷ And David smote them from twilight until the evening of the next day; and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. ¹⁸ David recovered all that the Amal'ekites had taken; and David rescued his two wives. ¹⁹ Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken; David brought back all. ²⁰ David also captured all the flocks and herds; and the people drove those cattle before him, and said, "This is David's spoil."

1 Samuel 30:17-20 (RSV)

To be able to encourage yourself when the big crises occur, you must prepare for it now by encouraging yourself when there isn't a crisis, or where the problems are only small. Then you will be ready for the big crises when they do arise and able to encourage yourself through them, even if nobody else is willing, or able, to do that for you. For another example of how David encouraged himself, and others, see the passage below from 1 Chronicles 29, in which King David was speaking in public to the whole assembly.

He reminds himself, and all of them, of God's character and power, by speaking of what God had done in the past and what He is capable of doing in the future. Reminding ourselves of those facts is a vital part of encouraging ourselves. It is about our will forcing our mouth to speak the truth out loud about God's nature and character and what He can do. Those facts are precisely what the demons want you to forget. Therefore they are what you must keep on reminding yourself of:

¹⁰ Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. ¹¹ Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honor come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name."

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 (RSV)

Another technique which David used in encouraging himself was to actually *speak to himself*. By a decision of his will, he would literally *tell himself* to give thanks, or to praise God, or to remember God's past deeds and so on. When David did this he would actually speak to his own soul, i.e. to his mind and emotions, and give them instructions. His will was *deciding* what to think and feel, rather than letting his mind and feelings react to bad news or difficult circumstances for themselves and to form their own conclusions.

David knew that he could not afford to let his mind think whatever it wanted to think. Neither could he let his emotions feel whatever they wanted to feel, based solely on his current circumstances. Even less could he do so based on what the circumstances *appeared* to be. This is what Paul meant when he told us to "*take every thought captive....*" We are to *decide* what to think and then to *command* ourselves to think those thoughts, just as David did. Here are some examples of this, in which David interrogates his own soul. Then his will commands his mind, and his emotions, to hope and to bless the LORD:

***Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help***

Psalms 42:5 (RSV)

¹*Bless the Lord, O my soul;
and all that is within me, bless his holy name!*

²*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,*

Psalm 103:1-2 (RSV)

David reminded himself of who God was, what He had done in the past and what He would do in future. By so doing, David forced his own mind to dwell upon the truth, rather than on his current circumstances and, even less, on mere appearances. It also built up his confidence and hope:

⁴*Thou art my King and my God,
who ordainest victories for Jacob.*

⁵*Through thee we push down our foes;
through thy name we tread down our assailants.*

⁶*For not in my bow do I trust,
nor can my sword save me.*

⁷*But thou hast saved us from our foes,
and hast put to confusion those who hate us.*

⁸*In God we have boasted continually,
and we will give thanks to thy name for ever.*

Psalm 44:4-8 (RSV)

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.*

²*Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

³*though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

Psalm 46:1-3 (RSV)

*With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.*

Psalm 108:13 (RSV)

It is not enough merely to think the right things about God and our circumstances. We need to *say* them as well, and to say them *out loud*. The main person who will benefit from this is yourself, because what you say will gradually become what you think. So, don't wait until you think the right things and then say them. Speak them now, even if those are not yet your real thoughts or convictions, and they will gradually become so. Search the Bible and find true things about God, or about what He has done, or His faithfulness. Then force yourself to say them, as David did:

*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
whom he has redeemed from trouble*

Psalm 107:2 (RSV)

*And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!*

Psalm 107:22 (RSV)

One example of how David would make statements or proclamations about God's character and provision, is Psalm 23. Once you see it in those terms, you realise how David could speak it out, even in his bleakest moments. He was reminding himself of the truth about God, and of His past dealings with him, so as to encourage himself to trust Him now, in whatever situation he faced. Read it from that perspective, with that objective in mind, and see how powerful it is. Don't just read it out

passively, as if it only related to David. Speak out each line assertively, as facts which you believe, claim and rely on for yourself:

*¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
² he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
³ he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil;
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff,
they comfort me.
⁵Thou preparest a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil,
my cup overflows.
⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
for ever.*

Psalm 23:1-6 (RSV)

It wasn't just King David who spoke in this way. Isaiah did the same. Here is something he said to, and about, himself. It makes an excellent proclamation, which every one of us can use regularly. Try speaking it out assertively and defiantly to be heard by God, the angels, the demons, other people and, above all, by yourself:

*“Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.”
Isaiah 12:2 (RSV)*

Every wrongdoer or wicked person that I have ever sacked or expelled has turned out, in the end, to be even worse than I thought they were when I made my decision.

I have made a discovery which has proved to be true of every person I have ever tackled. They always turned out to be even worse than I thought they were when I made the decision to sack, punish, expel or confront them. Imagine that at the point of making that decision I had 50 ‘units’ of evidence against them. I would agonise over whether I could be sure that evidence was all reliable. I would also keep questioning myself as to whether 50 units was enough to ‘convict’ them with, i.e. was it sufficient to justify their dismissal or expulsion?

The point is that if you had 50 units when you decided to tackle them, it will inevitably rise, and may even double or treble, over the next few days or weeks. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, after you have made your decision, *but not before*, other people will come forward. They will then provide you with extra evidence, or fresh allegations, that you did not previously know about. That is partly because they weren't aware, until then, that you needed such information. But, it is mainly because people aren't willing to give it to you until *after you have already made a decision*.

That's partly because they fear the wrongdoer, so they won't speak about him until they can be absolutely certain that he has gone and won't ever be coming back. Their logic is that they don't want

to be personally responsible for him getting the sack or being punished. They don't want you to base your decision on anything they may tell you. That's not because they care about him, or want to prevent an injustice. They just don't want him to find out that *they* gave you the evidence, because they fear that he may not be sacked and could end up staying in his job, or in the church.

Another reason why wrongdoers always turn out to be worse than you thought they were is that after you have made your decision and sacked, expelled or confronted them, they tend to take off their 'mask'. Until your decision has been made, it is in the interests of the wrongdoer to keep a low profile, keep up an act, and stay polite. However, once your decision has been made, and is irreversible, he may conclude that he has nothing to lose from giving you a verbal poke in the eye.

He may then come out into the open and reveal his true nature. You will then get some big surprises as you find out just how much hatred and contempt they have been bottling up while your enquiries were ongoing. In the light of all this, the strong likelihood is that you do already have enough evidence. Therefore be willing to act upon it. In all my years, I have *never* made a mistake in the direction of over-estimating a person's wrongdoing or exaggerating the extent of their wickedness.

I have only ever under-estimated it, even with those whom I already considered to be appalling. It always turned out, in the end, that they were even worse than I had thought, and that they had done even more harm than I had realised. You too are likely to under-estimate the scale of people's wickedness and the harm they have done, unless you are someone who cares nothing for truth or justice. But if you were such an unjust person, my advice would not apply to you.

If you are a person who fears making decisions, remember that *not making* a decision is itself a decision.

A decision *not to act*, or even a *failure to make any decision at all*, is more likely to harm people than a misguided or premature decision to act. You are likely to forget this, especially if you are an indecisive person who fears making decisions. Such a person may misguidedly comfort themselves that if they make no decision at all, then they cannot make a wrong decision. But that is a profound error, because not making a decision *is* a decision in itself, albeit a passive one. Moreover, it is far more likely to be wrong than a positive decision to act.

You cannot avoid errors, or injustices, merely by not making decisions. Indecisive people therefore make very bad leaders and cause far more problems than they prevent. For one thing, they are letting down the future victims of the wicked. They are also likely to be wrong right now, for failing to act. The very fact that you feel that scared of making a decision suggests that you are up against someone wicked, and even that mind-control is probably being used against you. If so, it makes it all the more essential to force yourself to make the tough decisions that you are afraid of making.

If you tackle a long series of wicked people you can also begin to get disillusioned. You may wonder if there is anybody at all who is sincere, and who can be trusted.

Another feeling I have experienced over many years of tackling wicked people in business and in churches is that you can easily become wary of everybody. It can begin to feel like there are very few, if any, honest and trustworthy people anywhere. In part, one gets to feel that way because it actually has a substantial amount of truth in it. The vast majority of people, even in churches, and even in church leadership, *aren't* fully honest. Neither are they fully faithful or fully trustworthy - not even the better people.

Most people, even in churches, will let you down, lie to you and fail to support you when times are difficult or if there is any risk of them having to pay any price for being honest, faithful or loyal. That is the harsh reality of life in this fallen world and you need to get used to it and not allow yourself to

be discouraged by it. Indeed, recognising this fact will take away a lot of the bewilderment that you may have been feeling at being let down over and over again. Begin to search for that small percentage of people who are sincere, faithful and genuine and spend more time with them.

We still need to uphold righteousness and resist the wicked, even when they are in the ascendant and seem to be winning every battle.

At every time in history, whether the Church is strong or weak, and whether we are in the majority or the minority, each Christian can do his bit to stand in the way of the wicked. That has to be done whether we succeed or not, and whether people listen to us or not. Therefore, we have exactly the same duty to speak to our generation as past Christians had to speak to theirs. Take abortion for example. We live in a time of unprecedented evil in world history. No previous generation has ever slaughtered its own children on an industrial scale, as we are now doing.

The United Kingdom alone has killed 8 million and the USA has killed 58 million, and the death toll is rising daily. So, for those few who speak against abortion, even within the churches, these are bleak times, with very little visible evidence of 'success'. However, God measures success very differently from us. As an individual, we can still be considered successful in God's eyes, merely because we were faithful in resisting evil and proclaiming the truth, irrespective of whether we 'win'.

That is still the case, even when the whole world is crumbling and degenerating around us. At such evil times in history, the duty is all the greater to carry on the fight. We can try to preserve at least some of the Christian heritage which used to be the foundation of Great Britain and the United States in particular. If we don't, then those foundations may be lost completely, in which case, the Christians of our generation would be letting down all future generations:

*if the foundations are destroyed,
what can the righteous do”?*
Psalm 11:3 (RSV)

Therefore we should carry on the fight to the end, regardless of whether we appear to be winning or losing. The duty to be salt and light applies to every generation, without exception, and you never know what might ultimately come of it. There have been many times in the history of Israel, and of the Church, when its spiritual condition has declined to perilously low levels. But even at such low points, a few faithful people have been able, with God's help, to turn things around.

A classic example is the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. They began the Methodist movement, which God blessed to an amazing extent. It brought a huge revival to Great Britain in the eighteenth century, reversing a period of severe decline in the condition of the British church. However, even if there is no revival, or no visible improvement of any kind, it is still our duty to be salt and light, to speak the truth to our generation and to resist the wicked.

If nothing else, it will serve the purpose of *warning the people around us*. Then each individual has the chance to repent if they wish to. If we do that, we are no longer answerable for them, and their blood will not be on our hands, even if they choose to ignore the message, as many will. That in itself is a major consideration, because it is always the responsibility of every generation, whether in Israel or the Church, to warn the wicked and to give them a chance to escape God's judgment:

¹⁶ And at the end of seven days, the word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁷ “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ¹⁸ If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die in his

iniquity; but you will have saved your life. ²⁰ Again, if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. ²¹ Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you will have saved your life.”

Ezekiel 3:16-21 (RSV)

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedo'nia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Acts 18:5-6 (RSV)

Sometimes the wicked come out into the open and try to terrify you with direct threats. If so, you must brace yourself and stay absolutely resolute.

Most of the time, especially if you have a position of power and authority, the wicked will stay in the shadows. They generally operate secretly, behind backs, with craft and manipulation. But if you are not in a senior position, and sometimes even if you are in one, they will come out into the open and bare their teeth at you. They will seek to intimidate you directly, hoping that you will not have the will or the courage to resist them. Controlling people openly, through direct intimidation and domination, is just as acceptable to the wicked as doing so by guile and deceit.

From their perspective, any method will be used, open or covert, direct or indirect, provided it works. They will choose whichever approach best fits the circumstances, the occasion, and your personality. So, if manipulation doesn't work, they might try a head-on confrontation to brow-beat you into submission. Or they will seek to stun you into a state of panic and bewilderment in which you are temporarily unable to think straight or to know how to resist them. You must be ready for all approaches and learn to recognise, and anticipate, such tactics so that you can better withstand them.

It is one thing to work out afterwards what you ought to have done, or to realise later that their threats were a bluff, or a pack of lies. It is another matter to be ready, prepared, and able to keep your head at the very moment of the crisis, while the threats are being made. It is precisely at such moments that you most need to be able to brace yourself and tell yourself the true facts. By doing all those things you can wrench yourself out from under their control, like a rabbit forcing itself to look away from the car's headlights. Such fear tactics, whereby the wicked person seeks to control you by intimidation, are an important part of what witchcraft is about.

The 'controller' seeks to gain power over you by an assault on your mind and emotions. Those are within your soul, rather than your spirit. That is why I refer to such forms of witchcraft as 'soulish'. The person is not primarily using demonic power. They are using the strength of their own will, mind and emotions, aided by deception to control your mind, will and emotions. Such witchcraft is soulish because it is operating at the level of the soul. One human being is exerting illegitimate influence over another, rather than demons doing so on the controller's behalf, as with full-blown occultic witchcraft.

How Sennacherib of Assyria tried to terrify the people of Judah into surrendering to him

An example of such soulish power being used to gain control through fear and intimidation is the attempt by Sennacherib of Assyria to terrify the people of Judah into submission and surrender by blood-curdling threats and claims. He had invaded Judah and his armies were encamped around the

fortified cities. He wanted the people to be so paralysed with fear that they would be unable to defend themselves effectively, and would even surrender to the invaders.

King Hezekiah of Judah saw through their tactics and he encouraged the people of Judah to be strong and of good courage. He also urged them to remind themselves that the LORD, the God of Israel, was with them and that His power was far greater than that of the Assyrians. Take note of what he said, as this is good advice. You will need to give it to yourself when you face such tactics from others who seem to be powerful, and may well actually be powerful, but not as powerful as our God:

⁶ And he set combat commanders over the people, and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, ⁷ “Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. ⁸ With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezeki'ah king of Judah.

2 Chronicles 32:6-8 (RSV)

The assault on the people's minds and emotions didn't stop there. The wicked will not stop, or go away, merely because you begin to wake up and remind yourself who God is and how much power He has. They will press on to see whether you can *maintain* that positive confession over a sustained period, while the mental, emotional and verbal assault continues. Sennacherib carried on and made a series of boasts and threats aiming to wear down the people's resistance. Note the things he says. Similar things may be said to you, and you need to see them for what they really are:

⁹ After this Sennach'erib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezeki'ah king of Judah and to all the people of Judah that were in Jerusalem, saying, ¹⁰ “Thus says Sennach'erib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you relying, that you stand siege in Jerusalem? ¹¹ Is not Hezeki'ah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, “The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria”? ¹² Has not this same Hezeki'ah taken away his high places and his altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, “Before one altar you shall worship, and upon it you shall burn your sacrifices”? ¹³ Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand? ¹⁴ Who among all the gods of those nations which my fathers utterly destroyed was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? ¹⁵ Now therefore do not let Hezeki'ah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand!’”

2 Chronicles 32:9-15 (RSV)

This went on for some time, which is by no means unusual. If a sudden shock or blood-curdling threat doesn't immediately work, the wicked will carry on. They know, from long experience, that most people will give in and lose heart if such a campaign of intimidation continues. Even Sennacherib's servants joined in, just as the friends and allies of the wicked people in your life will join in. They added their voices to his campaign, seeking to terrify the people of Judah:

¹⁶ And his servants said still more against the Lord God and against his servant Hezeki'ah. ¹⁷ And he wrote letters to cast contempt on the Lord the God of Israel and to speak against him, saying, “Like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezeki'ah will not deliver his people from my hand.” ¹⁸ And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were upon the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city. ¹⁹ And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands.

2 Chronicles 32:16-19 (RSV)

King Hezekiah, emboldened by the advice and encouragement of the prophet Isaiah, held firm and refused to submit. He also prayed and even cried out to God to save Judah from the Assyrians, which He did, by sending an angel who killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers as they slept in their beds:

²⁰ Then Hezeki'ah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. ²¹ And the Lord sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. ²² So the Lord saved Hezeki'ah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennach'erib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies; and he gave them rest on every side. ²³ And many brought gifts to the Lord to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezeki'ah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.

2 Chronicles 32:20-23 (RSV)

The parallel account in 2 Kings gives more detail so I will include part of it here, for completeness:

³⁵ And that night the angel of the Lord went forth, and slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. ³⁶ Then Sennach'erib king of Assyria departed, and went home, and dwelt at Nin'veh.

2 Kings 19:35-36 (RSV)

You must expect, and be ready for, all sorts of scare-tactics, especially if the wicked can see that you are starting to wake up and to discern where you are being deceived or manipulated. If they see that guile is not working as well as it did before, they will try intimidation instead. If their own personality is such that domination and intimidation are their preferred methods, they may even begin with threats and bullying. Either way, be ready for them and have your approach already worked out, so that you don't need to decide, in the heat of the moment, whether to fight on or give in.

Resolve now, before any such threats are made, and before you even meet the wicked person, that you will never, ever, ever give in to intimidation or be influenced by fear in any of your decisions. It is remarkable what a difference it makes to do that beforehand. It means that when the threat is actually made, there is no need to think or to decide whether to give in to it. That decision has already been made, months, or even years, beforehand. Then, when the threat is made, there is no panic, numbness or bewilderment.

Indeed, the very threats they make can actually aid your discernment, by confirming that they really are as wicked as you have been beginning to suspect they were. I have had occasions where I was unsure whether a person was malicious, or just incompetent or misguided. Then they have tried to intimidate me at some stage in my investigation. When they did, it was as if the last remaining scales fell off my eyes and I saw them clearly, for what they really were. Thus the wicked person's tactics, even their witchcraft, can be a form of unintended guidance, of which you can make use.

It can therefore help you to discern the real nature of the people you are dealing with. However, the key point, at least while the fear tactics are being used, is to keep your nerve. You must stay strong, maintain your resolve, and encourage yourself. Remind yourself of God's mighty power. Then speak the truth to yourself to counteract the lies you are being told. I say that because, most of the time, a threat is a *lie*. The person making it almost always has less power than they claim to have. Moreover, you have more power than they want you to believe you have.

That is why it is vital to speak the truth to yourself and to proclaim, out loud, the true facts about God and His power, provision, protection and faithfulness. Even if you are defeated, and even if God chooses not to intervene or rescue you, He still does not want you to give in to fear, or to be influenced by threats. That is especially so if it would involve acting wrongly or letting God or other people down. It is better to be defeated, or even to die, but to have remained faithful to the end, than to buy a temporary peace by doing wrong, or by giving in to a wrongdoer.

What if the wicked person is a family member?

This book mainly focuses on dealing with the wicked within churches and the workplace. But the wicked are also to be found in our own families. That must be so, because they all have relatives. That can further complicate our dealings with them. We may find that the wickedness we are trying to defeat is coming from a parent, grandparent or sibling, or even from our own child. When we are in that situation we will need even greater wisdom, sensitivity and discernment. But we will also need toughness at times.

That last point is hard to achieve. It is difficult to be tough, and even ruthless, when dealing with our own relatives. The natural instinct is to go easy on them, and to give them the benefit of the doubt, when we ought to take firm action to stop them in their tracks and to expose what they are doing. For example, a sad story was told to me by a former client, 'Mary', about what happened to her in the 1950s. She was a young woman then and had been very kind and helpful to an old man who lived nearby. She visited him, helped him with cooking and housework, and kept him company.

Years later, when he died, the old man left Mary his house in his will. He had never told her anything about this. Unfortunately, Mary's mother, 'Edwina', did hear about it, but told Mary nothing. Instead, Edwina went to the solicitor (lawyer) and told him that *she was Mary*. The house was then conveyed to her and she was given the title deeds. It was in the days before land had to be registered in that area. That made it easier to carry out this fraud. Then Edwina told everybody that *she* had been left the house by the old man and nobody had any reason to doubt her.

She even had the nerve to let Mary and her young husband move into the house, as tenants, and she charged them rent for three years! This could have gone on forever, if not for the fact that Mary's husband wanted to buy the house from Edwina and went to enquire about it. It then emerged that Edwina was not the owner at all, and that the house had been Mary's all along. Mary and her husband then quietly arranged to put the matter right and the title deeds were handed over to her, by her solicitor. So, her mother's wickedness was discovered, and her inheritance was restored to her.

However, Mary did not handle it wisely from then on. She felt sorry for her mother and did not want her publicly exposed as a liar and a thief, even to the family. It was made harder by the fact that her mother then had the cheek to tell the whole family that she had now given the house to Mary "*as a gift*". It shows how brass-faced the wicked can be, and how they feel no shame. That lie about it being a gift was also a calculated act. Once that had been said, Mary did not feel able to contradict what her mother had told everybody, as that too would bring disgrace on her.

The mother calculated correctly that Mary would feel that way, and that she would say nothing. However, the story did not end even there. Mary had several siblings and some were resentful that Edwina had 'given' Mary this house, when they had been given nothing. One sister had an angry showdown with Mary and said "*We've all had to work hard to buy our houses and you've just been given that house by Mum for nothing*". Mary still said nothing and, having stayed silent at the time, it became even more difficult, as the years passed, for Mary to reveal what really happened.

So, Mary said nothing and just learned to live with the resentment, especially from that one sister. She was never fully reconciled with her, even decades later. Mary's misguided sense of decency, or rather her naivety, in not revealing her mother's fraud, damaged her relationships with her family for a lifetime. The point of this story is not Mary's failure to realise she had been defrauded. There was little she could have done about that. Her mother had lied to her from the outset and hid all the letters. Therefore she knew nothing about it for over three years.

Mary's error was in her handling of it *after* she had discovered the fraud. Admittedly, it was her own mother, and revealing the truth would be painful. However, the path Mary chose was far more painful. Moreover, it damaged more relationships than would ever have occurred if she had immediately told the family what their mother had really done. Mary did what she thought was right,

but she did not think through the wider implications, or imagine what the longer-term consequences would be.

It was not only Mary who suffered as a result of her siblings' resentment, and the estrangement it caused. They were damaged too. Even more tragically, when Mary became a Christian, in middle age, some of her siblings did not want to hear the Gospel from her. They were still hard-hearted towards her, *and to the Gospel*, as a result of the mother's lie, 30 years earlier, which they still believed. Thus the estrangement caused by Mary's silence may even have led some of them to a lost eternity, all for the sake of avoiding embarrassment for her mother.

Mary paid far too high a price for being kind and considerate. Accordingly, when you face wickedness within your own family, it may be that some really tough decisions, and firm actions, need to be taken. You have to think of your own interests, and those of other family members, *not just the wrongdoer's*. It is also far easier to be deceived by a family member than by a non-relative, because your guard is likely to be down. You may even know about their wickedness but still feel unable, or unwilling, to tackle it with the same zeal that you would show if it was a non-relative.

How a godly daughter, Jehoshabeath, dealt with her wicked mother, Athaliah

Let's now look at an example from the Bible of how a person had to confront extreme wickedness within their own family. In this case it was another daughter tackling her own mother, with the help of her husband. But she took a very different approach. I refer to a lady called Jehoshabeath. She was the daughter of the wicked King Jehoram and was the sister of King Ahaziah of Judah. Her mother was the wicked queen, Athaliah:

² Ahazi'ah was forty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athali'ah, the granddaughter of Omri. ³ He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. ⁴ He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done; for after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his undoing.

2 Chronicles 22:2-4 (RSV)

King Ahaziah only reigned for one year. When he died his mother, Athaliah, seized the throne unlawfully, declared herself to be the Queen and began to rule in her own right. She was exceptionally evil and was herself the grand-daughter of the appallingly wicked King Omri, in whose reign idolatry flourished. Athaliah also took immediate steps to secure her hold on power and gave orders for all the other members of the family with any claim to the throne to be killed:

Now when Athali'ah the mother of Ahazi'ah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family of the house of Judah.

2 Chronicles 22:10 (RSV)

She almost succeeded in destroying the whole royal line of King David, and thus the line of descent to Jesus, but she was resisted by her own daughter, Jehoshabeath. She took her infant nephew, Joash, who was only a baby, and hid him away, so that Athaliah could not murder him:

¹¹ But Jeho-shab'e-ath, the daughter of the king, took Jo'ash the son of Ahazi'ah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were about to be slain, and she put him and his nurse in a bedchamber. Thus Jeho-shab'e-ath, the daughter of King Jeho'ram and wife of Jehoi'ada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahazi'ah, hid him from Athali'ah, so that she did not slay him; ¹² and he remained with them six years, hid in the house of God, while Athali'ah reigned over the land.

2 Chronicles 22:11-12 (RSV)

Jehoshabeath was a godly lady and was the wife of Jehoiada, the godly priest, who later became a faithful adviser and mentor to the young King Joash. Yet, she had the wicked King Jehoram for a father and the even more evil Athaliah for a mother. She was also the great-granddaughter of the wicked King Omri. Yet, to show how complicated families can be, she was also the grand-daughter of the exceptionally godly King Jehoshaphat.

All of that, and more, was in her varied heritage. There was extreme wickedness and exceptional godliness in the same family tree. Jehoshabeath was put into a situation where she had to resist the plans and actions of her own mother. After seven years the level of her resistance was raised even higher. She and her husband took steps to put the boy Joash on the throne and to depose Athaliah:

¹But in the seventh year Jehoi'ada took courage, and entered into a compact with the commanders of hundreds, Azari'ah the son of Jero'ham, Ish'mael the son of Jehoha'nan, Azari'ah the son of Obed, Ma-asei'ah the son of Adai'ah, and Elisha'phat the son of Zichri. ²And they went about through Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. ³And all the assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And Jehoi'ada said to them, "Behold, the king's son! Let him reign, as the Lord spoke concerning the sons of David.

2 Chronicles 23:1-3 (RSV)

They restored Joash to the throne, but they could not just leave it at that, because the wicked 'Queen' Athaliah would inevitably continue to be a menace. So Jehoiada formed a plan, together with senior officials, priests and army officers, to capture her. But first, he had to organise the young King's supporters so that he could be defended:

⁷The Levites shall surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand; and whoever enters the house shall be slain. Be with the king when he comes in, and when he goes out." ⁸The Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoi'ada the priest commanded. They each brought his men, who were to go off duty on the sabbath, with those who were to come on duty on the sabbath; for Jehoi'ada the priest did not dismiss the divisions. ⁹And Jehoi'ada the priest delivered to the captains the spears and the large and small shields that had been King David's, which were in the house of God; ¹⁰and he set all the people as a guard for the king, every man with his weapon in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house. ¹¹Then he brought out the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they proclaimed him king, and Jehoi'ada and his sons anointed him, and they said, "Long live the king."

2 Chronicles 23:7-11 (RSV)

On discovering that there had been a coup, and that she had been deposed, Athaliah was furious. She even had the nerve to call it 'treason', despite being a usurper herself. Indeed, she had murdered almost all the royal family to try to prevent the rightful heir coming to the throne:

¹²When Athali'ah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went into the house of the Lord to the people; ¹³and when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets, and the singers with their musical instruments leading in the celebration. And Athali'ah rent her clothes, and cried, "Treason! Treason!"

2 Chronicles 23:12-13 (RSV)

Jehoiada knew that the only practical solution to the ongoing threat posed by Athaliah was to have her executed. So, he arranged for that to be done, even though she was his wife's mother:

¹⁴Then Jehoi'ada the priest brought out the captains who were set over the army, saying to them, "Bring her out between the ranks; anyone who follows her is to be slain with the sword." For the

priest said, “Do not slay her in the house of the Lord.”¹⁵ So they laid hands on her; and she went into the entrance of the horse gate of the king’s house, and they slew her there.

2 Chronicles 23:14-15 (RSV)

This may seem harsh to our modern eyes, but executing Athaliah was the only realistic way to restore peace and godly government to Judah and to protect the young King Joash. Athaliah had already tried to kill him, and she would have tried again if she had been left alive. The people of Judah had no doubt that Jehoiada did the right thing:

So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet, after Athali'ah had been slain with the sword.

2 Chronicles 23:21(RSV)

Few of us will ever be called upon to execute our mother in law! But, in smaller ways, we may come across wickedness in a family member. We therefore need to work out how to handle them. As a general point, we need to take broadly the same approach with them as with wicked employees or church members. They can be just as dangerous, if not more so. It is just as necessary to identify who they are, what they are doing, and why. The main difference is that we can't generally remove, expel or sack our relatives.

We are stuck with them and usually have to find ways to live alongside them, yet without being controlled, undermined, cursed or otherwise damaged by them. Therefore, vigilance and discernment are still needed, no matter who they are. That said, there are some very sad cases where a relative's actions or influence are so malevolent that there is no realistic alternative but to avoid them completely. It can even be necessary to forbid them entry to your home, or even to refuse to tell them where you live. Such drastic steps are not necessarily wrong, in some families.

God wanted the Kings of Israel and Judah to stamp out all idolatry, but also the witchcraft and occultic practices that go with it.

In case you imagine that I am over-stating the significance of curses and witchcraft, or being unduly alarmist about them, ask yourself why God took it all so seriously. He was continually seeking to get the Kings of Judah to stamp out not only idolatry, but also witchcraft and all other occultic practices. That was partly because He knew how much harm they did. If you read the historical books in the Bible, which recount the deeds of the Kings of both Judah and Israel, you will see that God focuses very much on these issues.

He praises those who resist witchcraft and the occult and strongly condemns those who allowed it, or engaged in any of it. Indeed, it is curious how little God has to say in His assessments of the various Kings, of any of their other activities or achievements, in financial, military or agricultural affairs. They barely feature. Instead God focuses on their faithfulness to Him and especially the degree to which they opposed idolatry, witchcraft and the occult and prevented the people from engaging in it.

God's opposition to witchcraft is not solely because it is sinful. He also forbids it because it has real power and is effective in harming people.

One reason why God opposed the occult, in every form, is that it is sinful and very harmful. There are many other sinful activities which God focused on far less, such as corruption, theft, lies and sexual immorality. That was partly because the occult is so very damaging to those against whom it is used, but also to those who engage in it. It probably has more power to ruin people's lives, and to take them to Hell, and then the Lake of Fire, than any other sin. That is why all occult activity is regarded as wicked. It is not only direct rebellion against God, but also does great harm to His people.

King Josiah was highly praised by God for the measures he took to rid Judah of idolatry and witchcraft.

King Josiah did more than any other king to rid Judah of idolatry and witchcraft. He was the greatest King of all, after King David. What made him unique was not his stewardship of the economy, or his conduct of military affairs. It was his single-minded determination to wipe out all idolatry and witchcraft and to oppose everything that it stands for. In that regard, he was utterly whole-hearted and uncompromising, and so should we be. This passage describes his attitude and actions:

⁴ And the king commanded Hilki'ah, the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the threshold, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Ba'al, for Ashe'rah, and for all the host of heaven; he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵ And he deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places at the cities of Judah and round about Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Ba'al, to the sun, and the moon, and the constellations, and all the host of the heavens. ⁶ And he brought out the Ashe'rah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people. ⁷ And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes which were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Ashe'rah. ⁸ And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba; and he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on one's left at the gate of the city.

⁹ However, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brethren. ¹⁰ And he defiled To'pheth, which is in the valley of the sons of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech. ¹¹ And he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the precincts; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. ¹² And the altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manas'seh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, he pulled down and broke in pieces, and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron. ¹³ And the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ash'toreth the abomination of the Sido'nians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ¹⁴ And he broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Ashe'rim, and filled their places with the bones of men.

2 Kings 23:4-14 (RSV)

Josiah stopped at nothing to remove every trace of the occult and to prevent witchcraft from being practised, even to the extent of destroying the 'high places' which were used for those purposes. Other kings had not gone that far, perhaps due to lack of zeal, or fear of people's reactions. But Josiah had no such reservations. Moreover, he also got rid of all the mediums, wizards and witches:

²⁴ Moreover Josi'ah put away the mediums and the wizards and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilki'ah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

2 Kings 23:24 (RSV)

You need to resist witchcraft with steely determination and even ruthlessness.

You need to imitate King Josiah in your own family, church or business. Note how strongly God praised his priorities and policies. Why would God tell us how much He approved of Josiah, and how much He disapproved of other kings, if He did not want us to imitate Josiah in opposing the occult?

Yet, somehow this is overlooked by the vast majority of Christians. Most assume that witchcraft, curses and the occult in general have no effect on their lives and can be safely ignored. Far from ignoring witchcraft, we need to oppose it ruthlessly, whenever it rears its head.

We must not tolerate it. Wherever it is seen it needs to be faced down and defeated. Those who engage in it need to be removed, without any hesitation. You can afford to be merciful with many other forms of wrongdoing, but never with witchcraft, even when it is 'only' at a soulish level. Manipulation, domination, control, and especially mind-control, are deeply damaging. Our opposition is all the more vital against those who engage in full-blown witchcraft and who add demonic power to their own soulish techniques. They are all the more dangerous and must be opposed and removed without delay.

How Elijah dealt decisively with the prophets of Baal and Asherah and wiped them out

A classic example of the determination and ruthlessness that we need when confronting witchcraft is how Elijah dealt with the prophets of Baal and Asherah. He confronted them head-on and made sure every one of them was put to death. We can't use force in our dealings with witchcraft and witches. But we can, and must, show the same zeal to resist them and to undo all that they have achieved. Let's look at some of what Elijah did, beginning with his confrontation with King Ahab. Elijah told him there would be no rain in Israel until and unless he permitted it:

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

1 Kings 17:1 (ESV)

A long drought followed, to show Ahab the power which Elijah had as a genuine prophet of God. Then, after three years, he went to see King Ahab again:

After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth."² So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria.

1 Kings 18:1-2 (ESV)

Elijah confronted Ahab and told him to gather all of his 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Elijah didn't say so, but he intended to defeat them publicly and then to kill them all:

¹⁷ When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"¹⁸ And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals.¹⁹ Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

1 Kings 18:17-19 (ESV)

When all of these occult-practitioners arrived at Carmel, Elijah challenged them to a contest to see whether the true God, or their false gods, had the most power:

²⁰ So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.²¹ And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.²² Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.²³ Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.²⁴ And you call upon the name of

your god, and I will call upon the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.” And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.”

1 Kings 18:20-24 (ESV)

Elijah let the prophets of Baal and Asherah go first. Then, when their demon gods failed to answer, probably because God would not let them do so, Elijah mocked them in front of all the crowds:

²⁵ Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.” ²⁶ And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. ²⁷ And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” ²⁸ And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. ²⁹ And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

1 Kings 18:25-29 (ESV)

Then it was Elijah’s turn. He was so confident in God that he made it ‘harder’ for himself by telling the people to pour a huge amount of water all over the sacrifice:

³⁰ Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down. ³¹ Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” ³² and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. ³³ And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” ³⁴ And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time. ³⁵ And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.

1 Kings 18:30-35 (ESV)

Then, with everybody watching, Elijah called on the God of Israel to show His power and send fire to consume the offering. When God answered powerfully and burned up the sacrifice and the whole altar too, Elijah ordered the people to seize all 850 of the witchcraft-practitioners and kill them:

³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” ³⁸ Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹ And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God.” ⁴⁰ And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.” And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

1 Kings 18:36-40 (ESV)

If that wasn’t impressive enough, Elijah then brought the three year drought to an end. He even told King Ahab to go home quickly, so his chariot wheels would not get bogged down in the mud:

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain.” ⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. ⁴³ And he said to his servant, “Go up now, look toward the sea.” And he went up and looked and said, “There is nothing.” And he said,

“Go again,” seven times. ⁴⁴ And at the seventh time he said, “Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea.” And he said, “Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.’” ⁴⁵ And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. ⁴⁶ And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

1 Kings 18:41-46 (ESV)

The steely determination shown by King Jehu in dealing with the witchcraft of Jezebel and Ahab

Here is another inspiring example of the zeal that needs to be shown in tackling witchcraft and the occult. It is the account of how King Jehu of Israel destroyed the whole family line of the wicked King Ahab and his despicable witch of a wife, Queen Jezebel. She took Israel to new depths of wickedness and was an utterly evil influence over her husband and the whole nation. For that reason God issued a decree, through a young prophet who was sent by the prophet Elisha.

He announced that the entire family line of Ahab and Jezebel had to be wiped out, because of the potential for future wickedness if any of them survived and came to the throne. The story begins here with Elisha giving a message to be taken to Jehu, a commander in the army. It said that he must become King and that he must also entirely wipe out every trace of Ahab and Jezebel's family line:

¹ Then Eli'sha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, “Gird up your loins, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. ² And when you arrive, look there for Jehu the son of Jehosh'aphat, son of Nimshi; and go in and bid him rise from among his fellows, and lead him to an inner chamber. ³ Then take the flask of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel.’ Then open the door and flee; do not tarry.”

⁴ So the young man, the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. ⁵ And when he came, behold, the commanders of the army were in council; and he said, “I have an errand to you, O commander.” And Jehu said, “To which of us all?” And he said, “To you, O commander.”

⁶ So he arose, and went into the house; and the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, “Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel. ⁷ And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge on Jez'ebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord. ⁸ For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. ⁹ And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jerobo'am the son of Nebat, and like the house of Ba'asha the son of Ahi'jah. ¹⁰ And the dogs shall eat Jez'ebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.” Then he opened the door, and fled.

2 Kings 9:1-10 (RSV)

Jehu took this prophecy, and also the instruction, entirely seriously. He then set about carrying it all out with exceptional severity and thoroughness, which was absolutely necessary. He began by executing Ahab's son, Joram, the King of Israel, without any hesitation:

²¹ Joram said, “Make ready.” And they made ready his chariot. Then Joram king of Israel and Ahazi'ah king of Judah set out, each in his chariot, and went to meet Jehu, and met him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. ²² And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” He answered, “What peace can there be, so long as the harlotries and the sorceries of your mother Jez'ebel are so many?” ²³ Then Joram reined about and fled, saying to Ahazi'ah, “Treachery, O Ahazi'ah!” ²⁴ And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot.

²⁵ Jehu said to Bidkar his aide, “Take him up, and cast him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the Lord uttered this oracle against him: ²⁶ ‘As surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and

the blood of his sons—says the Lord—I will requite you on this plot of ground.’ Now therefore take him up and cast him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of the Lord.”

2 Kings 9:21-26 (RSV)

Next, Jehu turned his attention to Ahab’s widow, Jezebel, who was still exerting her wicked influence. He gave orders for her to be thrown from a tall building. Then, in accordance with God’s pronouncement about her, the dogs ate Jezebel’s body before she could be buried. Even in that grisly detail, God was showing how seriously He took her wickedness and, in particular, her witchcraft:

³⁰ When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jez’ebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of the window. ³¹ And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, “Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?” ³² And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, “Who is on my side? Who?” Two or three eunuchs looked out at him. ³³ He said, “Throw her down.” So they threw her down; and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her. ³⁴ Then he went in and ate and drank; and he said, “See now to this cursed woman, and bury her; for she is a king’s daughter.” ³⁵ But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. ³⁶ When they came back and told him, he said, “This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Eli’jah the Tishbite, ‘In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jez’ebel; ³⁷ and the corpse of Jez’ebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jez’ebel.”

2 Kings 9:30-37 (RSV)

Jehu then proceeded to wipe out all 70 of Ahab’s sons, so that none of them could ever ascend to the throne and resume the wickedness that Ahab and Jezebel had begun. Note in this next lengthy passage how remorselessly Jehu keeps on and on pursuing them, until they are all gone. He speaks of this to Jehonadab and describes it as his “zeal for the Lord”. That is exactly what it was, because he was carrying out God’s instructions to the letter:

¹ Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samar’ia. So Jehu wrote letters, and sent them to Samar’ia, to the rulers of the city, to the elders, and to the guardians of the sons of Ahab, saying, ² “Now then, as soon as this letter comes to you, seeing your master’s sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, fortified cities also, and weapons, ³ select the best and fittest of your master’s sons and set him on his father’s throne, and fight for your master’s house.” ⁴ But they were exceedingly afraid, and said, “Behold, the two kings could not stand before him; how then can we stand?” ⁵ So he who was over the palace, and he who was over the city, together with the elders and the guardians, sent to Jehu, saying, “We are your servants, and we will do all that you bid us. We will not make any one king; do whatever is good in your eyes.”

⁶ Then he wrote to them a second letter, saying, “If you are on my side, and if you are ready to obey me, take the heads of your master’s sons, and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow at this time.” Now the king’s sons, seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, who were bringing them up. ⁷ And when the letter came to them, they took the king’s sons, and slew them, seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to him at Jezreel. ⁸ When the messenger came and told him, “They have brought the heads of the king’s sons,” he said, “Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning.” ⁹ Then in the morning, when he went out, he stood, and said to all the people, “You are innocent. It was I who conspired against my master, and slew him; but who struck down all these? ¹⁰ Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the Lord, which the Lord spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for the Lord has done what he said by his servant Eli’jah.”

¹¹ So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his great men, and his familiar friends, and his priests, until he left him none remaining. ¹² Then he set out and went to Samar’ia. On the way, when he was at Beth-eked of the Shepherds, ¹³ Jehu met the kinsmen of Ahazi’ah king of Judah, and he said, “Who are you?” And they answered, “We are the kinsmen of Ahazi’ah, and we came down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the queen mother.” ¹⁴ He

said, "Take them alive." And they took them alive, and slew them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two persons, and he spared none of them.

¹⁵ And when he departed from there, he met Jehon'adab the son of Rechab coming to meet him; and he greeted him, and said to him, "Is your heart true to my heart as mine is to yours?" And Jehon'adab answered, "It is." Jehu said, "If it is, give me your hand." So he gave him his hand. And Jehu took him up with him into the chariot. ¹⁶ And he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord." So he had him ride in his chariot. ¹⁷ And when he came to Samar'ia, he slew all that remained to Ahab in Samar'ia, till he had wiped them out, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke to Eli'jah.

2 Kings 10:1-17 (RSV)

Even after he had wiped out all of Ahab's family line, Jehu still did not stop. His aim was to wipe out every last one of the remaining worshippers of Baal. He did so by a shrewd trick in which he invited them all to come and take part in a 'solemn assembly' to worship Baal. He told them he was a fellow Baal-worshipper and ensured that they all attended, and that no servants of the LORD were accidentally allowed to remain amongst them. When they were all in one place, he gave orders for every single one to be slaughtered and for their place of worship be turned into a latrine:

¹⁸ Then Jehu assembled all the people, and said to them, "Ahab served Ba'al a little; but Jehu will serve him much. ¹⁹ Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Ba'al, all his worshipers and all his priests; let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Ba'al; whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu did it with cunning in order to destroy the worshipers of Ba'al. ²⁰ And Jehu ordered, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for Ba'al." So they proclaimed it. ²¹ And Jehu sent throughout all Israel; and all the worshipers of Ba'al came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. And they entered the house of Ba'al, and the house of Ba'al was filled from one end to the other. ²² He said to him who was in charge of the wardrobe, "Bring out the vestments for all the worshipers of Ba'al." So he brought out the vestments for them. ²³ Then Jehu went into the house of Ba'al with Jehon'adab the son of Rechab; and he said to the worshipers of Ba'al, "Search, and see that there is no servant of the Lord here among you, but only the worshipers of Ba'al." ²⁴ Then he went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Now Jehu had stationed eighty men outside, and said, "The man who allows any of those whom I give into your hands to escape shall forfeit his life." ²⁵ So as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, Jehu said to the guard and to the officers, "Go in and slay them; let not a man escape." So when they put them to the sword, the guard and the officers cast them out and went into the inner room of the house of Ba'al ²⁶ and they brought out the pillar that was in the house of Ba'al, and burned it. ²⁷ And they demolished the pillar of Ba'al, and demolished the house of Ba'al, and made it a latrine to this day.

²⁸ Thus Jehu wiped out Ba'al from Israel. ²⁹ But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jerobo'am the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and in Dan. ³⁰ And the Lord said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."

2 Kings 10:18-30 (RSV)

Subject to the points made in chapter 25, we cannot ordinarily use violence in opposing the wicked. Neither would we wish to. However, we do need to match Jehu and Elijah in their general zeal and in how seriously they took witchcraft. It cannot safely be under-estimated or ignored. Wherever you come across it, as you certainly will, you must oppose it in every legitimate way, until all trace of its influence is removed from your church or business.

Nevertheless, a lot of unbiblical nonsense is being taught about the so called ‘*Jezebel spirit*’ and that wrong teaching is then putting people off the true teaching.

Having said all of that about witchcraft and Queen Jezebel herself, I must briefly address a widespread error about the so called ‘*Jezebel spirit*’. It is fashionable to speak of this, especially in charismatic or Pentecostal churches, but much of what is being taught and practised is unbiblical. The main error is to speak as if there is some high-ranking demon who causes people all over the world to behave like Queen Jezebel. Many people do behave as she did, but there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that any *particular demon* is causing or coordinating all of that.

People often say that a person or group is “*acting in the Jezebel spirit*”, or has “*come under the power of the Jezebel spirit*”. But they are going beyond what the Bible says and have created a man-made concept. To speak as if a single demon, however senior, is behind all such behaviour is unbiblical. The Bible never says that, not even indirectly. My belief is that every person or group that engages in witchcraft, whether at a soulish level, or with black magic and the use of demonic power, is being influenced and empowered by the *ordinary* demons which inhabit or accompany them.

Every demon is capable of tempting you into whatever sinful activity is most likely to appeal to you and to bring about your destruction, and/or that of the people around you. In other words, each demon can multi-task and operate in all sorts of ways, like a Swiss army knife. They will seek to get one man to gamble and another to drink. They will lead a third into witchcraft, a fourth into sexual immorality and a fifth into religious legalism and self-righteousness. The demons are all capable of doing whatever is most likely to undermine you.

There is nothing at all in the Bible to suggest that there are ‘specialist’ demons which focus on witchcraft and others which cause alcoholism or family breakdown. They are clearly organised in a rank-structure, and they do have varying levels of power and authority, including responsibility for geographical regions and/or political or religious institutions. However, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that any ‘specialist’ demon exists called ‘*the Jezebel spirit*’ who causes people all over the world to behave as that wicked woman did. So, I recommend that that phrase is not used.

CHAPTER 25

HOW FAR CAN WE GO IN RESISTING THE WICKED? CAN WE EVEN USE FORCE?

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock,
who trains my hands for war,
and my fingers for battle;
Psalm 144:1 (RSV)*

⁷ And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. ⁸ Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.

Leviticus 26:7-8 (RSV)

¹⁴ And I looked, and arose, and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

Nehemiah 4:14 (RSV)

³⁵ And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing."³⁶ And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.

Luke 22:35-36 (NASB)

⁴⁹ When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"⁵⁰ And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

Luke 22:49-51 (NASB)

¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons

Mark 11:15 (ESV)

*²² You shall not fear them; for it is the Lord your God who fights for you.'
Deuteronomy 3:22 (RSV)*

³ Know therefore this day that he who goes over before you as a devouring fire is the Lord your God; he will destroy them and subdue them before you; so you shall drive them out, and make them perish quickly, as the Lord has promised you.

Deuteronomy 9:3 (RSV)

"When you go forth to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. ² And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people, ³ and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you draw near this day to battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint; do not fear, or tremble, or be in dread of them; ⁴ for the Lord your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.'

Deuteronomy 20:1-4 (RSV)

¹³ *When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"* ¹⁴ *And he said, "No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."* *And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshiped, and said to him, "What does my lord bid his servant?"* ¹⁵ *And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.*

Joshua 5:13-15 (RSV)

*He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
2 Samuel 22:35 (RSV)*

Can we use physical force, or even weapons, to resist the wicked?

This chapter addresses an area of confusion for many Christians, which is whether we can use physical force to resist the wicked. Some believe we can't resist them at all, by any means, because of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore they become pacifists. Even if violence doesn't come into it, many feel uncomfortable about sacking bad staff, expelling wicked people from churches or resisting the wicked in general. So, we need to look closely at what Jesus said:

³⁸ *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* ³⁹ *But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;* ⁴⁰ *and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well;* ⁴¹ *and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.* ⁴² *Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.*

⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* ⁴⁴ *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

Matthew 5:38-44 (RSV)

At first sight, it may seem that Jesus is forbidding all resistance of the wicked, at any time, whatever they may do, and that we should just pray for our enemies, without doing anything to stop them. The question is in what circumstances, if any, are we meant to take this approach? Is it always applicable, or only in certain situations? We need some clear answers, or this whole book could be said to be in disobedience to Jesus' words, because I am advocating that we *should* resist the wicked.

To get a clear understanding of Matthew 5: 38-44 we must read it alongside the many other passages in Scripture which deal with resisting the wicked, and hold them all in balance at the same time. We must not read Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 5 as if that was all He ever said on this issue. It must be interpreted alongside everything else that He said and also what the prophets and apostles said, both before and after. But seeking that balanced overall understanding is not easy. There are many such passages and some appear, at first sight, to be saying contradictory things.

For example, in Luke 22:36, Jesus Himself *commands the disciples to buy swords*. Moreover, He said that *after* what He said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Therefore, we cannot say that the command to buy swords was revoked, or even modified, by what He said there. On the other hand, neither can we say that Luke 22:36 revokes, or even contradicts, Matthew 5. There is no contradiction. The different things that Jesus says in Matthew 5 and Luke 22:36 are all consistent, provided we understand them correctly and in their proper context.

That is not just the immediate surrounding passages, but the whole of the rest of the Bible. Taking that broad and balanced approach makes interpretation harder, but that is the way it has to be if we want to understand Scripture correctly. So, we will firstly go right back to Genesis and see what the

Bible has to say about resisting the wicked, and especially about using force. Then we will look at various later passages, both before and after the Sermon on the Mount.

After the Flood Noah was commanded to execute murderers, but that must have been done by private individuals, as there was no state.

From the Flood, until the Tower of Babel, there were no nations or governments and the whole human race had one language. There may have been local forms of government, but if there were, we aren't told anything about them. It would seem that, all over the world, people governed and protected themselves. They took personal responsibility for enforcing the law and punishing offenders, including executing murderers. At least to begin with, private individuals were responsible for all of that, as there were no governments, police forces or Courts. Here is what God commanded Noah:

⁵ For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man's brother I will require the life of man. ⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.

Genesis 9:5-6 (RSV)

The covenant God made with Noah affects the whole human race, not just the Jews. It is not part of the Law of Moses. Therefore the command to execute murderers applies worldwide, even today, as it has never been revoked. Given that in the early centuries after the Flood there were no nation states, and no prosecuting authorities, the executions would have to have been done by private individuals, as in the 'Wild West' in the 19th century. So there is no basis for arguing that, under the covenant made with Noah, there was any duty *not* to resist the wicked, or not to use violence, or even lethal force.

The approach taken in the Law of Moses to self-defence and capital punishment

Let's now move on many centuries in time and consider the position under the Law of Moses, or the 'Mosaic Covenant.' Unlike the covenant made with Noah, which is *still fully in force*, and which applies to *all mankind*, the Law of Moses only applied to the Jews. More importantly, even for them, it ended when Jesus died. Even so, we still need to examine what it had to say about self-defence, capital punishment and resisting the wicked in general. That will provide us with valuable guidance as to God's general attitude and approach.

Let us begin with the sixth commandment, in Exodus 20:13, which is correctly translated, in the ESV, as "*You shall not murder*". Many still assume that that prohibits killing of any kind, or for any reason. That confusion partly arises because the King James version of the Bible wrongly translated the verse as "*Thou shalt not kill*". However, the Hebrew word used clearly means to 'murder', not 'kill'. Therefore what is being forbidden is only unlawful, unjustified killing, not killing itself.

It doesn't prohibit killing which is done in war, self-defence or for capital punishment. On the contrary, those forms of killing are expressly authorised, and even positively required, elsewhere in the Bible, especially within the Law of Moses itself. Therefore, the Bible provides no basis for pacifism, or for the abolition of capital punishment, unless you deliberately choose to misinterpret verses like Exodus 20:13. We have already seen that God directly commands capital punishment for murder.

The Bible is even clearer in sanctioning the killing of enemy combatants in war, because God frequently commands the Israelites to fight. Let's look therefore at a passage which deals with self-defence, which is more likely to be of relevance to most of us. It concerns Nehemiah, whom God instructed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. While his men were working on the wall, they kept weapons in their hands, or close by, to use in self-defence if they were attacked:

²¹ *So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn till the stars came out. ²² I also said to the people at that time, “Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.” ²³ So neither I nor my brethren nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon in his hand.¹*

Nehemiah 4:21-23 (RSV)

What did Jesus mean in the Sermon on the Mount when He said to “turn the other cheek” and does that instruction apply at all times, or only in certain circumstances?

Many have felt that Jesus’ words in Matthew 5 require them to adopt a pacifist position. They won’t fight for their country in war, or use violence to defend themselves, or even their families. If the Bible contained nothing other than the Sermon on the Mount, and if Jesus and the apostles had never said anything afterwards, a pacifist stance could conceivably be justified by that passage. But the Bible does say other things and, in particular, so does Jesus Himself. Let us now look at Luke 22: 35-36, a passage which few people ever notice, and on which few sermons are ever preached.

It is where Jesus tells the disciples to go out and *buy swords*. Furthermore, He doesn’t merely *allow* them to do so. He positively *commands* them to buy one. What is more, that order is given to *all* of them, not just to a select few. Thus it cannot be explained away as an exceptional arrangement, which only applies to a minority of people. Therefore, we have to interpret Matthew 5 in the light of Luke 22, which came *later* than the Sermon on the Mount. We know that for sure because Luke’s gospel is specifically stated to be in chronological order.

Whatever Jesus meant in the Sermon on the Mount, it is evidently consistent with the command for every disciple to buy a sword. We can’t just ignore one or other of Jesus’ instructions and focus solely on the one we prefer. We must find out exactly what Jesus meant, on each occasion, and how these apparently contradictory instructions can be reconciled. The first point is that the command to “turn the other cheek” is given in the context of how one is treated as a Christian. In particular it is about what is done to you in the course of your evangelistic ministry.

Therefore we know immediately that we may not promote the Gospel by force, or impose it on others. Moreover, when we are insulted and mistreated in the course of our ministry, or simply for being a Christian, we are to respond graciously, not aggressively. The reference to turning the other cheek is primarily about being *reviled and abused*, rather than any all-out *physical attack* upon us. To slap a person on the cheek was an insult and was a way of showing contempt and disrespect. It wasn’t an attempt to kill, or even to injure.

Therefore, in choosing that very minor form of assault as His example, Jesus was staying within the context of abusive and insulting behaviour towards us. He was not speaking about full-scale physical violence, which is intended to kill or injure. Indeed, it is quite possible that Jesus had in mind the episode from 2 Chronicles, where the prophet Micaiah was abused in that very way by Zedekiah, one of the false prophets, whom he was opposing and rebuking:

²² *Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; the LORD has spoken evil concerning you.” ²³ Then Zedeki'ah the son of Chena'anah came near and struck Micai'ah on the cheek, and said, “Which way did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?”*

2 Chronicles 18:22-23 (RSV)

When Micaiah was insulted by being slapped on the cheek, he did not respond with violence. He answered the false prophet, and the King, with some very direct words but he did not fight back *physically* in response to that provocation. If we are insulted and mistreated *for being Christians*, Jesus does not want us to fight, but to show forbearance and to love, and pray for, those who hate us.

However, it does not follow that He wants us to accept *full-scale violence* being used against us. Otherwise, Jesus would not have subsequently commanded all the disciples to buy swords.

On the rare occasions when Luke 22:36 is mentioned at all, the usual explanation is that Jesus told the disciples to buy swords to guard against wild animals, not people. But that cannot be right. Firstly, no mention is made of wild animals. Secondly, there were no wild animals in Israel anyway. The lions and bears that King David fought 1000 years earlier had long since disappeared. Thirdly, when Jesus sent the disciples out on an earlier evangelistic campaign, in Luke 10 and Mark 6, He *didn't* tell them to bring swords. But He surely would have if wild animals had been the reason for the swords:

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. ²And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road.

Luke 10:1-4 (RSV)

Moreover, when instructing the disciples in Matthew 10, Jesus tells them they are not even to bring a wooden *staff*, of the kind used for self-defence, let alone to carry swords:

⁹Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, ¹⁰no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food.

Matthew 10:9-10 (RSV)

Thus, on that occasion, Jesus did not think they needed any weapon at all to defend themselves, *not even a staff*. That was possibly because they were only preaching within Israel itself and the potential risk was only slight. Yet, when He spoke to them later, in Luke 22, He did tell them to bring swords on their future trips. What is more, He did not limit that instruction to any particular trip or location. The command is across the board and appears to apply to *all the disciples and all occasions*:

³⁵And he said to them, "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." ³⁶He said to them, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.

Luke 22:35-36 (RSV)

What then is the purpose and meaning of a sword and what does it signify? It is plainly intended only to be used for *self-defence*, not as a weapon of *offence*, because the Gospel has to be spread by preaching, not by force of any kind. Indeed, we may not even use manipulation or deceit, let alone violence, as a means of bringing people to faith. Nevertheless, we are quite clearly looking at the swords being used to *fight* with, because a sword has no other use.

Jesus wasn't referring to pen knives, scissors or cutlery. He said swords, and He meant swords, not any other kind of sharp instrument, for which we might possibly have a non-violent use. Therefore, anybody who argues for pacifism, whether on the basis of Matthew 5 or otherwise, must explain why swords are needed at all. They must also explain why Jesus made it *mandatory* to go out and buy one, rather than leave it up to each disciple's discretion to choose whether to do so.

Peter was carrying a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane, in Jesus' presence. That is why it was there, already on his person, for him to use on Malchus.

Actually, Jesus must have already instructed the disciples to carry swords, even before the command that He gave in Luke 22:36. That must be so because when He made that statement, in the Garden of Gethsemane, at least two of the disciples *were already carrying swords*. What's more, they were doing so *in His very presence*, without being rebuked for doing so, and without appearing to have any

expectation of being rebuked. Would you carry a sword, or a loaded gun, in the immediate presence of your boss if you had any reason at all to suppose that he would disapprove?

Indeed, would you carry a weapon of any kind unless your boss had already expressly authorised it beforehand? We can't be absolutely certain that Jesus had already given them instructions, because it does not say so. However, it surely makes no sense otherwise. Note the open and confident way in which Peter points to the two swords and offers to use them. He clearly doesn't sound like he expects even to be questioned as to why he is carrying a weapon, let alone told off for doing so:

***And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough."
Luke 22:38 (RSV)***

If the above verse is ever referred to, preachers focus on the second part, where Jesus declines Peter's offer to use the sword and says "*It is enough*". The usual conclusion is that Jesus opposes all violence *as a matter of principle* and is forbidding the use of swords *in general*. But that is to misunderstand the passage. All that Jesus was declining was the use of violence *for the purpose of preventing His crucifixion*. He knew that, for our sake, it had to go ahead. We cannot deduce anything further than that from His words to Peter. However a sword was then used, contrary to Jesus' instructions:

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" ⁴⁹ And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Luke 22:47-53 (RSV)

If we look at the parallel passage, in John's gospel, we see that it was Peter who used the sword:

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"

John 18:10-11 (RSV)

When these two passages are taught in churches, the same misguided conclusion is often reached, that Jesus opposes *all violence*. However, no such statement is made by Jesus, or even implied, in any of the gospel accounts. Jesus' reason for not wanting Peter to use his sword, on this occasion, is that what is about to happen next must go ahead. So the instruction not to defend Him was specific to that particular situation, not to all situations. We might make a similar point today if, in a hostage situation, a senior police officer was to instruct his men not to open fire.

We could not deduce from that instruction that he is a pacifist and opposes all use of force, at any time, or in any circumstances. We would realise that he just means that they should not fire at that moment, or on that occasion, or until he orders otherwise. Indeed, as in Gethsemane, the very fact that the senior officer allowed his men to carry firearms in the first place, and to be present at the scene, means that he does not oppose firearms in general. Note also that, in John 18:11 above, Jesus says to Peter "*Put your sword into its sheath...*" He did not tell him to *get rid of it*, or throw it away.

Neither did He say anything to object to him either *owning* it or *carrying* it. That is very significant, because to put the sword back into its sheath means that Peter would be *continuing to carry it*. Jesus would never have authorised the continued carrying of a sword, even inside a sheath, if it was wrong or sinful, in any way, for him to do that. If Jesus had objected in principle to Peter carrying a sword

He would, instead, have said something like *“Take that sheath off and get rid of it altogether. You shouldn’t be carrying any sword.”*

Moreover, the very fact that Peter had a sheath for his sword, which would be attached to his belt, would have made it obvious to everybody, not just to Jesus, that he was carrying a sword. Yet, as we saw earlier, Jesus said nothing to object to him doing so. Accordingly, the passages in Luke 22 and John 18 cannot validly be used to argue against the use of force in general, or even lethal force. That is not what those passages are about. They both actually provide powerful arguments *in favour* of the use of force, in appropriate situations and appropriate ways.

Why then did Jesus give the command about buying swords at that time? Perhaps it was because He was mindful that, very soon, they would not have Him physically present with them. Or, maybe it was because they would soon be going outside of Israel, to hostile Gentile nations, where they would face many new dangers? It could be that any or all of those considerations caused Him to speak at that moment. Who knows? Whatever his precise reasons were, the operative point, which there is no getting away from, is that this is what He then said:

He said to them, “But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.

Luke 22:36 (RSV)

If Jesus had any objection, in principle, to the use of violence and, in particular, to the use of lethal force, He would never have said those words. He would either have said nothing at all, or He would have said something else, but He wouldn’t have commanded them *all* to buy swords. Moreover, on the issue of whether it is wrong in principle for men to serve as soldiers, and thus to carry weapons and use them, consider this rarely-mentioned passage from Luke 3. Crowds are gathered around John the Baptist. He had been preaching repentance and telling the people to *“bear fruit that befits repentance.”*

In response to this, people of different types and occupations, such as tax collectors and others, approach John the Baptist and ask him what they need to do in order to repent. Then some *soldiers* come to John and ask him what *they* ought to do. If John had any objection, in principle, to them being soldiers at all, or to carrying weapons, or using them, he would surely have said so. But he doesn’t. He merely gives them this very limited advice as to how they should conduct themselves *while continuing to be soldiers*:

Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

Luke 3:14 (ESV)

If a prostitute, abortionist or pornographer had asked John what they need to do in order to repent, he would have told them to stop doing what they were doing and seek another career. But John the Baptist plainly had no objection to the concept of being a soldier or to them bearing, or even using, arms. If he had, then his words would make no sense. Also, by telling soldiers to be content with their wages, it plainly follows that he did not consider it sinful to earn one’s wages by being a soldier.

Neither is it sinful to be in the army, or to do the things that soldiers have to do, including using lethal force. If it was, John would have said so, because he was not known for being shy or timid or for not speaking his mind. It was rebuking Herod Antipas for his adultery that led to John being imprisoned and executed. Moreover, it is also clear that John envisages that those soldiers will *continue* to carry weapons, because he tells them not to rob anybody by violence.

They would not be able to rob anyone in the first place unless they had weapons. Thus what John is warning them against is not the *possession* or *use* of weapons. He means their *illegitimate* use as a means of robbing passers-by and forcing them to hand over money. Therefore anybody who claims

that it is inherently wrong for a Christian to serve in the military has John the Baptist to contend with. They would need to explain away his words, both what he does say and what he doesn't say.

What about the use of force by a person who works for the State as a soldier, police officer or other such role?

narrower point is whether it is at least legitimate for a Christian who works as a *servant of the State* to use force. What if the person confronted by violence is not engaged in Christian ministry or being attacked for their own faith? What if he is a policeman or soldier with a job to do on behalf of the State, by which he has been validly appointed? He clearly can use force, even lethal force, if the need arises, to fulfil his lawful duties. Firstly he is authorised by the State but, far more importantly, the Bible also endorses that. Apostle Paul addresses this point directly:

¹Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.

Romans 13:1-4 (RSV)

This not only applies to pagan soldiers working for the Roman Emperor, but to all law enforcement officers, whether they are Christians or not. God wants order in civil society, but that will inevitably involve resisting, fighting, and even killing, the wicked. There is no other way. I remember an incident when I was a brand new recruit as a police officer. We were on night shift and a 999 call came through. A man had stolen a caterpillar type digger, used for demolition and construction work, and he was driving it into walls and buildings.

He had some kind of grudge against the local council and was venting his anger. It was a dangerous situation to deal with, as his vehicle was huge and no police car could stop it. If we had been in the USA, we would probably have shot him. But we were in the UK, where the police aren't armed. We would therefore have had to radio for an armed officer to come which, in those days, would have taken about 30 minutes. It is quicker these days. At that point a constable called Gerry, who was a strong Christian, had an idea.

He picked up a cluster of wall bricks, held together with cement which had come from one of the walls the man had demolished. Gerry was big and was actually the police heavy weight boxing champion for the county. He then asked the Inspector if he could throw the cluster of bricks at the window of the driver's cabin and the Inspector told him to go ahead. So, Gerry threw it at high speed and it smashed through the screen and hit the driver on the side of the head. I saw his head reverberate from the impact. It was a direct hit and stopped the man driving any further.

Then a number of officers climbed onto the digger and pulled him out, while he was still dazed. The question is was it legitimate for Gerry to throw that cluster of wall bricks at the man's head? There was every chance that it could kill him. Yet, the only realistic alternative was to let that deranged maniac carry on. If so, any number of other people could have been killed, whether members of the public or police officers. Some might criticise Gerry, but I thought he did exactly the right thing and that the Inspector was absolutely correct to authorise it.

What about using force to defend another person from violence being used against them?

Before we look more deeply at the issue of using force for self-defence, let's consider what the position is where it becomes necessary to use force to protect *another person*, rather than yourself. My own conviction is that this is clearly legitimate, at least biblically. However, you need to be aware that *the legal position in your country may not reflect that*. We shall look at that a little more closely below. At any rate, at least biblically speaking, defending other people would be one of the purposes of the 'sword' that disciples are meant to carry, as per Luke 22:36.

If anything, using force to defend another person is even more obviously appropriate than using it to defend oneself. From a theological perspective, as opposed to a legal one, I would agonise far less over that than about protecting myself. Even what Jesus said in Matthew 5 would not, in my view, prevent us resisting the wicked *on behalf of another person* who is being attacked or injured. That said, the above points are largely academic because, 99.9% of the time, the way in which any of us resist wickedness, and wicked people, is not by means of violence anyway.

I was a policeman for three years and, even in that job, the use of violence on my part very rarely came into it. Even for me, let alone for a member of the public, 99% of the resistance that I put up against wicked men in those days was not by physical force. It was done in a host of other ways and mainly involved law, procedure and the use of authority. Whenever I arrested a person I generally just used words alone, and the power of my uniform, without any physical force. I told them the position and calmly told them to come to the police station with me.

It was rare to have to wrestle them to the ground and force them into handcuffs, contrary to the impression given by TV programmes, which tend to sensationalise the job. Likewise, where we encounter wickedness in daily life, we are meant to resist it in a multitude of different ways, depending on all the circumstances. Most of these responses will not involve any violence. So, even if you are a pacifist, we need not get bogged down in a debate about the rights and wrongs of using physical force, because such things hardly ever arise, except on the TV.

In real terms what we are usually talking about is making yourself into a non-violent obstacle in the path of wicked people, whether at work, in the church or anywhere else. When I ran a law firm I took very seriously my duty to watch out for and resist workplace bullying. However, I never needed to hit anybody to achieve that. Yet, if I had somehow needed to use force, I believe it would have been justified, at least biblically, if not in terms of the criminal law or employment law of the UK.

An incident where I had to prepare myself to use force to protect my son from a violent attack

What about the rights and wrongs, at least theologically, of using physical force to defend a friend, a family member, or indeed any other person? I remember an occasion when I took my son to a football match, away at Charlton Athletic. After the game we took a bus back to the car park. The bus was crowded and we could not stand together so my son, who was aged 15, had to stand several feet away from me. I then noticed two young men in their early twenties standing near me. They were Charlton fans and were discussing my boy. It was clear they intended to attack him.

He was unaware of all this, as he never heard any of what they said about him. I had about five minutes to get ready for what I expected them to attempt to do and to plan my response. I chose not to say anything, either to the two men or to my son, because I wanted to keep the element of surprise. I did not want to alert them to the fact that I was with him, as I wanted them to be unprepared for my intervention. I also knew that any attack would probably take place after we got off the bus, not while we were still on it. All buses have CCTV cameras and they would not want to be filmed.

As the bus pulled up at each bus stop I waited to see whether they would get off or whether they really were waiting for my son to get off first. It became ever clearer that the latter was the case. They did

not get off at any of the stops and also continued to whisper to each other while looking at my son. Eventually we arrived at the bus stop before the one where we needed to get off. At that point I moved over to the exit door where my son was already standing. I then indicated, solely by eye contact, that we were getting off, as I did not want to be heard to speak to him.

I waited for the other passengers to get off, and on, as I wanted the doorway to be clear. Then my son and I quickly got off. As I had expected, the two men got off immediately after us. As soon as they were off the bus, I grabbed my son and pushed him back on. Then I got back on myself and stood in the doorway, to stop the two men getting back on. By this stage, they had realised that we were together and they began to threaten us. But I simply waited in the doorway, the one in the middle of the bus, not the one at the front, and waited for them to try to get back on.

I was ready to hit the first one who tried it. I have a strong punch and a good kick too, as I used to do karate when I was a teenager and got half way to black belt. So, I wasn't planning to go easy on them. I fully intended to hit very hard and, if need be, to seriously injure them. By altering our positions, so that they were now on the pavement and I was on the raised platform at the entrance of the bus I gained a further height advantage of about 18 inches. It also meant I had the doorway covered, such that it would have been difficult for both of them to get on at once.

Whichever of them did come at me would have to face the obstacle of stepping up onto the bus in order to get on. That would give me a fraction of a second when they were exposed and in an awkward posture. I was determined to take full advantage of that. They could see they were at a tactical disadvantage, and would be vulnerable when boarding. They probably also sensed how resolute I was and they must have known that the first one to try it would get injured.

My intention was to punch hard at the nose. It breaks easily, causes a lot of pain, and can end a fight quickly. I calculated that I would probably only need to hit the first one and then the other would back off. Thankfully, while the two men were edging forwards, the bus driver suddenly closed the doors. As the doors were closing, the larger one lunged forwards, but was too late. So he began to punch the windows and shout.

I have deliberately been explicit and have set out frankly, without any euphemisms, exactly what my intentions were. Many would find it shocking to hear someone speak of intending to break a person's nose and say that it "*doesn't sound very Christian*". Some might object less if that injury was the unintended, accidental consequence of my defending myself and my son. But for it to be my conscious intention may be thought to be going too far. It is not what one usually hears in church. However, it ought to be, because it is a real issue and needs to be faced and prepared for.

Being prepared is important. The incident I faced was slow in its build up and I had several minutes to form a plan and get ready. I was also able to get clear in my own mind what I could legitimately do and how much force I should use. However, that is not the norm, as such crises are usually sprung upon you without any warning. One moment you may be out shopping, and the next someone is mugging you, or your wife, or attacking your child. In that split second there is no time to do a Bible study to work out your position on the ethics of self-defence, or to cross refer Matthew 5 with Luke 22. You need to have your theology already worked out in advance.

Then, if and when the moment comes, you can spring straight into action without any delay and without an agony of indecision and uncertainty. You need to know, *at least biblically*, if not legally, that where you or another person are threatened with death or injury, you can respond with *whatever force is necessary* to stop it happening. That force might only need to be at the lower end of the scale and involve only punches or kicks. However, it can sometimes be much worse than that and a situation could arise where you have no realistic alternative but to injure, or even kill, the attacker.

However, be acutely aware of the law on self-defence and defence of others in your country. Legal systems vary and in the UK the legal defence of ‘self-defence’ is shrinking fast.

When I speak of self-defence I am referring to it from a *biblical* perspective and am only saying what *God* allows us to do. That may, or may not, coincide with the criminal or civil legal systems in your jurisdiction. In the United Kingdom the legal defence of ‘self-defence’ when faced with a charge of assault, or even murder, was well-established and used to be widely understood. However, in recent years, with the rampant growth of political correctness and rights-based thinking, that legal defence has been severely weakened.

Therefore it may not now be available to you, even in circumstances where it once was. Thus, if you are going to defend yourself, or your family, as the Bible permits, you must face the fact that the police and courts may not approve. They may not see it as a valid defence to a charge of assault that is then brought against you, even if *God* does. When I was a policeman in the mid-1980s, and even in my early years as a lawyer, a person defending himself or others from an attacker would not have been prosecuted unless his response was grotesquely disproportionate and/or unreasonable.

That is no longer the case. When there is a fight, prosecutors will look at prosecuting both the attacker and the defender and sometimes only the defender. That is how absurd the position has become, due to political correctness. It has no place for concepts like right and wrong, and only thinks in terms of ‘rights’. Even then, it is the supposed rights of the criminal that are prioritised, not the victim or bystanders. So, you have to be very realistic and assume that if you do defend yourself, or your family, you may not receive the support of the legal system afterwards.

Indeed, you may well be prosecuted for your response,, even if the assailant is let off. If you and the attacker are both prosecuted, the sentence given to you for using what they deem to be “excessive force” to defend yourself may be more severe than what he gets for attacking you. That may be the case even if you have no previous convictions and he has many. Nevertheless, the practical reality is that it is still necessary to defend yourself and your family, no matter how absurd the law may have become.

Therefore, if you agree that self-defence is necessary, and that the Bible permits it, then go ahead. But do so with your eyes wide open as to how it may be viewed afterwards by the police, prosecutors and courts. Their values and thinking are diverging ever farther away from *God*’s. One of the key things they will look at is whether you used a weapon and, if so, what kind. If it is anything which is ordinarily intended to be used as a weapon, it is increasingly likely to be viewed as excessive.

So, in the UK, to carry a gun or a knife is illegal and would automatically lead to prosecution. Thus, if you wish to carry or use a weapon, make sure it is something which isn’t ordinarily used or viewed as such. You may have to be imaginative. For example, keep in your bedroom, hallway or car various innocuous items which are not ordinarily thought of as weapons, but which can be put to such use if need be, such as a walking stick. Another good idea is a can of strong wasp killer. That can be more effective than pepper spray and is less likely to be viewed afterwards as a weapon.

The nearer it is to being a weapon, the more the authorities will disapprove of its use, or even its possession, at least in the UK. It will differ in other jurisdictions. When I was in Israel recently, there was a campaign of knife attacks by Arabs on Jews. So I carried a walking stick wherever the tour group went. Some other men copied my idea so we were ready, if the need arose, to respond to a knife attack. Yet, we were breaking no laws because all we had were walking sticks, which we were entitled to carry, albeit that, privately, we had a different purpose in mind for them.

The best thing is to obtain at least some basic training in self-defence and in how to use your fists, feet, elbows and knees as weapons. Their use will attract less criticism than the use of any object, even if it is not a conventional weapon. They also have the added advantage of always being with

you, wherever you go. Enquire into this kind of training and prepare yourself as best you can. Then, if an attack occurs, your skills will be ready, as well as your theology.

What about the use of firearms by private citizens, even with the intention of killing the assailant?

What is the position, at least in God's eyes, about the use of *lethal* force by a private citizen, such as by the use of firearms? In the UK the question is largely academic, as firearms are so heavily regulated. One needs a licence just to own them. Even then, they need to be kept locked away in a cabinet at home. Therefore they are unlikely to be accessible quickly enough to use in an emergency anyway. The reality is that if you did ever use a gun to wound or kill a violent burglar or rapist, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service would be likely to prosecute you.

They will be extremely reluctant to be persuaded that the use of a gun in self-defence is ever reasonable. In theory it can be, and that argument was accepted much more readily in the past. However, it is far less likely to be considered reasonable today. If you live in another legal jurisdiction, such as many states in the USA, the position may be very different. Then the question of whether you should own, carry and potentially use a firearm becomes a live issue. I met a man in 2014 who opened my eyes to all of this. His name was Josh and he came from Minnesota.

He owned licensed firearms and also obtained a licence to carry a concealed weapon on his person, more or less all the time. Therefore he had a handgun immediately accessible wherever he went, at work, driving, shopping and so on. He was a strong Christian and saw it as an aspect of his ministry to carry a weapon to defend others, should the need arise. He had also discussed this with his employer and he was happy for Josh to carry a gun while at work.

His boss saw it as a benefit for the business and its other employees. Due to the UK's very different culture, many British Christians would struggle to see how Josh carrying a gun could be something which God would ever approve of, or see as a service to the community. However, it made perfect sense to me and I thoroughly approved of him. In Israel, vast numbers of civilians carry guns routinely. Anyone who used to be an officer in the IDF is allowed to carry a weapon. So are security guards and various other authorised persons.

That adds up to a high percentage of the civilian population, not to mention all the serving soldiers and police who are out and about, whether on or off duty. Any terrorist, or common criminal, knows that he is likely to be resisted by some bystander walking or driving nearby. By contrast, in the UK, where only criminals and terrorists carry guns, there is almost never anybody nearby who can defend the public from the assailant. Therefore the terrorist or robber has it all his own way.

The USA is somewhere in between. Although most people don't carry a gun, there are enough who do to pose a serious threat to those with wicked intentions. Someone might object that the very possession of firearms is the problem and that reducing the public's access to them would reduce violence. There is some merit in that argument, because guns can, and do, end up in the wrong hands. But the overwhelming likelihood is that they would anyway. The real issue is whether the right-thinking element of the community should carry arms *as well*, because the wrongdoers already do.

Those evildoers don't spend any time agonising over whether God approves. They only care about whether there is anybody to resist them. Therefore the possibility, or likelihood, of coming up against an armed citizen is a deterrent to wrongdoers, and even to terrorists. But even if it isn't, it is at least a way of stopping them at an early stage, before they go on an extended shooting spree. The first time I visited En Gedi in Israel I saw a group of primary school kids on a school trip. Some of their teachers, including women, had automatic rifles hanging from their necks.

It was a strange sight, but it was right and necessary. Moreover, it seems to be working. Israel is surrounded by millions of vicious enemies and also has many hate-filled Muslims living within it. Given the circumstances, their approach keeps the levels of violence surprisingly low, such that I have always felt safe walking the streets in Israel. That said, the primary issue is not whether the carrying and use of guns is effective as a deterrent. The real question is whether the Bible *permits* us to use force, including weapons if need be. I personally believe it does.

Why did Jesus Himself use physical force when dealing with money-changers in the Temple?

Some may still be unconvinced, and feel that Jesus' words in Matthew 5 forbid any form of force, or indeed any resistance to evil whatsoever, violent or otherwise. If so, they would need to address the issue of Jesus' own conduct when He drove the money-changers from the Temple and knocked over their tables. That doesn't sound either peaceful or passive. It was direct action and it also involved the use of force to make them stop what they were doing. However much we might try to tone down this incident, the inescapable fact is that Jesus used physical force:

¹⁵ And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶ And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." ¹⁸ And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.

Mark 11:15-18 (ESV)

Some may argue that the incident in the Temple cannot be used as a precedent and that Jesus was doing something which only He was allowed to do. But where is the authority for that? The Bible doesn't say so. It would be pure supposition. Certainly, Jesus was the only one who could call the Temple His "Father's house". But that is not the issue. The question is whether we can use force in opposing or apprehending those who do wicked things. The place where those wicked acts occur is not the issue. Jesus' actions on that day were entirely consistent with His teaching.

They had to be, because He was always consistent with his own nature and with God's Word. Any inconsistency would have been sin, and He never sinned, so we can rule that out. Therefore His actions did not contravene either the Law of Moses, which was still in force at that time, or His own words in the Sermon on the Mount. It follows that when in a similar situation, a Christian can use appropriate force to prevent something wicked, even if it is not a threat to anybody's life or safety. Therefore we are entitled, in certain circumstances, to act as Jesus did on that day.

What about Jesus' own use of force, and even weapons, in His roles as "LORD of hosts" and "Commander of the army of the LORD"?

The incident with the money-changers was during Jesus' earthly ministry and involved only limited force. However, one of Jesus' many titles is the '*LORD of hosts*', which means the '*LORD of armies*'. It is a military title like 'Field Marshal' or 'Commander in Chief'. It therefore makes Jesus a military figure. That is an aspect of His role which few ever consider. It doesn't fit the usual image of Jesus and would make some uncomfortable, as it is not how they like to think of Him. Let's look at a few passages where Jesus' title, '*LORD of hosts*', is used. This one is from Isaiah:

*⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government will be upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called*

*“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

*⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom,
to establish it, and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

Isaiah 9:6-7 (RSV)

This next passage, from Zechariah, shows the LORD of hosts directly engaged in military action, protecting the people of Israel:

*¹⁴ Then the Lord will appear over them,
and his arrow go forth like lightning;
the Lord God will sound the trumpet,
and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.
¹⁵ The Lord of hosts will protect them,
and they shall devour and tread down the slingers;
and they shall drink their blood like wine,
and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.*

Zechariah 9:14-15 (RSV)

Also, in the book of Joshua, we see that ‘the Lord’, or the ‘Lord God of Israel’, fights for Israel:

*¹⁴ There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man; for
the Lord fought for Israel.*

Joshua 10:14 (RSV)

*⁴⁰ So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the
slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the
Lord God of Israel commanded. ⁴¹ And Joshua defeated them from Ka'desh-bar'nea to Gaza, and
all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. ⁴² And Joshua took all these kings and their land at
one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel. ⁴³ Then Joshua returned, and all Israel
with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*

Joshua 10:40-43 (RSV)

In Jeremiah it is made clear that the LORD of hosts is the King, and we already know that the King of Israel is Jesus:

*“As I live, says the King,
whose name is the LORD of hosts,
like Tabor among the mountains,
and like Carmel by the sea, shall one come.
Jeremiah 46:18 (RSV)*

Many other passages also use this title, ‘the LORD of hosts’. Therefore this description of Jesus in military terms or, to be more precise, of the Second Person of the Trinity, is a consistent theme. However, let’s now see an even more explicit passage where the Second Person of the Trinity makes a pre-appearance on the Earth. In this case He is described as “*the commander of the army of the Lord*”:

¹³ *When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"* ¹⁴ *And he said, "No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."* *And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshiped, and said to him, "What does my lord bid his servant?"* ¹⁵ *And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.*

Joshua 5:13-15 (RSV)

This military figure, with a drawn sword, is the Son of God Himself in a pre-appearance. He is clearly not a mere angel, because Joshua *worships* Him and is not told to stop. He certainly would have been told to stop if it had only been an angel, as they never permit anybody to worship them. By contrast, this Person actually encourages Joshua to do so. He even tells him to take off his shoes, as he is standing on holy ground, because God Himself is present. He would not be told to do that if the "Commander of the army of the Lord" was only an angel.

The point of all these passages is that Jesus is clearly *a military figure*. He would never be the Commander of an army if there was anything inherently wrong or sinful about the use of military force. Blasphemy, idolatry, lust and all other forms of sin are always wrong, regardless of who does them or when or why. Therefore there are no circumstances in which Jesus would ever engage in them. However, that is evidently not the case with military force and capital punishment.

In the book of Revelation we again see Jesus as a warlike military figure. We would never see Him carrying a sword, let alone using one, if there was anything intrinsically wrong or sinful about doing so. There are times when God wants the wicked to be fought against, and even destroyed without mercy, because their evil is so great that they simply have to be wiped out. The classic example of this is Joshua's campaign against the Canaanites, all of whom had to be destroyed:

¹⁹ *There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; they took all in battle.* ²⁰ *For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed, and should receive no mercy but be exterminated, as the Lord commanded Moses.*

Joshua 11:19-20 (RSV)

Consider also this passage from Isaiah which speaks of what will happen when Jesus returns and how He Himself will confront, and kill, the wicked:

¹⁵ *"For behold, the Lord will come in fire,
and his chariots like the storm wind,
to render his anger in fury,
and his rebuke with flames of fire.*

¹⁶ *For by fire will the Lord execute judgment,
and by his sword, upon all flesh;
and those slain by the Lord shall be many.*

Isaiah 66:15-16 (RSV)

Apostle Paul's statements in relation to the use, or non-use, of violent force in self-defence or for the defence of others

I believe it is legitimate, at least in God's eyes, to use physical force, and even lethal force, in self-defence or to protect another person from injury or death. However, let us now consider what apostle Paul has to say about the right way to respond to mistreatment, cursing and even persecution. Paul's

words are reminiscent of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells us to bless those who persecute us:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Romans 12:14 (ESV)

Paul goes even further and tells us not to avenge ourselves and that when our enemy is hungry, we are to feed him and, if he is thirsty, to give him a drink. This is partly a metaphor, but is also to be taken literally in appropriate circumstances. The point is that a Christian has to overcome evil with good. Therefore, wherever possible, we should avoid force and seek to bless our enemies, especially if the persecution is not physical but takes other forms:

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:17-21 (ESV)

Nevertheless, what Paul says must also be read alongside what Jesus says in Luke 22, just as Jesus' own previous statements in the Sermon on the Mount need to be. So, as we saw earlier, nothing that Paul says about blessing our enemies precludes us from using force in self-defence when physically attacked. Neither does it prevent us from generally resisting the wicked, by non-violent means, when we face other forms of non-violent attack. It all depends on the circumstances.

Apostle Paul caused, or helped to cause, the temporary blinding of Elymas the magician.

To illustrate this point about how Paul's words in Romans 12:14-21 do not preclude us from resisting the wicked, and even using force to do so, let us consider this strange incident. Paul came across a false prophet called Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas. He was causing all sorts of problems through his wickedness. However, Paul opposed him, and very dramatically too:

⁶When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.

Acts 13:6-11 (ESV)

If the Sermon on the Mount, and/or Paul's own words in Romans 12, meant that we must never do anything to resist the wicked, then Paul would not have acted as he did with Elymas. Admittedly, Paul didn't personally use physical force, but he did still resist Elymas. Or at least he was used as the channel through whom God resisted him, even to the extent of making him temporarily blind. By any standards, what Paul did has to be classified as 'resisting' Elymas. That shows that Jesus' words, and also Paul's, need to be understood in their proper context and not interpreted too broadly.

How does forgiving others fit in with the use of force and is there a contradiction?

Some might ask how all this talk of using force can be reconciled with what the Bible says about our duty to *forgive* others. I have written some detailed chapters in my Book 2 about forgiving others and what it does, *and doesn't*, mean. I would refer you to those for a thorough discussion of that subject. In brief, the position is that forgiving others is not an emotion or a feeling. It is essentially a decision of your will. You are to choose not to harbour bitterness, take revenge, or act as if you were that person's judge (*kree-tace*). That role is reserved to Jesus alone.

He will judge them in the end, and take any necessary vengeance. In the meantime, it is not for us to usurp Jesus' unique position as Judge of all mankind, or to decide what punishment people deserve. Neither are we entitled to engage in bitterness, hate or rage towards them. Even if we were, it would still be a bad idea, because such emotions are deeply damaging to us. For all those reasons, we are commanded to forgive others in the sense of releasing them from our lives and letting Jesus judge and punish them, instead of us doing so.

I liken it to how a judge '*recuses*' himself by stepping aside and transferring a case on to the list of another judge if he has reason to think that it is not a suitable case for him to deal with. That might occur where he knows the Defendant personally, or has some conflict of interest. Such a judge then steps aside and lets another judge hear the case and decide what to do. That is, essentially, what forgiving others is all about. However, forgiveness does not necessarily involve anything other than, or more than, that.

For example, contrary to what many assume, forgiveness does not mean that we also need to be reconciled, or resume a relationship with the wrongdoer. Neither does it mean that we should trust him, go on holiday with him, treat him as a friend, or lend him our lawnmower. All of those things might, or might not, occur after we have forgiven a person, i.e. after we have '*recused*' ourselves. But they need not necessarily do so and they are not part of the definition of forgiveness. They are separate, additional things which may, or may not, arise later, *after* we have forgiven the wrongdoer.

Likewise, to forgive another person for what he has done, or is still doing, does not necessarily require us to refrain from defending ourselves or our family, church or business from him. Such defence or self-defence does not contradict, or render illegitimate, any forgiveness on our part. So, to use an example from the context of criminal law, we can defend ourselves against an attacker to whatever extent is reasonably necessary and yet still hand him over to the police and courts for them to judge him thereafter.

Indeed even before, or during, that use of force in self-defence you can have already forgiven, and still be continuing to forgive, the assailant. You may have genuinely forgiven him but you are, quite rightly, preventing him from causing any further harm to yourself or your family. One of the greatest causes of difficulty in the area of forgiving others is the confusion that people feel about the definition of forgiveness. In particular it is a result of all the other things which they wrongly imagine to be contained within forgiveness, or which they mistakenly think must accompany it.

CHAPTER 26

PRAYING AGAINST THE WICKED – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ‘IMPRECATORY’ PRAYER

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “Arise, O LORD, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.”

Numbers 10:35 (RSV)

*“No weapon that is formed against you will prosper;
And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,
And their vindication is from Me,” declares the Lord.
Isaiah 54:17 (NASB)*

Arise, O Lord!

*Deliver me, O my God!
For thou dost smite all my enemies on the cheek,
thou dost break the teeth of the wicked.
Psalm 3:7 (RSV)*

*Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!
Psalm 35:1 (RSV)*

*Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues;
for I see violence and strife in the city.
Psalm 55:9 (RSV)*

²³ *But the Lord your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed.*

Deuteronomy 7:23 (RSV)

*Let my persecutors be put to shame,
but keep me from shame;
let them be terrified,
but keep me from terror.
Bring on them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction.
Jeremiah 17:18 (NIV)*

² *And he said to me, “Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city;*

Ezekiel 11:2 (RSV)

*Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man.”
Ezekiel 11:4 (RSV)*

Is it ever valid to pray *against* another person?

The first question is can we ever pray *against* a person, or at least against their actions and plans? This is controversial, as many believe we should never do so, under any circumstances. The word ‘praying’ is almost always followed by the word ‘for’. The very idea of praying *against* any person or

thing therefore seems alien to many of us. Some won't teach on this at all, for fear of inducing immature Christians to go too far or to use imprecatory prayer in the wrong way, against the wrong people, or with wrong motives. Our starting point is that we should, ordinarily, pray *for* others, not against them:

⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

Matthew 5:43-44 (ESV)

Are Jesus' words absolute, with no exceptions? Or do they need to be read alongside, and be tempered by, other passages? I believe they do and that there are times where we can, *and should*, pray against the wicked, or at least their plans and actions. However, we must be sure, before even considering the use of imprecatory prayer, that the person really *is* wicked. We cannot assume that anybody who opposes us is, by definition, wicked, or even wrong. We tend to think that, as we are so very self-centred, but not all who oppose us are even bad, let alone wicked.

They could be entirely right to resist us, as we may be in the wrong, or doing wrong. Indeed, God Himself may even have sent them to oppose us, as His agents. So don't leap automatically to the conclusion that anybody who ever gets in your way must be a bad person, such that imprecatory prayer is justified. Instead, stop and question yourself closely and examine the facts objectively. Also ask God to reveal the truth to you. Very few of us ever do any of that, but such questions must be addressed before imprecatory prayer is even *considered*, let alone engaged in.

Subject to that strong caveat, there are situations where it is appropriate to use imprecatory prayer. We shall examine some in this chapter. We shall also look at what various Bible characters did and how, when, why, and against whom, they did it. We shall begin by defining '*imprecation*' and then look at King David in particular. Imprecatory prayer was a major part of his prayer life, as the Psalms clearly show, no matter how many preachers ignore them. Then we shall look at others in the Bible who engaged in imprecatory prayer, because it was by no means limited to David.

What exactly do we mean by the words 'execration', 'anathema' and 'imprecation'?

These are old-fashioned words which are rarely used now, so we must define them. Also there aren't really any modern words in common use today which have the same meaning and which we could use instead. Therefore we shall set them out in turn:

- a) **'Execration'** (noun) To 'execrate' (verb) is another word for the verb 'to curse', whereby someone or something is cursed, or a curse is pronounced upon them or it. The word execration, when used as a noun, means the action of execrating, or it can mean the actual uttered curse or 'anathema' itself.
- b) **'Anathema'** (noun) This is a Greek word which is used in the New Testament, for example in Galatians 1:8-9, and it means 'accursed'. Apostle Paul uses this word in speaking against those who preach a false gospel when he says: "... *let him be accursed*". (anathema):

⁸ *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.*

Galatians 1:8-9 (RSV)

- c) **'Imprecation'** (noun) To 'imprecate' (verb), means to pray for, invoke, or call down evil upon a person, or to curse them. So, imprecation (noun) is the act of imprecating. It can also mean the act of invoking evil, vengeance or divine judgment upon another person, or on oneself, as when taking an oath in court or 'adjuring'. The adjective form of the word is '*imprecatory*' and is used

to describe a prayer or pronouncement which involves or contains imprecation, execration or cursing.

Those are the alternative technical terms applicable to this subject. We can now examine what King David and others did, and why. Then we can consider whether or not we are meant to do likewise.

Some examples of ‘imprecatory’ psalms in which King David prayed for the failure, defeat, and even death, of his enemies or directly cursed them himself

There are many examples in the book of Psalms of David’s imprecatory prayers and/or imprecatory declarations and proclamations. We could go on and on listing them for pages. However, I will set out only a representative sample, in which David prays for the confusion, scattering, failure, defeat and even death, of his enemies. I will refer to enough of these to show that this was how David prayed and/or spoke on a regular basis, not just in exceptional, one-off situations. Consider the following extracts:

¹ *Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;
let those who hate him flee before him!*

² *As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;
as wax melts before fire,
let the wicked perish before God!*

Psalm 68:1-2 (RSV)

*Let them be put to shame and confusion
altogether who seek to snatch away my life;
let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt!*

Psalm 40:14 (RSV)

*Arise, O Lord! confront them, overthrow them!
Deliver my life from the wicked by thy sword,
Psalm 17:13 (RSV)*

¹⁷ *Let me not be put to shame, O Lord,
for I call on thee;
let the wicked be put to shame,
let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.*

¹⁸ *Let the lying lips be dumb,
which speak insolently against the righteous
in pride and contempt.*

Psalm 31:17-18 (RSV)

⁸ *Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked;
do not further his evil plot!*

⁹ *Those who surround me lift up their head,
let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!*

¹⁰ *Let burning coals fall upon them!
Let them be cast into pits, no more to rise!*

¹¹ *Let not the slanderer be established in the land;
let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!*

Psalm 140:8-11 (RSV)

⁹ *Keep me from the trap which they have laid for me,
and from the snares of evildoers!*

¹⁰ *Let the wicked together fall into their own nets,
while I escape.*

Psalm 141:9-10 (RSV)

¹¹ *For thy name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!
In thy righteousness bring me out of trouble!*

¹² *And in thy steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am thy servant.*

Psalm 143:11-12 (RSV)

⁴ *Requite them according to their work and according to the evil of their practices;
Requite them according to the deeds of their hands;
Repay them their recompense.*

Psalm 28:4 (NASB)

²⁴ *Pour out thy indignation upon them,
and let thy burning anger overtake them.*

²⁵ *May their camp be a desolation,
let no one dwell in their tents.*

²⁶ *For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten,
and him whom thou hast wounded, they afflict still more.*

²⁷ *Add to them punishment upon punishment;
may they have no acquittal from thee.*

²⁸ *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;
let them not be enrolled among the righteous.*

Psalm 69:24-28 (RSV)

¹ *Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!*

² *Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help!*

³ *Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers!
Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"*

⁴ *Let them be put to shame and dishonor who seek after my life!
Let them be turned back and disappointed who devise evil against me!*

⁵ *Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away!*

⁶ *Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!*

⁷ *For without cause they hid their net for me;
without cause they dug a pit for my life.*

⁸ *Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it--to his destruction!*

Psalm 35:1-8 (ESV)

*Let them be put to shame
and disappointed altogether who rejoice at my calamity!
Let them be clothed with shame
and dishonor who magnify themselves against me!*

Psalm 35:26 (ESV)

¹⁹ *O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God,
and that men of blood would depart from me,*

²⁰ *men who maliciously defy thee,*

who lift themselves up against thee for evil!
²¹ *Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord?*
And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee?
²² *I hate them with perfect hatred;*
I count them my enemies.

Psalm 139:19-22 (RSV)

King David also made declarations and proclamations by himself, or directly to other people. These amounted to curses, in that he was invoking God's judgment upon them.

David also asked God to expose false friends who were pretending to support him but were secretly opposed to him. Or he would say such things to people himself, *as a declaration of his own*, rather than as a request to God. When he did that he was proclaiming, in faith, that he confidently expected that they would be exposed by God. Such an imprecatory statement is effectively a curse in itself when said directly to, or about, the wicked. David himself was *invoking* God's judgment upon them, rather than *asking* for it. That is David was cursing them *himself*, rather than asking God to do so:

May the Lord therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you, and see to it, and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand."

1 Samuel 24:15 (RSV)

¹⁷ *Saul recognized David's voice, and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king."* ¹⁸ *And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands?"* ¹⁹ *Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'*

1 Samuel 26:17-19 (RSV)

¹⁶ *And some of the men of Benjamin and Judah came to the stronghold to David. ¹⁷ David went out to meet them and said to them, "If you have come to me in friendship to help me, my heart will be knit to you; but if to betray me to my adversaries, although there is no wrong in my hands, then may the God of our fathers see and rebuke you."*

1 Chronicles 12:16-17 (RSV)

David also made such declarations or proclamations to, or about, his enemies who were seeking to kill him. He not only proclaimed that they would be exposed or opposed by God, but even that they would be *killed*. It is important to see that, when speaking in this way, David was not asking God to do this. He was declaring it, *in his own right*, as what *he* expected, and wanted, to happen. Accordingly, he was cursing them himself. Or you could say he was announcing out loud what he was believing for, or had faith for. He speaks in that way in these passages:

⁹ *But those who seek to destroy my life*
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
¹⁰ *they shall be given over to the power of the sword,*
they shall be prey for jackals.

Psalm 63:9-10 (RSV)

Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.

⁷ *Some boast of chariots, and some of horses;*
but we boast of the name of the Lord our God.

⁸ *They will collapse and fall;*

but we shall rise and stand upright.

Psalm 20:6-8 (RSV)

Likewise, in this next extract, we see David making a declaration, or proclamation, of the fact that he has faith about what will become of his enemies. He boldly asserts that God has already heard his prayers for help and that He will deal with those enemies. Therefore he is sure that they will 'turn back' be 'ashamed', 'sorely troubled', and 'put to shame'. These are the outcomes which David wants, has been asking for, and is confident will happen:

⁸ *Depart from me, all you workers of evil;
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.*

⁹ *The Lord has heard my supplication;
the Lord accepts my prayer.*

¹⁰ *All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled;
they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.*

Psalm 6:8-10 (RSV)

David does the same in this next psalm:

³ *For insolent men have risen against me,
ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before them.*

⁴ *Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life.*

⁵ *He will requite my enemies with evil;
in thy faithfulness put an end to them.*

Psalm 54:3-5 (RSV)

What David was doing in the examples above amounts to curses being uttered *by him*. He is not merely asking *God* to expose, rebuke or punish the person. David is pronouncing it over them *himself*, with the intention that it should take effect *if* they are false. There are also psalms in which David makes statements or proclamations by himself, even if only for himself to hear, of what he believes God will do. In some cases he suddenly moves from making such statements into asking God to deliver him from his enemies and to smite them etc, as in Psalm 3:

O Lord, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

² *many are saying of me,
there is no help for him in God.*

³ *But thou, O Lord, art a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.*

⁴ *I cry aloud to the Lord,
and he answers me from his holy hill.*

⁵ *I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, for the Lord sustains me.*

⁶ *I am not afraid of ten thousands of people
who have set themselves against me round about.*

⁷ *Arise, O Lord!
Deliver me, O my God!*

*For thou dost smite all my enemies on the cheek,
thou dost break the teeth of the wicked.*

⁸ *Deliverance belongs to the Lord;
thy blessing be upon thy people!*

Psalm 3:1-8 (RSV)

The prophet Jeremiah also made such proclamations or declarations about the wicked, just as David did. Again, these were really *statements* rather than requests.

Jeremiah also made imprecatory statements or announcements in which he proclaimed what he believed would happen to the wicked. As in David's case, when Jeremiah did this he was not asking God to do anything. He was declaring what *he himself* believed, or had faith for. Consider this passage in which Jeremiah is speaking about his persecutors:

¹⁰ *For I hear many whispering,
Terror is on every side!
"Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
say all my familiar friends,
watching for my fall.
"Perhaps he will be deceived,
then we can overcome him,
and take our revenge on him."
¹¹ *But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
they will not overcome me.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.*
*Jeremiah 20:10-11 (RSV)**

Having proclaimed what he has faith for, Jeremiah then moves into a direct imprecatory prayer in which he asks God to bring vengeance upon these wicked men:

¹² *O Lord of hosts, who triest the righteous,
who seest the heart and the mind,
let me see thy vengeance upon them,
for to thee have I committed my cause.*
Jeremiah 20:12 (RSV)

We too sometimes need to pray and proclaim *against* the wicked, as King David did. He was not unique in having the ability, or the right, to do it.

Too many Christians are sentimental and soft about the wicked. God is not. He has openly declared that He is opposed to them and He wants us to be so too. Although it is correct to pray *for* the wicked, and to ask God to save them, it can also be right to pray *against* them, at least at certain times. It depends on the context and on the nature and severity of the situation. For example, we might ask God to destroy the plans of the wicked and to confuse their communications when they are plotting. That is important, because the wicked operate as a pack, and they devise schemes together.

We therefore need to ask God to send confusion and disunity into their camp, as they rely on each other in their plots and are conspiratorial by nature. That said, '*the camp of the wicked*' also includes the demons who inform and empower them. The demons are part of the 'gang' and need to be seen as such. So, when we pray for confusion in the enemy camp, one thing we are asking for is that the demons won't be able to assist or coordinate the wicked effectively. Therefore, we are not only praying against the human beings, but also the demons who are in or alongside them:

*Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues;
for I see violence and strife in the city.*
Psalm 55:9 (RSV)

David prayed in this way during Absalom's rebellion. He asked God to interfere with the advice given to Absalom by the shrewd and highly skilled counsellor, Ahithophel:

³¹ *And it was told David, "Ahith'ophel is among the conspirators with Ab'salom." And David said, "O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahith'ophel into foolishness."*

2 Samuel 15:31 (RSV)

In Psalm 109 David sets out a lengthy and blood-curdling curse against the wicked people who oppose and attack him.

Psalm 109 is one of the more robust of David's imprecatory psalms. The heading above it in the Revised Standard Version is '*A Psalm of anathema*', which means a psalm of cursing. That word has probably been avoided by the RSV translators so as not to upset those who are uneasy about, or opposed to, the concept of cursing anybody. Even I find parts of this psalm surprising in terms of the severity of David's request, not only about the wicked, but *their wives and families as well*.

Nevertheless, it is in the Bible, so we have to deal with it. It is how King David often prayed and there is no getting away from it. Do also bear in mind that, from David's perspective, and also from Israel's, the children of the wicked were very likely to become wicked themselves. If so, within ten years or so, they would become the next generation of adult enemies with whom David would have to contend. Seen in that context, and given that David and his line had the throne permanently, it makes sense for him to think of the long term, not just the present.

Look closely at verses 1 to 20, especially verses 10-13 and see how explicit David was. Note also that this passage contains a variety of approaches. David uses imprecatory prayer, in which he asks God to do things. He also makes proclamations and declarations of what he believes will occur. But he also makes a number of *direct curses of his own* in which he speaks curses over his enemies and invokes a dreadful outcome for them. He speaks it over them, wills it upon them, and seeks to cause it, by his own cursing words:

¹ *Be not silent, O God of my praise!*

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.*

⁶ *Appoint a wicked man against him;
let an accuser bring him to trial.*

⁷ *When he is tried, let him come forth guilty;
let his prayer be counted as sin!*

⁸ *May his days be few;
may another seize his goods!*

⁹ *May his children be fatherless,
and his wife a widow!*

¹⁰ *May his children wander about and beg;
may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit!*

¹¹ *May the creditor seize all that he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!*

¹² *Let there be none to extend kindness to him,
nor any to pity his fatherless children!*

¹³ *May his posterity be cut off;*

- may his name be blotted out in the second generation!*
- ¹⁴ *May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,
and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out!*
- ¹⁵ *Let them be before the Lord continually;
and may his memory be cut off from the earth!*
- ¹⁶ *For he did not remember to show kindness,
but pursued the poor and needy
and the broken hearted to their death.*
- ¹⁷ *He loved to curse; let curses come on him!
He did not like blessing; may it be far from him!*
- ¹⁸ *He clothed himself with cursing as his coat,
may it soak into his body like water,
like oil into his bones!*
- ¹⁹ *May it be like a garment which he wraps round him,
like a belt with which he daily girds himself!*
- ²⁰ *May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord,
of those who speak evil against my life!*

Psalm 109:1-20 (RSV)

This psalm presents a difficulty, even for advocates of imprecatory prayer. It goes further than I personally would want to go, unless I was in extreme circumstances. But then, the fact is that David spent much of his life in extreme circumstances. He faced wars, rebellions, attempts on his life, plots, lies, slanders and curses. He also had to spend years on the run with people hunting him, or seeking to betray him to those who would kill him. If I was in some of the harrowing situations David had to deal with, I think I would be willing to pray such a prayer.

Bear in mind as well that what David was praying for in verses 10-13 of Psalm 109 is actually less severe than what the British and American air forces did to Germany in the strategic bombing campaign of 1941-1945. The bombs which we dropped relentlessly, night and day, were not only aimed at German industry, dockyards and railways, but also at their *cities*. We took the view that until we were strong enough to invade France, which wasn't until June 1944, the only major offensive action of which we were realistically capable was the aerial bombing of Germany.

I believe we were right to bomb Germany, *including their civilian population*, because their whole nation was one huge war-making machine. If we could not hit all of their railways, depots and factories, we could at least hit their houses. That would render the factory workers homeless, and reduce the efficiency and industrial capacity of Germany. That was necessary, and justified, because those factory workers were just as much a threat to our troops as the German soldiers, sailors and airmen. Therefore David wasn't praying for anything worse than we inflicted on Germany.

Anyone criticising David should also bear that in mind what we did to Hiroshima and Nagasaki which were obliterated by atomic bombs. That said, Tokyo was almost equally destroyed by conventional bombs and incendiaries, by which we created a fire-storm. We were prepared, rightly in my view, to destroy those cities ourselves, and the *men, women and children who lived in them*, many of whom were innocent bystanders. Therefore, why would David be wrong to ask God to bring about the same effect, on a far smaller scale, and solely amongst the families of the wicked, not the innocent?

The difference between asking God to curse a person or group and directly cursing them yourself

The very suggestion of praying *against* a person and asking God to oppose or remove them is hard enough for most people to accept. It seems alien and improper and the fact that it is not done in the vast majority of churches strengthens the impression that there must be something wrong with it. Even more would recoil from the idea of a Christian *directly cursing* a person or group themselves.

That would seem unthinkable to many. But the problem is both of these things are done by many major figures in the Bible, including apostle Paul.

Leaving aside their validity, let us seek to distinguish these two methods more clearly. That will help us to see when it might be more appropriate to ask *God* to oppose, or curse, the person or group and in what circumstances we should do so *ourselves*. Imagine what happens when artillery is used in warfare. Those are the very large guns that fire explosive shells onto enemy positions. Let's consider how that artillery is used, and by whom, and how it is directed onto the intended targets. The soldiers can do one of two things:

- a) They can fire the heavy guns themselves. This is like what happens when a person curses something or someone themselves. They themselves are doing the actual firing.
- b) Or soldiers can request support from those who fire the artillery and give them map references, coordinates, or even laser guidance. This can be done by those in forward positions who can see the target. They then radio in and tell those who are doing the firing where the enemy is located.

The main approach taken in the Bible would broadly correspond to option (b) above. That is the most usual approach. It would involve us asking God to 'fire the artillery' at the enemy. Then the person engaging in imprecatory prayer is not firing any weapon themselves. They are asking God to do so. Nevertheless, they are still heavily involved and they fully intend for God to 'open fire' on that enemy. However, there is no getting away from the fact that, at certain times, David, Moses, Paul and others also engaged in option (a) above.

That is they fired the 'artillery' themselves by directly cursing a person or group, rather than by asking God to do it for them. I accept that this is the less-used of the two approaches. Nevertheless, it was still used by figures in the Bible and I believe there are times when we are meant to do so too. That is there are certain times when God not only permits us, but *wants us*, to fire the artillery ourselves, by directly cursing someone or something. An example of when I have engaged in such direct imprecation or cursing involved two former business partners of mine. They acted wrongly towards me and expelled me from a law firm in which I had a one third equity stake.

They did so because I had caught one of them forging an invoice on the firm's letterhead and confronted him about it. The other one, the senior partner, initially promised to support me. But he then changed sides and was totally silent when I raised it at a partners' meeting. The end-result was that they joined together to drive me out of that firm and then refused to pay me my one third share of the equity value. It was impossible for me to sue them *and* set up a new law firm of my own. I had not got the money, or the time, to do both. So I reluctantly chose not to sue them.

Instead I prayed for God to judge between us, to grant me justice, and to bring His judgment upon them for what they had done. I proclaimed Psalm 35 in relation to them. In that psalm, which is set out earlier in this chapter, David asks God to contend with his enemies and to fight against them. I later felt that God wanted me to go even further and to be involved in the judgment that He was going to bring upon them. To begin with, I believe God spoke to me through a friend of mine called Bob. He was older than me and far more knowledgeable about imprecatory prayer.

Bob told me the difference between asking God to bring judgment on those two men and speaking it over them myself, as an imprecatory declaration *by me*. An analogy came to my mind of me lighting the blue touch paper, as when one is lighting fireworks. I felt that God was actually waiting for me to 'light the blue touch paper' before He would move against them in judgment. That is I felt God wanted me to be part of what He was doing and to operate in conjunction with Him.

I believe God wanted *me* to speak the judgment over them, as Ezekiel was told to prophesy judgment over various groups and nations. I felt unsure about this, so I told Bob. He said it sounded absolutely right to him and that I should go ahead. However, note how cautious I was about all of this. I had

been treated abominably and my former partners had taken all my assets. Yet I was not rushing, even into imprecatory prayer, let alone into directly proclaiming against them or cursing them myself. On the contrary, I had to be persuaded to do it and I entered into it slowly and reluctantly.

Yet I believe it was right to do so. From the point when I 'lit' the blue touch paper and spoke God's judgment over them, a series of events started which went on for over ten years. They declined, lost staff, and got into one problem after another, including trouble with regulatory authorities. However, I went from strength to strength. Within five years my new firm was over three times bigger than theirs and vastly more profitable. Moreover, when I eventually sold my law firm, to become a full time Bible teacher and writer, everything went well with the sale. God provided me with the perfect buyer.

However, the year after my sale and the start of my new ministry, both of my former business partners were declared bankrupt. I believe that God's judgment had pursued them throughout those 14 years and that He was punishing them. In the end, God took everything away from them, not only what had belonged to me, but all of their own assets too. Who could have foreseen that, in the natural, at the outset? Their business was a successful going concern. They had all the staff, files, clients, premises, equipment and a strong cash flow.

In stark contrast, I had nothing at all and had to begin my new firm with no staff, clients, files or equipment whatsoever. If anyone had said then that I would end up successful, and they would both go bankrupt, it would have been considered ridiculous. In the natural, it seemed impossible, not only for me to succeed, but for them to fail. But both of those things happened and I believe that a large part of the reason for what became of them was my imprecatory prayer. In particular, I believe it was the direct imprecation of my own, when I spoke God's judgment over them.

David's imprecatory prayers on behalf of Israel

Now consider these examples of imprecatory prayer which David used specifically on behalf of *Israel*, rather than himself. Whatever one might say about the validity of such prayer on one's own personal behalf, I believe it is undoubtedly justified when done for the benefit of Israel:

¹⁹ *Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail;
let the nations be judged before thee!*

²⁰ *Put them in fear, O Lord!
Let the nations know that they are but men!*
Psalm 9:19-20 (RSV)

*Thou, Lord God of hosts, art God of Israel.
Awake to punish all the nations;
spare none of those who treacherously plot evil.*
Psalm 59:5 (RSV)

¹² *For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips,
let them be trapped in their pride.*

*For the cursing and lies which they utter,
¹³ consume them in wrath,
consume them till they are no more,
that men may know that God rules over Jacob
to the ends of the earth.*

Psalm 59:12-13 (RSV)

¹¹ *O grant us help against the foe,
for vain is the help of man!*

¹² *With God we shall do valiantly;
it is he who will tread down our foes.
Psalm 60:11-12 (RSV)*

A major imprecatory psalm on behalf of Israel which is written by Asaph, not King David

This next psalm is written by Asaph, a Levite. He was not a King of Israel but a musician and worship leader in the Tabernacle. We are also told in 1 Chronicles 25:2 that he “*prophesied under the direction of the King*”. In Psalm 83 he is asking God to expose, defeat, destroy and put to shame the enemies of Israel and of the Jewish people. Asaph begins by identifying the main enemies of Israel, the Arab nations surrounding them. That was true then and still is today, 3000 years later:

*O God, do not keep silence;
do not hold thy peace or be still, O God!*
² *For lo, thy enemies are in tumult;
those who hate thee have raised their heads.*
³ *They lay crafty plans against thy people;
they consult together against thy protected ones.*
⁴ *They say, “Come, let us wipe them out as a nation;
let the name of Israel be remembered no more!”*
⁵ *Yea, they conspire with one accord;
against thee they make a covenant—*
⁶ *the tents of Edom and the Ish'maelites,
Moab and the Hagrites,*
⁷ *Gebal and Ammon and Am'alek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;*
⁸ *Assyria also has joined them;
they are the strong arm of the children of Lot.*
Psalm 83:1-8 (RSV)

Asaph spells out starkly what he wants God to do to those hostile Arabs who are causing trouble for Israel. He does not use any sanitised euphemisms or toned-down, politically correct language. He means business and asks God to intervene in drastic ways. I believe we are entitled to pray in similar ways today against those who oppose Israel, or the Church, or who seek world domination. That includes groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban etc, but also the very religion of Islam itself. That is utterly evil and satanic and promotes violent Jihad:

⁹ *Do to them as thou didst to Mid'ian,
as to Sis'era and Jabin at the river Kishon,*
¹⁰ *who were destroyed at En-dor,
who became dung for the ground.*
¹¹ *Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmun'na,*
¹² *who said, “Let us take possession for ourselves
of the pastures of God.”*
¹³ *O my God, make them like whirling dust,
like chaff before the wind.*
¹⁴ *As fire consumes the forest,
as the flame sets the mountains ablaze,*
¹⁵ *so do thou pursue them with thy tempest
and terrify them with thy hurricane!*
¹⁶ *Fill their faces with shame,
that they may seek thy name, O Lord.*

*¹⁷ Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever;
let them perish in disgrace.*

Psalm 83:9-17 (RSV)

King David did not invent imprecatory prayer, and neither did Asaph. Moses also used it many centuries earlier.

On the rare occasions when imprecation is mentioned at all in churches, it is usually implied that only King David ever did this, or even that it can only be done by Kings. That isn't true. David was not the only one to engage in imprecatory prayer or proclamation. He wasn't even the first. For example, Moses used it, as in this prayer below:

³⁵ And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee."

Numbers 10:35 (RSV)

We need to examine this practice right across the board and look at some of the many different figures in the Bible who prayed like this. You may be surprised by how numerous they are.

King Jehoshaphat also used imprecatory prayer on behalf of Judah when it faced military attack by the men of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir (Arabs).

When the Kingdom of Judah faced attack King Jehoshaphat asked God to intervene and to "execute judgment" upon these attackers. They were what we would now call Arabs:

¹⁰ And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Se'ir, whom thou wouldst not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy—¹¹ behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. ¹² O our God, wilt thou not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon thee."

2 Chronicles 20:10-12 (RSV)

God did not disapprove of the prayer, or refuse to answer it. He actually replied to Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah through a prophetic word spoken by Jahaziel, one of the sons of Asaph. God said they would not even need to fight in this battle, as He would fight for them:

¹⁴ And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jaha'ziel the son of Zechari'ah, son of Benai'ah, son of Je-i'el, son of Mattani'ah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly. ¹⁵ And he said, "Hearken, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehosh'aphat: Thus says the Lord to you, 'Fear not, and be not dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's. ¹⁶ Tomorrow go down against them; behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz; you will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeru'el. ¹⁷ You will not need to fight in this battle; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Fear not, and be not dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you."

2 Chronicles 20:14-17 (RSV)

Later God answered the prayer directly by intervening and causing these three Arab armies to turn on each other and destroy themselves, without Judah having to do anything:

²² And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Se'ir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. ²³ For the men of

Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Se'ir, destroying them utterly, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Se'ir, they all helped to destroy one another. ²⁴ When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped.

2 Chronicles 20:22-24 (RSV)

Further imprecatory psalms concerning the enemies of Israel which are written by people other than King David

Other psalmists besides David also wrote imprecatory psalms about the enemies of Israel, i.e. 'Zion'. An example of this is in Psalm 129, by an unnamed psalmist:

*5 May all who hate Zion
be put to shame and turned backward!
6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops,
which withers before it grows up,
Psalm 129:5-6 (RSV)*

Likewise, in Psalm 79, Asaph makes this imprecatory prayer for God to punish the enemies of Israel, who had taunted God:

*Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors
the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord!
Psalm 79:12 (ESV)*

Then, in Psalm 94, an unnamed psalmist makes a powerful imprecatory prayer, and also a proclamation, against the arrogant nations which seek to crush the Jewish people:

*O Lord, thou God of vengeance,
thou God of vengeance, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O judge of the earth;
render to the proud their deserts!
3 O Lord, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?
4 They pour out their arrogant words,
they boast, all the evildoers.
5 They crush thy people, O Lord,
and afflict thy heritage.
6 They slay the widow and the sojourner,
and murder the fatherless;
7 and they say, "The Lord does not see;
the God of Jacob does not perceive."
Psalm 94:1-7 (RSV)*

*For the Lord will not forsake his people;
he will not abandon his heritage;
Psalm 94:14 (RSV)*

He concludes by proclaiming that God will "wipe them out":

*He will bring back on them their iniquity
and wipe them out for their wickedness;
the Lord our God will wipe them out.
Psalm 94:23 (RSV)*

I believe it was right for David and others to pray for the destruction of those Arab armies and that it is equally valid for us to do so today. Israel's enemies are now found in every nation. Yet, they are still mainly amongst the Islamic neighbours of Israel, especially the Arabs. Accordingly, I believe we should also pray for the defeat of Islam itself. It is an evil abomination, created by Satan, which is committed to destroying Israel and the Jewish people. Those facts alone both entitle and oblige us to pray against Islam, quite apart from the fact that it also persecutes the Church.

Other miscellaneous psalms of imprecation which are not written by King David

In these passages the Psalmists proclaim what they want, and expect, God to do to the wicked. These examples further underline the point that imprecatory prayer was not restricted only to King David, or even to Kings in general. The other psalmists were not Kings, but they all took the same approach to imprecatory prayer:

*Let the wicked together fall into their own nets,
while I escape*

Psalm 141:10 (RSV)

Next, we see a prayer for the wicked to be "put to shame and confusion" and "turned back in disgrace":

*¹Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD,
come quickly to help me.
²May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.*

Psalm 70:1-2 (NIV)

The Psalmist speaks similarly in this next psalm. He does not mince his words, or use any polite euphemisms to disguise his real meaning:

*¹⁰For my enemies speak against me;
those who wait to kill me conspire together.
¹¹They say, "God has forsaken him;
pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him."
¹²Be not far from me, O God; come quickly,
O my God, to help me.
¹³May my accusers perish in shame;
may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.*

Psalm 71:10-13 (NIV)

In Psalm 10, the Psalmist asks God to break the arm of the wicked and to seek out their wickedness:

*Break thou the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
seek out his wickedness till thou find none.*

Psalm 10:15 (RSV)

In this next example the Psalmist asks directly for his enemies to be *destroyed*:

*¹¹For thy name's sake, O LORD,
preserve my life! In thy righteousness bring me out of trouble!
¹²And in thy steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am thy servant.*

Psalm 143:11-12 (RSV)

In Psalm 72, King Solomon makes an imprecatory prayer against oppressors in general:

*Give the king thy justice, O God,
and thy righteousness to the royal son!
² May he judge thy people with righteousness,
and thy poor with justice!
³ Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness!
⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor!*

Psalm 72:1-4 (RSV)

*May his foes bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust!*

Psalm 72:9 (RSV)

Also the famous, but unnamed, writer of Psalm 119 said these things:

*Let the godless be put to shame,
because they have subverted me with guile;
as for me, I will meditate on thy precepts.*

Psalm 119:78 (RSV)

⁸⁴ *How long must thy servant endure?
When wilt thou judge those who persecute me?*

⁸⁵ *Godless men have dug pitfalls for me,
men who do not conform to thy law.*

⁸⁶ *All thy commandments are sure;
they persecute me with falsehood; help me!*

⁸⁷ *They have almost made an end of me on earth;
but I have not forsaken thy precepts.*

Psalm 119:84-87 (RSV)

Some other examples of imprecatory prayers which are not in the Psalms

Let's now look at some examples of prayers against the wicked from elsewhere in the Bible, not within the Psalms. Here is the forthright, politically incorrect stance taken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously,
who tests the heart and the mind,
let me see your vengeance upon them,
for to you have I committed my cause.*

Jeremiah 11:20 (ESV)

Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction.

Jeremiah 17:18 (NIV)

⁶⁴ *“You will repay them, O Lord,
according to the work of their hands.*

⁶⁵ *You will give them dullness of heart;*

your curse will be on them.

⁶⁶ *You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O Lord.”*

Lamentations 3:64-66 (ESV)

When Judah was attacked by Assyria, King Hezekiah rallied the people to resist the invasion. He urged them not to be afraid, but to trust that God was with them and would fight for them in the coming battles:

⁷ *“Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. ⁸ With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezeki'ah king of Judah.*

2 Chronicles 32:7-8 (RSV)

Hezekiah's statement above relates to the nation of Judah, not an individual Christian. However, it is reasonable to conclude that God will also fight for an individual Christian, church or family if they are seeking to do His will and to resist the wicked. That must be so, because so many of the imprecatory psalms, and also Jeremiah's prayers, relate to the writers' own personal enemies and accusers, not just to the enemies of Israel or Judah.

Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, prayed for God to take vengeance upon those who were putting him to death.

Zechariah was the godly son of the priest, Jehoiada, who had saved the life of King Joash and served him faithfully thereafter. When Jehoiada died King Joash went astray and fell into idolatry. Zechariah therefore confronted him, but Joash would not listen. Instead, he listened to his new supporters, who were conspiring against Zechariah, and he gave orders for him to be stoned to death. As they were preparing to kill him, Zechariah prayed a prayer of imprecation in which he asked God “to see and avenge”:

¹⁷ *Now after the death of Jehoi'ada the princes of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king harkened to them. ¹⁸ And they forsook the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Ashe'rim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt. ¹⁹ Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord; these testified against them, but they would not give heed. ²⁰ Then the Spirit of God took possession of Zechari'ah the son of Jehoi'ada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.’” ²¹ But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. ²² Thus Jo'ash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoi'ada, Zechari'ah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, “May the Lord see and avenge!”*

2 Chronicles 24:17-22 (RSV)

God dramatically answered that prayer. At the end of that year the Syrian army came against King Joash and killed the princes of Judah who had conspired against Zechariah. Those Syrians did not know it, but they were an answer to his prayer:

²³ *At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Jo'ash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. ²⁴ Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the Lord delivered into their hand a very great army, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Jo'ash.*

2 Chronicles 24:23-24 (RSV)

That wasn't the end of it. The servants of King Joash then conspired against him and killed him. They also compounded the judgment upon him by refusing to bury him in the tombs used for the previous Kings. That was a great dishonour to him:

25 When they had departed from him, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoi'ada the priest, and slew him on his bed. So he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings.

2 Chronicles 24:25 (RSV)

Therefore what those conspirators had done was brought back upon themselves as a judgment. Also King Joash, who gave the order to the conspirators, was himself murdered as a result of a conspiracy. They all reaped exactly what they had sown, which is what apostle Paul told us will happen to all of us. Indeed, you could say it is a law of God which has been woven into the very fabric of the universe. Therefore it already applies to all of us, whether or not anyone is praying for it:

7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Galatians 6:7 (RSV)

This link to the "law of sowing and reaping" is significant. One could say that Zechariah was simply asking God to operate in accordance with this law, which He has already said He will. Thus any imprecatory prayer, *if rightly made*, is really just a request for God to act in accordance with His own nature. He has said that this will involve Him in opposing the wicked and avenging all wickedness. Samuel also confirms that "the wicked shall be cut off" and that "the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces". Samuel describes how God operates, and His robust approach to the wicked:

***7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.***

***8 He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.***

***For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
and on them he has set the world.***

***9 "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones;
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might shall a man prevail.***

***10 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.***

***The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed."***

1 Samuel 2:7-10 (RSV)

Samuel indicates that this is how God is *by His very nature*, so these are the things He does, even without being asked. It surely follows that an imprecatory prayer comes within the category of asking God to do something which is in line with His own will. That is the kind of prayer which He has said He will answer, because we are asking Him to do what He already intends to do:

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:7 (RSV)

14 And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

1 John 5:14 (RSV)

Even God Himself engages in imprecation when He pronounces His own curses upon the wicked and states His own intentions for them.

It would take too long to set out all the verses in which God Himself speaks against the wicked. There are very many where He pronounces His judgment upon them, states His future intentions towards them, or even directly curses them. However, I will give just a few examples to illustrate the point and to prove that God Himself engages in imprecatory pronouncements *and direct curses*.

So it is not just characters in the Bible who do so, but God Himself. That is very significant as it underscores the point that imprecatory prayer, *when done rightly*, is consistent with God's own nature. It also corresponds to His own stated intentions in regard to the wicked, For example, consider what God said, through the prophet Isaiah, about the city of Damascus in Syria:

*An oracle concerning Damascus.
Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city
and will become a heap of ruins.
Isaiah 17:1 (ESV)*

This pronouncement against Damascus is supplemented by what God says later through the prophet Jeremiah:

²⁵ *How is the famous city not forsaken,
the city of my joy?
²⁶ Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares,
and all her soldiers shall be destroyed in that day,
declares the Lord of hosts.
²⁷ And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad.”
Jeremiah 49:25-27 (ESV)*

God also pronounces His judgment upon Edom. That is within what we now call Jordan, and is part of the Arab race. It is also known as 'Esau', because they are the descendants of Jacob's brother. God is particularly severe towards the Edomites, or descendants of Esau, because they are the closest group, in racial origin, to the Jewish people. Therefore, they are even more accountable, and blameworthy, than all the other nations which have mistreated Israel:

¹⁷ *“Edom shall become a horror. Everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. ¹⁸ As when Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities were overthrown, says the Lord, no man shall dwell there, no man shall sojourn in her. ¹⁹ Behold, like a lion coming up from the jungle of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly make him run away from her. And I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? ²⁰ Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman: Even the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away. Surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate. ²¹ At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble; the sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea.
Jeremiah 49:17-21 (ESV)*

Likewise, God pronounces a blood-curdling judgment on the city of Babylon in Chaldea, for all of their wickedness. Babylon was where the occult was first practised, and from which witchcraft and idolatrous, occultic forms of false religion spread all over the world. Here is what God says He will do to Babylon. It is long and highly detailed, so I will just quote some extracts from it:

¹ *The word that the Lord spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet:*

Jeremiah 50:1 (ESV)

⁹ For behold, I am stirring up and bringing against Babylon a gathering of great nations, from the north country. And they shall array themselves against her. From there she shall be taken. Their arrows are like a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed. ¹⁰ Chaldea shall be plundered; all who plunder her shall be sated, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 50:9-10 (ESV)

¹³ Because of the wrath of the Lord she shall not be inhabited but shall be an utter desolation; everyone who passes by Babylon shall be appalled, and hiss because of all her wounds.

Jeremiah 50:13 (ESV)

¹⁸ Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria.

Jeremiah 50:18 (ESV)

³⁹ “Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. ⁴⁰ As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, declares the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her.

Jeremiah 50:39-40 (ESV)

¹ Thus says the Lord:

“Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon, against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai,

² and I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they shall winnow her, and they shall empty her land, when they come against her from every side on the day of trouble.

³ Let not the archer bend his bow, and let him not stand up in his armor.

Spare not her young men; devote to destruction all her army.

⁴ They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and wounded in her streets.

Jeremiah 51:1-4 (ESV)

¹¹ “Sharpen the arrows!

Take up the shields!

The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple.

Jeremiah 51:11 (ESV)

²⁴ “I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 51:24 (ESV)

⁵⁵ For the Lord is laying Babylon waste and stilling her mighty voice.

Their waves roar like many waters; the noise of their voice is raised,

⁵⁶ for a destroyer has come upon her, upon Babylon;

*her warriors are taken;
their bows are broken in pieces,
for the Lord is a God of recompense;
he will surely repay.*

Jeremiah 51:55-56 (ESV)

I could go on giving other examples of how God makes such cursing pronouncements, but you can see them yourself, all over the Bible, once you open your eyes. If anyone tries to argue that this was only how God spoke and acted in the Old Testament, bear in mind that His pronouncements about Damascus, Edom and Babylon have still not been entirely fulfilled, so they are still future. That means God is still carrying them out now, or is going to. If that is not enough to prove that God has not changed, and never will, look at how He speaks even at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation, when His future judgment is further described:

²¹ *Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,
“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;*

²² *and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,*

²³ *and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,*

*for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.*

²⁴ *And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”*

Revelation 18:21-24 (ESV)

¹¹ *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV)

¹⁹ *And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*

Revelation 19:19-21 (ESV)

⁷ *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from*

heaven and consumed them,¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV)

Nehemiah also prayed against the wicked when they were trying to prevent him from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah prayed against the wicked, not only when they posed a threat to his own life, but also because they were opposing God's work. He was entrusted with the task of organising the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and certain men, in particular Sanballat and Tobiah, were obstructing him. They weren't seeking to kill Nehemiah, but he still felt it was right to pray against them:

Now when Sanbal'lat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he ridiculed the Jews. ² And he said in the presence of his brethren and of the army of Samar'ia, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" ³ Tobi'ah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!" ⁴ Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn back their taunt upon their own heads, and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. ⁵ Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from thy sight; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

Nehemiah 4:1-5 (RSV)

Ezekiel prophesied against the enemies of Israel and also against the wicked within Israel. God used him as an agent, through whom to pronounce His own judgment on them.

In this intriguing series of passages God uses Ezekiel as His agent, or mouthpiece, through whom He causes His own judgments to be pronounced, and even released, upon various groups. In this passage Ezekiel is instructed to "*prophesy against*" certain wicked people within Israel who were devising iniquity and giving wicked counsel. God tells him to pronounce His judgment upon them. God chooses to involve Ezekiel in this process of judgment, and one could even say that He allows him to release it, rather than God just doing and saying it all Himself:

The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord, which faces east. And behold, at the door of the gateway there were twenty-five men; and I saw among them Ja-zani'ah the son of Azzur, and Pelati'ah the son of Benai'ah, princes of the people. ² And he said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city; ³ who say, 'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the flesh.' ⁴ Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man."

Ezekiel 11:1-4 (RSV)

Then Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy in a similar manner in relation to the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites, all of whom are part of what we now call the Arab race. The first of these, the Ammonites lived in what we now call Jordan, and were enemies of Israel. God intends to punish them, but note that He wants *Ezekiel* to say it:

The word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites, and prophesy against them. ³ Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when it went into exile; ⁴ therefore I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. ⁵ I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the cities of the Ammonites a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ⁶ For thus says the Lord God: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within you against the land of Israel, ⁷ therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as spoil to the nations; and I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 25:1-7 (RSV)

God then tells Ezekiel to do the same concerning the Moabites, close relatives of the Ammonites, who also came from what we now call Jordan. Again, it was due to their mistreatment of Israel:

⁸ “Thus says the Lord God: Because Moab said, Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations, ⁹ therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jesh'emoth, Ba'al-me'on, and Kiriathaim. ¹⁰ I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that it may be remembered no more among the nations, ¹¹ and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 25:8-11 (RSV)

The same is said about the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, for their mistreatment of Israel:

¹² “Thus says the Lord God: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance upon them, ¹³ therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom, and cut off from it man and beast; and I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. ¹⁴ And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel; and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath; and they shall know my vengeance, says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 25:12-14 (RSV)

Lastly, Ezekiel is told to prophesy against Egypt, as before, for their treatment of Israel:

In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; ³ speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God:

*“Behold, I am against you,
Pharaoh king of Egypt,
the great dragon that lies
in the midst of his streams,
that says, ‘My Nile is my own;
I made it.’*

*⁴ I will put hooks in your jaws,
and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales;
and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams,
with all the fish of your streams*

which stick to your scales.

⁵ *And I will cast you forth into the wilderness,
you and all the fish of your streams;
you shall fall upon the open field,
and not be gathered and buried.*

*To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the air
I have given you as food.*

⁶ *“Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord. Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel; ⁷ when they grasped you with the hand, you broke, and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned upon you, you broke, and made all their loins to shake; ⁸ therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will bring a sword upon you, and will cut off from you man and beast; ⁹ and the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste. Then they will know that I am the Lord.*

“Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine, and I made it,’ ¹⁰ therefore, behold, I am against you, and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia.

Ezekiel 29:1-10 (RSV)

Ezekiel was instructed to “*prophecy against them*”, not merely *about* them. In a sense, so were all of the other prophets when they pronounced God’s judgment. God operates with us in a kind of partnership, whereby He allows us to be involved in what He plans to do. When He asks the prophets, and even us, to make such pronouncements, He is letting us work with Him. I believe there have been times when God has wanted me to speak out His judgment on a group or institution, and to be part of what he was doing. I gave an example earlier, concerning my former business partners.

Are we entitled to pray against the wicked as King David did, given that we are not Kings?

I remember a sermon in which a church leader said that David was only authorised to pray as he did because he was a King and because he was asking God to destroy Israel’s enemies. That preacher then argued that because we are not Kings, and are not Kings of Israel in particular, we have no right to imitate the content, or even the tone, of David’s imprecatory prayers. However, he made no mention of the many other psalmists and prophets who also used imprecatory prayer.

I thought initially that his argument had some potential merit and could not be brushed aside. Yet I felt, even at the time, that it was unsatisfactory. It was a glib handling of an important and complex question, which deserves to be examined thoroughly and with a genuinely open mind. Some years ago, when I was beginning to explore this subject, I asked an older man for his view, but his mind was entirely closed. He was not willing even to consider the idea of imprecatory prayer and warned me against even looking into it.

He insisted that we should *never* curse *any* other person, under any circumstances, or even pray against anybody, *in any way whatsoever*. For a time, his vehemence made me feel wary about this subject, until I had given it a lot of further study and clarified my thinking. So I spent years pondering this, on and off, but the task was made harder by the fact that so few people write or preach about imprecatory prayer. It is almost completely ignored. Even when they are forced to address the psalms of imprecation, in commentaries on the Psalms, they don’t handle them adequately.

They briefly mention David’s imprecatory prayers, but they don’t know what to make of them and are scared even to try to discuss them. So they move quickly on to comment on other psalms, about which they feel more comfortable. Imprecation seems alien to them, as though it belongs to another era long ago. Let us firstly address the suggestion that David only ever prayed for the destruction of *God’s* enemies, or *Israel’s* enemies, and never his *own* personal enemies. That is simply not true.

Here is one of the many instances where David is undoubtedly asking God to destroy his own *personal enemies*:

*And in Your loving kindness, cut off my enemies
And destroy all those who afflict my soul,
For I am Your servant.*

Psalm 143:12 (NASB)

One might argue that in Psalm 143 David was not praying on his own account, but *in his role as King*. From that perspective, one could say his own enemies were, by definition, also the enemies of Israel and of God too. That is a potentially fair point, but it doesn't deal adequately with the issue. Neither does it explain why David spoke so frequently of "*my*" enemies when, in other prayers, he referred to them as Israel's enemies or God's enemies. Why would he differentiate by using all three descriptions if his own enemies were also, by definition, the enemies of Israel and of God?

Why not just call all of them "*my*" enemies all the time? The fact that David refers to them differently in different prayers suggests that he differentiates between them deliberately, to *create* a distinction, rather than remove it. That said, it is possible that the phrases could all effectively mean the same thing, but we would need to see solid evidence for that and cannot merely assume it. But even if David did pray against individuals or groups as King, not in his personal capacity, we would still need to explain why other men used imprecatory prayers on their own behalf.

These include Asaph, the other psalmists, Moses, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Elisha, and so on. I see no basis to think they were only praying in some official capacity, such that Jeremiah did so solely in his capacity as a prophet and Nehemiah in his capacity as Governor of Judah. Nevertheless, even if it was done in an official capacity, don't all of us have some kind of role or capacity? We might be an elder, teacher or missionary. Or we could have a job as a headmaster, school teacher, police officer, social worker, factory manager, supervisor, lawyer or judge.

But it is not only roles such as those which create authority and responsibility. We could have any one of hundreds of other roles which also create some element of responsibility and authority. All those jobs are important and those who do them are as entitled as anyone else to say that God has appointed them to that role and wants them to serve Him in it. The importance of our position, or our level of seniority, is not the issue. Nevertheless, even if imprecatory prayer can only be done by someone who holds some special role or senior position, that would still cover a great many people.

That said, I don't accept the argument that we need to have some important role or status. I believe we can pray in our own personal capacity, as well as in any other official role that we may have, not only in the church, but in our family or job. Indeed, isn't simply being a disciple a role, and one which we are all meant to have? Also, what about being a parent and praying on behalf of our children? It is hard to think of any role which is more important than that of a disciple or parent.

Therefore, how can we say that Nehemiah was entitled to make an imprecatory prayer, because he was the Governor of Judah, but that you aren't, because you are 'only' a nurse, an elder, a parent, or a disciple? Remember too that every Christian is also a 'saint', and a 'priest', as part of the priesthood of all believers. If you and I are entitled to enter God's very throne room with our other prayers, why should some different, or greater, qualification be required to approach Him with an imprecatory prayer? The Bible never says so, and we must not invent any such rules.

The prophet Elijah called down fire from heaven upon two groups of soldiers who came to arrest him.

Here is an example of imprecatory prayer which had an immediate and dramatic answer. The prophet Elijah called down fire from heaven on two groups of soldiers who wanted to arrest him:

⁹ Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'" ¹⁰ So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. ¹¹ Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and said to him: "Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!'" ¹² So Elijah answered and said to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

2 Kings 1:9-12 (NKJV)

Elijah was willing to make a prayer which would involve the death of 50 men, and to do so again afterwards. It would be hard to classify his prayers as anything other than imprecatory. Moreover, God was willing to answer Elijah. He would not have done so if the prayers were sinful in any way.

Later, the prophet Elisha also prayed that God would strike with blindness the Syrian soldiers who were coming to capture him.

The prophet Elisha operated similarly when the King of Syria sent soldiers to seize him, because Elisha was revealing his secret plans to the King of Israel. The account begins here:

⁸ Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place." ⁹ And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." ¹⁰ Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. ¹¹ Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?" ¹² And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." ¹³ So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him." And it was told him, saying, "Surely he is in Dothan." ¹⁴ Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵ And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

2 Kings 6:8-15 (NKJV)

Elisha prays for his frightened servant to be able to see the angels who surround them and serve as their protectors. He then moves into imprecatory mode and prays that God would strike the Syrian soldiers with blindness. Again, God would not have answered him if the prayer was improper:

¹⁶ So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸ So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. ¹⁹ Now Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria.

2 Kings 6:16-19 (NKJV)

The blindness inflicted on the Syrians was only temporary, but it was still an imprecatory prayer. Having achieved his goal, by having his enemies struck blind and captured, Elisha asks the King of Israel *not* to kill them. That is interesting, because it proves Elisha was not motivated by hatred. Yet he was still willing to use imprecatory prayer. Moreover, he did so in a limited sense, both in terms of

the severity of the sanction and its duration. So there is a precedent for us to do likewise. However, the key point is that even a man as merciful as Elisha was still willing to use imprecatory prayer:

²⁰ So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria! ²¹ Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" ²² But he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master." ²³ Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.

2 Kings 6:20-23 (NKJV)

Elisha also cursed a gang of youths (not boys) and it resulted in two bears mauling them.

This episode of Elisha and the bears is controversial because most Bible translations wrongly imply that the youths whom Elisha cursed were "little children" (KJV), "young lads" (NASB) or "small boys" (RSV). The NKJV and NIV translate it most accurately as "youths". It occurred when Elisha was travelling to Bethel and met a large and hostile gang of young men who began to abuse him. The likelihood is they would have become violent. So Elisha cursed them and two she-bears then emerged from the woods and mauled 42 of the youths:

²³ Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" ²⁴ So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. ²⁵ Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

2 Kings 2:23-25 (NKJV)

Note that it says Elisha "pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord". Note also that it is not just the NKJV which says he *cursed* them. So do the NIV, NASB, RSV, ESV and KJV. 'Curse' is the right word to use, even if it makes people uncomfortable. Elisha defended himself from a hostile mob of youths by cursing them. Many would say this was wrong, whatever age the youths were. However, the mistake of assuming them to be very young boys, or even "little children", as the KJV wrongly puts it, compounds the problem. It causes many preachers to avoid the passage completely.

Let us firstly address the issue of the age of the youths. Then we shall look at the wider question of whether it was legitimate for Elisha to curse anybody, of any age, even if they were attacking him. The Hebrew word used in the passage, which the NKJV and NIV correctly translate as *youths*, is 'na'ar'. It refers to young men, in their late teens, twenties, or even thirties. It does *not* mean children. Interestingly, *na'ar* is the very same Hebrew word which is used in Genesis 22:5 to refer to Isaac when he went with Abraham to be sacrificed.

The KJV also gets that passage disastrously wrong and refers to Isaac as a 'lad'. He was actually a grown man, in his thirties. Indeed, the very point of sacrificing Isaac was for him to be a type of Jesus, who was Himself a man, not a little boy, when He died for us. Abraham is meant to be seen as a type of God the Father, who later offered his own Son as a willing sacrifice. Thus for Isaac to be portrayed as a little boy, as in the usual Sunday-school pictures, profoundly undermines the typology of the event. It is meant to point to Jesus' *voluntary* death on our behalf, as an adult.

Also, in 2 Samuel 14:21, the same Hebrew word, *na'ar*, is used to refer to the adult Absalom. That was just after he had had Ammon murdered, and just before he began his revolt against David. Therefore he plainly wasn't a little boy. Accordingly, the youths insulting Elisha were grown men, and well able to attack him. So his decision to curse them is easily understandable. He could either

have fought them himself, or put it into God's hands. By 'cursing' them, he was effectively asking God to intervene and to judge them, even by force, for what they were doing. Elisha was clearly right to do that.

The fact that God responded by sending two she-bears strongly supports that view. If these youths were not violent, we would need to ask why they were in such a large gang that 42 of them were mauled. It isn't the size of group that peaceful people usually gather into. But even if they weren't threatening Elisha, the very least we can say is they were insulting the senior prophet in Israel, just after he had taken over from Elijah. If nothing had been done about their abuse, Elisha's authority would have been undermined, and so would God's honour. One cannot insult a prophet and expect to get away with it.

The most compelling argument for the continued legitimacy of imprecatory prayer is that apostle Paul himself used it, in the New Testament era.

The most common argument *against* imprecatory prayer is the idea that it was only done in Old Testament times, not in the Church age. Some also contend that Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount forbid us from cursing anybody. We need to meet that argument head-on, as we did in chapter 25, when looking at whether the Sermon on the Mount prohibits physical force in self-defence. Please refer to those points, because similar issues arise. However, I believe the most powerful argument in support of imprecatory prayer is that *apostle Paul* used it.

Note also that that was *after* the Sermon on the Mount. Given that Paul was the most knowledgeable of all the apostles, we can safely assume he understood Jesus' words and was not disobeying them when he used imprecatory prayer. It therefore follows that imprecatory prayer, in itself, cannot have been put out of bounds for us and that it was not what Jesus was forbidding. Let us now look again at what Paul said in Galatians when he uttered a curse against all those who preach a false gospel, i.e. anything different from the true Gospel, as preached by Paul:

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-9 (ESV)

The word translated 'accursed' in these verses is the Greek word 'anathema', which we defined earlier. Paul taught, in Romans 12:14, as we saw in chapter 25, that we should not curse others merely because they abuse us. Yet he pronounced a curse on anybody who preaches a false gospel. He evidently considered that justifiable. To distort the true Gospel, and cause people to lose the opportunity of salvation, is of the utmost seriousness. Paul meant it would be better for those who preach a false gospel to be accursed than for others, who need to hear the true Gospel, to be lost eternally.

The operative point is that Paul felt it was valid to engage in imprecatory prayer, and even to make an imprecatory proclamation. He plainly did not feel that it was improper, or that the Sermon on the Mount prevented it. One cannot even say that Paul made an error, or spoke hastily. This was said in a formal letter, not verbally in a sermon. Moreover he said it twice, in order to really underline it. He would never have done that if it was wrong to say it. So, we can safely say that Paul said it deliberately, and soberly, and that he absolutely meant it.

If a Christian is allowed to carry a sword, and to use it to *kill* his enemies, both in war and self-defence, why would God not want him to *pray* against those enemies?

The next strongest argument for the legitimacy of imprecatory prayer is that in Luke 22:36 a Christian is required to go out and buy a literal metal sword. As we saw in chapter 25, that must mean he can also use it to kill people in war and self-defence. How can it make any sense to say that we can *kill* an enemy with a sword, but that God would not want us to *pray* against that enemy? If we are entitled to kill a man, wouldn't it be absurd to say that we may not pray against him, or for the failure of his wicked plans, military or otherwise?

It would mean that killing him with a literal sword is alright, but using a metaphorical sword to pray for his attack to fail, or for his defence not to hold, would be wrong. If we are trying to kill that man it must follow that we want him to fail. Indeed, by killing him, we are trying to ensure that his attacks, and also his defences, do fail. So, if we believe that it is God's will for us to fight physically, why would we then hold back from praying for our success, and our enemy's failure, in that battle? Consider the national days of prayer in the UK in World War 2.

When people prayed about Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain or D-day they were praying for our forces to succeed. Few would argue against that. However, they were equally praying for *the Germans to fail and/or be defeated*. To be brutally frank, we were praying for their men to be killed and for our men not to be. It has to be put in those blunt terms, or the point is missed. Therefore, praying for our army to succeed is exactly the same as praying for the German army to fail. If so, we should say that plainly and stop acting it as if there was a distinction which means that the former is acceptable, but the latter is not.

Some might say it is alright to pray for the success of our army, at a *national* level and for the defeat of our nation's enemies, but wrong for us to do so at an *individual* level. But how can that make any sense? In chapter 25 I spoke of how I needed to defend my son from two men who wanted to attack him. How could it be wrong for me to pray for my success, and their failure, in the fight that I was expecting to happen? By that logic, it would be right for me to hit those men, even with the intention of injuring them, but wrong to pray for *God's help in doing so*.

That would be an absurd argument, and one which is based on emotional squeamishness, not logic. Some people can't imagine themselves praying a prayer such as: "*LORD, please help me to defend myself and my child effectively. Help me to hit hard, and accurately, and to knock this man out.*" Or they can't imagine being a soldier and praying: "*LORD please help me to shoot accurately and rapidly and to kill or incapacitate all of the men that I aim at. Please also show me which men to aim at.*" Such prayers would simply feel wrong to many people, at an irrational and purely emotional level.

They may be able to imagine taking part in a war, or fighting someone in self-defence. But the idea of actually asking God to help them to hit someone, or even to kill a person, would seem to be beyond the pale. Yet, they would not be able to put into words *why* that would be wrong, or what Scripture they base it on. I know, because I have questioned Christians on such points and none of them could ever formulate any coherent position, or justify what they felt. They could only *feel* it, not define it, or even explain it. But you cannot base your theology on your feelings.

The issues may sound theoretical now, but they won't if you ever face a life or death situation, in which you need to defend yourself, your family or your business from a wicked person. There was nothing abstract about the Charlton fans who wanted to attack my son, or the people who have tried to attack my business and harm me or my staff. In each of those battles I needed all the help I could get. To rule out praying for God's help, due to the misguided belief that it would be improper, would be a huge error. When I faced such battles, I made it my practice to pray as King David did and to ask:

- a) that God would expose the schemes of my enemies so that I, and others, can see what they are up to
- b) that He would cause them to trip over their own lies and catch themselves out
- c) that He would send confusion, disunity and disarray into the camp of my enemies, so that they are not capable of co-operating or organising themselves effectively, as when David prayed for the advice of Ahithophel to be turned into foolishness
- d) that they would over-reach themselves and make tactical errors which they later regret
- e) that God would give me inspired ideas for how best to fight, how to gain the advantage, and how to outwit them
- f) that new and additional witnesses, documents, or other forms of evidence would come forward, or be found, and undermine my enemy's case or obstruct his schemes
- g) that any lies told would be exposed
- h) that any liars would, likewise, be exposed
- i) that God would send fear and panic into the hearts and minds of my enemies, so that they would flee from me
- j) that God would raise up third-parties to become "enemies to my enemies" and contend with them, so as to weaken them and distract them from fighting against me

If I had felt that it was improper or "unchristian" to pray in those ways, I would have denied myself benefits that God wanted to give me, and which He did actually give me many times. Some might say that we need not pray specifically for such interventions and can just leave it to God to intervene in such ways as He sees fit, if He wants to. In other words, they might argue that we need not spell out exactly what we want Him to do to the wicked, but can just let God decide whether and how to help us. Then we don't have to be explicit, or say anything which makes us uncomfortable.

That indirect approach, whereby we either ask for nothing at all, or just drop hints to God, without saying anything specific, may appeal to some. But it is not how we operate with any of the other needs which we pray about. We have no qualms about being direct and specific when praying about those. Why should we switch to being vague and indirect when praying against the lies, schemes and attacks of our enemies? We should be just as vocal, and specific, in those requests as in any other. At any rate, I see no valid reason why we should not.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between praying against a person's evil actions or plans and praying against the person themselves.

There is an important difference between praying against a wicked person's *evil actions or plans* and praying against *the person themselves*. We can do the former without necessarily doing the latter. Indeed, in many ways, if we pray for the defeat of a wicked person's schemes, it can actually benefit them. It is in their own long-term interests for their wicked plans to fail. If they went ahead, they would only be storing up for themselves an even harsher sentence at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The failure of their plans, and the consequent reduction in their future punishment would actually be good for them, even if they were never saved, because there are degrees of punishment, even in the Lake of Fire. There is also the possibility that their exposure, dismissal, bankruptcy or even being sent to prison, could be the very thing which breaks their hard hearts and brings them to repentance. So, opposing the wicked, or praying against their schemes, is not contrary to their long term interests.

It may be exactly what they need, even though they don't yet know it. If they fully understood the true facts, had wisdom, and knew about the severe judgment that awaits them, they would actually

want you to oppose them. It could even be that your prayers for them to be exposed and defeated may lead to their eventual salvation. They might reflect later on their actions and realise they have done wrong. But they would probably never do any of that if their wicked plans were to succeed.

We can still pray against the wicked even when we don't know who they are, or which party is right or wrong in a dispute.

We do not necessarily need to know who the wicked are, or who is right or wrong in a dispute, in order to pray for their exposure and defeat. If you are in a new job or church and don't yet know who the wicked people are, or what they are doing, you can still ask God to open your eyes, give you discernment, and help you to identify them. That prayer is often answered by God causing the wicked person to slip up, miscalculate or over-reach himself. Then he gives himself away and enables you to get a glimpse of his real nature and motives.

It may be that you have no idea who the wicked people are, or which of the parties in a dispute are right or wrong. You can still ask for the wicked to be obstructed and defeated and for God to reveal their identities and motives, and even for Him to drive them out of the workplace or church. All those prayers can be made even before you find out who the wicked ones are. You don't need to wait until then to start praying against them. God already knows who they are, even if you don't.

It is also possible to pray against a person's evil actions and plans, and to resist them, and yet still forgive them and pray for them personally.

To resist a person's evil actions and plans does not necessarily mean we are being 'unforgiving'. We can fully forgive that person *even while we continue to oppose them*. There is no inconsistency in that. Forgiveness is really about releasing the other person to God, so that they receive *Jesus'* judgment, rather than *yours*, and so that you do not seek for any personal *vengeance*. Resisting the wicked, opposing their actions, and exposing them for what they really are, have got nothing to do with vengeance. That has to do with *punishing* the person for what they did.

However, resisting, sacking, expelling, or even prosecuting, a wicked person need not involve any vengeance. All those things can, and should, be done calmly, without any emotion, as a pure duty, not a pleasure. In all of my dealings with the wicked, I never got any enjoyment out of it. I always had to grit my teeth, press on and face them down. It would actually have been far easier just to let them get away with it. That is why so many pastors, elders and church members, 'turn a blind eye' to the actions of the wicked, and say nothing. So do a lot of managers in a business context.

Tackling the wicked is like getting a tooth filled or cleaning a toilet. It is something you only ever do because it needs to be done, not because you enjoy it. Therefore, you can genuinely forgive the *person* by handing their judgment, and any punishment, over to Jesus, or to the police. But, at the same time, you can be actively involved in opposing their *actions and plans*. Moreover, whilst doing so, you can be earnestly praying for God to forgive them and to let them learn from the pain of being exposed, sacked, or whatever else is involved in tackling them.

Although imprecatory prayer is valid, if used rightly, we are not to take pleasure from the bad things that happen to our enemies or to gloat at their misfortunes.

A counter-balancing point is that we are not to gloat over, or take pleasure from, the bad things that happen to our enemies. That is not the right attitude for a Christian to have and is not what imprecatory prayer is about. By the same token, we are not to curse people in the way the wicked do, by wanting them to suffer, fail or die merely for our satisfaction, or because we hate them. That would be entirely wrong because the *motive* is wrong. A passage which brings this out is what Job

says when he is defending himself from his accusing ‘friends’ and explaining the ways in which he has not sinned:

²⁸ *then these also would be sins to be judged,
for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.*
²⁹ *“If I have rejoiced at my enemy’s misfortune
or gloated over the trouble that came to him
³⁰ I have not allowed my mouth to sin
by invoking a curse against their life
Job 31:28-30 (NIV)*

Imprecatory prayer can be valid *if done with the right motive*. That qualification is not a mere technicality. It really matters to God, and it needs to matter to you, if you are to engage in imprecatory prayer. If your heart attitude is not like Job’s, David’s or Jeremiah’s, then stay well away from it. Imprecatory prayer should only be done by the godly and the mature, not by the carnal or vengeful. Above all, it must never be done by those who *enjoy* it. I would liken it to the approach that a police force would take (in the UK) in selecting officers to work in an armed response unit.

They would not want any officer working in such a unit, or carrying a gun at all, if he relishes the prospect of shooting someone, takes pleasure from it, or day-dreams about doing so. Such a man would be totally unsuitable. Ironically, the only men you would want carrying guns are those who *have no desire to shoot anyone*. They must be men who, though *willing* to do it, if necessary, would try very hard to avoid it and take no pleasure from doing it. I expect that that is pretty much the same way God views it when deciding who is suitable to engage in imprecatory prayer.

Is there any real difference between praying for the vindication of those who are falsely accused and praying for false accusers to be exposed as liars?

King Solomon prayed that if witnesses lie when giving evidence under oath, God would bring judgment upon them and cause their own wicked conduct to rebound upon them:

³¹ *“If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and comes and swears his oath before thine altar in this house, ³² then hear thou in heaven, and act, and judge thy servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct upon his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.
1 Kings 8:31-32 (RSV)*

What else is this but imprecatory prayer? Solomon is invoking God’s judgment upon liars who give false evidence. That issue must have been close to his heart, because he sat as a judge and had to decide who was truthful and who was lying. So does any manager or church leader who has to deal with disputes or accusations, and so did King David. Psalm 71:13 may sound harsh to our modern ears. David asks for those who accuse him falsely to be *“put to shame”* and *“disgraced”*. But how is that any different from simply asking for himself to be vindicated? See how David puts it:

*May my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
with scorn and disgrace may they be covered
who seek my hurt.
Psalm 71:13 (RSV)*

If David had just asked God to vindicate him, most people would not even consider it to be an imprecatory prayer. Yet it would be, because for David to be vindicated requires the truth to be revealed about whoever was accusing him falsely. Likewise, honour for David would have to involve dishonour for the false accuser. How is that any different, in real terms, from simply asking directly

for his accuser to be put to shame and disgraced? Any form of vindication for David must inevitably involve scorn, disgrace and shame for the accuser. How could it not do so?

If the truth is revealed, then those who lied about him would have to be exposed as false. If not, how can David be vindicated in any meaningful sense? The argument can become a dispute about semantics, involving notional distinctions between words, but without any substantive difference. A person may be relaxed about praying for himself to be vindicated, but feel uneasy about asking God to expose false accusers. Yet, when you look closely, it is a distinction without a difference. The two prayers are effectively the same.

The directly imprecatory prayer is just more honest. It says what it really means, whereas a prayer to be vindicated is the same thing, but only hints indirectly at what is being asked for. The same applies to other prayers which might not be considered to involve any element of imprecation, but actually do. To pray for success in a battle is effectively to pray for the failure or defeat of your opponent/enemy. It sounds nicer, but again, it really amounts to the same thing. I discussed this issue on a trip to Israel with a group of Christians from varied church traditions.

Some were uncomfortable about praying *against* the Arabs, or even against the Arab armies. But they felt comfortable about praying *for* Israel's success and protection. I challenged them to identify any meaningful difference between the two things, but none of them could. I then asked them to imagine that Egypt, Syria, Jordan, or some other Arab nation or terrorist group, had launched an attack on Israel. That is exactly what they did do in 1948, 1967 and 1973 and, on a smaller scale, many other times.

Then I asked them to spell out what they might pray if such a war began, and how God could grant victory to the Israelis without, at the same time, imposing defeat on the Arabs. I also asked how the Israelis could be given victory unless either they themselves, or God on their behalf, were to kill Arab soldiers, destroy Arab tanks and shoot down Arab aircraft. I also asked how praying for Israel, or even praying against its Arab enemies, was any different from *cursing* those enemies, because to pray for their defeat is effectively to curse them.

When I put it in those stark terms, not one of them was able to identify any difference between praying *for Israel* and praying *against its enemies*. Neither could they say why the latter didn't amount to a curse. Their discomfort with these concepts was at an entirely emotional level. They were just using alternative words that made them feel better, but there was no practical difference between them. Therefore if we are to debate this issue properly we need to stop using euphemisms to disguise what we really mean and start to be frank and explicit.

It is insincere, and pretentious, to object to the concept of imprecatory prayer, but then to pray for precisely the same things using more diplomatic wording. If you really do object to imprecatory prayer, and truly mean it, then you would not be able to pray for your own success or vindication at all. Asking for those things would require God to oppose your opponent on your behalf. If that is what you really mean, and you genuinely don't want God to do anything to resist, expose or defeat your enemy, then say so openly. You would also need to ask God not to help you in any way.

In fact, you would need to stop praying for yourself in any way, because any protection, guidance or assistance which God might give to you could mean that success is withheld from your enemies. If that is really how you believe you need to operate, with God doing nothing at all to help you, in case it hinders your enemy, then say so. However, I doubt whether you, or anybody else, ever will go that far, because as soon as one states that argument in plain words its absurdity is exposed.

Using weasel words and euphemisms to disguise your real meaning is dishonest. The psalms of imprecation are simply a more honest, earthy way of praying than most of us feel comfortable with. We may be being pretentious, and even deluding ourselves, by objecting to praying against our

enemy. The need for truthfulness applies just as much in our prayers as in any other form of speech. What King David did in his prayers was to call a spade a spade and we should do likewise.

What about apostle Paul's rebuke to Ananias, in which he said God would strike him?

In Acts 23 apostle Paul rebukes Ananias, the High Priest and also says what God will do to him. The High Priest was wrong to order that Paul be struck in the face, so Paul rebuked him and said: "*God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall.*" Let's look at the passage:

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?"

Acts 23:1-3 (ESV)

We can rule out any suggestion that Paul was behaving wrongly. He was surely the most godly, self-controlled man on Earth at that time, so he was not acting sinfully. Paul was actually using heavy irony to draw attention to the fact that Ananias was not really the High Priest at all. He had usurped the office illegally. I explain that irony more fully in my Book 3. So, the rebuke he gave to Ananias was entirely appropriate. What then are we to make of Paul's declaration, or prophecy, that God would *strike* Ananias?

Was Paul merely stating what he expected God to do in judging Ananias? Or was Paul proclaiming it with the intention of causing it to happen? As with Elymas the magician, who was struck blind, was Paul effectively calling down God's judgment upon Ananias, or merely predicting that it would come? I actually think it was both. So, he was telling Ananias what was coming, but also seeking to bring it about. Perhaps he was even making himself the vehicle by which that judgment would come.

We can use imprecatory prayer to pray against, and curse, groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and even Islam itself.

A prime example of when it is right to ask God to destroy an organisation or ideology, is with groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda and the Taliban. They are wicked to the core. Everything they stand for is against God's will. Our governments should destroy them, but most Western leaders are too blind to realise what we are up against. Given the wicked aims of these Jihadist groups, who seek to take over the world by violence, it is entirely appropriate for our governments to *fight* them and for us to *pray against* them. We can therefore pray for all the following things, and more:

- a) for the failure of their plans and objectives
- b) for them to be exposed for what they really are
- c) for their identities to become known to the police and military
- d) for their fighters to be killed or captured
- e) for their sources of money to dry up
- f) for their locations to become known to our intelligence services
- g) for them to be defeated and killed in battle
- h) for our governments to send more troops to fight them
- i) for our troops to succeed, and theirs to fail
- j) for our intelligence services to discover and foil their plots

- k) for individual suicide bombers to fail and even to blow themselves up prematurely, as happened recently when an instructor blew up his whole ‘class’ by accidentally detonating a bomb belt while explaining how to use it. In fact, it would not surprise me if that explosion occurred as a direct result of the imprecatory prayers of one or more Christians.
- l) for them to become confused, disorganised and paranoid, and to suspect each other, and fight against each other, as the men of Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir did when the people of Judah began to sing and praise (See 2 Chronicles 20:22)
- m) for their propaganda to be exposed as lies

Some might protest at this and say we should pray for the salvation of the Jihadists. Of course we should, but that does not prevent us praying, at the same time, for their defeat in battle and the failure of their objectives. For many, it is only when their false god, Allah, is defeated that they first begin to wonder if he is real and whether Islam is false. Therefore those Muslims actually need the Jihad to be defeated, in order for their eyes to open to the Gospel and to find the true God of the Bible. So, I would pray for all Muslims to be saved, including Jihadists, but I would also pray that God would destroy those terrorists whom he knows will not repent.

If He knows that they will never respond, or give up violence, it is better that they be destroyed now rather than later, after they have caused more harm. But it isn’t just these Jihadist groups that we should pray against. We should also pray for the containment, defeat and exposure of *Islam as a whole*. The whole thing is an evil monstrosity and the biggest threat to the Gospel in the world today. It is an utterly false religion, quite apart from its promotion of violence, corruption, oppression, rape and the degradation of women. Therefore Islam itself needs to be opposed, and prayed against, not tolerated.

However, it is not only Islam, or individual Jihadists, that we need to pray against. There are many other individuals, organisations and nations which are hostile to Christianity and doing all they can to oppose the Gospel and persecute Christians. It is just that Islam is by far the biggest and the most evil. So, we also need to pray against every other false religion, and every other evil group or government, for their wicked schemes to fail. For example, Freemasonry is a great evil and we need it to fail. So too is witchcraft, the abortion industry and anti-semitism. The list is very long.

The late Derek Prince told a story of how, in 1953, Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union intended to begin a new wave of persecution against the Jews. Derek Prince, and others, prayed against this, and against Stalin personally, and asked God to stop him. Then Stalin suddenly died, possibly due to poisoning by someone close to him. So the purge against the Jews did not go ahead. If Stalin’s death was caused by God’s intervention, and if that was in answer to imprecatory prayers, then I believe it was fully justified. Moreover, it is something we ought to do far more often, and openly, than we do.

CHAPTER 27

DEALING WITH WITCHCRAFT AND CURSES – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO TWO VERY BIG SUBJECTS

*....Blessed be everyone who blesses you,
and cursed be everyone who curses you.”
Numbers 24:9(b) (RSV)*

*“.....in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments”
Isaiah 47:9(b) (RSV)*

*“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you -----?”
Galatians 3:1(a) (RSV)*

*Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
So a curse without cause does not alight.
Proverbs 26:2 (NASB)*

¹⁰ There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. ¹² For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominable practices the Lord your God is driving them out before you. ¹³ You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. ¹⁴ For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do.

Deuteronomy 18:10-14 (RSV)

⁶ And he burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and practiced soothsaying and augury and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

2 Chronicles 33:6 (RSV)

¹⁹ And when they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?

Isaiah 8:19 (RSV)

Now it happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” So he answered, “What peace, as long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft are so many?”

2 Kings 9:22 (NKJV)

*I will destroy your witchcraft
and you will no longer cast spells.
Micah 5:12 (NIV)*

*all because of the wanton lust of a prostitute,
alluring, the mistress of sorceries,
who enslaved nations by her prostitution
and peoples by her witchcraft.*

Nahum 3:4 (NIV)

⁵ “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage

earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 3:5 (NASB)

⁹ But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰ to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” ¹¹ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

Acts 8:9-11 (NKJV)

²⁴ But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.

Revelation 2:24 (NASB)

And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Revelation 9:21 (NKJV)

“.....and all nations were deceived by thy sorcery

Revelation 18:23(b) (RSV)

Why we need to be aware of the power of witchcraft

This chapter is in this book because witchcraft and curses are an integral part of how the wicked undermine you. So, we need to understand these things if we are to tackle the wicked more effectively. However, this is a huge subject and we cannot possibly deal with it all in one chapter. To make matters worse, it is also badly misunderstood by very many Christians. Therefore there is a lot that needs to be ‘unlearned’ as well as learned.

Even to begin to study curses and witchcraft we would need to spend time defining a number of words. Then we can go on to consider how to defend ourselves from all of this. As we begin to look at this, please don’t assume that witchcraft can’t possibly be real, or that it can’t have any effect on us today. Sadly, it is entirely real and needs to be taken far more seriously than it is in the modern Church.

What exactly is a curse?

The word ‘*curse*’ may conjure up images from Macbeth or from horror films of witches in pointy hats. The reality is far more mundane. Curses are negative words, spoken by a person, which harm, hinder or blight the life of some other person or group. The words spoken may also be charged with supernatural power, either from God or the demons, and then fulfilled as a result of that power.

It may, or may not, be the intention of the person who utters the curse that these harmful consequences should follow. He may not necessarily believe in the power of curses, or even that such things exist. Indeed, he may not even know that he has uttered a curse. Tragically, we often see this when a parent or teacher says words which have an ongoing effect on the person to whom, or about whom, they were said.

Even as adults, many are still blighted by negative or belittling words, spoken over them in childhood, which continue to ring in their ears and shrink their confidence. Often it was said by someone who had no idea of the terrible harm their words would cause. A curse need not necessarily be about anything that you might classify as ‘spiritual’. It can relate to anything at all. The operative point is that it has power to affect that person’s happiness, marriage, career, finances, health, fertility and so on.

Who can utter a curse?

The ability to utter a curse is not limited to witches or other occult-practitioners. Anybody can do it, and virtually all of us have done so, whether we realise it or not. Moreover, and this may surprise many people, even *God Himself* curses people. Indeed, He is responsible for more curses than any other person, because He does it on such a huge scale. Isaiah speaks of this and confirms that most of the Earth is under God's curse because of our sins and transgressions:

⁵ *The earth lies polluted
under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed the laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.*
⁶ *Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,
and few men are left.*

Isaiah 24:5-6 (RSV)

The most famous curses God uttered were at 'the Fall'. That was when He cursed Adam and Eve, and all their descendants, because of their sin. He even cursed the ground itself, and the whole Earth, such that farming and gardening are now hard labour rather than a pleasure. Much later Moses also set out an array of specific curses which God would bring upon the Jewish people if they failed to listen to His voice and obey His commands:

“But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.”

Deuteronomy 28:15 (RSV)

There are then another 53 verses in Deuteronomy 28 which spell out exactly what those curses will consist of and result in. Please go through them, as there are far too many to list here. However, they are preceded in the chapter by a series of blessings, which God also says will come upon the Jewish people if they *do* listen to Him and obey His commands. These are listed in verses 3-14, but this is how they are introduced:

¹*“And if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.*
²*And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God.*

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 (RSV)

The grim list of curses set out in Deuteronomy 28:15-68 are graphically described. The blessings are equally specific. The history of the Jewish people for the past 3500 years shows the outworking of both the blessings and the curses. God raised the Jews up, and also brought them down, depending on the level of their obedience or disobedience to Him. There are also many other curses that God has spoken at other times and to other people. These continue to operate, even today.

A curse that comes from God Himself is usually a statement or pronouncement by Him as to what will happen to a person if they do something which He has forbidden. More to the point, it is what He Himself will do to that person, or which He will cause to happen to them. The outworking and fulfilment of the curse are inevitable, because it was God who spoke it. In this verse, Jeremiah tells us that we are cursed if we trust in man, or in our own flesh, or in anyone else's flesh:

Thus says the Lord:

***“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the Lord.
Jeremiah 17:5 (ESV)***

We also see from Zechariah that a curse is sent out upon all who steal or lie and that they will be “cut off”. That curse will even enter the house of the liar or thief and remain with them as it takes effect and exerts its influence over them:

¹ Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll! ² And he said to me, “What do you see?” I answered, “I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its breadth ten cubits.” ³ Then he said to me, “This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for every one who steals shall be cut off henceforth according to it, and every one who swears falsely shall be cut off henceforth according to it. ⁴ I will send it forth, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in his house and consume it, both timber and stones.”

Zechariah 5:1-4 (RSV)

Malachi spoke in similar terms of the curse that God sent out upon those priests who did not listen to Him and who did not give glory to His name:

“And now, O priests, this command is for you. ² If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.

Malachi 2:1-2 (ESV)

Malachi also speaks of how God cursed those who ‘robbed’ Him by failing to give their proper tithes and offerings. That is how financial giving was arranged under the Law of Moses, though our duty to give is expressed very differently now, in the Church age. The operative point is that this is what happened to those who failed to give properly under the Mosaic covenant, when tithing still applied:

⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

Malachi 3:8-10 (ESV)

That specific curse for failing to give financially in accordance with the Law of Moses does not apply to us today. But other curses do apply and we can still be affected by those. Therefore, if we have any common sense, we will choose to live in such a way as to make ourselves eligible to receive God’s blessings and so as to avoid His curses. Some might recoil from the very idea that a Christian could ever be affected by a curse that God has spoken. However I believe that we can be affected, just as much as an unbeliever can.

For example, God has put in place a law, or you could call it a binding principle, whereby anybody who exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. You could think of those two statements as a fixed law that God has woven into the fabric of the universe. Alternatively, you could choose to see it as being both a curse and a blessing, depending on what we decide to do. Here is the passage:

***whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
Matthew 23:12 (RSV)***

Therefore if you ignore Jesus' words and choose to exalt yourself by boasting, pride, self-importance or self-exaltation, then God is obligated to humble you. His own words require Him to do so. That is He must move you lower down in response to your own exalting of yourself. That is an example of a curse in operation. A negative outcome is occurring because of what *God said*, and because of what you did to bring yourself within its scope.

Conversely, if you choose to humble yourself, then the blessing will operate instead and therefore God will exalt you. There is another very similar law, or curse, if you prefer. This likewise affects us all, whether we are Christians or not. It is called the "*law of sowing and reaping*". It means that God has decreed that a person's actions and decisions whether good or evil, will later come back upon themselves. Apostle Paul speaks of this:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.
Galatians 6:7 (RSV)

This law is stated by Paul, but he is speaking under God's inspiration. It is therefore what God is saying. It also applies to us all, whether we are saved or unsaved. Therefore, whatever we do, whether good or evil, selfish or unselfish, obedient or disobedient, will inevitably bear fruit *of its own kind*. We will then be made to reap that fruit in our own lives, whether it is good or bad. So, if we do evil we will inevitably reap a harvest of evil. It will pursue us, wherever we go. But if we do good, we will reap a harvest of good. That could be seen as an unbreakable law of the universe.

However, it is also legitimate to view it as both a curse and a blessing, depending on what we choose to do, and thus the effect it has on us. We have just looked at some examples of curses, and also of blessings, that have come from God Himself. However, both curses and blessings can also be spoken by human beings. Moreover, they can speak these in their own right, not only on God's behalf. Furthermore, they can be spoken by *any of us*, whether we are Christians or not and whether we believe in the power of curses or not. We shall look at some examples below of curses that were uttered by characters in the Bible and the negative consequences that flowed from those.

The key point is that *anybody* can utter a curse, not just those people. We do not need to have any special position or title. Neither do we need any knowledge or understanding of what we are doing, or of the effect our words will have. Accordingly, it is all the more vital that we begin to take this whole subject seriously and gain a proper understanding of how it all operates. That will help us to avoid cursing other people without even realising we are doing so. It will also help us to realise what is going on *when other people curse us*, and what we can do about that in order to defend ourselves.

Self-imposed curses, by which a person speaks a curse *over himself*, even if they don't realise they are doing so

One of the commonest forms of a curse is where it is self-imposed. The person curses themselves, usually without being aware that they are doing so, or having any belief that it will take effect. An example of this in the Bible is Rebekah, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau. She spoke a curse over herself, probably without having any idea of the seriousness of what she was saying. The account begins when Isaac tells Esau that he wants to give him his (Isaac's) blessing before he dies. He then sends Esau out to hunt for game, so that they can eat before he gives him that blessing:

¹When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son, and said to him, "My son"; and he answered, "Here I am." ²He said, "Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me, ⁴and prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that I may bless you before I die."

Genesis 27:1-4 (RSV)

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, heard all of this. However, she favoured Jacob and wanted him to receive the blessing instead of Esau. So, she quickly thought of a scheme by which Isaac could be tricked into giving the blessing to Jacob. She told Jacob to get two goats from the herd. Then she could cook them, and Jacob could take the food to Isaac and pretend to be Esau, so as to be given the blessing:

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ⁷ 'Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food, that I may eat it, and bless you before the Lord before I die.' ⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock, and fetch me two good kids, that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he loves; ¹⁰ and you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies."
Genesis 27:5-10 (RSV)

Jacob was anxious about his mother's scheme and feared that his father would discover the trick and curse him rather than bless him. That was when Rebekah spoke the fateful words by which she cursed herself. To be more precise, she redirected a curse from Jacob onto herself. She urged Jacob to go ahead and do it and said "Upon me be your curse...."

¹¹ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing." ¹³ His mother said to him, "Upon me be your curse, my son; only obey my word, and go, fetch them to me."

Genesis 27:11-13 (RSV)

Then Jacob went ahead, Isaac was deceived, and the blessing was given to Jacob. This blessing was the one that is due to the first born son. Do not confuse it with the birth right, which Jacob had already induced Esau to sell to him for a bowl of soup. That flippant transaction, which greatly angered God, was in the past, and was Esau's own fault. This second episode had to do with the blessing that Isaac, as a father, wanted to give to his first born. That is what Jacob stole from Esau by this deception.

Before we see what happened to Rebekah due to her self-imposed curse, let's look at how the blessing was given to Jacob and how it couldn't be taken back afterwards. That is very significant in itself and shows the great power that words have, whether to bless or to curse. They can be difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to undo. That is why we need to be extremely careful what we say, especially to our children. This is what happened when Jacob's trick was discovered:

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹ He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." ³² His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your first-born, Esau." ³³ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and he shall be blessed." ³⁴ When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" ³⁵ But he said, "Your brother came with guile, and he has taken away your blessing." ³⁶ Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" ³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, "Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"

Genesis 27:30-37 (RSV)

Esau was angry when he realised what Jacob had done, and he resolved to kill him:

⁴¹ *Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."*

Genesis 27:41 (RSV)

As a result, Jacob had to flee, or Esau would have killed him. Jacob stayed away for 20 years and Rebekah never saw him again. She died while he was hiding from Esau. That in itself must have been a torment to her because he was her favourite son. That is why she suggested the trick in the first place. At some later point she spoke to her husband, after Jacob had gone, and said "*I am weary of my life....*". That was part of the outworking of the curse which she had brought upon herself, or redirected towards herself, by her unwise words. It was already taking effect:

⁴⁶ *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"*

Genesis 27:46 (RSV)

In addition to missing Jacob, she was also anxious as to what would become of him and whom he would marry. She feared he would end up marrying one of the Hittite women, who were pagans and Canaanites. Actually, he married Rachel and Leah, the daughters of Rebekah's brother Laban. But Rebekah would never have known that, because Jacob could not come back to visit her to give her news or Esau would have killed him. Thus Rebekah spent her final years in a 'weariness' of regret and torment. She also died young, and before her husband, which is unusual in itself.

She was experiencing the outworking of the curses which would, otherwise, have come upon Jacob. Firstly there would be Esau's own curses, which he must have uttered himself. Secondly, there would be God's curse, which comes upon all liars. Both of these curses, and more, were then *redirected* towards Rebekah as a result of her own words, by which she declared that they would come upon her and had even asked that they do so. Sadly, we never hear of Rebekah again after this.

How does a curse operate?

Let's now consider *how* a curse operates. That is who, or what, gives the curse its power and causes the specified consequences to occur? The short answer is that it is either God, the Devil or the demons. If a curse is spoken by God Himself, then He will implement it or instruct angels to do so. If a curse is spoken by a person, whether or not they are intentionally serving Satan, then the demons will cause it to be fulfilled. That is another reason why we need to be so careful in what we say.

We may not know, or believe, any of this. We could even be convinced that demons do not exist. Yet that ignorance or unbelief will make no difference. The cursing words which we speak, whether over ourselves or others, will still be implemented. The demons are not constrained by whether or not you believe in them, or in the reality and power of curses. All that matters is that you *actually spoke* the cursing words. If you did, the demons are within their rights to latch on to your words, and to bring about the specified consequences.

They will do so regardless of what you may think about demons, or about your own words. Imagine a person is speaking about themselves and they say: "*I believe I will get cancer one day. It's bound to happen to me, knowing my luck.*" When the person says that, and especially if they *keep on* saying it, they are asking for trouble. They are unwittingly invoking a curse over themselves and inviting the demons to make their own words into a reality, which they are well able to do.

Let's deal with the general point first. Are demons *capable* of inflicting illness upon a person, for whatever reason, not just due to curses? We see many such cases in Scripture where sickness, and even death, were the direct result of demonic activity. Of course, that is not true of all sickness, but it

is clearly true of some of it. Moreover, it is made all the more likely in cases where the demons are positively invited to do so. Remember, the Bible says that Satan seeks to *devour* us, even Christians. One of the ways he does that is by causing illness or death:

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8 (RSV)

For example, there is the account of the woman in Luke chapter 13 whom Jesus healed on a Sabbath day. She was bent over and could not straighten her back. Jesus Himself said that she had “*a spirit of infirmity*” and directly attributed her physical condition to Satan. He even specified that Satan had been causing her spinal deformity for 18 years. By that Jesus either meant Satan himself, or one of his demons on his behalf - most probably the latter:

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?”

Luke 13:16 (RSV)

This verse demonstrates that it is possible, at least in some cases, for a demon to bring physical illness into a person’s life. One of the ways in which that can happen is where the person speaks it over themselves, and effectively *invites* the demons to bring about that outcome. However, self-imposed curses do not only apply in the context of illness. There are many other negative events or outcomes that we might speak over ourselves, or over our children, church or business, as a result of unguarded words.

This will happen even if we don’t believe our words have power, or don’t intend any harm. That said, the demons’ entitlement to cause such problems is increased if the person uttering the cursing words *does believe* in what he is doing and does *intend that harm should result*. If so, they are not only speaking cursing words, but doing so *with faith*. The person may even be in direct contact with the demons and entering into agreements with them, so as to bring about the desired outcomes.

How one person’s curse can, and does, impact other people’s lives

We see many cases in the Bible where a person’s cursing words have led to harmful consequences, or even death, for another person. Sometimes that was intended. Other times the person uttering the curse did not intend, or expect, any harm to follow. There is no room in this chapter to go through all of these. However, I hope to do a thorough study of the subject in a future book which will focus entirely upon curses, witchcraft and the occult.

One major point is that curses do not only affect ourselves. We have the potential to harm others too, whether or not we intend to. The words we speak operate either as an invitation or a request. The demons who accompany us will then latch onto those words and seek to bring about the negative consequence. They do so not to help us against our enemies, but to advance their own evil purposes. They therefore use your own foolish or hasty words as a means of obtaining the right to do things which they may not, otherwise, have been authorised to do.

The demons are subject to restrictions which limit what they can do, or whom they can attack. The most obvious example is Job. Satan could not touch him at all until God permitted it. Even then, he could only do so in the specific ways that God authorised and no more. If you are a parent you are the God-given protector of your child. You are meant to operate like a shield or umbrella, to keep the demons from being able to attack him.

If however you yourself speak cursing words over, or about, or to, that child, you are effectively removing that shield or umbrella. You are therefore enabling, or even authorising, the demons to do

harm which they would not, otherwise, have been permitted to do. You might never realise the dreadful significance of your own words, or intend any harm. But your words will still be seized upon by the demons and put into effect or taken advantage of.

Who is most vulnerable to being affected by other people's curses and why?

You might then wonder why we aren't all subject to many different curses all the time, from ourselves or others. The answer is that not all curses that are directed at us, deliberately or otherwise, are *able to take effect*. It depends on a number of factors and the net effect is that some of us are far more affected by curses than others. There is an intriguing verse in Proverbs in which Solomon considers why some curses hit their target, and become operative, whereas others don't:

*Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
a curse that is causeless does not alight.*

Proverbs 26:2 (RSV)

Solomon means that a curse will only take effect in a person's life, if there is some *reason or basis* for it to do so. There would need to be some sin, or occult activity, either by them or by a parent or grandparent, which creates an opening. Or it could be due to the absence of the proper protections that should be in place from a parent, church leader or other authority figure. Alternatively, it could relate to other words spoken, or things done, which have given the demons the right to become involved in the person's life.

Then the demon who is seeking to put the curse into effect is able to use that opening, or rely on that weakness, sin, or other legal pretext, as a basis for intervening in that person's life. Imagine a person uses tarot cards, or an ouija board, or he goes to see a medium or attends a séance, or is involved in Freemasonry. Or, perhaps it could be that a *parent or grandparent* did one or more of those things. That occult activity would then provide a 'legal' basis for a curse to take effect at some point thereafter, not only upon the life of that person themselves, *but also their children or grandchildren*.

That may sound profoundly unfair to us. However, where did you get the idea that there is anything fair about demons or their activities? They look for openings wherever they can find them. Then they exploit them as viciously and ruthlessly as they can, without any regard to what is 'fair'. They have no ethics or morals and will not hesitate to bring harm into the life of a child or grandchild as a result of what its parents or grandparents did. Alternatively, the demons might make use of, or rely upon, some other form of sin, such as abortion or perhaps sexual sin, or even child abuse.

Such things create openings into people's lives and allow curses to 'land' on the person themselves, *and also on their descendants*, and to take effect. Indeed, it can also lead to demonisation of one type or another. At the lower end of the scale, the person can become oppressed and/or influenced in various ways by a demon who is on *the outside* of them. Or if it is more serious, it can even result in a demon obtaining the legal right to enter the person and to take up occupancy *inside* them.

Both outcomes, at either end of the spectrum, are very common. They also occur regardless of what we believe or don't believe about curses, or the wider activities of demons. Accordingly, before we begin to look at how curses can be broken, and at how demons can be resisted and even expelled, we need to consider how we can avoid being affected by curses in the first place. That means avoiding all forms of the occult, but also all sexual sin, and every other form of sin too.

We also need to humble ourselves, 'crucify the flesh', repent, turn away from sin, love the truth, fear God, be transformed by the renewing of our minds and become mature disciples with strong self-control. The extent to which we do all those such things will have a major bearing on our ability to avoid these spiritual problems. Even the way in which we treat the poor and needy has a bearing on the extent to which curses will be allowed to affect us:

*He who gives to the poor will not want,
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.
Proverbs 28:27 (RSV)*

Joshua's curse against anyone who would rebuild the city of Jericho

This is an example of a very specific curse which was uttered by a man *in his own right*, not by God. Yet it took effect and had a devastating impact many years later. The curse was spoken after the old Canaanite city of Jericho was destroyed by God, when the Israelites were taking possession of the land. Joshua did not want the city to be rebuilt and he spoke a curse over any man who should ever rebuild it. He said it would result in the death of both his eldest and youngest sons:

²⁶ *Joshua laid an oath upon them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho.*

*At the cost of his first-born shall he
lay its foundation,
and at the cost of his youngest son
shall he set up its gates."*

Joshua 6:26 (RSV)

That curse was later fulfilled, exactly as Joshua had said, even though it took place centuries later. It was fulfilled in the days of King Ahab, when a man called Hiel of Bethel rebuilt the city. Doing so cost him the deaths of his eldest and youngest sons, exactly as Joshua had said:

³³ *And Ahab made an Ashe'rah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.* ³⁴ *In his days Hi'el of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abi'ram his first-born, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.*

1 Kings 16:33-34 (RSV)

I am not sure why God allowed, or even caused, that curse to take effect in the lives of Hiel of Bethel and his sons. However what matters, for our present purposes, is that *it happened*. Therefore we need to accept that curses are real, that they can be spoken by people against other people, and that they can take effect even long afterwards. That being so, we have to find a place for this subject in our theology and start to see its relevance in our daily lives.

The cursing words with which the people of Israel swore not to allow any of their daughters to marry Benjaminites - a vow they later regretted

Here is another strange account involving the tribe of Benjamin and the vow made by the other 11 tribes when a civil war arose. They all vowed not to let their daughters marry Benjaminites. They fortified that with a curse upon anyone from their tribes who might break the vow and allow his daughter to marry a Benjaminite. The account begins when a civil war broke out due to a dispute. This led to a fierce battle in which the Benjaminites were heavily defeated. They lost 25,000 young men, and only 600 were left:

⁴³ *Cutting down the Benjaminites, they pursued them and trod them down from Nohah as far as opposite Gib'e-ah on the east.* ⁴⁴ *Eighteen thousand men of Benjamin fell, all of them men of valor.* ⁴⁵ *And they turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon; five thousand men of them were cut down in the highways, and they were pursued hard to Gidom, and two thousand men of them were slain.* ⁴⁶ *So all who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand men that drew the sword, all of them men of valor.* ⁴⁷ *But six hundred men turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, and abode at the rock of Rimmon four months.* ⁴⁸ *And the men of Israel*

turned back against the Benjaminites, and smote them with the edge of the sword, men and beasts and all that they found. And all the towns which they found they set on fire.

Judges 20:43-48 (RSV)

When the battle was over, and they realised the scale of the devastation to the tribe of Benjamin, the other 11 tribes regretted it. They wished now that they could give their daughters to the Benjaminites after all, so that that tribe could be repopulated. But they knew they couldn't, because of the hasty vow they had made and the curse which went with it. They all knew that that curse was *real and effective*:

Now the men of Israel had sworn at Mizpah, "No one of us shall give his daughter in marriage to Benjamin." ² And the people came to Bethel, and sat there till evening before God, and they lifted up their voices and wept bitterly. ³ And they said, "O Lord, the God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that there should be today one tribe lacking in Israel?" ⁴ And on the morrow the people rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. ⁵ And the people of Israel said, "Which of all the tribes of Israel did not come up in the assembly to the Lord?" For they had taken a great oath concerning him who did not come up to the Lord to Mizpah, saying, "He shall be put to death." ⁶ And the people of Israel had compassion for Benjamin their brother, and said, "One tribe is cut off from Israel this day. ⁷ What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since we have sworn by the Lord that we will not give them any of our daughters for wives?"

Judges 21:1-7 (RSV)

The purpose of setting out this account here is to show that the 11 tribes all took their curse entirely seriously. They wanted to give their daughters to the Benjaminites, and bitterly regretted having made the vow. But they could not do so, because they knew their curse would take effect, and cause them harm, if they broke the vow:

¹⁶ Then the elders of the congregation said, "What shall we do for wives for those who are left, since the women are destroyed out of Benjamin?" ¹⁷ And they said, "There must be an inheritance for the survivors of Benjamin, that a tribe be not blotted out from Israel. ¹⁸ Yet we cannot give them wives of our daughters." For the people of Israel had sworn, "Cursed be he who gives a wife to Benjamin."

Judges 21:16-18 (RSV)

They later solved the problem in a roundabout way by which they got some wives for the Benjaminites by other means. However, the fact that they went to such elaborate lengths indicates that they all took the curse absolutely seriously. The account is in the Bible for us to learn from. It shows, firstly, that we should not make foolish, hasty vows, or indeed any vows at all. But it also demonstrates that curses are completely real and need to be taken far more seriously than they generally are.

King David's curse uttered against Mount Gilboa, on which his friend Jonathan died

Let's look at another example of a specific curse in operation. This one is rather different because it was spoken against an inanimate object, rather than a person or group. King David uttered a curse against Mount Gilboa, the very mountain itself, because his best friend, Jonathan, was killed on it. He then declared that there should be no rain upon it:

*"Ye mountains of Gilbo'a,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor uprising of the deep!
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.*

2 Samuel 1:21 (RSV)

The intriguing thing is that, even now, 3000 years later, Mount Gilboa does not receive adequate rainfall and is of little use for agriculture. David's curse evidently took effect, and is *still in operation* today. Some might call that a coincidence, but I don't. Every little detail in the Bible is there for a reason and can provide useful insights to those who make the effort to search for them. What happened to Mount Gilboa, and why it happened, are useful pointers. They help us to see the reality of cursing words, how they operate, and the effect they can have, even centuries later.

Jotham's curse over Abimelech and also the citizens of Shechem

There is a strange account in the book of Judges about Jotham. He was the son of Gideon, who was also known as 'Jerubbaal'. Jotham uttered a curse against his wicked half-brother, Abimelech, and all the citizens of a city called Shechem. They had supported Abimelech and made him their king, because Abimelech's mother came from Shechem. Abimelech murdered all of his brothers, except for Jotham, who escaped. Jotham went to Mount Gerazim, which is alongside Shechem, and spoke a curse over the whole city and all its citizens, because they had supported Abimelech.

We later learn that, in some unspecified way, the people of Shechem had actually helped Abimelech when he murdered Jotham's brothers. That is an important detail, as it helps to explain why the people of Shechem were so severely affected by the curse that Jotham later uttered. His curse was not "*causeless*", because they themselves had acted sinfully, in that they had assisted in a mass murder. That fact made them much more vulnerable to be affected by Jotham's cursing words than they would otherwise have been:

¹⁶ "Now therefore, if you acted in good faith and honor when you made Abim'elech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubba'al and his house, and have done to him as his deeds deserved—¹⁷ for my father fought for you, and risked his life, and rescued you from the hand of Mid'ian;¹⁸ and you have risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, seventy men on one stone, and have made Abim'elech, the son of his maidservant, king over the citizens of Shechem, because he is your kinsman—¹⁹ if you then have acted in good faith and honor with Jerubba'al and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abim'elech, and let him also rejoice in you;²⁰ but if not, let fire come out from Abim'elech, and devour the citizens of Shechem, and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the citizens of Shechem, and from Beth-millo, and devour Abim'elech."²¹ And Jotham ran away and fled, and went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abim'elech his brother.

Judges 9:16-21 (RSV)

Note how specific Jotham's curse is. He not only curses Abimelech himself with death. He also asks for fire to devour the citizens of Shechem, both of which events later occur. In this case, it would seem that the power behind the curse, which was bringing it to fulfilment, was God Himself. In verse 22 we see that God Himself sends an evil spirit between Abimelech and the people of Shechem, who had previously supported him.

This results in them falling out with Abimelech, such that they then cooperate with his enemy, Gaal. He is in rebellion against Abimelech and they put men in place to ambush him. However, while waiting to ambush Abimelech, the men of Shechem also behaved wickedly in another way, by robbing travellers on that road. In doing that, they provided another 'cause' for Jotham's curse to 'alight' upon them, for the same reasons explained earlier by Solomon:

²² Abim'elech ruled over Israel three years.²³ And God sent an evil spirit between Abim'elech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abim'elech;²⁴ that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubba'al might come and their blood be laid upon Abim'elech their brother, who slew them, and upon the men of Shechem, who strengthened his

hands to slay his brothers. ²⁵ And the men of Shechem put men in ambush against him on the mountain tops, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abim'elech.
Judges 9:22-25 (RSV)

The people of Shechem also worshipped a pagan god, rather than the God of Israel. That provides yet another 'cause' for Jotham's curse to alight upon them. They were idolaters and were probably involved in other aspects of the occult too. Such things are highly significant and provide a powerful basis for curses to come upon anyone who engages in them. If you come across a person whose life is blighted, one of the first questions to ask is whether they, or their parents or grandparents, have had any involvement in the occult. It is remarkably common and has a huge impact in people's lives:

²⁶ And Ga'al the son of Ebed moved into Shechem with his kinsmen; and the men of Shechem put confidence in him. ²⁷ And they went out into the field, and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and held festival, and went into the house of their god, and ate and drank and reviled Abim'elech. ²⁸ And Ga'al the son of Ebed said, "Who is Abim'elech, and who are we of Shechem, that we should serve him? Did not the son of Jerubba'al and Zebul his officer serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem? Why then should we serve him? ²⁹ Would that this people were under my hand! then I would remove Abim'elech. I would say to Abim'elech, 'Increase your army, and come out.'"

Judges 9:26-29 (RSV)

Then Abimelech hears of this rebellion and he begins to make plans for a counter-attack against Shechem:

And Abim'elech and all the men that were with him rose up by night, and laid wait against Shechem in four companies.

Judges 9:34 (RSV)

Abimelech's plans succeed and his men then defeat Gaal, who flees from Shechem:

⁴⁰ And Abim'elech chased him, and he fled before him; and many fell wounded, up to the entrance of the gate. ⁴¹ And Abim'elech dwelt at Aru'mah; and Zebul drove out Ga'al and his kinsmen, so that they could not live on at Shechem.

Judges 9:40-41 (RSV)

Abimelech then turns on the city of Shechem and destroys it. In doing this, albeit without realising it, Abimelech is being used by God to fulfil Jotham's curse on the people of Shechem. That is the case, even though he himself is also going to be destroyed later, as a result of that same curse:

⁴⁴ Abim'elech and the company that was with him rushed forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city, while the two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and slew them. ⁴⁵ And Abim'elech fought against the city all that day; he took the city, and killed the people that were in it; and he razed the city and sowed it with salt.

Judges 9:44-45 (RSV)

At this point, the people of Shechem entered the stronghold of the tower of Elberith, because they thought they would be safe there. But they weren't. Abimelech then set the stronghold on fire, with all the people still in it. He killed 1000 of them by fire, exactly in line with Jotham's curse, which was remorselessly fulfilled against him, and all the people of Shechem:

⁴⁶ When all the people of the Tower of Shechem heard of it, they entered the stronghold of the house of El-be'rith. ⁴⁷ Abim'elech was told that all the people of the Tower of Shechem were gathered together. ⁴⁸ And Abim'elech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the men that were with him; and Abim'elech took an axe in his hand, and cut down a bundle of brushwood, and took it up and laid it on his shoulder. And he said to the men that were with him, "What you have seen me do,

make haste to do, as I have done.”⁴⁹ So every one of the people cut down his bundle and following Abim'elech put it against the stronghold, and they set the stronghold on fire over them, so that all the people of the Tower of Shechem also died, about a thousand men and women.

Judges 9:46-49 (RSV)

That's not yet the end of the account. Abimelech then went to a place called Thebez to attack it. When he did, the people took refuge in a tower and a woman threw a millstone down. The stone landed on Abimelech's head, wounding him mortally, so that he asked his armour-bearer to finish him off. Thus, in the end, he too became a victim of Jotham's curse:

⁵⁰ Then Abim'elech went to Thebez, and encamped against Thebez, and took it. ⁵¹ But there was a strong tower within the city, and all the people of the city fled to it, all the men and women, and shut themselves in; and they went to the roof of the tower. ⁵² And Abim'elech came to the tower, and fought against it, and drew near to the door of the tower to burn it with fire. ⁵³ And a certain woman threw an upper millstone upon Abim'elech's head, and crushed his skull. ⁵⁴ Then he called hastily to the young man his armor-bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" And his young man thrust him through, and he died. ⁵⁵ And when the men of Israel saw that Abim'elech was dead, they departed every man to his home.

Judges 9:50-55 (RSV)

In case anybody still doubts who was behind these strange events and who caused Jotham's curse to be fulfilled, the next passage makes it unmistakably clear. We are explicitly told that it was God Himself. He made the curse of Jotham come upon Abimelech and on the people of Shechem who had made him their king and aided him in his earlier murders.

So, it is not mere supposition. It is plainly stated that God was involved throughout. That is not politically correct, and may cause controversy, because it does not fit in with the modern, western, liberal view of God. But it happens to be true and it is a truth that we need to face up to, and try to understand, rather than ignoring it or pretending it isn't in the Bible:

⁵⁶ Thus God requited the crime of Abim'elech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers; ⁵⁷ and God also made all the wickedness of the men of Shechem fall back upon their heads, and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubba'al.

Judges 9:56-57 (RSV)

When did you last hear any preacher speak about this incident, or any other such episode, in which a curse is empowered and implemented by God Himself? It is a no-go area for preachers. Therefore, most of God's people have no understanding of these themes, and no idea what to do about curses. My aim in this short chapter is only to introduce you to these issues. It is impossible to cover the subject fully. That will have to come later, when I hope to go into much greater detail in a book I intend to write on 'Spiritual warfare'.

Moses also used curses in particular situations.

Another practice, which sounds strange to us, is what God told Moses to do where a woman was accused of adultery but there was no evidence to prove or disprove it. She had to take an oath by which she invoked a curse over herself if she was guilty. If she had committed adultery, but not otherwise, that self-imposed curse would bring about a painful death. If anybody still doubts that a curse can affect us, we have here a specific biblical authority which makes clear that it can. The woman had to go to the priest and swear an oath as follows:

¹⁹ The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, being under the authority of your husband, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; ²⁰ if you, however, have gone astray, being

under the authority of your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you”²¹ (then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), “the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people by the Lord’s making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell;²² and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away.” And the woman shall say, “Amen. Amen.”

²³ ‘The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness.²⁴ Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness.²⁵ The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman’s hand, and he shall wave the grain offering before the Lord and bring it to the altar;²⁶ and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as its memorial offering and offer it up in smoke on the altar, and afterward he shall make the woman drink the water.²⁷ When he has made her drink the water, then it shall come about, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness, and her abdomen will swell and her thigh will waste away, and the woman will become a curse among her people.²⁸ But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, she will then be free and conceive children.

Numbers 5:19-28 (RSV)

Many may not believe this could possibly work, but the fact remains that it is in the Bible. Moreover, Moses and the people took it entirely seriously. We should too, and start to realise the effect that curses have in our lives. In our courts we still ask witnesses to swear on the Bible. When that practice first began, most witnesses took it deadly seriously. They knew they were invoking a curse upon themselves if they were to lie, because they were swearing “*by Almighty God, to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth*”.

Therefore, in the past, when a far higher proportion of people were Christians, or at least had some fear of God, witnesses were genuinely afraid to lie on oath. The oath really meant something and they knew God would bring judgment upon them if they lied. Today it is generally seen as just a quaint old ritual. The public’s view may have changed, but God’s has not. He still takes it very seriously if witnesses lie after having sworn, *by His Name*, not to do so. They will come under God’s judgment, probably in this life, but certainly in the next.

A young man I know was cursed by a witch and became seriously epileptic within a few days.

Anyone who still doubts the reality of curses and witchcraft may also wish to reflect on this incident. I know a young man, ‘Anthony’, who was active in a Pentecostal church. He went on an evangelistic mission with a group which was not part of his own church. It was in a very rural part of the UK. He told the pastor of his church about this and he advised him not to go. I’m not sure why, but he evidently saw a problem of some kind. However, Anthony ignored that advice and went anyway.

Furthermore, while on the mission trip, he didn’t take things as seriously as he should have done. He went out drinking in the evenings, contrary to the wishes of the mission leaders. So, he was also ignoring their express instructions. While they were evangelising, they were approached by a hostile woman who told them she was a witch. She said she didn’t want them in her village. This woman was an occult-practitioner and was deadly serious. For some reason, she then walked straight up to Anthony in particular and spoke cursing words directly at him.

She may have discerned, perhaps by demonic guidance, that he was more vulnerable than the others. The incident was serious enough for him to remember it, and even to be scared by it, but not to pray for protection, or to ask others to do so. Neither did he ring the elders of his church, or even tell the leaders of the mission. He did nothing at all, partly because he saw no need, and partly because he didn’t know what to do anyway, or how. A few days later he had a major epileptic fit, the first he had ever had, and he has had them regularly ever since, despite strong medication.

The drugs may perhaps reduce the number of seizures, but they don't stop them. That non-response to medication is a strong indicator that his epilepsy is not caused by organic factors, but is due to demons. The reason I mentioned those seemingly minor details at the start of this story is that I believe they caused Anthony to be exposed. Accordingly the curse, when it was uttered, was able to 'alight' upon him, as per what Solomon said in Proverbs 26:2. Let's recap the unwise and inappropriate things he did, or failed to do, which made him more vulnerable than the others:

- a) He ignored the advice of his pastor who said he ought not to go.
- b) He was disrespectful and rebellious on the mission trip by defying the leaders' wishes and drinking in the evenings.
- c) He was not in a strong condition as a disciple generally and did not know his Bible well.
- d) He also had a lot of occultic 'baggage' in his life from his grandparents and even his great grandparents. Some of them had been involved in spiritualism, fortune-telling and Freemasonry. Those ungodly things in his family background would make him an easier candidate for the witch to curse and provide major openings into his life for the demons to use.
- e) When the curse was uttered against him he did not take it seriously. He just brushed it aside as if it didn't require any action or attention. We should certainly not fear the power of demons. But, on the other hand, a frivolous, jocular attitude is also wrong and is asking for trouble.
- f) He did not pray, or ask anybody else to pray for him.
- g) He went on the trip with a casual, complacent attitude. Yet the reality is that he was taking part in a 'raid' against enemy territory. What the group was doing would inevitably arouse human and demonic opposition. He should have realised that beforehand and prayed for protection. He was like a man who goes for a walk, at night, in a high crime area, run by drug-dealers and violent gangs, as if there was no need to be concerned.

How can we prevent ourselves being affected by curses, or be set free from the power of curses if they are already affecting us?

Let's look at what Anthony could, and should, have done before, during and after this incident with the witch. Firstly, he ought to have enquired into his own family background. He should have known that that could affect him, and that it needed to be addressed, so that he could be free of its influence. Then, when he learned of his grandparents' involvement in spiritualism, séances, Freemasonry and fortune telling, he should have prayed about it and:

- a) renounced it all, as specifically and earnestly as he could, preferably item by item
- b) asked for God to cut him off from any spiritual 'inheritance' that may have come down to him from any relative who had engaged in the occult and which might be casting a sinister shadow over him
- c) asked God to protect him from the effect of any curses which might already be in operation in his life as a result of the actions of his grandparents and great-grandparents and to break the effect of those curses
- d) carefully weighed the advice of the elder/pastor who had urged him not to go. That is not to say that he was obliged to 'obey' that leader. He was not. But he should at least have listened to the advice. It was possible the pastor knew something, or that God was speaking through him. The

very fact that he felt prompted to urge Anthony not to go was unusual, and should have been seen as significant. It suggested that God was giving him advance warning of this very danger.

- e) respected the requests of those leading the mission and abided by any reasonable instructions
- f) responded immediately, as soon as the curse was uttered, by *renouncing* it, there and then, to the witch's face. He could have said "*I reject all of your words and renounce and cancel them now, in the name of Jesus Christ*".

Let me give an example to illustrate that last point. When my baby daughter was being dedicated the wife of a local church leader, who was a misguided and spiritually mixed-up lady, came over to us. Then she suddenly began to speak prophetically over our daughter, without our permission. Moreover, the words she was beginning to say were foolish and negative. I felt an immediate sense of alarm. Indeed, the Holy Spirit was warning me to take *instant action*. So I spoke up, sharply and loudly, and told her to stop speaking. I then said to her, fully audibly, for all nearby to hear:

"I reject and renounce every word you have just said. It was not from the Holy Spirit, and I ask God now, in Jesus' name, to protect this child from any influence that might have come from you, or your words."

Some might think it was harsh of me to speak in that blunt way, and that I may have hurt her feelings. But I could not allow any such consideration to limit my actions. I had to reject and revoke her words, immediately and unmistakably, and to stop her *before she said anything else*. That was my clear duty as a father. I had to shield my daughter from the effect of that foolish woman's cursing words and to renounce any 'divination' or 'fortune-telling'. That said, with false prophets, and false people generally, you can't offend them anyway, even if you wanted to. They have skins like a rhinoceros.

What exactly is witchcraft, at its most basic level?

Let's now look briefly at witchcraft and try to define it. At its most basic level it is the attempt to manipulate, dominate, intimidate or otherwise control any other person or group. It initially operates at the level of the *soul* rather than the *spirit*. That is it is conducted via the person's own soul, namely their *mind, emotions and will*, and is exerted upon the other person's mind, emotions and will. Therefore witchcraft need not necessarily involve any demons. It can be done by human beings, to other human beings, *by purely natural means*, at a soulish rather than spiritual level.

Even where we see the more heavy-duty witchcraft, such as mind-control, or even hypnosis, it can still be happening at a purely soulish level. However, witchcraft can also be, and frequently is, even more sinister than that. It can be supplemented by the addition of demonic power. Thus it often involves a *spiritual* dimension as well as the soulish. Then the person who is engaging in witchcraft becomes capable of even greater control, manipulation and domination than if he was to rely only on his own soulish power.

In case you think I am exaggerating the power and influence of witchcraft, consider how the prophet Isaiah spoke of it. He would not be invited to speak in many churches today, given his views. At any rate, he wouldn't often be invited back. In chapter 47 Isaiah is speaking about those who engage in witchcraft. He does not say that they have no real power, or that they are just playing silly games based solely on their imagination. He takes them entirely seriously and says their enchantments have "*great power*":

**".....in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments."
Isaiah 47:9 (b) (RSV)**

Admittedly, Isaiah is saying in the passage below that those who practise witchcraft and use sorcery and enchantments will ultimately fail and be destroyed. Of course they will, but that is not the point. The point is that, here and now, until they encounter God's judgment and wrath, they *do* have real power, and at a very high level. If Isaiah took witchcraft seriously, and felt it could do harm, we must stop under-estimating it, ignoring it or making light of it, even though those who practice it will fail and be punished in the end:

¹² *“Keep on, then, with your magic spells
and with your many sorceries,
which you have labored at since childhood.*

*Perhaps you will succeed,
perhaps you will cause terror.*

¹³ *All the counsel you have received has only worn you out!*

*Let your astrologers come forward,
those stargazers who make predictions month by month,
let them save you from what is coming upon you.*

¹⁴ *Surely they are like stubble;
the fire will burn them up.*

*They cannot even save themselves
from the power of the flame.*

*These are not coals for warmth;
this is not a fire to sit by.*

Isaiah 47:12-14 (NIV)

Witchcraft becomes far more serious, and powerful, when it moves into the spiritual realm and the assistance of demons is enlisted in addition to the person's own soulish power.

Witchcraft is real and can profoundly affect *us and those around us*, not just other people, long ago or far away. That applies to both kinds of witchcraft, the ordinary soulish type, and the full-blown black magic variety. That is where the witch seeks demonic help to give added power to their curses or enchantments. We already know, or should know, that demons oppose us in their own right, without the need for anybody to ask them to do so. That is the very reason why we are told to resist them, and even to expel them.

It is only a short step from there to realise that demons can also work in conjunction with wicked human beings. That cooperation between the witch and the demon makes witchcraft far more damaging. So, there is all the more reason to take it seriously and to seek God's protection from it. Therefore, we must not be complacent about witchcraft, but we need not fear it either. We need to be balanced and show a proper sense of concern, as we would if crossing a busy road. We would all take that seriously, but we would not be afraid of it.

Witchcraft was practised by the King of Moab, when he sacrificed his eldest son. By so doing, he altered the course of a battle, presumably because he obtained the 'help' of a demon.

A more direct example of witchcraft, which illustrates that it has real power and is not imaginary, is the King of Moab in 2 Kings, chapter 3. He was an enemy of Israel and his army was fighting, but losing badly. The Moabite soldiers were being slaughtered by Israel's army:

²¹ *When all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to put on armor, from the youngest to the oldest, were called out, and were drawn up at the frontier.*

²² *And when they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, the Moabites saw the water opposite them as red as blood. ²³ And they said, “This is blood; the kings have surely fought together, and slain one another. Now then, Moab, to the spoil!” ²⁴ But when they came to*

the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose and attacked the Moabites, till they fled before them; and they went forward, slaughtering the Moabites as they went.

2 Kings 3:21-24 (RSV)

When the battle was at a crucial stage, and his forces were being defeated, the King of Moab used witchcraft to provide more power to support his army. He didn't do it half-heartedly. He took his own eldest son and killed him as a sacrifice to his 'gods' which were, of course, demons. This use of the power of witchcraft had a profound effect and reversed the whole course of the battle:

²⁶ When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. ²⁷ Then he took his eldest son who was to reign in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came great wrath upon Israel; and they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

2 Kings 3:26-27 (RSV)

I have heard it argued that the sacrifice of his son did not have any real power. Some suggest that it was "all in the mind" and simply emboldened the Moabites, causing them to *imagine* that they would be given added power. It is said that they therefore fought harder, due to being encouraged by that superstitious illusion. That seems to me to be a very lame explanation. One would only arrive at that sceptical conclusion because one *wanted* to do so, and was simply unwilling to believe that witchcraft could be real, regardless of the evidence.

If one examines the passage honestly, without any pre-existing agenda or scepticism, it is plain that the King of Moab's witchcraft really did affect the outcome of the battle. That being so, if witchcraft was real back then, and for him, then it must be equally real now, for us. That is the only honest, logical, realistic conclusion that we can reach. We should therefore be taking active steps to identify and counteract witchcraft in our own lives and churches, rather than denying its existence or ignoring it, as most western Christians do.

If anyone is going to argue that things have changed, such that witchcraft was real back then, for the King of Moab, but is no longer real today, or for us, or for the people we know, they need to explain *how* and *why* things changed. They also need to say what they think caused the power of witchcraft to cease. The Bible says nothing whatsoever to that effect. Therefore any such argument is purely man-made, as there is nothing in the Bible to support it. In my view, there is no reason to think that anything at all has changed, so far as witchcraft is concerned.

Witchcraft was also practised by some of the Israelites, after they learned it from the Canaanites.

It wasn't only the surrounding Canaanites who practised witchcraft. The Israelites began to do so too. Indeed, that was one of the reasons why God told them to exterminate all the Canaanites in the first place. He knew that, otherwise, the Israelites would imitate their wicked ways. This grim passage shows how the Israelites themselves later became involved in witchcraft, divination and sorcery, not just idolatry:

⁹ And the people of Israel did secretly against the Lord their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; ¹⁰ they set up for themselves pillars and Ashe'rim on every high hill and under every green tree; ¹¹ and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations did whom the Lord carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the Lord to anger, ¹² and they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, "You shall not do this." ¹³ Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you

by my servants the prophets.”¹⁴ But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God.¹⁵ They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do like them.¹⁶ And they forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Ashe'rah, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Ba'al.¹⁷ And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings, and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

2 Kings 17:9-17 (RSV)

It was to avoid the Canaanites' idolatry and witchcraft being copied by the Israelites that God specifically commanded them to wipe them all out. Tragically, they did not fully obey that command:

¹⁶ But in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes,¹⁷ but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Per'izzites, the Hivites and the Jeb'usites, as the Lord your God has commanded;¹⁸ that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods, and so to sin against the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 20:16-18 (RSV)

King Ahaz of Judah also burned his own son to death as an offering, just as the King of Moab had done. Indeed, a number of the Kings of Israel, and even of Judah, did likewise. They sacrificed their own children as part of their idolatry and witchcraft:

² Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done,³ but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.⁴ And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

2 Kings 16:2-4 (RSV)

King Manasseh of Judah also practised witchcraft and even burned his own son as an offering, as the King of Moab had done.

Likewise King Manasseh, who was also from Judah, burned his own son, and not solely for purposes of idolatry. He engaged in various forms of witchcraft, including soothsaying and augury (fortune-telling) and he also dealt with mediums and wizards:

¹Manas'seh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Heph'zibah.² And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.³ For he rebuilt the high places which Hezeki'ah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Ba'al, and made an Ashe'rah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them.⁴ And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem will I put my name."⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.⁶ And he burned his son as an offering, and practiced soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

2 Kings 21:1-6 (RSV)

However Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, who succeeded him as King of Judah, was extremely vigilant and zealous. He drove witchcraft out of Judah and got rid of all the mediums and wizards. The fact

that he did this is one of the things for which God praised him. God considered him to be better than all previous kings. That in itself indicates how seriously God takes witchcraft:

²⁴ Moreover Josi'ah put away the mediums and the wizards and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilki'ah the priest found in the house of the Lord. ²⁵ Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

2 Kings 23:24-25 (RSV)

Witchcraft has grown exponentially in the West and is now a huge problem. The vast numbers of witchcraft books being sold today demonstrate how many people are involved in it.

The scale and popularity of witchcraft has been growing exponentially for decades. If you doubt that, you need only go into any large secular bookshop. Examine the many shelves of books they have on the subject of witchcraft, magic, spells, the occult, and all sorts of associated themes. It is truly shocking and dwarfs the shelf space which they devote to Christianity. That growth is partly due to the phenomenal success of the Harry Potter books. They were greatly used by Satan to popularise witchcraft and the occult in general.

Moreover, they are not invented fantasies or make-believe. Most of the things done and spoken about in the Harry Potter books are real and are based on solid facts about witchcraft. Either J.K Rowling has experience of witchcraft herself, or she has done a lot of research. Her books are far from being harmless. They were intended, at least by Satan, if not by their author, to soften up a whole generation and to make the occult appear attractive. However, the explosion of interest in witchcraft was already happening even before the Harry Potter books were written.

I remember examining the shelves of a well-known national bookshop and stationer in the early 1990s. Even then, the number and range of witchcraft books was astonishing. The books covered all sorts of issues, such as how to use enchantments to make someone fall in love with you, how to get money, how to use spells to get another couple to split up, how to curse someone with illness and so on. It was appalling, even then, and it is far worse today. Again, some might argue that all of these things are just imaginary and have no real effect, but I don't accept that.

I think they are entirely real, just as the King of Moab's witchcraft was real when he reversed the course of a battle by sacrificing his own son. Nevertheless, despite its great power, witchcraft has its limits. It is not infinitely powerful, as God's power is. Pharaoh's magicians, who were witches and occult-practitioners, tried to match the miracles performed by Moses. They were able to do so, up to a point, as when they produced frogs. That alone shows what immense power Satan has:

⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the rivers, over the canals, and over the pools, and cause frogs to come upon the land of Egypt!'" ⁶ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ⁷ But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt.

Exodus 8:5-7 (RSV)

Nevertheless, Pharaoh's magicians did not have unlimited power and could not do everything that Moses did. For some reason, which the Bible does not disclose, they were not able to produce gnats, even though they had reproduced many of the other plagues. Somehow, God must have drawn the line and stopped them at this point. It illustrates the fact that God's power is infinitely greater than Satan's, which is something that we all need to remember:

¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.’” ¹⁷ And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and struck the dust of the earth, and there came gnats on man and beast; all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout all the land of Egypt. ¹⁸ The magicians tried by their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. ¹⁹ And the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them; as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:16-19 (RSV)

We need to be balanced about witchcraft, curses and the supernatural in general, and avoid both unbelief and gullibility

When it comes to the supernatural there is a serious lack of balance within the Church. On the whole, people are either sceptical and reject everything, or they are gullible and believe anything. Many Christians are inconsistent. Though they would claim to be ‘Bible-believing’, they do not accept what the Bible says about demons, curses, witchcraft, or the supernatural as a whole. Yet the Bible speaks very clearly of all those things. Some may believe these things occurred back then, to the people in the Bible, but not here or now, to themselves, or to the people they know.

Others go to the opposite extreme and are willing to believe and imitate anything they are told, regardless of whether it is in the Bible. They lean so heavily towards the supernatural, and think so much in terms of experiences, rather than solid biblically-based doctrine, that they become gullible. Often they have so little knowledge of the Bible, they are unable to test what they are taught, or to compare it to Scripture. Therefore they are just as easily led into an over-emphasis on the supernatural as sceptics are led into denying or under-emphasising it.

I have met many people of both types because, over the last 35 years, as I moved around, God led me to join several churches from different denominations. I have seen some people with utterly closed minds who believe nothing. But others I have met went overboard and were obsessed with the supernatural. They saw spiritual, or ‘super-spiritual’, factors behind everything that happened and paid too little attention to the ordinary ‘bread and butter’ issues of repentance, forgiving others, crucifying the flesh, growing in maturity as disciples and immersing ourselves in God’s Word.

They preferred to seek for short-cuts to success in the Christian life. But there are no shortcuts. Becoming a mature, rounded, well-informed, effective disciple takes time and effort. It also requires us to do *all* of the things that the Bible tells us to do, not just those which we prefer. If you are an evangelical and have been taught to shy away from the supernatural, and that everything is purely natural and physical, think again. Examine the Bible, with an *open mind*, and ask yourself what you see there. Then ask why you assume that anything is now different from what it was in the past.

But if you are Pentecostal or Charismatic, or perhaps even ‘*charismaniac*’, and you under-emphasise Scripture, and focus on the supernatural rather than discipleship, and on demons rather than your flesh, then you too need to think again. In particular you need to re-balance your beliefs and your practices to make them biblical, rather than just getting into line with whatever your denomination does. Please see my Book 3 which contains a more detailed section on the vital need for balance.

The mistaken idea that *everything* was achieved for us at the cross, such that we don’t need to do anything at all - even the things we are told to do

If you ever speak about the supernatural, and about demons or curses in particular, you will get an agitated or even hostile reaction. These subjects unsettle people. They feel uncomfortable that their own beliefs, practices and traditions are being contradicted or even questioned. I spoke at a conference recently and was approached afterwards by a man who wanted to correct my theology. He

told me he didn't believe that any Christian has any need for deliverance from demons and that we need not concern ourselves with witchcraft, spiritual warfare or curses.

He said "*everything was dealt with at the cross*" and that to suggest that anybody needs deliverance, or to break free of any curses, "*is to say that the cross isn't enough*". That statement may sound spiritual, and imply that he has a high view of the cross, but there is deep confusion behind it. That has caused him to reject a number of biblical truths on the misguided basis that the cross did away with them. The truth is the cross achieved everything it was *intended to achieve*, and it did so perfectly. However, the cross did *not* achieve the things which it was never intended to achieve.

For example, what Jesus did on the cross paid the penalty for our sin and made it possible for God to forgive us, if we repent and believe. His wrath was poured out on His own Son instead of on us. Other things were achieved too, and I address those in my Book 1. However, some things were *not* achieved at the cross and they still need to be done, either by us, or the Holy Spirit, or both. For example, growing in maturity as a disciple was not achieved at the cross. It remains to be done by each of us in our own lives. It is not a past event. It is an ongoing process and very much involves us.

So does repenting, forgiving others, crucifying the flesh, dying to self, picking up our cross daily, loving others, renewing our minds, studying the Bible, taking every thought captive and so on. We cannot treat those things as having already been done for us, in the past, by Jesus. They need to be done now, by us, albeit with the help of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, deliverance from demons and the breaking of curses are not automatic and have not already occurred, such that we need not do anything about them. I will address this in Book 9 on demonology, and in my future book on spiritual warfare.

But what can we do if we have cursed ourselves, or others, or if we have been affected by other people's curses or witchcraft?

I have drawn attention to the importance of our own, and other people's, cursing words and how we can be affected by those. However, I do not want to give the impression that there is nothing we can do to deal with the effect of such curses, whether due to witchcraft or generational factors. There are things we can do to defend ourselves and our families, churches and businesses, and also to undo what has been done in the past. In particular, we need to *repent* of our own sinful or occultic behaviour and *renounce* any such activities by our parents and grandparents.

We also need to *revoke* any cursing words spoken by ourselves or others and to ask God to cancel their effect. In particular, it is very important to *forgive* others who have cursed us, or whose sins and occultic activities have affected us. Such forgiveness has the effect of removing or reducing the effect of such curses in our lives. So too does our own repentance about the things we did ourselves. When we admit the wrongness of our own sins and sinful words, and then renounce and revoke them, we can be set free from their effect in our lives, just as repentance sets us free from the *penalty* of sin.

When Jesus died on the cross for us He not only took all the *sins* of the whole world upon Himself. He also took all the *curses* of the whole world upon Himself. So, in the same way that the Bible says Jesus *became sin* for us, He also *became a curse* for us. In other words, Jesus took all the sins of mankind upon Himself to such an extent that, in the eyes of God the Father, Jesus *was sin*. That is God saw Him as sin itself and therefore rejected Him and poured out His wrath upon Him. Many Christians know that, or at least the essence of it, in the context of sin.

However, Jesus also took all the curses of the world upon Himself, such that God also saw Him *as a curse*. The very fact that Jesus was crucified on a cross, or on a *tree* as the Bible puts it, is significant. Apostle Paul, alluding to Deuteronomy 21:23, says "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*". In Hebrew the same word is used for a whole tree as for a part of a tree. So, the large beam of wood that Jesus was nailed to was called a 'tree'. God ordained, long ago, that being hung upon a tree or log of wood symbolised being under His curse. Here is the passage from Galatians:

¹³ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—*¹⁴ *in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Galatians 3:13-14 (NASB)

Therefore, when Jesus hung on the tree, He *became a curse for us*. That means that the very curses which blight our own lives can now be placed upon Him, if we ask for that, just as our sins can be. Some might object at this point that if all the curses have already been placed upon Him by God, when He was on the cross, then why do we need to do anything now to repent, revoke, renounce or forgive? Also, why do we need to seek to have those curses transferred to, or placed upon, Jesus? However, the very same things could be said in relation to our sin.

That too was placed upon Jesus, for the benefit of the whole world, past present and future. But each of us still need to believe the Gospel and repent in order to be forgiven and justified. We also still need to ask Jesus to be our Saviour and to take *our* sins upon Himself. Accordingly, it is no contradiction to say that Jesus became a curse on the cross and yet also to say that we need to *ask* for the curses which affect us to be transferred to Him, rather than continuing to affect us. Therefore, take the full benefit of every aspect of that free gift, not only in relation to sin, but curses too.

Hand over to Jesus, and place upon Him, any curses that affect you, just as you would hand your sin over to Him. Let those facts about what happened on the cross be at the forefront of your mind when you repent and renounce those things which have caused your life to be blighted. Claim the *full* benefit of what Jesus did for us on the cross, not only the forgiveness of sins, and don't treat it as if everything was automatic. Also persist, rather than expecting that it will all happen instantly. Be willing to keep on tackling these issues. Don't assume it all has to be dealt with overnight, in one go. Sometimes we need to carry on going deeper, like taking layers off an onion.

Ask God to reveal more things which need to be dealt with, from your own past, or from your parents or grandparents, or from things being said or done now. Keep on repenting of sins, renouncing things you have said, and forgiving others for what they have said or done. This may result in ongoing breakthroughs. It reminds me of how I had to keep on removing vine weed from the hedge at the bottom of my garden. I dug up the roots of the vine weed more than once. I also went out many times to spray weed killer onto the leaves of any new growth of vine weed that emerged.

Gradually, over time, I dramatically reduced the vine weed. But it isn't all gone, even now. Nevertheless, its overall extent and effect has greatly diminished. That analogy has some relevance to spiritual warfare and to dealing with witchcraft and curses in particular. Keep at it. Be vigilant. Keep repenting. Keep forgiving. Keep avoiding sin. Keep avoiding the occult. Keep on doing the things which bring God's blessing. Keep on avoiding the things which cause Him to oppose us. In all of these ways we can, over time, see major breakthroughs and our lives can be transformed.

What can we do, in practical terms, to defend ourselves and those we care for from other people's witchcraft and curses?

This little chapter is just a brief introduction. I included it to make people aware that this whole subject of witchcraft and curses exists and how it is connected to the issue of dealing with the wicked. I am conscious that I am stating what the problem is, and how much harm it causes, yet without going into detail about how to defend ourselves and our families, businesses and churches from it. That will have to come later, in another book, in which I will seek to cover the whole area of spiritual warfare much more thoroughly.

It will also give practical advice on how to prevent harm being caused in the first place and how to undo or reverse harm that has already been done. That is too big a subject to fit within this book,

which is primarily about dealing with wicked *people*. However, let me close this chapter, and this book, by at least giving some brief advice on how we can defend ourselves from witchcraft and curses, both past and present, and how we can learn to be overcomers.

Firstly, let's look briefly at what the Bible says about the *authority* that each individual Christian has, merely by being a Christian, not by being a leader, or by being special in any way at all. Look at this passage in which the 70 disciples report back to Jesus after coming back from a mission trip on which He had sent them. Bear in mind also that these are not the 12 apostles. They were *ordinary* people, like you and me:

¹⁷ Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." ¹⁸ And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Luke 10:17-20 (ESV)

Do you see the enormity of the authority which Jesus says those 70 people had? They themselves were surprised that even the demons were subject to them. That is they were able to speak with authority and the demons had to obey them. That was true of those 70 disciples and it is true of you and me too. The problem is so few Christians are aware of their authority. It is not being taught in churches. Indeed, the opposite is being taught and the faith is therefore sucked out of us, to be replaced by unbelief, due to the unbiblical teaching in so many churches.

When Jesus said they would also "*trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.....*" He wasn't referring to literal snakes and scorpions. He meant the demons. The authority that each of us has, *even as ordinary Christians*, means we outrank the demons. We have power over them and can force them to go, step aside, leave a person and release their grip on them. We are able, by the authority vested in us, *in Jesus' name*, to do all those things. We can also remain safe while contending with the powers of darkness, including witchcraft and curses.

That said, Jesus' words about snakes and scorpions, though primarily a metaphor, were also meant literally. Therefore if we are operating in the will of God, doing what He wants us to do, then even physical creatures and other such dangers, will not be able to hurt us. Look at what Jesus said when He was sending out His disciples on the 'Great Commission', to take the Gospel to the world. He refers to serpents there too, and we shall see below that His words were literally fulfilled in the ministry of apostle Paul:

¹⁵ And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

Mark 16:15-18 (NASB)

These words would be fulfilled in our lives too, if we began to believe them and to act upon them in faith and obedience. In this passage we see apostle Paul emerging unharmed after being bitten by a viper/adder, which is a poisonous snake. It happened on the island of Malta, after Paul had survived a shipwreck and was gathering sticks to make a fire:

¹ When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. ³ But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another,

“Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.”⁵ However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

Acts 28:1-6 (NASB)

We need to wake up, realise the immense authority we have as Christians, and learn how to exercise it. The authority is already there, *if we are genuinely saved*. But many of us aren't aware that we have it, so we don't use it. I remember the very first day I reported for duty as a police officer. I was wearing my brand-new uniform and had been sworn in as a constable before a magistrate. In the eyes of the law, and the public, I was just as much a constable as some other officer with 20 years' experience. The problem was I didn't know it, or rather I didn't *feel* it.

Deep down, I still thought I was a civilian. I felt awkward as I walked down the street to the divisional HQ to be introduced to the Chief Superintendent on my first morning on duty. I passed a woman in the street and she spoke to me and I actually felt embarrassed that she thought I was a police officer. It all seemed unreal, and that I wasn't a proper constable, but was only dressed up as one. Nevertheless, regardless of how I felt, the fact is I *was* a real officer and had all the authority and powers that go with it.

Over the next few weeks the reality of that started to sink in, even to me. I began to think I was a constable, and to act like one. Eventually I thought that way even when I wasn't in uniform. Most Christians don't realise the extent of their authority, or exercise it. To change that, you need to “*be transformed by the renewal of your mind*” as Paul said. That also involves realising the extent of your own authority as a disciple. To do that you will need to “*take every thought captive to obey Christ*”, as Paul also says in 2 Corinthians 10.

That process of taking every thought captive is spoken of in the context of spiritual warfare. It really amounts to *deciding* what you are going to think, as a deliberate exercise of your *will*, rather than letting your thoughts form themselves randomly. Randomness will never lead you towards the truth, but only towards error. Two of the many aspects of our authority as disciples are our ability to raise up the ‘*shield of faith*’ and to wield the ‘*sword of the Spirit*’, as spoken of by Paul:

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;¹⁸ praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

Ephesians 6:14-18 (NKJV)

Whether you face evil people, crisis situations, demonic opposition, or the power of witchcraft and curses, you can raise the shield of faith and defend yourself and those you care for. In practical terms, that means you take one or more of the statements or promises in God's Word and rely upon them with boldness, and even defiance. That is you put your trust in what God has said or promised and you rely on it. Then you lift up His words and proclaim them in faith, like a shield, to protect yourself or your family or church from whatever threat they face. Then God will protect you:

***¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.***

***¹² For you bless the righteous, O Lord;
you cover him with favor as with a shield. Psalm 5:11-12 (ESV)***

⁶ *Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with the saving might of his right hand.*
⁷ *Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*
⁸ *They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand upright.*

Psalm 20:6-8 (ESV)

This is not magic or voodoo. It is the active reliance upon God's promises and, ultimately, upon Him when you face danger. That is when you really find out whether the shield works - when you lift up God's promises and the enemy's arrows hit against the shield, not you. Likewise, the 'sword of the Spirit' involves taking God's Word and proclaiming it boldly to those around you, to your enemies, to your situation, and even to yourself. It likewise involves reliance upon God's promises and statements, but more as a weapon of *attack* than of defence:

²² *And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³ Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

Mark 11:22-24 (ESV)

²² *And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.*

2 Chronicles 20:22 (ESV)

³ *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.*

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (ESV)

Therefore, this is primarily used when you are going forward and overcoming opposition, rather than when operating defensively. I have said a little about the power of proclamation earlier in this book but I will enlarge upon it in future books. Please see those for further information. This weapon, the sword of the Spirit, can include 'speaking to the mountain' or to the lake or the wind, or to whatever issue, person or crisis you face, and confronting it with God's Word, wielded as a weapon. Now, having said that, I really must bring Book 6 to an end.